



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

(Hansard)

Volume 31

(27 May 2008 to 22 June 2008)

BELFAST: THE STATIONERY OFFICE LTD

£70.00

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ISBN 978-0-339-80029-8

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 27 May 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill

Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: The Commission for Victims and Survivors Bill received Royal Assent on Friday 23 May 2008, and it will be known as the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

Local Government (Boundaries) Bill

Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: The Local Government (Boundaries) Bill received Royal Assent on Friday 23 May 2008, and it will be known as the Local Government (Boundaries) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

North/South Ministerial Council

Mr Speaker: I have been advised that a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in education sectoral format will be held on 28 May 2008 and that a meeting of the Council in health and food-safety sectoral format will be held on the same day. Copies of the letters that set out the agendas for those meetings and the names of the Ministers who will attend have been placed in the Library.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Environmental Governance

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that she wishes to make a statement on environmental governance.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): As Members are aware, the Department of the Environment (DOE) has a broad remit that includes matters such as local government and planning. At the heart of that remit is the responsibility to protect and enhance our built and natural environment. In order to do that, we need effective systems of governance and regulation.

I have thought carefully about my approach to those systems, taking account of the independent review of environmental governance (REGNI), which was led by Professor Tom Burke, and the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's (CJINI) report on enforcement in the DOE. Those reviews were carried out under direct rule, but I have considered their recommendations in the context of the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive.

To help me to develop my ideas, I listened to the views of Members and of stakeholders in the business, farming and environmental sectors. I sought advice from my counterpart in the Scottish Government, and I took account of the wider policy and financial considerations.

I am therefore pleased to be able set out today my goals for the future of environmental governance. Those goals have a particular focus on my agenda for better regulation.

The restoration of the Assembly and our devolved institutions, including the Executive, has meant the restoration of local responsibility and accountability. Our governance system has fundamentally changed. I, as Minister, am accountable to the Assembly and to the electorate. The Committee for the Environment scrutinises my Department's performance.

Arrangements for accountability are much more effective than existed under direct rule. I am satisfied that those arrangements have provided the clarity and transparency that was previously lacking, and the absence of which was the subject of much criticism from Professor Burke and his colleagues.

Decisions that I have taken as Minister will help to determine the future shape and nature of our system of local environmental governance. My recent announcement on the review of public administration (RPA) will mean greater local responsibility and accountability, with the transfer of significant functions from Departments to the 11 new councils in 2011.

Major planning responsibilities will transfer, including development control and enforcement. Councils will draw up local development plans for their respective areas, ensuring that local people have a say in how those plans are shaped. My fundamental review of the planning system will streamline the planning process, making it more effective and better prepared for the RPA transition. I will take my emerging proposals to the Executive soon.

We have already made significant improvements to the planning system. The introduction of pre-application discussions with planners means that developers know exactly what information is required before they submit applications. Streamlined consultation with the city council in Londonderry means that approvals for minor applications are issued in 20 working days. Having assumed responsibility for planning policy statement 5 (PPS 5), PPS 12, PPS 13, PPS 14 and PPS 20 from the Department for Regional Development (DRD), my Department is now responsible for all planning policy statements.

The review of environmental governance's central recommendations involved organisational change. The review team proposed the transfer of environment-related responsibilities from other Departments to mine. It also suggested that an environmental protection agency be created by merging the responsibilities of DOE's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) with those of the Rivers Agency and the Loughs Agency in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and some Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) functions.

Although there may be arguments for moving all environment-related functions to DOE, strong arguments also exist for leaving them exactly where they are. The Minister for Regional Development, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure have all set out practical, and even constitutional, reasons why the transfer of functions is not appropriate at this time. As the Assembly knows, the Programme for Government commits us to a review of Departments by 2011. It seems obvious that that is the proper context in which to consider any fundamental restructuring of departmental responsibilities.

My record, and that of my Department, demonstrates my commitment to working co-operatively across the Executive at all levels, and I will continue to do that. My priority is to build a modern, risk-based approach to regulation. We will make a fresh start, with our sights firmly fixed on regulation.

EHS — indeed, the wider Department — already has an impressive pool of intellectual capacity and practical ability, as well as a determination to get things done. That is a valuable and irreplaceable resource of which

we can be proud, and we must deploy it wisely in order to achieve our objectives.

EHS has the necessary expertise and capability. I will retain and reorganise it as a DOE executive agency, and launch it on Tuesday 1 July as the "Northern Ireland Environment Agency". Its mission will be to protect our built heritage and natural environment. The new agency will carry out EHS functions and build on its successes. Last year, EHS supported the maintenance of 97 listed buildings, and its funding of 19 biodiversity officers resulted in district councils declaring seven new nature reserves. In total, EHS has declared 257 areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs), and those cover 94,400 hectares. That important work is the backbone of environmental protection.

I appreciate that some people will be disappointed by the decision not to make EHS an independent agency, as the Burke Report recommended. I say to those people that I, and my party, take the role of environmental governance too seriously to externalise the organisation. The return of devolution resulted in the appointment of local Ministers to make decisions.

I am opposed to the setting up of yet another quango in which unelected people will take decisions on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. I am Minister of the Environment, and it is I, along with my Executive colleagues, who will take the decisions that will be scrutinised by the House and by the Committee for the Environment.

My decision today will result in certainty in environmental governance, both for staff in my Department and in the wider community. It means that we can get on with the job of better governance for the people of Northern Ireland. My environment agency will develop a new, more focused approach to environmental regulation, and on that the EHS has already made an excellent start.

On 29 May, I will convene the first meeting of our better regulation board. Its members will be leaders in the agriculture, construction, water and business sectors. In speaking directly to opinion-formers at that level, my aim is to inject environmental concerns into the lifeblood of industry. I want to inspire action, not just because it is the right thing, but because it makes sound economic sense. For example, responsible waste management can shave up to 25% off construction costs. The board will be about dialogue. I want to hear directly from industry what its needs are. I want to learn how the Department can help businesses to help themselves to improve their compliance. The board will meet twice a year and will kick-start action.

Also on 29 May, I will formally issue our 'Better Regulation for a Better Environment' document. Through that programme of action, we will modernise and simplify our approach to regulation. By working in

partnership with the better regulation board, we will maximise environmental benefit and minimise the cost to business. Our programme reflects European and UK better regulation principles. It is risk-based, with the most robust action focused on the most damaging activities; accountable, with regulatory actions explained and decisions justified on the basis of public standards and criteria; consistent, in that rules and standards are applied fairly; transparent, with rules that are simple and user-friendly and policies that are clearly explained; and targeted, both on the problem and on delivery of the desired outcome.

Through the better regulation programme, the environment agency will help businesses to comply by giving them clear guidance that will take the guesswork out of compliance and provide tools to help them improve their environmental performance. It will streamline the process of granting permits by introducing on-line application and payment systems. In the longer term, there will be standard permits, simpler registration, management agreements and codes of good practice for lower-risk activities. The agency will also change the way compliance is assessed, so that more resources are targeted on activities and sites that pose greatest environmental risk. In the longer term, site visits will move beyond ensuring compliance: they will consider overall environmental performance and opportunities for savings.

The Northern Ireland environment agency will not have to start from scratch. NetRegs already provides online regulatory information and advice that benefits small businesses. The better regulation and simplification review will reduce the regulatory burden on the agrifood industry: EHS has already taken steps to rationalise its activities in relation to water-discharge consents, packaging regulations and inspection for cross-compliance in relation to single farm payments. All those examples show how, within current arrangements, we are already finding opportunities for modernisation and acting upon them. Future action will build on those early steps.

Environmental crime is not just bad news for the environment; it is also anti-competitive. The responsible businesses that comply are undercut by the rogues and criminals who do not. The environment agency will have to act, and be seen to act, to stop criminals and reassure legitimate businesses. It must hit perpetrators where it hurts most — in their pockets. Illegal waste activities present EHS with a serious challenge, and its response has been equally serious. Since formation in 2003, its environmental crime team has investigated 5,779 incidents of illegal waste activities. It has secured 299 convictions, which have resulted in more than £670,000 in court fines, 13 prison sentences and four confiscation orders.

Recent developments mean that future action will be more effective than before. The Serious Crime Act 2007 classified the most serious environmental crimes alongside armed robbery and money-laundering and introduced new powers to deal with them.

10.45 am

Assets recovery is more effective than are court fines as a punishment and a deterrent. During the past financial year, the Assets Recovery Agency (ARA), in association with the EHS, obtained orders to confiscate assets worth more than £833,000 in four cases following prosecutions involving the illegal dumping of waste. In one such instance, the owner of an illegal dump received a confiscation order for £100,000 and, at the Crown Court, an 18-month suspended sentence following a guilty plea to breaches of waste management and water pollution legislation.

The EHS has a team of financial investigators who are fully trained and accredited in line with the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. They work with the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and the PSNI, and they are investigating illegal dumping with a view to confiscating perpetrators' illegal earnings.

In April 2007, Northern Ireland Water took over DRD's water supply and sewerage duties and improved the regulatory and enforcement landscape. Unlike DRD, Northern Ireland Water does not enjoy Crown immunity from prosecution. It is, therefore, subject to the full range of the EHS's enforcement powers. The EHS has brought two successful prosecutions against Northern Ireland Water for water pollution, the most recent of which was earlier this month and which resulted in a £5,000 fine. A number of potential enforcement cases are under consideration.

To increase the speed and improve the effectiveness of enforcement action, I will implement an agency-wide environmental crime unit — as recommended by the review of environmental governance for Northern Ireland and the Criminal Justice Inspection — which will build on the success of the existing waste environmental crime unit.

A wider range of sanctions and penalties is also required. The use of stop notices, voluntary undertakings and fixed penalties would empower the EHS to work with businesses to ensure rapid and effective change. They would also free up more resources to deal with the most serious offenders.

Some £0.77 million will be invested in better regulation and the environmental crime team in 2008-09, and that will rise to £1.98 million in 2010-11. That investment will allow the creation of 40 new posts. The EHS and the planning and environmental policy group have grown to meet myriad demands and requirements. Their focus has been on getting the job done, and it is right that that is the case. My officials

need to examine closely the balance of responsibility and the relationship between those two parts of my Department. I want to see clear blue water between the role of the core Department as policy-maker and legislator and the role of the environment agency as protector, regulator and enforcer. Together, the Department and the environment agency must share the objective of fulfilling our European obligations, and we must ensure that those are matched by the talent and resources available to us. I am convinced of the need for transparency and openness in decision-making.

In order to achieve that, I will recruit two independent members to the board of the Northern Ireland environment agency. Those members will have a broad perspective that has been gained from experience elsewhere, and they will be independent thinkers who will bring a fresh perspective to the business needs of the agency. At the same time, they will have the ability to challenge constructively and to act as critical friends.

The EHS publishes the minutes of its board meetings, team briefs, corporate and business plans, performance data, accounts and other essential information on its website. Furthermore, it is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the environmental information regulations. The Committee for the Environment scrutinises its work, and Assembly Members question me on it. I am keen to make decision-making even more transparent, and I have decided that the environment agency's board meetings should be open to the public.

As part of the RPA and planning reform programme, I will also ensure that the environment agency becomes a statutory consultee in the planning process, and with that will come the requirement to comment on planning applications within a specified time.

There are three statutory advisory councils: the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside; the Historic Buildings Council; and the Historic Monuments Council. Professor Burke and his team proposed that they should be amalgamated. Each council has a distinct and necessary role that is enshrined in legislation, and membership comprises volunteers who bring expertise and experience, and they do an excellent job.

Members of those councils do not believe that amalgamation will bring any additional benefit, and nor do I. Their chairpersons are in regular contact with each other, and the councils co-operate as they see fit to fulfil their objectives. The Historic Buildings Council and the Historic Monuments Council work together on the joint committee for industrial heritage on projects such as advising my Department on the Titanic Quarter.

I encourage the councils to work in partnership, but I will not change their status. I appointed Patrick Casement as chairperson of the Council for Nature

Conservation and the Countryside recently. Next spring, I will reconstitute both that council and the Historic Monuments Council, and recruitment for that will commence this autumn. Indeed, preparations for that work are already in hand.

Professor Burke said:

“Accurate, rigorous and timely data as to the state of the environment is essential to good environmental governance.”

I could not agree more. On 9 April, our first state of the environment report was published. It sets out 30 baseline indicators in six environmental policy areas. Those indicators are robust figures that allow comparison with the rest of the UK and with the Republic of Ireland. We will revise the state of the environment report every year so that we can keep track of developments.

That is not the only way in which we share data and knowledge. In April alone, three significant conferences were held that the DOE supported: the environment forum; the EHS research conference; and the marine and coastal forum conference. On 20 May, which was just last week, we held our major conference on the built heritage.

I have described how we will increase openness and transparency in our regulatory system. We also need to present our policies and plans — and the European obligations that drive them — more openly and transparently. European environmental legislation is notoriously complex, and there is an awful lot of it. That means that our policy framework is also voluminous and complex. The challenge for us is to ensure that it is better articulated. That is why I am commissioning Northern Ireland's first White Paper on the environment, which will be published during the lifetime of this Assembly.

The White Paper will identify our major objectives on waste management, climate change, biodiversity, water, landscape and the built heritage. It will map out our commitments and demonstrate how we will work with other Departments to protect and enhance the environment by fulfilling our European obligations and by implementing effective and complementary initiatives of our own. It will refer to the state of the environment report and will link the Programme for Government, the sustainable development strategy and individual policies and strategies. It will look ahead to 2025 and, in particular, will focus on the next Budget period, which will cover the years 2011-14.

I am confident that the reforms that I announced today will deliver better environmental governance in Northern Ireland. However, to ensure that effective regulation is being delivered, I believe that in 2011 there should be an independent review of the policy, of legislative development in the Department of the Environment, and of the effectiveness of the Northern

Ireland environment agency as a protector, regulator and enforcer.

As I said, I want better regulation for a better environment, and that is what we will deliver. We will do that by clarifying and simplifying the existing system, by deploying our talents and resources where they are most needed and by working in partnership with others. We will prioritise and focus on the real problems, which we will solve.

Mr Speaker: Given the importance of the Minister's statement, I am aware that some Members may feel that they also want to make a statement. I warn the House that it is vital that only questions are posed in response to the Minister's statement. Of course, Committee Chairpersons are allowed some latitude before asking their questions.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr McGlone): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given the nature of the Minister's announcement, it is inevitable that there will be more questions. However, it remains to be seen whether they will be answered.

I thank the Minister for her statement, to which the Committee for the Environment will formulate its response in due course. Indeed, several specific issues have cropped up during meetings of the Committee for the Environment.

In October 2007, the Criminal Justice Inspection NI published a report on enforcement in the DOE. Conclusion 2.3 of that report refers to the EHS as an agency whose operational activities are:

"fragmented, encouraging a 'silo' approach to its enforcement activities with little integration of methods, systems or effort."

It also states that there is:

"a lack of communication and interaction between the various units."

Subsequent to that report, the Committee wrote to the Department. We received a response advising that the detail of the Department's response was inextricably linked to the outcome of the review on which the Minister has made a statement today. The Committee would like some appraisal of that and of how certain methods highlighted in that report have been changed to bring us to the point where we are today.

The Minister's statement today — and specifically the wide range of sanctions and penalties needed — was also discussed at Thursday's Environment Committee meeting. Indeed, members were very anxious to establish whether representation had been made to the Public Prosecution Service or the courts, either by the Minister or on behalf of the Minister, in relation to these matters. I am sure that that would be of interest to the whole House.

These are the issues that I would like to raise on behalf of the Committee. Speaking as an MLA, I wish to refer to 'Foundations for the Future: The Review of Environmental Governance' — specifically chapter 5, which deals with environmental regulation. What is the view of the Minister or her Department on how the regulatory responsibility for functions can or should be transferred to the new agency in an independent capacity in relation to pollution prevention and control; waste management; the protection of species and habitats; sustainable water management; the built heritage, including archaeology; sustainable inland fisheries; and the like? There were also recommendations that the Planning and Water Appeals Commissions should be restructured and developed to create a new environmental tribunal for Northern Ireland. What is the Minister's view on that? There were also issues —

Mr Speaker: Order. I really must insist that the Member comes to the close of his question.

Mr McGlone: Sorry; I was asking questions and trying to elicit information. I was not making a speech. I will be brief, as I have only a few more points to make. *[Laughter.]*

Shortcomings were highlighted with respect to legal specialisms and the in-house lawyer specialisms. The environmental protection department should have a sufficient mass of expertise in science, economics and law. The report also stated that the arguments for a non-departmental body, a non-ministerial Department, or a transfer of enforcement powers to local government were not convincing. Instead, it called for an independent body. I am anxious to hear why the Minister has not taken this independent course in light of the recommendations contained in the report and from other bodies external to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Minister, before you answer those questions, it is obvious that there might be multiple questions from Members for the Minister today. If Members insist on asking multiple questions, the Minister may decide to answer any or none of them. Members must realise that. If Members ask multiple questions, it is very difficult for a Minister to answer them all. In fact, it is almost impossible.

The Minister of the Environment: So I have multiple-choice questions —

Mr Weir: The answer is c.

The Minister of the Environment: OK.

I thank the Chairman for his many points in relation to the statement this morning. The first point was in relation to the CJINI report of last year. He will recall that that report called for a more joined-up way of dealing with enforcement. In my statement today I stipulated that there would be an agency-wide enforcement unit. This shows that I am taking on board

the CJINI recommendation in relation to that issue. Therefore, we are having effective waste management not just in environmental protection but right across the agency, be that in water management or, indeed, in wildlife crime or illegal waste. We are dealing with all the issues through what I believe to be a very good model, worked up in respect of waste enforcement.

The review will also deal with the issue of a need for sanctions and penalties. Proportionate regulation is required, so the environment agency must have a wide range of sanctions available. I believe in that strategy, which places education before — respectively — regulation and enforcement. It is important that the environment agency has that under its wing, because education is vital to many businesses. For example, the Environment Agency of England and Wales uses education as a tool in much of its work with various sectors. I am keen to emulate that through my new environment agency.

11.00 am

As I said, the review of environmental governance was commissioned under direct rule by the then Minister with responsibility for the environment, Jeff Rooker. In June 2007, the REGNI report's authors presented me with their findings. However, much of the report was set in a direct-rule context, so I then had to assess it in the context of devolution. That is part of the reason why we have decided not to establish an independent environment agency.

The Chairperson of the Committee also asked whether representations had been made to the judiciary about fines. As he knows, the REGNI report contains a section on environmental justice. I felt, therefore, that it was appropriate that I send a copy of the report to the Lord Chief Justice. In his response, the Lord Chief Justice took issue with the report's comments on sentencing in environmental cases. He said:

"The report does not provide evidence to support this statement. The very least one might have expected would have been for the group to have sought my views before making this bold statement."

It is regrettable that the report's authors did not take the opportunity to speak to the Lord Chief Justice on environmental regulation.

The formal response to the CJINI report will be published in July. Moreover, as the Member is aware, the Planning Appeals Commission is within the remit of OFMDFM, which has no plans to amalgamate it with DOE.

Finally, I address the Chairperson in his capacity as an SDLP Member. I have received many calls during the review of draft PPS 14 to increase the number of single houses in the countryside. That contradicts the call for an independent environmental protection agency to be established. The Member, and others who call for more single houses in the countryside, cannot

have it both ways. Some Members need to start participating in joined-up government.

Mr Weir: I welcome the Minister's statement, which advocates efficient and effective environmental protection rather than bureaucratic burden. This morning, as is a Member's role I tabled to various Ministers and Departments several questions that focus on the pollution of our beaches, which is an important issue. Will the Minister assure Members that, rather than abdicating responsibility for environmental protection and subcontracting it to an arm's-length body, her proposals will ensure that proper accountability remains with the House?

The Minister of the Environment: That is why I felt that environmental governance needed to be kept within the Department of the Environment's remit. Although I recognise that a need to reorganise EHS and change its culture existed, my proposals will result in better regulation for a better environment.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I hope that the Minister was not referring to me when she mentioned PPS 14.

Although I thank the Minister for her statement, I am disappointed because she has missed a good opportunity to introduce an independent environmental protection agency (EPA). The Minister mentioned some positive aspects about EHS; however, it has a bad record when it comes to planning and illegal dumping, particularly in border areas.

How will the Minister ensure that the service offered will be effective and efficient? Furthermore, bearing in mind how border areas are affected by the dumping of illegal waste, what consultation did she have with her counterpart in the South in making her decision? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. He will be aware of a road map that was drawn up with John Gormley, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, and his team in the Republic of Ireland to address the issue of the illegal dumping of waste. I was so concerned about that issue that I wrote to Mr Gormley earlier this year to try to bring some degree of urgency to the issue of the repatriation of waste from two sites in particular — one in Fermanagh and one in Tyrone. My aim was to ensure that the repatriation was conducted in a more effective and efficient manner. Dialogue about the illegal dumping of waste between me and Mr Gormley is ongoing.

I said in my statement, and I make no apology for it, that the issue of the illegal dumping of waste is challenging. It is not simply an issue of people deciding to throw a couple of bags of rubbish over a hedge; it is big business, and large amounts of money are

involved. That is why I believe that an agency-wide approach to the issue is required.

A lot more powers are now available to address such issues, not least the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Serious Crime Act 2007. Those powers will enable us to take effective action, not relying simply on fines, but using confiscation orders for those who break the law and who are benefiting from a great deal of money. I want to tackle such issues personally. I have taken a close interest in the work of the illegal dumping unit in the Department of the Environment, and I will continue to do so.

Mr Gardiner: I am disappointed with the Minister's statement. I now understand why no members of her own party even bothered to attend the meeting in the Park Avenue Hotel about the setting up of an environmental protection agency.

Will the Minister explain why she feels that Northern Ireland should be the only part of the United Kingdom not to have an environmental protection agency? Is she prepared to create a local version of an environmental protection agency that would take account of the concerns of farmers and rural dwellers, especially given that agriculture is a bigger part of Northern Ireland's economy than is the case in other parts of the United Kingdom?

The Minister of the Environment: It is interesting that the Member has recognised that farming is a huge issue in Northern Ireland, especially given that I saw a statement of his over the weekend that singularly failed to recognise that.

Some 85% of land in Northern Ireland is owned and managed by farmers. Therefore, farmers are key stakeholders in environmental management. That is why I want to work with farmers and with the business sector to bring about education that will lead to better regulation. If such education does not work, we will move to the regulation of environmental governance, and, if that does not work, we will move to enforcement. That is a clear way in which to address the issue of environmental governance in the future. I have every confidence that that will work.

I note the Member's disappointment with my statement and with my efforts to address environmental governance and to tackle environmental crime. It is worth noting that when members of his party were in my position, nothing was done about better regulation and better governance for the future. In fact, it was the then Minister of the Environment, Mr Dermot Nesbitt, who created the sewerage hotspots in Northern Ireland that nearly resulted in our being fined by the European Court of Justice for the first time. Therefore, I will take no lectures from the Ulster Unionist Party about environmental governance and better regulation for the country for the future.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her statement. Given that representatives of three of the Executive parties have expressed concerns about the Minister's statement, will she clarify whether it is agreed Executive policy or a solo run? On a more substantive point — *[Interruption.]*

That was a question.

In her lengthy statement, the Minister failed to address the recent High Court ruling on the issue of independent environmental advice to the Planning Service, although she did refer to the EHS becoming a statutory consultee. Given that she referred to "my environment agency", how can the Minister possibly persuade either people in Northern Ireland or the courts in Europe that that agency will be adequately independent?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his questions. I took this matter to the Executive Committee last Thursday. It is not a cross-cutting issue, and therefore I did not seek the support of Executive members. I brought the statement to the Executive out of courtesy, so that they knew what would be in my statement today.

The Member knows full well that that High Court ruling is being appealed, and therefore I cannot answer his questions. I am somewhat surprised that he asked such questions, given the fact that that matter is before appeal in the High Court.

Mr Ross: I find it quite staggering that the parties in the Assembly that wanted devolution in order to have local accountability now want to give powers away to an independent agency that is not accountable to this Assembly or to the Environment Committee.

Will the Minister outline the cost of setting up an independent EPA, including running costs on a yearly basis? Will she also outline how successful independent EPAs have been in other jurisdictions?

The Minister of the Environment: It was disappointing that the REGNI report did not fulfil its terms of reference and provide the estimated costs of an environmental protection agency. It has taken some time to try and guesstimate the amount of money that it would take to do what the REGNI report envisaged.

From an administrative point of view, it would cost at least £2.5 million to set up an independent environment protection agency. It would also cost an additional £600,000 per year to run such an agency. That does not take into account the diseconomies of scale that would be involved in having an independent environmental protection agency, because such an agency would have to buy in expertise. The Chairman of the Environment Committee talked about the agency having the appropriate expertise — an independent environment protection agency would

have to buy in that expertise. From time to time, this House hears about how much is spent on consultants, and we all know that the public does not like those high costs.

The Member also asked whether other jurisdictions that have independent protection agencies have a better record than Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland has an independent agency, as does the rest of the UK. Both those countries have been infracted by the European Commission for breaches of environmental governance.

Having an independent protection agency would not make a difference: I want to make a difference in relation to better governance and better regulation. I listened to the Friends of the Earth spokesman this morning, and I listened to others. I look forward to the day when those people put themselves up against me for election; to see what the people of Northern Ireland believe is the best way to achieve better regulation and better governance.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her statement. It is an understatement to say that her announcement will be met with disgust and dismay by the entire environmental sector and the majority of this Assembly. The EHS record of protecting the environment is clearly abysmal, and the review of environmental governance was correct to recommend that an EPA should be independent of Government, while remaining accountable to the Assembly through the chairperson of the agency.

I agree with the Minister that farmers are key stakeholders in protecting the environment. Will the Minister admit that she has punished the environment sector by not trying to address the concerns of some people in the agriculture sector?

The Minister of the Environment: I am absolutely amazed by the Member's comments. I wonder whether the Member was in the Chamber to hear what I am doing to achieve better regulation and a better environment in the future.

The Member said that the entire environment sector will be opposed to what I said today; he is wrong.

I will tell Members why he is wrong. The built-heritage sector had grave concerns about what was said in the REGNI report, and the Member knows it. It is remiss of Members to misrepresent the stated opinion of Government environmental agencies on environmental governance.

11.15 am

The REGNI report came to me after a period of direct rule. The Member is on the Committee for the Environment. Is he happy to hand away his scrutiny of

what goes on in environmental governance and regulation? I am disappointed about that. I thought that, after recent instances, he would find himself to be the guardian of the environment and would want to take on board current environmental regulation and governance concerns. I wrote to two of his ministerial colleagues about transferring powers from DARD and DRD; however, they did not want to transfer those powers to the DOE and have it deal with them. The Member should speak to his ministerial colleagues about the transfer of regulations to DOE.

Mr T Clarke: When does the Minister hope to set up the working group with businesses on environmental governance, and who will be on that working group?

The Minister of the Environment: The better regulation board will have its first board meeting on Thursday this week, and it will be made up of members from the environmental, water, construction and farming sectors. Bringing together all of those sectors will be a good body with a better understanding of what better regulation means for Northern Ireland.

Mr Elliott: In her statement, the Minister said that EHS already has an impressive pool of intellectual capacity, practical ability and determination to get things done. When were those people appointed? It must have happened quite recently because, as yet, I have failed to meet them.

Does the Minister accept that EHS has been successful in clamping down on small businesses and individuals and, due to its focus on those minor discrepancies, has failed to clamp down on the major offenders in environmental issues in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of the Environment: It is a sign of weakness when Members have to attack civil servants to get their points across. It is pathetic of the Member to ask questions about the intellectual capacity of EHS staff, who have a proven record on their scientific abilities. I am interested to hear the Member's views, and whether he is in favour of an independent environmental protection agency. At the Balmoral Show two weeks ago, he told us how he was working with the farmers for better regulation.

With regard to hitting small business and over-regulation, I thought that that was quite a good argument for not having an independent environmental protection agency. However, the Member can make those arguments as well as I can; he is constrained only by where he sits today.

We are engaged in a risk-based system —

Mr Kennedy: It is always easy to change party, is it not?

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of the Environment: We are engaged in a risk-based approach to environmental regulation. Perhaps the Member was listening earlier when I talked about working with the farming and business communities and having education and better regulation, and then, if necessary, having better enforcement. We want to have better regulation for everyone in Northern Ireland, and I hoped that the Member would agree with that. However, that depends on where he sits today.

Mr Gallagher: We have all waited with great interest for a statement from the Minister, and we got that this morning.

It is a great pity that the Minister came to the Assembly with such a poor response to the biggest single issue facing everyone on the planet: how to regulate the environment. The Minister has merely repackaged the EHS, which is akin to moving the chairs around as the Titanic went under.

The Minister mentioned a better regulation board. The document, 'Foundations for the Future: The Review of Environmental Governance', which has wide public support, recommended the establishment of a board, but stressed that it should be a strong and focused regulator. How will the Minister's better regulation board meet key principles such as being representative, accountable and open?

The Minister of the Environment: The better regulation board is specifically intended to be representative. It will include people from the water industry, construction, the farming industry and environmental organisations. The new Northern Ireland environment agency will be responsible for four main elements of better regulation.

First, compliance assistance will provide direct support and guidance to companies, using web tools, such as the NetRegs that I mentioned in my statement. Better regulation will streamline the permits system by introducing online application and payment, and that will also facilitate easier compliance with environmental regulations. Compliance assessment will use proven, accredited management schemes and risk-based audit, and the final element will be effective enforcement.

Today, I have set out a clear road map for environmental governance. People who do not take the first hint to comply will move to the next stage of the process, further non-compliance will move them to the next stage, and ultimately they will be punished by the courts.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's statement. I do not want to disappoint the Minister. She may have thought that Mr McKay might want to make a difference or that he was saddened by the thought of no Committee scrutiny, but he rarely attends its meetings. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Paisley Jnr: How can he represent the farmers in his constituency?

Mr I McCrea: Exactly; I am sure that he has barely considered the farmers in his constituency. Will the Minister outline in more detail how her proposals will lead to more scrutiny and what will be the benefits to the environment?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. Essentially, the proposals aim to ensure better regulation and, importantly, accountability, which is why Members have been elected to this place. Recently, I spoke to someone about a new independent environmental protection agency, and his parting question concerned the point of electing me to Stormont if I was going to hand over half of my Department to someone who is not accountable to the House.

That question rang in my ears for some time. Members have been elected to the House to be accountable, and they can express their concerns about regulation in written questions and debates. They can also do so through oral questions, and I will doubtless face some later today. I find it strange that some Members would be happier for an outside agency to take decisions on environmental governance and regulation. The Assembly should keep its eye firmly on the ball.

Mr Wells: The Minister mentioned that her decision will cause disappointment — indeed, I would say intense disappointment — to many of Northern Ireland's environmental non-governmental organisations. However, her statement also referred to a review of environmental issues in 2011. Will she confirm that that review will be all-encompassing and that the Assembly will be able to revisit the possibility of establishing an independent environmental protection agency in 2011? *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of the Environment: I remind those Members who are making a racket that empty vessels make the most noise.

I say to Members who have made points in the debate that I have the greatest respect for the Member who asked the question, my honourable friend Jim Wells. He is a true environmentalist who knows what he is talking about — unlike many of the other Members in the House, it has to be said — when he speaks about environmental governance and environmental regulation.

I say to the Member that the review that I have mentioned, which will take place in 2011, will be an independent review. It will look at all aspects of the proposals that I have announced today, and therefore it will look again at the possibility of, and the need for, an independent EPA. However, I do not believe that that will be necessary at that time — and I hope the Member shares my view on that — because I have every confidence that what I am doing today will bring

about better regulation for a better environment. Therefore, I do not believe that there will be a need for such an agency; however, there may be, and the opportunity will be there in 2011 to revisit the matter.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for her gentle stroll through the environmental policies. It is always good to have a nice ramble in the country; a little bit of this, a little bit of that. Will the Minister tell me if she agrees with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), that the Environmental Heritage Service is underfunded, and therefore unable to perform its duties? Will she explain why there is a significant lack of detail in her proposals with regard to costs? I note that the written answer she gave me earlier is twice as long as the actual amount of money in her statement. Will she further explain why, having said that she is not in favour of quangos, she has failed to tackle three such quangos? Finally, will the Minister assure the House that her proposals amount to more than just a halfway house, designed to give the DUP time to do a U-turn ahead of the next election?

The Minister of the Environment: I find it interesting that the Member should ask me about doing a U-turn before the next election, because the DUP is the only party that did not say that it would establish an independent EPA. In fact, the Member's party was, for some considerable time — between 2000 and 2002 — in a position to establish one. Of course, the Member was not around at that time.

A Member: Tell us what party you were in.

The Minister of the Environment: Do not remind me, please. It is a bad nightmare; it was a long time ago.

In relation to the CBI's view about an independent environmental protection agency, I refer the Member to the briefing note from the CBI on that issue, which states:

"There is not universal support within the CBI membership for an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)".

The Member should get his facts right before he comes to this House. One swallow does not make a summer, and one member of the CBI does not represent the entire CBI. The Member should know that.

In relation to advisory councils, they are not quangos; they are statutory advisory agencies. However, I do not expect that the Member will understand that, so he may wish to check up on those bodies. The staff are not paid; they are volunteers, and they do an excellent job. The Member should have another look at those statutory advisory councils, and, indeed, apologise to them for calling them quangos, because they are not.

Mr Dallat: Given the effusive praise that the Minister has heaped on her officials, and her assertion that she takes environmental governance too seriously to externalise it to an outside agency, how does she

answer the charge that she has been captured by her civil servants? Devolution is surely supposed to make a difference, yet, whether in relation to the need for an independent environmental protection agency, the issues surrounding PPS 14, or even the Giant's Causeway debacle, is it not true that the officials are calling the shots, and that the message is that there is no change at the DOE?

Finally, given that the proposed new agency will be launched on 1 July, the historic anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, surely it is more likely to be the sham fight at Scarborough — *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of the Environment: I am sure that the members of the Royal Black Institution would welcome the Member to Scarva for the sham fight on 13 July.

In relation to the charge that I have been captured by my civil servants, quite frankly, that is ludicrous.

11.30 am

Mr Dallat made a lot of noise when I came before the House with a decision about the Giant's Causeway visitors' centre. At that time, his charge was that I had ignored my civil servants. He cannot have it both ways. He must understand that the Department is trying to create better regulation. It is easy for him to make as many allegations as he likes against civil servants in EHS because, of course, they cannot answer him.

The good body of men and women in EHS stand ready to take up the challenge of the changes that have been brought about in order to create the environment agency. I believe that the agency will work. As I told Mr Wells, I am confident that the changes will be effective. However, an independent review will be conducted in 2011. If the agency does not work, I am quite sure that Mr Dallat will tell me that I got it wrong.

Mr S Wilson: Unlike the Member for Lagan Valley Mr McCrea, I will not take a quiet ramble through the countryside. However, he has plenty of time to do that now that he is not a member of his party's executive.

I welcome the fact that the Minister has not caved in to the frenzied demands of Friends of the Earth and the Coalition for Environmental Protection, which have admitted that to introduce an independent environmental protection agency for Northern Ireland would be too costly an exercise. I also welcome the fact that she has recognised that, for example, the Scottish National Party has admitted that the independent Scottish Environment Protection Agency has been a disaster — it is unaccountable, remote and out of control.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr S Wilson: Yes, Mr Speaker, I will come to the question now.

Can the Minister assure Northern Ireland's tourism, construction and manufacturing industries that the frustration that they experience in trying to secure planning permission and in ensuring Northern Ireland's economic development will be allayed and alleviated by the changes that she has made in setting up the new body; and that those changes will lead to faster planning decisions and will remove the delays that are often caused by the Environment and Heritage Service?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. The Member is, of course, correct — I do not react well to threats. Earlier, some such comments were made about my being taken before the European Commission. Of course, that is not the first time that I have heard such threats, and I doubt that it will be the last.

There are only 1·7 million people in Northern Ireland. The devolved Administration is in place to deal with all the relevant issues, and I believe that that represents the proper forum in which to deal with better regulation and governance for the environment.

The Member asked whether I believe that the reforms that I have announced will help to speed up planning applications and whether they will deal more efficiently with responses to consultations with EHS. The new body, the Northern Ireland environment agency, will respond to planning applications within a specified time. I wish to be clear about that. It will also relate neatly to my planning reforms, the proposals for which I hope to bring to the Executive in the near future — in any event, before the summer recess.

The new agency will sit well with planning reform and will deal effectively with the issues that the Member has raised. During the past several years, there have been difficulties with planning, such as perceptions of delay, and so forth. The Department has tried to deal with those through planning reform. I hope that the introduction of the environment agency will bring about better and more proportionate regulation for everyone involved, whether they are in business, tourism, agriculture, etc.

Dr Farry: It is not contradictory to work for the economy and to protect the environment. Bearing in mind that the Minister has outlined the quite minimal costs that are involved in setting up an environmental protection agency — £2·5 million, and then £600,000 a year — can she explain the actual and potential financial, economic and environmental costs of not setting up such an independent agency?

I was under the impression that the St Andrews Agreement was supposed to stop solo runs by a Minister. However, according to today's ministerial statement, this issue touches on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and, no doubt,

every other aspect of governance here, so how can the Minister say that it is not a cross-cutting issue?

The Minister of the Environment: To take the Member up on his last point, it would have been a cross-cutting issue had I been taking functions away from those Departments, but I am not. My Department and I are dealing with environmental governance. Therefore, this is not a cross-cutting issue and it does not need the support of the Executive Committee.

Mr B McCrea: What about education?

The Minister of the Environment: Does the Member really want me to answer that? It is foolish to ask me about education when I am dealing with environmental issues. It shows where that Member's priority lies; he is not really interested in environmental governance, instead he wants to talk about education during the debate.

I want to return to the issue about solo runs. I am not on a solo run; I am dealing with environmental governance and the restructuring of my Department. That is why I felt it was necessary to inform the Executive of my decision. No support was sought, nor was it given.

Dr Farry is absolutely right about business and environmental governance not being mutually exclusive. That is why I have invited leaders from the business sector, as well as the agriculture, construction and water sectors, to sit on the better regulation board, so that we can work together to improve regulation.

Dr Farry also talked about the minimal costs of setting up and running an independent environmental protection agency. My Department's budget would not be able to finance the additional cost of that at present; money would have to be found. There is concern among some sections of the community that if an independent agency got off the ground, it would increase the cost of regulation, which would increase the burden on the — already strapped — business and agriculture communities. That would be a mistake.

I have taken the decision in the round. Cost was not the only factor in my decision. I believe in accountability and, therefore, that the House is the proper place to look after regulation.

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the Minister's statement and her extremely sensible decision.

We, like the Minister, know that the cost of an independent environmental protection agency would be pinned on the ratepayers of Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Minister is as surprised as me that certain Members, including Dr Farry, who cried for years about re-establishing devolution and bringing accountability back to Northern Ireland, would want to cede control of a matter as important as environmental protection to an independent, unaccountable quango.

What consideration was given to the argument, which has been made, that Northern Ireland, with a population of 1·7 million, is simply too small for an independent EPA?

The Minister of the Environment: That was certainly part of my considerations. I felt that the money would be better spent on improving regulation instead of investing in another quango and creating a layer of bureaucracy.

People will be able to see what happens on the ground more quickly. EHS has demonstrated that with its designations of ASSIs. We have a challenging target to meet in 2016 in relation to that. We want to get on with the job, and that is what we will do under the Northern Ireland environment agency.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for her statement to the Assembly this morning, in which she said:

“In the longer term, site visits will move beyond ensuring compliance: they will consider overall environmental performance and opportunities for savings.”

What assistance will be given to businesses so that they can comply with and gain the overall environmental performance standards sought by the Department?

My colleague Sammy Wilson mentioned EHS and the planning process, which does seem to take an extraordinarily long time. Will the Minister again confirm that a timescale for planning applications will be put in place to which the Northern Ireland environment agency must adhere?

The Minister of the Environment: There will be a time limit for the new agency to respond to planning applications as a consultee.

As regards compliance visits, I have been impressed by some businesses that have strongly addressed environmental issues recently. They have seen the benefits of doing so; not only because it helps the environment, which is a good enough reason in itself, but because it saves them money.

I attended a recent event in the Long Gallery at which the Quarry Products Association gave an excellent presentation on its environmental strategy for all its members. I was impressed by that presentation, and the outworkings of that will be seen.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Northern Ireland Strategy for 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure that he wishes to make a statement on Northern Ireland's strategy for the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poets): I wish to inform Members of the plans and ambitions for Northern Ireland to participate in and benefit from the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, and to set out how we will ensure delivery.

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

The UK has committed to delivering Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012 that aim to be an inspirational world sporting event for athletes and the viewing public. Potentially far-reaching benefits will arise from the games, not only for sport, but in respect of the economic boost from increased investment, training and jobs that will benefit the whole of the UK. The Cultural Olympiad will ensure participation in a range of cultural and educational opportunities.

The games will have a big impact on raising community and national pride and will help to raise the international profile of Northern Ireland and the UK. Having the games on our doorstep presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for all of us. The extent to which Northern Ireland benefits from that opportunity depends entirely on the level of our engagement.

My Department's vision for Northern Ireland's participation is to get more young people involved in sport and physical activity at domestic and international levels; to increase our success at major world-class events; to create better sporting infrastructure through facilities, coaching and development; and to maximise the economic and social impact for Northern Ireland. Ultimately, the strategy is about leaving a legacy from the games for future generations.

Some challenging targets have been set. We want Northern Ireland to host part of the torch relay for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and we will work to ensure that at least 10 Olympic or Paralympic teams come to pre-games training camps. We will also deliver on the other important elements of Northern Ireland's strategy for 2012. My Department has worked in partnership with lead organisations across central and local government to develop a strategy to deliver benefits for Northern Ireland across a number of key themes.

The cultural theme of the Northern Ireland 2012 strategy is underpinned by the plan to host a four-year cultural celebration across the UK, which will be known as the Cultural Olympiad. That project will be launched over the weekend of 26 September 2008, and will comprise local and regional projects and events; large-scale signature projects, which were included in the London 2012 bid; the mandatory opening and closing ceremonies; and other ceremonies.

Northern Ireland projects will be considered for inclusion in the Cultural Olympiad, and they can apply for inclusion through the DCAL 2012 unit. Although new funds are limited, some moneys have been allocated to support cultural activity. Northern Ireland expects to gain an additional £1.31 million through Legacy Trust UK to support local Northern Ireland projects that bring together culture, education and sports. There are also opportunities for local communities and grass-roots organisations to get involved and to use the gold dust of the Olympics to raise the profile of their sector.

Another key theme is business, and an electronic brokerage system has been specially designed to support UK business in bidding for contracts for 2012. That system, CompeteFor, was launched on 8 April 2008 in Belfast by Invest NI and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). To date, 216 companies from Northern Ireland have registered, and an agreed target is in place of 300 registrations a year for Northern Ireland.

The 2012 games will result in a growth in international leisure tourism to the UK. An additional total of 500,000 visitors is forecast for 2012.

Hosting the Olympics can boost inbound tourism for a decade, and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board will wish to maximise its share of additional visitors to the UK by supporting the Cultural Olympiad and maximising public-relations and destination-marketing opportunities that are associated with London 2012. Given that 2012 will mark the Titanic's centenary, the Titanic brand will also offer potential to attract visitors around that date. We must use the Olympic Games to promote Northern Ireland as a destination of choice for major international and world-class events.

11.45 am

Volunteering is a fundamental part of Northern Ireland's 2012 Olympic strategy, and the Volunteer Development Agency is taking the lead on that theme. The 2012 games should inspire existing volunteers to volunteer during the games and encourage the involvement of those who have not yet had volunteering experience. Sustaining that volunteering contribution will be challenging; however, an even greater challenge is to envisage how that contribution might be increased in order to build further capacity in the

sector. Nevertheless, the unique attraction of being a volunteer during games time — being part of that world event — should add value.

The Personal Best programme — a new programme that is inspired by the games — is an excellent example of that, and its objective is to ensure that marginalised and socially-excluded people have the opportunity to participate in London 2012 activities. The programme uses the excitement generated by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to engage socially-excluded people, and it will encourage them into, and support them in, further accredited training, volunteering and paid employment. Participants will experience volunteering — perhaps for the first time — and develop skills in areas such as event management, health and safety and business.

Successful graduates from the programme will be guaranteed an interview with LOCOG to be considered as a games volunteer. In coming months, the programme will be implemented throughout the UK, and the Department for Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the sector skills councils, is considering how we might participate and derive benefits from that excellent opportunity.

Such skills will not only benefit London. Northern Ireland successfully bid to host the World Police and Fire Games in 2013, when we will welcome more than 25,000 visitors, including athletes and their support personnel. In order to support that major event, 5,000 volunteers will be required, and people with training, and possibly even experience from the London games, will be of huge value then and beyond.

Opportunities in education are still being developed. However, the games will provide a unique opportunity to inspire young people to greater participation in cultural activities and sport and to develop their knowledge and skills. Young people and their teachers and schools, colleges and universities throughout the UK will have access to films and other education resources and materials, such as, from June, an interactive website that will enable students to learn about the Olympics and Paralympics. The Paralympic Games handover will take place on 17 September, and its theme will be education.

Aspirations to maximise the sporting opportunities provided by London 2012 are fully aligned with my Department's draft strategy for sport and physical recreation, which focuses on participation, performance and places. Its aims are to increase participation by 2014; to provide every child over the age of eight with the opportunity to participate in at least two hours a week of extra-curricular sport and physical recreation; to secure, by 2017, a 3% increase in adult participation in sport and physical recreation, a 6% increase by women and a 6% increase by people with a disability.

With regard to increasing performance, by 2017, we want 100 medallists at Commonwealth, European, World or Olympic level, and, with regard to places, we aim to complete the elite facilities programme.

Sport Northern Ireland intends to invest in 100 multi-skill coaches; 80 community coaches and physical activity leaders; 22 disability and women's sports officers; 60 talent coaches; six performer development centres; and 24 high-performance coaches and performance directors.

With regard to pre-games training camps, Northern Ireland has been successful in having 27 sports facilities included in the pre-games training camp guide for London 2012. The guide will be launched at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing this summer. Furthermore, eight of our sporting venues are included in the London 2012 guide for pre-games training camps for paralympic sports.

Inclusion in the guide is the first stage, but that does not guarantee success. We must work hard to secure the sports to ensure that our facilities are used by athletes. That will present opportunities for the young and for local communities to be inspired further by seeing Olympians live, work and train in their area.

There is also scope to expand our plans and activities for 2012, and to include additional themes, such as health and the environment. Engagement with the relevant organisations is already well under way. Although much more work remains to be done on taking forward Northern Ireland's plans for 2012, it is worth recognising that steady progress has been made. It is crucial to continue to work in partnership and to engage across all sectors to ensure delivery.

Northern Ireland is a full part of the London 2012 structure for the Games — it is represented on the organising committee's nations and regions group at a senior level, along with the nine English regions and the other two devolved Administrations. We are working closely with our colleagues in Scotland and Wales to ensure that we learn from and share best practice.

Being part of the London 2012 structure will ensure that we are kept informed of key developments across the themes of our strategy and that we feed into the wider Government policy objectives for creating a lasting and valuable legacy.

I presented the plans to the Executive Committee on 22 May 2008, and they agreed to the establishment of an inter-agency steering group — chaired by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure — to provide strategic oversight of Northern Ireland's contribution to the 2012 games. The Executive also agreed to embed 2012 opportunities into respective departmental plans and, where appropriate, include those plans as part of the normal in-year monitoring and budgetary process.

That demonstrates the Northern Ireland Government's commitment to capitalising on the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games in 2012. The eyes of the world will transfer from China to the UK on 24 August 2008, when the spotlight moves from the 2008 Olympics and Paralympics in Beijing to London and the UK. It is essential that Northern Ireland plays its part fully to ensure that we gain the maximum benefit for Northern Ireland — for our businesses, communities and our young people. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and we are well placed to deliver on it.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas seo.

I welcome the Minister's statement. What opportunities will the vision for business that he referred to present for the hard-pressed construction industry — for example, in helping to build the Olympics infrastructure for 2012? Is the Minister's refusal to reach a decision on the location of the multi-sports stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site tantamount to the throwing away of opportunities to host major sporting events ahead of and during 2012? Are we losing out on major sporting opportunities because of the dithering in arriving at a decision on the multi-sports stadium?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Member has raised a couple of issues; the first relates to business. Lloyds TSB has estimated a potential £400 million of business for companies in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the Olympics. That is a significant target, and Invest NI believes that it is a very challenging one. However, if targets do not present a challenge, they are not worth setting. It is better to set challenging targets in the first instance.

I wish to challenge businesses to get involved in CompeteFor. Invest NI has already held a launch event and will be visiting regional towns to encourage local businesses to get involved. I have no doubt that many of our companies will attract business as a consequence of the London Olympics. A number of firms have already won sub-contracts with some of the companies that have received the more significant awards for construction of Olympic facilities, and they will be well placed to further cement those relationships.

The Member knows well that the decision on the stadium — and all that goes with it — is not one to be made by myself alone; rather, it is for the Executive as a whole. It is a cross-cutting issue, and I am, therefore, not in a position to make a decision on it without the full support of the Executive. Further work must be done on the matter before we can reach a conclusion, and I trust that a decision will be made sooner rather

than later. Nonetheless, the matter is not exclusively in my hands.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his statement. He outlined clearly a vision for involving young people in sport and physical activity, for creating a better sporting infrastructure and for leaving a lasting legacy. With that in mind, I want to ask about target sports, which is one of the sectors in which Northern Ireland has excelled over the years, whether it be clay-pigeon shooting or shooting with shotguns, rifles or pistols. We have brought gold, silver and bronze medals home with a regularity that has astounded the rest of the world. What is being done to ensure that target sports are getting the help that they clearly need, especially where the provision of suitable grounds, training and elite facilities are concerned?

In particular, what opportunities will young people have to participate in target sports? The vision mentions the need for more young people to get involved in sport and physical activity, and that is important. Target sports are good for discipline, personality and character. We have great talent in this country and the potential to win some gold and silver medals.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware that target-sports bodies submitted several applications to stage one of the elite facilities programme. Unfortunately, they did not meet the requirements and failed to proceed to the next stage. I am also aware that there are facilities in Northern Ireland that are of a very high standard, some of which have opened just recently. I am also aware that the target-sports sector has enjoyed great success in the past. I would have encouraged the organisers of the London Olympics to hold target-sports events in Northern Ireland, but, unfortunately, facilities in London have already been secured, meaning that those in Northern Ireland will not be required.

I am also aware that young people's participation in target sports here is subject to an age restriction that does not apply in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Department would certainly support a change in the regulations that would allow young people to participate — under proper supervision — in target sports from an earlier age.

Mr McNarry: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I recognise that it is built on plans and ambitions. I note the line:

"Having the games take place on our own doorstep presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us all".

In the recent past, the Minister talked — if not boasted — of bringing Olympic soccer teams here for Olympic competitions. Is that an ambition, or is there an actual plan to bring Olympic soccer to Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: That ambition could be delivered if we had fit-for-purpose premises. Ultimately, delivery of that ambition depended on our proceeding with plans for a multi-sports stadium. However, until we make a decision on whether to proceed with the stadium, we cannot pursue any plans for Olympic soccer competitions.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I share his optimism and hope for the future. It is important to showcase Northern Ireland in a wider context and to increase pride in all communities in Northern Ireland.

Can the Minister outline his commitment to equality of access in the three Ps that he described — participation, performance and places — to ensure that there is a proper geographical balance across the regions and all areas and that there is a true sporting legacy for all young people? I frame my question with the North West Regional Sports Campus in mind. Has the Minister had any discussions with the new Irish Government Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism about cross-border elements of pre-training and about elite facilities?

12.00 noon

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The elite facilities are going to an outline business case at present. There is a shortlist of 15 potential sites, none of which happens to be in the west of the Province. That has come about as a result of the quality of the bids that were submitted and not on the basis of excluding any particular area. As a consequence, we are where we are.

I am aware of the facilities in Londonderry to which the Member for Foyle Mr Ramsey has referred. Meetings were held to discuss that issue, and an alternative source of funding, albeit with less money, was identified to help to support that project. I look forward to meeting again those people who want to deliver that project in order to see what progress has been made and how the Department's offer of assistance can be turned into action.

Dr Farry: I welcome the Minister's statement and acknowledge his commitment to the development of sport in Northern Ireland. I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. Will the Minister assure the House that the finite capital resources that are available for the development of elite facilities will be concentrated, as necessary, to ensure that a number of those facilities become a reality? The flagship project that is earmarked for Bangor is the aquatic centre. Will the Minister update the House on the current outline business case for that project?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We have less than the £53 million for elite facilities that was originally referred to by David Hanson, the then Minister with responsibility for culture, arts and leisure,

and I will seek to make up the shortfall in other ways. However, I want to sweat the money that has been allocated for elite facilities and get as much match funding as possible from the deliverers of the projects. I will, therefore, be encouraging those who are making bids to do so on the basis of value for money as well as on all the other conditions in the bid applications.

North Down has two bids: one for a swimming pool and one for marina facilities. I am sure that the people of north Down would not want all the money to go into one project, with the result that the other project had no possibility of being funded. Later today, I will be speaking to the chief executive of North Down Borough Council and to the council's director of leisure services, and I hope that we can reach a conclusion quickly and get that 50-metre-pool project off the ground and under way as soon as possible.

Lord Browne: I also welcome the Minister's statement and am pleased that steps are being taken to ensure that the Olympic Games will have a sustainable impact on sport in Northern Ireland.

The Minister's statement referred to increased participation, performance and places, adding:

"The aim is to increase participation by 2014 to provide every child in Northern Ireland over the age of eight with the opportunity to participate in at least two hours per week of extra-curricular sport and physical recreation".

Will those proposed additional two hours be compulsory or voluntary?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department is wholly reliant on the collaboration and co-operation of other Departments in delivering the proposals, which is why a cross-departmental working group has been established. The group has already met, and I appreciate the co-operation that has so far been shown.

The delivery of the additional two hours' extra-curricular activity for children over the age of eight is dependent on the co-operation of the Department of Education (DE). I will be looking to the Department of Education for advice on the proposals.

However, I am not sure whether we can make extra-curricular activity compulsory. In fact, for many years — even in recent times — some schools offered no extra-curricular activities. Therefore, we must ensure that every school offers such activities, particularly in sport. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), among others, will reap the benefits in years to come.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his statement and for his answers. I note his commitment to balanced regional development in the upgrading of sports facilities throughout the North.

I also note the emphasis that he placed on inspiring people to become volunteers, especially for the 2012 Olympic Games, not to mention the World Police and Fire Games, which will follow in Belfast in 2013. I am sure that the Minister is aware that Belfast City Council premised its bid to host those games on the fact that there would be a multi-sports stadium at the Long Kesh site. That site is listed as one of 27 sports facilities that will be used for the 2012 Olympic Games. However, if a stadium is not built on that site, what impact will that have on the entire volunteering project?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It will certainly set a challenge for us. More than 25,000 visitors, including participants and their support teams, will attend the World Police and Fire Games. At present, we do not have a facility to cater for that number of people at the opening and closing events. However, we are considering several options, and I have always said that I am prepared to consider all feasible options. Ultimately, we must have delivered a facility of that scale by 2013. Therefore, a decision must be made on whether the facility be sited at the Maze/Long Kesh or at another site. That decision is not for me as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to take, but one that the entire Executive must take.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. I, too, recognise the massive potential that exists not only for sport but for business in Northern Ireland.

The Minister mentioned volunteers. I have been involved in hosting tournaments in various sports clubs, so I recognise the massive contribution that volunteering makes to hosting sports events or training camps. What steps have been taken to ensure that we have enough volunteers and that we encourage people to become involved in the Olympic Games in that capacity?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We have held meetings with the Department for Social Development and the Volunteer Development Agency, both of which will assist the cross-departmental working group. Therefore, we are working closely with those who are charged with the delivery of volunteering in Northern Ireland.

The biggest issue may not be whether we get sufficient volunteers to go to the London Olympics but whether we receive a fair allocation. The organisers of the Olympic Games are looking for 70,000 volunteers. There will be greater capacity in London and the home counties to fill those 70,000 places, but we want a quota of those places for volunteers from Northern Ireland.

However, there are other issues to consider. For example, it will be a challenge to identify how we might financially support volunteers in order to enable them to travel to London and pay for their accommodation. Ultimately, we will seek sponsorship from private-sector organisations. Lloyds TSB, which is the

Olympic Games' main sponsor, is not based in Northern Ireland — although other sponsors are — so that will present us with a further challenge. The problem will not be getting volunteers; rather, it will be obtaining enough places for those people who wish to volunteer at the London Olympics.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an ráiteas seo, agus gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as. Fáiltím fosta roimh na deiseanna spóirt, oideachais agus cultúir a thiocfas as na cluichí oilimpeacha agus parailimpeacha.

I welcome the Minister's statement and, in particular, the opportunities that will be available to sport, education and culture through the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. Will the Minister help to ensure that films and other educational resources will be available in the Irish language? Given that the Irish language is a central part of our culture, and that we have a vibrant Irish-medium education sector that should have access to such resources in the Irish language, will the Minister ensure that the Irish-language film industry will have access to the funding? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My statement did not mention films, and, therefore, I do not understand to what the Member for Newry and Armagh refers. However, the various TV companies that have acquired broadcasting rights will be responsible for coverage of the Olympics. I am sure that those companies would — if there was sufficient demand — be prepared to broadcast in the Irish language. However, if there is no demand, those companies will take a commercial decision not to do so. If the Member has sufficient evidence to support the broadcasting of the Olympics in the Irish language, he should, perhaps, approach those TV companies.

Mr Gallagher: I welcome the Minister's statement and, in particular, the possibility of situating pre-Olympic training camps across Northern Ireland. Does he consider a quality centre such as the Necarne Equestrian Centre to be the type of facility that could be used for that purpose? If so, is there any work that such centres can conduct in the meantime?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Necarne Equestrian Centre is one of the 27 venues identified by LOCOG; I hope that Fermanagh District Council will support the marketing of that facility to ensure that Olympic equestrians can participate in Northern Ireland.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Mesothelioma, etc., Bill

Accelerated Passage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill proceed under the accelerated passage procedure in accordance with Standing Order 40(4).

The Bill is an important piece of legislation, which will establish provision in Northern Ireland that corresponds to the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Bill, which is expected to receive Royal Assent at Westminster soon.

The Mesothelioma, etc., Bill is a compassionate piece of legislation designed to help those who need it when they need it. Social security Bills are, by definition, exceptional. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 — which established the Assembly and is the basis for its legislative competence — recognises the unique position of social security, child support and pensions. Under Section 87, I have a statutory duty to consult with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with a view to maintaining single systems of social security, pensions and child support in the United Kingdom. Section 87 recognises the long-established principle of parity in social security issues between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's social security system is not self-financing. The cost of paying benefits in Northern Ireland is very heavily subsidised by Great Britain. In 2006-07, for example, the Northern Ireland National Insurance fund needed a transfer of £630 million from the Great Britain fund to meet its benefit obligations. In the same period, expenditure on non-contributory benefits, which are demand-led and financed out of taxation revenue, was in excess of £2.29 billion. That means that in 2006-07, the amount we received from Great Britain to fund our social security system was approximately £3 billion. That funding is predicated on the maintenance of parity.

12.15 pm

The Bill introduces a new scheme to make a lump-sum payment to a person with diffuse mesothelioma, or a payment to his or her dependant if that person has, sadly, passed on. The aim is to provide faster compensation to all those people diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma by providing upfront financial support to those people who were exposed to asbestos in or outside the workplace, while they can still benefit from it.

Diffuse mesothelioma is an asbestos-related cancer of the lung or abdominal linings. It has a long latency and is rapidly progressive and, invariably, fatal, with

death normally occurring within nine months of diagnosis. Mesothelioma causes up to 50 deaths each year in Northern Ireland. The very short life expectancy from diagnosis often means that the sufferers die before compensation is paid. The provisions of the Bill are highly beneficial to those suffering from this devastating and fatal disease.

The Bill also provides for lump-sum payments under the new scheme and the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 to be recoverable from subsequent civil compensation. Any moneys recovered will be ploughed back into the scheme with the aim of funding higher payments in future. The amount payable is expected initially to be set at around £6,000. As money starts to be recovered from civil compensation, it is hoped that the payment will increase to match the amount payable under the 1979 Order for those people who can establish an occupational link, which is currently around £18,000.

In order to ensure that the proposals in the Bill are implemented at the same time as in Great Britain, the necessary powers must be available as soon as possible. I have discussed the provisions of the Bill with the Committee for Social Development, and, in accordance with Standing Order 40(3), I have explained the reasons for my request for accelerated passage. I believe that the Committee shares my view that the Bill should be implemented as soon as possible. In fact, I recently received a letter of support from the Committee for accelerated passage of the Bill.

In accordance with Standing Order 40(4), I will now explain the reasons for seeking accelerated passage. The Department for Work and Pensions proposes to make the first payments under the corresponding Westminster Bill by October 2008. If we were to use the normal Bill procedure, it would not be possible to maintain parity of timing with Great Britain. That would mean that sufferers in Northern Ireland would not be allowed compensation from the same date as sufferers in Great Britain. On this occasion, the use of accelerated passage is unavoidable if we are to maintain parity of timing with Great Britain.

Given that death normally occurs within months of diagnosis, I am sure that Members will agree that it is vital that the scheme is operative from as early a date as possible. The aim is to have the scheme up and running by October 2008. Members will appreciate that I do not seek accelerated passage lightly. However, if we do not use the accelerated passage procedure, the implementation of these beneficial measures in Northern Ireland will be delayed for several months, and people will be denied the extra financial security that this Bill offers during the final months of their lives.

Surely that cannot be right.

As I said, recently I had a very useful discussion with the Committee for Social Development on the future handling of parity Bills in the field of social security. The Committee acknowledged the imperatives underlining parity, and the inevitable tensions in relation to the parity of timing that are inherent in a single system of social security in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Although, I intend to use the full legislative procedure where possible, it is inevitable that there will be occasions — such as the introduction of this Bill — on which I must seek accelerated passage.

For the reasons given, I am sure that Members will wish to support the motion for accelerated passage to ensure that Northern Ireland sufferers of that terrible, pernicious disease can receive payments, under the scheme, from the same date as can sufferers in Great Britain. Accelerated passage means that there will not be a formal Committee Stage. However, Members will have opportunities to make their views known and to discuss the issues fully at the Second, Consideration and Further Consideration Stages.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Campbell): At its meeting on 17 April 2008, the Committee for Social Development received a briefing from departmental officials on the background and policy objectives of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill. On 15 May, Minister Ritchie attended a meeting of the Committee to explain her reasons for requesting accelerated passage for the Bill, and she outlined — as she has just done for the Assembly — the consequences of it not being granted.

Mesothelioma has a long incubation period. It may not be diagnosed for many years after exposure; however, as soon as the symptoms manifest themselves and a diagnosis is made, the sufferer's life expectancy is very limited. The Bill will ensure that, once diagnosed, every sufferer will receive a payment in six weeks of making a claim. Ensuring that sufferers receive a lump-sum payment when they can still benefit from it is of the utmost importance. It is hoped that it will give them greater financial security in the final months of their lives.

As the Minister said, the Bill is a parity measure. It is crucial that sufferers of that terrible disease in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged in any way whatsoever with regard to the timing of the payment of the lump sums.

In conclusion, the Committee for Social Development supports the Minister's request that the Bill be granted accelerated passage.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with Minister Ritchie's argument that the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill, in particular, warrants accelerated passage, due to the nature of the condition and the relatively short period between diagnosis and

the sufferer's death. I welcome the fact that the Bill encompasses spouses who develop the condition as a result of having washed clothing that had been in contact with asbestos.

The Minister discussed accelerated passage and parity legislation with the Committee for Social Development. Although, each Bill will be examined on its merits, this particular legislation warrants accelerated passage. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the Bill's introduction in the House today. There can be no doubt that it is compassionate legislation, and it will be welcomed by all mesothelioma support groups in Northern Ireland. It will ensure that benefits will reach the sufferers quickly.

The Bill removes the need for a test to establish how the disease was contracted. Members will have heard the stories of their constituents who have that horrible disease. Wives contracted the disease from washing their husband's clothes, and some children have it because they played with their dads when they came home from work with asbestos dust on their clothes. It is a horrible, filthy disease.

I am delighted about the Bill's accelerated passage because it will ensure that people in Northern Ireland receive their benefit as quickly as people in GB.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party supports the accelerated passage of the Bill in order to maintain parity of timing and to get the scheme up and running in October 2008, the same time as in Britain, so that people who suffer from this terrible disease will receive compensation and not be left behind.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for Social Development for his remarks. I agree that mesothelioma has a long incubation period and results in limited life expectancy, which is one reason that I am asking for accelerated passage in order to ensure that there is parity in making the payments at the same time as the legislation is enacted in GB.

I thank Mr Brady, Mrs Bradley and Ms Lo for their comments and for their support and endorsement of the accelerated passage procedure. The detail of the Bill will be discussed during Second Stage, subject to the approval of accelerated passage by the Assembly, and I look forward to that discussion.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill [NIA 16/07] proceed under the accelerated passage procedure, in accordance with Standing Order 40(4).

Mesothelioma, etc., Bill

Second Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill [NIA 16/07] be agreed.

As Second Stage follows immediately after the motion for accelerated passage, there will inevitably be an element of déjà vu in what other Members and I say, but I hope that Members will bear with me.

The Bill makes provisions that correspond to those contained in the Westminster Child Maintenance and Other Payments Bill; it is, therefore, a parity measure. In seeking accelerated passage for the Bill, I have outlined the arguments in favour of maintaining this long-standing policy, not least of which are the financial realities. I trust that all Members accept the benefits of parity and that the Bill is a compassionate piece of legislation, which, if enacted, will enable people in Northern Ireland who suffer from mesothelioma to benefit financially.

During the accelerated passage debate, I briefly described the contents of the Bill; I will now address the Bill's proposals in greater detail. Under current provisions, a sufferer of the disease may receive compensation from one or more sources. First, a civil claim for damages can be made against the company or companies responsible for negligently exposing people to asbestos, in breach of their statutory duty. Secondly, people may be entitled to claim through the industrial injuries disablement benefit scheme, which is administered by my Department. Thirdly, for those unable to pursue a civil claim against an employer, a lump-sum payment can be made under the scheme set up by the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, which is now administered by my Department.

Making a civil claim can be difficult; for example, the employer's company may have ceased to exist, making its insurer difficult to trace. Eligibility for industrial injuries disablement benefit or a payment under the 1979 scheme is dependent on asbestos exposure having occurred during the course of employment.

Therefore, those who contract mesothelioma from any other type of exposure, and those who cannot establish an employment link, are ineligible for such payments.

12.30 pm

It can often take some time for an entitled claim to be processed, particularly if it involves tracing relevant employment records. Sadly, the poor life expectancy

associated with mesothelioma — on average, around nine months from diagnosis — means that sufferers often die before compensation is paid. Therefore, quick receipt of compensation — while they can still benefit from it — is important to sufferers and their dependants.

The Bill provides for lump-sum payments to be made to those suffering from diffuse mesothelioma without the need to establish an occupational or, indeed, a causal link. Mesothelioma is a particularly terrible disease, with a very long latency period and a very short life expectancy from diagnosis.

The Bill's aim is to provide payment to sufferers within a matter of weeks of diagnosis, while they can still benefit from it. If a person dies before a payment is made, that person's dependants can claim a payment under the scheme. The scheme will benefit, in particular, people who currently cannot claim compensation, such as women who have been exposed to asbestos when washing their partner's clothes; those who were self-employed; and those who cannot establish any occupational or causal link. Everyone who contracts mesothelioma will be eligible for an upfront lump-sum payment within weeks of diagnosis of this devastating disease.

The Bill will amend the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to enable payments made under the new scheme, and the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, to be recovered if a person proceeds to receive compensation from a civil claim. Payments recovered from civil compensation will be used to fund future payments made under the scheme.

The amount payable under the scheme is expected to be set initially at around £6,000. As money starts to be recovered from civil compensation, it is hoped that the payment will increase in coming years to match the amount payable under the 1979 scheme, which is currently around £18,000. To avoid double provision, a person who has already received compensation — such as a payment under the 1979 scheme or civil compensation — will not be eligible for a further lump-sum payment under the Bill.

The Bill also provides for the appeals system — which applies to social security benefits — to apply to the determination of claims by the Department. That gives a claimant a right of appeal to an appeal tribunal and a subsequent right of appeal to a commissioner on a point of law.

In short, the Bill will ensure that people suffering from diffuse mesothelioma receive compensation more quickly. It will provide upfront financial support within a matter of weeks to those who were exposed to asbestos inside or outside the workplace. The Bill is

beneficial and will provide significant financial support at a time when it can be of most use. It will provide additional financial security during what must be a very difficult time for sufferers and their families. No amount of money can adequately compensate a person facing death as a result of this terrible disease, but I hope that the speedy payment of a lump sum under this proposed legislation will assist sufferers in the final months of their lives.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Campbell): The Minister has outlined the background and policy objectives of the Bill in some detail. I will not go over all of the same ground; however, I will highlight a couple of points.

Under the scheme, all sufferers of mesothelioma, or their dependants, will receive a lump sum quickly, without having to establish an occupational link.

In practical terms, payment under the scheme will be made to certain groups, including those who have been exposed to asbestos indirectly, for example, from a relative, those who have been exposed environmentally, and the self-employed. The Minister has already given specific examples of those who are covered by the Bill.

At present, people suffering from mesothelioma may receive payment as the result of a civil claim or compensation under the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979. However, payment under that Order is dependent on an occupational link. Therefore, under the Order, those who contract mesothelioma from any type of exposure other than through their occupations are ineligible.

Furthermore, a civil claim may take a considerable time to process, especially if it involves tracing employment records from many years ago. Unfortunately, and as has been mentioned already, the poor life expectancy that is associated with mesothelioma often means that sufferers die before compensation is paid.

It is important to sufferers and their dependants that they receive compensation while they can benefit from it. Although no amount of money can compensate for the misery and suffering that are caused by this terrible disease, the quick payment of a lump sum should offer at least some assistance.

On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I thank the Minister and her officials for briefing the Committee on the principles and details of the legislation. The Committee supports the Bill.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have no wish to repeat what has been said, and I have only one point to make. The Minister mentioned that sufferers will be able to appeal. I hope that that will not be a major feature of the outworkings of the legislation, because a sufferer may die before

their appeal is heard, and we know that appeals can take a long time. In general terms, however, Sinn Féin supports the Bill. Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Lo: I, too, have no wish to repeat the many points that have been made. I endorse the Bill warmly: it fills the gap that has been left by the 1979 Order. Without stipulating the need for an occupational link, the Bill will compensate those who have contracted this terrible illness either directly or indirectly. That goes a long way towards being fair to everyone who suffers from the illness. I support speedy payment, which should be made in a matter of weeks, to those who suffer as a result of the disease. As other Members said, no amount of money can compensate for suffering or for loss of life. However, material compensation will help sufferers and will make their lives easier.

The Minister said that the scheme will start by paying lump sums of £6,000. However, she said that she hopes that it will eventually match levels of payment that are provided for by the 1979 Order, under which maximum sums of £18,000 were paid. The Department for Social Development must work hard, using the benefit-recovery legislation, to recoup money. Indeed, the whole scheme depends on that recoupment: we can increase the size of payments only if we recoup enough money from insurers. Taxpayers should not have to pay for the liability of employers. Where an employer is ordered to pay compensation to an employee, the employer's insurer may go to court and ask that the level of compensation be reduced on the ground that the employee has been compensated by the state already. It is therefore important that we work hard to recover the full amount from employers' insurers.

The Minister for Social Development: I have listened carefully to Members' comments, and I trust that I will be able to address their concerns. I thank the Chairman and members of the Committee for Social Development for supporting the expeditious passage of the Bill. It is necessary, because it concerns people who are enduring great suffering and misery as a result of that pernicious disease, mesothelioma.

I cannot disagree with what Mr Brady said about appeals. Any appeals that are received must be dealt with expeditiously, because of the low life expectancy of mesothelioma sufferers. We want people to benefit from the compensation scheme when they are alive. That is preferable to the family's receiving the compensation following the victim's death.

Ms Lo mentioned the levels of compensation payment. We have arranged to pool the money that has been recovered from civil compensation claims with Great Britain. That recovered money comes from the employer's insurer, and not from the person who is being compensated.

I listened carefully to Mr Brady's comments, and I agree that there will be few appeals. However, as I said already, it is hoped that the appeals will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. In our past lives, Mr Brady and I experienced the appeals structure, and we know that, sometimes, appeals can impose further misery on applicants and — due to the possible delays — place an inordinate burden on them.

The Department for Social Development has the power to reconsider a decision, perhaps in cases where a new fact comes to light, or where a mistake has been made. In such cases, the Department will be happy to examine the matter. We are in no doubt that this is a matter of grave concern to the sufferers, their dependants and their families. We want to deal with the problem in the most conciliatory, sensitive and sympathetic manner possible.

I hope that I have addressed all of the concerns that were raised. I will read the Hansard report, and if a Member has raised a matter that I have failed to address, or that needs to be dealt with in more detail, I will write to the Member.

I am happy to commend the Bill to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill [NIA 16/07] be agreed.

Libraries Bill

Final Stage

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): I beg to move

That the Libraries Bill [NIA 5/07] do now pass.

The decision to establish a new body to manage and deliver a unified library service was taken last year by the Executive, following a period of public consultation. Since then, the Bill has undergone an important period of scrutiny by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Now, at the Bill's Final Stage, the Assembly can have its say.

The service provided by public libraries has a vital role in today's society. Libraries are an undervalued asset in our communities, and their existence is sometimes taken for granted. However, libraries are rich resources that provide open access to books and information for knowledge, enlightenment and entertainment. Furthermore, there is the bonus of knowledgeable staff who provide advice, direction and assistance. The Library Service is imbued with a philosophical approach that emphasises the value of books, information and cultural assets; and the egalitarian right of everyone to be helped to access them.

The Library Service is committed to the importance of self-discovery, in helping people realise their potential. It is also committed to the need for access to quality materials and advice and assistance in using them. Libraries can, and do, help citizens achieve an improved quality of life, and they nurture vibrant communities. A society that puts efforts into achieving the best structures for the management and delivery of libraries is one that cares for such values.

12.45 pm

In the past two years or more, significant effort has gone into considering how best to provide a library service for Northern Ireland. I remind Members that, during the consultation on the review of public administration proposals, the future of the Library Service was genuinely open to debate. There was no previously determined solution — options were proposed and consulted on. I am, therefore, confident that, together, we have achieved not only a sound and sensible solution but an exciting and innovative one.

I strongly believe that the model that proposes a unified library service for all of Northern Ireland that is delivered and managed by a new body — the library authority — is the best option for achieving a high-quality public-library service.

There are several reasons why that is the case. The library authority, as a separate body, will deal solely with the public-library service and will, therefore, place a

dedicated focus on libraries. In some respects, that is something that, to date, has been lacking. A single library service for the whole of Northern Ireland will provide improved quality of service by facilitating the sharing of best practice and by bringing all parts of the service up to the same level as that achieved by the best providers. It will ensure parity across Northern Ireland. A single service will also ensure coherent planning across the region for the service as a whole, and will, as a result, ensure the most effective use of resources.

By providing a single focus for library services, the library authority will be best placed to develop partnerships with other services — such as in education or health — to deliver programmes to targeted groups. Combining five library services into one is a streamlining measure that will produce efficiencies by ending the duplication of administration and of the functions that are currently provided by Library Service headquarters. It will also achieve greater transparency in accounting for public funds.

Moreover, as a service of central Government that is accountable to the Executive and the Assembly, the library authority will be well placed to ensure that library services support a wide range of Government priorities. Those priorities include promoting literacy and lifelong learning, and addressing social inclusion. Libraries are concerned with informal learning and offer an especially significant opportunity for those who have missed out on learning or who feel uncomfortable in formal learning situations.

Many people have helped the Bill to reach its Final Stage, when the Assembly gives final consideration to the Bill's proposed restructuring of the delivery of public-library services. In particular, I thank the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, which considered the Bill between September 2007 and January 2008. The Committee agreed the model of a unified service led by the library authority, but, in scrutinising the legislation, it raised several important issues, some of which have been incorporated in the Bill.

One of the Committee's main concerns was that there should be local engagement with the Library Service to ensure that any new service reflected local needs. Plans are now in place to secure local engagement in two ways: first, by giving library-authority managers responsibility for a particular area, which is to be located in the area where they serve; and, secondly, through consultative arrangements that the library authority will establish. Those consultative arrangements will involve local government and other statutory and voluntary agencies, and they will apply until district councils' community-planning responsibilities are in place.

The legislation represents an innovative model for library services. Moreover, it is a model that has been

tailored in Northern Ireland for Northern Ireland. It is a unique model that has provoked a great deal of interest from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland.

Over the next few years, I look forward to seeing restructuring leading to the establishment of a unified library service that will deliver service improvement and parity across Northern Ireland, as well as a major capital-investment programme's being put in place to develop and improve the library estate for the twenty-first century. In that way, the library authority will be able to deliver on the Department's vision of flexible and responsive library services that provide a dynamic focal point in the community and assist people in fulfilling their potential.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next contribution will come from the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Barry McElduff.

The sitting was suspended at 12.49 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to address the House in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. Cultúir, Ealaíon agus Fóillíochta.

The Libraries Bill was referred to the Committee on 19 June 2007 and was considered at 16 Committee meetings. I thank all the individuals and organisations who provided written and oral evidence to the Committee. I also thank the officials who, over several meetings, took the Committee through the detailed provisions of the Bill. I commend all Committee members for the work that they did in considering the details of the Bill, and I also thank the Assembly and Committee staff for the support that they gave to the Committee.

In Committee, the Bill was scrutinised clause by clause. The Committee concluded that it was content to support all the provisions of the Bill, with the exception of aspects of clause 2, schedule 1 and schedule 3. I am happy to report that all the amendments have now been agreed between the Department and the Committee. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister for agreeing to include its suggested amendments. The Committee welcomes the amendments to the Libraries Bill, and I commend them to the House.

Mr Shannon: I concur with the Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. I also thank all the staff for the considerable effort, help and assistance that they provided to the Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill. Members have tried to bring legislation to the Chamber to deal with certain issues, and the Libraries Bill is an example of one such piece of legislation. Committee members supported the Bill unanimously, which is good news.

Given that we are now making progress, will the Minister tell us the timescale within which the library authority will be established in shadow form? Will he also indicate when staff will be set aside for that particular job and when all the necessary resources will be made available?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Members who contributed to the passage of the Bill, especially the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for its assistance in bringing us to this significant milestone in the development of the public library service in Northern Ireland. We have also reached a significant milestone in the review of public administration, which is something on which we hope to make progress.

Northern Ireland will have a high-quality and dynamic public library service that remains free at the point of delivery. Staff contracts of employment will be protected under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE), and existing pension arrangements will be honoured. Equality considerations will also be taken into account where the location of headquarters and any changes in policy delivery are concerned.

We will also embark on a substantial capital programme to meet needs across Northern Ireland for new and improved library premises. In addition, we will have a dedicated board of members with corporate responsibility to ensure that the public get the best quality library service. That board will include interested and suitably experienced people who are drawn from the general population. Importantly, district councillors, who are elected representatives, will also be members of the board. Therefore, the board will bring together different people with different qualities who have the single goal of improving front line service provision for all.

To conclude, the dedication of the staff in the public library service has been superb, and I thank them all for that. The new library service will be established in April 2009, and the shadow board and the chief executive designate will be appointed in autumn 2008. Therefore, as we move into that new era, we will seek to deliver on the promises that have been made to create a more efficient, accountable library service in Northern Ireland. That new service will save the taxpayer money in administration costs but will, hopefully, not reduce front line services in any way.

That is the commitment that we are making to the House on the delivery of a single library authority.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Libraries Bill (NIA 5/07) do now pass.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Standing Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on the membership of a Standing Committee. As with other similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Jim Wells replace Mr Ian McCrea as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [*Lord Morrow.*]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Regulation of the Pharmacy Profession

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 each.

Mrs I Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the work of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in regulating the pharmacy profession over the last eighty years; supports the conclusions of the 'Future of Pharmacy Registration, Regulation and Representation in Northern Ireland' document; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to update the society's statutory framework accordingly.

It is a pleasure to propose the motion.

The role of pharmacists is evolving, and professional leadership is essential. Pharmacists operate in various settings — high streets, hospitals, health centres, GPs' surgeries, universities, laboratories and in industry. People who work in the healthcare environment — increasingly in the role of clinical practitioners — have different responsibilities to those who are at the cutting edge of industry and technology in multinational companies.

The Westminster Government have committed to ensuring the independent regulation of the broader healthcare profession. A recent White Paper described the need to separate the regulation and professional leadership functions for pharmacy. Current proposals for the mainland include the formation of a general pharmaceutical council analogous to the General Medical Council (GMC) and a new separate representative body — possibly a royal college for pharmacy. The public needs to be assured of excellence in governance arrangements, and the separate body would ensure excellence in clinical practice, innovation and leadership.

The safe and effective prescribing and dispensing of medicines is becoming more complex, and greater clinical responsibilities are being placed on the pharmacy profession. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has been regulating the pharmacy profession for more than 80 years since it was established by the Pharmacy and Poisons Act (Northern Ireland) 1925. The society maintains a register of more than 1,800 pharmacists and 500 premises in the Province. It is a legally recognised body with powers and duties conferred to it under the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

In Northern Ireland, we have the potential to operate the maximum devolved control over professional regulation. Other devolved regions would love the

extra freedom that we have been offered; for example, there are plans in Scotland to establish a Scottish pharmacy body.

Pharmacy should be guided by the same professional principles throughout the United Kingdom on regulations and the development of pharmacy. However, now that we have finally secured stable devolution, our devolved Minister should exert the maximum possible influence to meet the requirements of the profession and patients in the Province. Our local body should remain separate and distinct from its counterpart organisation in GB. Replacing the local regulatory and professional functions with a centralised UK-wide system would inhibit the ability of the devolved Administration to develop in a manner that reflects the overall strategy for healthcare in Northern Ireland.

Pharmacies should not be semi-detached from the rest of the developing Health Service in Northern Ireland. We should be able to play a full role as a devolved region within the United Kingdom. The uniqueness of the system in Northern Ireland — with the inspection role separated from the Pharmaceutical Society — was recognised and complimented by Dame Janet Smith in the Shipman Inquiry report.

Northern Ireland has a leading-edge inspectorate, and it would be foolhardy to dispense with its experience. It should retain responsibility for inspecting the practice of pharmacists, investigating complaints against pharmacists, and inspecting premises.

Pharmacies in Northern Ireland face their own challenges, which are distinct from those faced in other parts of the United Kingdom. We are unique in the United Kingdom in that we share a land border with another European Union country. That creates challenges and opportunities. The registration of non-UK pharmacists is an important factor to consider. Issues, for example, of temporary registration of qualified pharmacists as occasional workers have greater relevance for Northern Ireland.

The recent European Commission's reasoned opinion to the UK Government — and the resultant changes that have been proposed to enable a UK pharmacist to dispense a prescription written by a doctor or a dentist registered in another European state — will have a greater impact on pharmacies in Northern Ireland, due to our proximity to the Republic of Ireland. That will affect regulatory activities, particularly in border areas.

In future, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland could follow two good existing examples: the Law Society of Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council. Both bodies operate within UK-wide frameworks, but with significant local autonomy.

A reformed Pharmaceutical Society would be governed by a council or executive board, which

would comprise an appropriate number of pharmacists who would be appointed by lay representatives. The council or executive board would be responsible for the registration of pharmacists, technicians and their premises; pre-registration services; the registration examination; continuing professional development and revalidation; professional guidance and standards; and leadership of the profession. It would also look after accreditation for Northern Ireland pharmacy degrees and courses, and fitness-to-practise support.

It is essential that, in any new arrangements, the fully devolved nature of healthcare in the Province is reflected, public confidence in the adjudication process is maximised, and patient and public involvement is strengthened. Arrangements should be more adaptable and future-proofed, which would allow for parallel development with other UK regulators. We should build on the recognised strengths of the inspectorate. A strong local vehicle for stakeholder input and planning must exist, with a strong local voice and identity for pharmacies.

Essentially, we need a structure in which professional development, revalidation and fitness to practice can be delivered in a local context. With those objectives in mind for the leadership of pharmacies in Northern Ireland in future years, I have great privilege in proposing the motion.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Members opposite for tabling this valid motion, which Sinn Féin will support.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety outlined many issues that will probably be addressed during the course of the debate. She said that the Pharmaceutical Society has been in existence since 1925, and, during that time, has carried out its role of regulating, registering and representing the profession in every aspect of its work. In fact, the role of the Pharmaceutical Society has been highly commended for its effectiveness and its uniqueness. The Chairperson also said that our system is separate and distinct in that the inspection role is separate from that of the Pharmaceutical Society.

Discussions are ongoing about the future of the body for pharmacists, which could include the role of the Pharmaceutical Society in the North. However, it is my understanding that the society does not view that as a positive step forward.

2.15 pm

Based on the information presented to me, I am led to believe that the current system works well, with which I agree. However, there are some issues. On this island, there is a need for partnership working with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland. Although I will not use her words, the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety highlighted

the fact that we share a land border with the Twenty-six Counties.

There are numerous concerns about this issue in the border areas. Time and again, the Assembly has debated some of those concerns — for example, that people living in Newry would find it easier to visit a doctor in Dundalk, rather than having to wait weeks to see a doctor in Daisy Hill Hospital.

Some of the issues require a common-sense approach, such as the mutual recognition of qualifications. On one occasion, there was a major incident in Omagh of which we are all deeply aware. A group of doctors and nurses based in and around Dundalk travelled to Omagh and tried to help. However, due to the fact that they were not regulated, they were not able to provide help on the day, which was madness. The uniqueness of the situation here has resulted in an agreement between both societies — a memorandum of understanding has been established.

The society believes that retaining a local regulator will ensure the safeguarding of patient safety, the operation of effective devolution, patient and public confidence, and will ensure the development of the pharmaceutical profession. The society believes that patient safety will be best served by the retention of a local regulator.

The Chairperson mentioned that the arrangement has been praised by Janet Smith in her inquiry into the horrible Shipman murders, and it is something that we should promote. A locally based regulator for the pharmaceutical profession would also help the Executive and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to achieve their ambitions for healthcare. Of all the devolved Administrations, this Assembly has full control over professional regulation in the health sector, which provides the Executive, the Minister, the Department, and the Committee with an opportunity to make new and imaginative uses of Health Service professionals so that positive changes in the sector can be achieved.

Sinn Féin will support the motion proposed by the party opposite. From the outset, it is important to consider what professionals say because they are the experts in the field — we might think that we know everything but we do not. I urge the Minister to listen carefully to the contributions of other Members during the course of the debate. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCallister: The process of transforming the regulation of the health sector is a necessary and welcome step. In light of the disturbing revelations of the Shipman case in England, the Westminster Government have started a process seeking to achieve the separation of professional representation, regulation and adjudication on fitness-to-practise cases from the health regulatory bodies in Great Britain. That will mean that the

Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain will be separated into a new general pharmaceutical council and a Royal College representative body.

At a time when pharmacists are being given more clinical power to dispense drugs, change is crucial. However, the Health Minister is in the position of being fully in charge of devolved health matters, meaning that he can shape reforms that reflect circumstances in Northern Ireland.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has set public safety and professional standards here for 80 years. It has continually transformed in order to meet developing professional and regulatory standards. In many instances, it has been the model of good practice for other regulators in the UK, exemplified by the independent inspectorate in the Department. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has made a persuasive case as to why it should remain a separate entity from its counterparts in Great Britain.

There are unique circumstances in Northern Ireland. We have a land border with another EU country, which has ramifications for temporary registration and non-registration of pharmacists. Equally, there are some safety concerns with counterfeit medicine smuggling and cross-border purchasing that require flexibility to co-operate fully with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland also argues that centrally organised regulators may not provide the best form of representation for public and professionals alike. It holds a genuine concern that a move to replace the regulatory and professional functions with a centralised system would significantly inhibit the ability of the Minister and the sector to develop pharmacy at a pace and in a manner that reflects the overall strategy for healthcare in Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the Minister's decision to delay any judgement on the matter until the general pharmaceutical council in Great Britain is up and running. In the meantime, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has proposed a range of changes that seeks to bring it into line with the proposals in the Government's White Paper and with the regulations in the Health and Social Care Bill.

The proposals represent a positive move in the right direction. The separation between the regulatory body and the new independent statutory committee that will adjudicate in disciplinary matters would be a progressive step. Equally, the proposal to make the council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland more strategic and board-like, with a requisite number of professionals and lay people, is a correct move.

The Ulster Unionist Party also supports the retention of the departmental inspectorate, and the need for an oversight commissioner or organisation for the

independent statutory committee. That model is based on the Law Society of Northern Ireland and is clearly a competent model.

The Minister has deferred any decision on whether the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland should join the new general pharmaceutical council of Great Britain. The general pharmaceutical council will not be up and running until 2011. If we continue with the structures that are in place in the meantime, we will be continuing with a less-than-satisfactory regulatory framework. It is important to consider the changes to the statutory framework of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland to ensure the best outcome for pharmacists and the public.

Although the Ulster Unionist Party recognises the Pharmaceutical Society's desire to be the body in Northern Ireland, it believes, at this juncture, that the society's proposals should be investigated further by the Health Minister and the Health Committee. A range of questions comes to mind. Do the proposals go far enough in separating the professional representation and the regulatory roles, which I consider to be the cornerstone recommendation of the Shipman Inquiry? I note that the Government's White Paper proposes that regulatory councils be brought closer to the accountability of Parliament, and the provisions for that proposal.

Mr Gallagher: I welcome the debate and thank the Members who proposed the motion. I acknowledge the work of the Pharmaceutical Society over the past 80 years — a significant part of which was under direct rule. However, the context has changed in Northern Ireland. As Members know, responsibility rests largely with the Assembly, especially in relation to the health sector, and that brings to the fore some key issues.

First, since we have a devolved Administration and control over our affairs — and, in particular, health — the ability to regulate health matters is important. Pharmacists, like other health professionals, will be involved more in delivering key services here and in taking forward our health strategy. Working together effectively with the other partners in the Health Service will require a local model for regulating the pharmacy profession — a model that meets the needs of the pharmacists and the patients and reflects the political reality in Northern Ireland.

The Pharmaceutical Society supports such a system for Northern Ireland — one that is guided by the same principles that apply in the rest of the United Kingdom yet also recognises the Assembly's authority over the Health Service.

As was mentioned earlier, Northern Ireland is unique in the UK in that it shares a land border with the Republic of Ireland, and patients and medicines cross that border daily. The probable increase in that traffic

will bring challenges to, and opportunities for, the health sector in Northern Ireland, not least for pharmacists. Therefore, a local regulatory body would be in a much better position than a UK-wide body to support the growing number of cross-border health projects that are under way. Everyone will have heard of the Cooperation and Working Together initiative, which supports several such projects.

As a representative of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I am familiar with the border area, and I regularly see customers from the South visiting pharmacies in the North, and vice versa. Regulations must reflect that reality, and the establishment of a local body is also important for the autonomy of the pharmaceutical profession in Northern Ireland.

Other professions have undergone similar developments. The Law Society of Northern Ireland regulates the legal profession here. Moreover, through the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, social workers subscribe to exactly the same principles as their colleagues throughout the rest of the United Kingdom while remaining regulated by a council in Northern Ireland. The same should apply to the pharmaceutical profession. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question Time is scheduled to begin with questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister at 2.30 pm. Therefore, I propose that Members take their ease until then. The debate will recommence at 4.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Kieran McCarthy.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Funding for Minority Ethnic Communities: CSI Strategy

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has for the administration of funding for ethnic minority communities under the new cohesion, sharing and inclusion strategy. (AQO 3673/08)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On 15 May, the First Minister and I were delighted to announce awards of almost £1 million of funding for 2008-09 under the OFMDFM funding scheme for minority ethnic communities. That represents a very substantial increase on previous years. It comes from the additional funding of almost £7.5 million over the next three years for promoting good relations and good race relations, which was announced in the Budget. Our total investment for the period 2008-2011 to meet the public service agreement target of a shared and better future for all will be almost £29 million. OFMDFM is committed to providing funding to promote good race relations and racial equality.

Proposals for a programme of cohesion, sharing and integration for a shared and better future, which were signalled in the Programme for Government, are now at an advanced stage of development. At the core of those proposals will be action to tackle racism, sectarianism and intolerance. Those proposals, which will be brought forward soon, will include a funding scheme to promote inclusion and integration, particularly at the local level. The programme is being designed to build on some of the excellent work being done, particularly at the local level, to address the challenges that communities face.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. In the past, many ethnic minority organisations have been aggrieved by the fact that they had to compete with some local community organisations for the particular pot of money put aside by OFMDFM for ethnic minority organisations. Given that, will the Minister anticipate putting aside core funding for those ethnic minority organisations, and perhaps making

some project funding available to local community organisations, to enable those that wish to engage with local ethnic minority residents in their area to access some kind of one-off project funding in that way?

The deputy First Minister: Obviously, the Member has played a very valuable role in building better relationships within society, and it was one of the better days for the Assembly when she was elected to represent that important constituency. I am always willing to listen to ideas and suggestions concerning how we go forward, but it is important to state that we cannot hope to tackle racism without tackling sectarianism, and vice versa. Both racism and sectarianism have their origins in unacceptable attitudes, and find their outlets in unacceptable behaviours. We should not kid ourselves that we can tackle one without tackling the other, nor should anyone imagine that they can take refuge in tackling racism because they find it uncomfortable to tackle sectarianism, or vice versa. Those twin evils feed off and, indeed, sustain each other. Of course, there can be no place whatsoever for intolerance or hatred, however it manifests itself, and whoever it chooses as a victim.

Real progress has been made. Substantial funding is being put aside, and, obviously, it is very important to ensure, as we go forward, that the issue is dealt with in an holistic way.

Mr Shannon: I welcome the £29 million funding that the deputy First Minister mentioned. Ethnic minority organisations and communities are not specific to one part of the Province, they are found in all parts of the Province. The area that I represent has a great number of people from the ethnic minorities, who make a great and significant contribution to the areas in which they live, in Strangford and elsewhere. My question concerns the £29 million to which the deputy First Minister referred. Will that be distributed and allocated per capita for each constituency? I would like to ensure that we in Strangford get our share of that money.

The deputy First Minister: We all recognise that racism and sectarianism are not peculiar to any one area of the North and that we have been afflicted by them for many years. It is important that difficulties are dealt with as they are identified and that support is given to the groups that do fantastic work at grass-roots level to provide leadership and to complement the Assembly's work.

It is hugely important to recognise and face up to the plagues of racism and sectarianism — wherever they exist in society — without preferential treatment being given to any particular geographical area. We must recognise and face up to problems, rather than run away from them. Hopefully, that will encourage local communities. There is strong evidence that,

throughout the North, people on all sides of the different debates on racism and sectarianism increasingly stand up to and challenge the bigots and racists in society.

Obviously, as the matter is progressed, the Department must make judgements on how best to direct its limited resources. Fortunately, because there has been a substantial increase in investment in the matter, I believe that we will be well able to manage the challenges that lie ahead.

Mr Gardiner: Will the deputy First Minister indicate what steps his office has taken under its remits for children and young people and community relations to ensure the full integration in society of children from ethnic-minority communities — including familiarisation with the English language — particularly in areas where there are large immigrant populations?

The deputy First Minister: Obviously, those issues represent huge challenges for all Departments, not just for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Since the start of the decade, when I was the Education Minister, the Department of Education has been conscious of the needs of children from ethnic minorities. The Member has raised an important argument, for which I have tremendous sympathy. If we fail those children due to a lack of response on the essential support that they require — given the massive difficulties that they and their parents face — we will also have failed society.

Devolution of Policing and Justice

2. **Dr Farry** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has had with the Northern Ireland Office on the devolution of policing and justice. (AQO 3674/08)

6. **Mr Ford** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the devolution of policing and justice; and what discussions it has had with the Northern Ireland Office on this matter. (AQO 3676/08)

The deputy First Minister: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 2 and 6 together.

It is for the Assembly to request the devolution of policing and justice powers. Its report, which was submitted in March 2008 to the Secretary of State in accordance with section 18 of the St Andrews Agreement Act 2006, recommended that political parties commit to further discussions as to when such a request might be made. The issue is currently being discussed by political parties. Neither the First Minister nor I have entered into discussions with the NIO. However, prudent preparatory work to plan for the administrative and resource implications of devolution

in the event that there is political agreement to proceed has been undertaken by OFMDFM officials and has involved engagement with NIO officials.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for his answer. As he is aware, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee has finished its report, and the 1 May deadline for devolution has passed. Rather than simply having informal discussions between political parties, can the Minister assure the House that a formal, structured process will be implemented to progress discussions with the Northern Ireland Office, and that, under that framework, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will adopt a joint approach?

The deputy First Minister: Obviously, important recommendations emerged from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's report on the devolution of policing and justice. Recommendation 21 states:

"preparations for the appointment of an Attorney General ... should be taken forward by the First Minister and deputy First Minister before the devolution of policing and justice matters."

We are well aware of that recommendation and of the statutory obligation that section 22 of the Justice Act 2002 places on OFMDFM about the appointment of an attorney general.

However, agreement between the political parties remains the key determinant before detailed steps can be taken to implement devolution of justice.

Recommendation 38 proposes that the NIO and OFMDFM should take forward work to ensure that existing North/South agreements on policing and justice remain in place at the point of devolution. Work on that matter will form part of the ongoing preparatory engagement between OFMDFM and officials.

We are all conscious that this issue has been widely discussed in recent times. We also know that there is a responsibility on the political parties to resolve it. I hope that it can be resolved. I hope that we can move forward to see the Assembly deal with policing and justice, which are matters of critical importance to all people, as well as other matters of importance, such as health, environment and agriculture. I hope that in the period ahead, we will see that resolved.

Mr Ford: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response to my colleague's question. He specifically mentioned resource issues; will he give us an update as to what progress has been made on the budget for policing and justice? Are there any proposals for ring-fencing that budget if or when devolution happens?

The deputy First Minister: The Member will be aware that the issue has been in the public domain recently. OFMDFM is in agreement that, in the context of powers being transferred to a local Executive and Assembly, there is a duty and a responsibility on the British Government to ensure that such a transition is

adequately funded and that appropriate structures and policies are put in place to ensure that the essential funding we require can be put to good use in combating crime and criminals in society.

As we go forward, I have no doubt whatsoever that in the context of the ongoing debate, both publicly and privately, that issue will feature strongly. The First Minister and I, in all our engagements with the British Prime Minister and Secretary of State, have made it clear that we expect extra financial support from the British Government.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the deputy First Minister for his earlier reply. Any potential devolution of policing and justice will involve other matters, including the possible transfer of ownership of former military bases such as the Lisanelly site in Omagh. Will the deputy First Minister give his up-to-date assessment of any progress his officials have made in their discussions with the Prime Minister's office on that issue?

The deputy First Minister: The issue of redundant military sites is one that featured in discussions with the Prime Minister during his last visit to the North for the US/NI investment conference. The First Minister and I took the opportunity to highlight to the British Prime Minister the need to gift those sites to the Executive and Assembly. I understand from some comments made by the Prime Minister recently that that matter is being given some consideration.

Mr Campbell: Given the political reality that devolution of policing and justice will not materialise in the foreseeable future, would it not be more productive for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and the Assembly in its entirety, to look at projects that are within their remit in the lifetime of the present Assembly?

The deputy First Minister: During the discussions at St Andrews, both Governments outlined the commitments that they expected: that all parties would deliver during a process that led to the devolution of policing and justice to the North.

The issue must be resolved. We have to approach it sensibly and recognise the strong argument that, if politicians have the intellect and ability to deal with other matters of governance in the North, they surely have the ability, wit and intelligence to deal with policing and justice. The political parties will either resolve or not resolve the issue, but I hope that it will be resolved.

2.45 pm

Transfer of MOD Sites

3. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm whether the delay in making a decision on the regeneration of the Maze/

Long Kesh site will affect further transfers of former military sites owned by the Ministry of Defence.
(AQO 3612/08)

The deputy First Minister: As the Member is aware, a development of the size and importance of the Maze/Long Kesh site takes time to prepare. The First Minister and I will submit a paper to the Executive on the proposed development of that site. In order to allow the Executive to make an informed decision on the issue, the paper will consider the outline business case and the outcome of the competitive dialogue-bidding process with private-sector developers. We are mindful that the Secretary of State said recently that lack of development at the Maze/Long Kesh site could weaken our hand in future discussions about the gifting of sites.

Not only has a huge amount of work been done to prepare for the development of all the sites that are in our care, but some real progress has been made. The action that has been taken at the sites on, for example, the Malone Road and the Crumlin Road in Belfast are indications of successes in the area. The proceeds of the sale of the Army base at Windsor Park have been ring-fenced for the redevelopment of the Crumlin Road jail, which is in one of Belfast's poorest wards. A master plan is currently under consideration for the development of that area.

Furthermore, we are about to finalise the sale of the Army barracks in Magherafelt in County Derry for a new school campus to be built by the North Eastern Education and Library Board. Plans for the development of a former military barracks at Ebrington in Derry are already under way. On 1 May 2008, the junior Ministers visited the site 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. Therefore, we have a robust track record of developing those key assets, and we look forward to a successful conclusion to our bid for further gifting.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the deputy First Minister, and I note his response and his earlier answer to Mr Kennedy. Does he accept that the delay with, and negative signals about, the Maze project are causing questions to be asked about the gifting of former military sites? Furthermore, can he give a specific answer on the progress — or lack of progress — on the gifting of the Lisanelly site?

The deputy First Minister: As many Members are aware, the issue has exercised the Assembly, particularly MLAs from West Tyrone, who have been vocal about what they want the sites at Lisanelly and St Lucia in the Omagh area to be used for. There appears to be a growing consensus that the proposed project, which is mainly educational, is of huge symbolic importance

because it has the ability to bring together on the one campus schoolchildren of different political and religious persuasions. That case has been made to the Secretary of State and the British Government.

People are intrigued by the opportunity that the project presents, and the debate on the matter continues. As I said in my earlier answer, the First Minister, Ian Paisley, and I took the opportunity to speak with the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, about the matter when he came here. I am sufficiently encouraged to believe that the project is under serious consideration at least. It remains to be seen whether it comes to anything, but powerful arguments about the project have been made.

In spite of the difficulties with the Maze/Long Kesh site, a compelling case for it remains to be made. We have made such a case, and, hopefully, we will get the answer that we deserve.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Have the Executive ruled out building a multi-sports stadium on the Maze/Long Kesh site?

The deputy First Minister: All of that is a matter for the Executive to consider. In recent days, we have received the Department of Finance and Personnel's view on the value-for-money aspect of the business case, which the Executive must consider. An OFMDFM paper will address the matter further as well as assessing the outcomes of developers' bids for the site, including the construction of Government projects.

It is important to note that the business case deals with estimated costs for a number of development options, whereas, the private-sector bids deal with actual negotiated costs. Therefore, an Executive decision will not be based on the business case alone, but on consideration of the private-sector developers' bids. Media reports in recent days have quoted figures ranging from £307 million to £379 million. However, such costs are based on the business case and, hence, they are estimates. By contrast, bidders' costs are fixed and have been priced, tendered or negotiated.

Mr McNarry: I was interested to hear the deputy First Minister's response to Mr O'Loan's question. In light of that, would the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister include steps to establish a Maze development corporation designed to drive forward the overall regeneration of the Maze site? That would be irrespective of the pending outcome of his Department walking away from the Maze stadium option and would create forward momentum after what I hope the deputy First Minister would accept has been an indefensible delay in managing this important site.

The deputy First Minister: I heard that suggestion made by the Ulster Unionist Party — or, more accurately, by the Member — in the media last week. I suppose people are entitled to their opinions about the best way

forward. The situation is that the Department of Finance and Personnel has assessed the business case, and that assessment has been distributed to members of the Executive who must now consider it. The First Minister and I will also be submitting a paper to the Executive. The outcome of the Executive's deliberations should not be pre-empted.

Lisanelly Site, Omagh

4. **Mr Doherty** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what lobbying it had undertaken for the transfer of the former Lisanelly site, Omagh, including any contact with the office of the Prime Minister. (AQO 3680/08)

The deputy First Minister: I confirm that we have both raised the matter regularly with the British Government, and we are awaiting a decision from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about the gifting of that military site and others. In addition to official meetings on the subject, we are taking every opportunity to raise this important matter with the Prime Minister; and, as I said in my earlier answer, the most recent occasion was at Hillsborough on Thursday 18 May 2008, at which the First Minister and I pressed the Prime Minister on the subject.

The Secretary of State, Shaun Woodward, recently visited the Omagh site to ascertain at first hand what might be achieved and to be briefed on the significant potential prospects. We trust that that will assist the British Government in considering our request. I assure the Member that we expressed, in the clearest terms, why we consider any decision other than gifting to be a retraction from the position adopted by the British and Irish Governments in April 2003 in the joint declaration.

Given that development costs for the proposal outlined for Lisanelly will be considerable, we are pressing for a favourable response; and, if achieved, gifting could ease the burden on the Executive. We will keep Members informed about the outcome of our discussions with the Prime Minister.

We take this opportunity to commend the Member, and we recognise that he has been at the forefront of efforts to promote the Lisanelly education campus. I confirm that I will visit the area to meet several groups — including the Omagh Educational Campus Group — that have expressed interest in developing sites in the region, and I anticipate that that visit will take place early next month.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Will he outline how Gordon Brown's recent announcement of an increase of £2.2 million in the sale of assets will impact on the case?

The deputy First Minister: The gifting of former military lands is a separate and distinct issue to that of the sales of public assets. We are seeking progress in discussions on the gifting issue with the Prime Minister. He confirmed in a recent BBC interview that discussions on the gifting issue are still continuing.

Mr Buchanan: This matter has been the subject of considerable discussion in the Chamber. In the joint declaration, a governmental commitment was made to allow such lands to come into the hands of the Executive. The deputy First Minister has said today — and in answer to previous questions — that the Government are giving this matter serious consideration. What response has been received from the Government?

The deputy First Minister: I agree absolutely and wholeheartedly with the first part of what the Member said. The response of the British Government makes it obvious to me that this is a subject for considerable discussion. Many people have been exercised about the project. Shaun Woodward has visited the site; discussions with the British Prime Minister have been ongoing; and Owen Paterson, the shadow Secretary of State for the North, has also been to Omagh to discuss the issue. That clearly demonstrates that this item is very high on the political agenda.

I hope that this matter will be successfully concluded, because it is a hugely worthwhile project — no one in the Chamber would disagree with that assertion. A number of schools in the Omagh area are experiencing difficulties in respect of their buildings — some of them require new builds. There is a fantastic opportunity to bring different schools together on one campus. That would make a massive contribution towards the process of integration of our young people, which is, as we all know, absolutely vital. The situation is still under consideration — I would have hoped that we would have received an answer long before now, but the fact that the situation is still being considered is encouraging.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad-Aire as a fhreagra, agus tá súil agam go leanfaidh sé de bheith ag déanamh a dhíchill chun suíomh Lios an Eallaigh ar an Ómaigh a aimsiú don phobal ansin.

I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer to the question about the Lisanelly site. I encourage him to redouble his efforts to ensure that that valuable asset becomes part of the educational infrastructure in Omagh.

What lobbying has OFMDFM engaged in on the gifting of the Forkhill barracks site? Does the deputy First Minister agree that the scheme that has been advanced by a local development company in Forkhill would represent an ideal peace dividend for that area?

That deserves the support of his office and the Assembly. Go raibh maith agat.

The deputy First Minister: I, the First Minister, and other Executive Ministers have lobbied extensively to ensure that all of those sites are utilised for the benefit of local communities. The fact that those sites have recently been vacated has sent a very powerful message throughout the community about the political transformation that has taken place.

The big question concerns how to use those sites in the future. Some of them have been gifted, and the Ministry of Defence is seeking substantial funding for other sites. That debate is ongoing. As the Member for West Tyrone Mr Buchanan said, a promise was made in the joint declaration by the two Governments that those sites would be gifted. We want the British Government to keep their word, and in keeping their word, to empower local communities to develop the sites in a way that can add to the economic prosperity of communities.

3.00 pm

ENVIRONMENT

Wind Farms

1. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she is taking to free up the planning system to allow for more wind farms. (AQO 3660/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): My Department has recently consulted on draft planning policy statement 18 (PPS 18), which sets out updated planning policy for proposals to develop renewable sources of energy, including energy from wind. Draft PPS 18's primary aim is to encourage and facilitate the provision and siting of renewable-energy-generating facilities in appropriate locations across Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, I am currently consulting on draft supplementary planning guidance (SPG) that relates specifically to wind-energy development and its impact on the landscape. The draft SPG provides amplification for wind-energy proposals assessed under policy RE 1 of draft PPS 18. That guidance is intended to assist developers in identifying sites for wind-energy development, as well as defining the types of development that may be most suitable visually and for the landscape.

Northern Ireland has a target of 12% — 400 MW — energy consumption from renewable sources by 2012. Although that target includes 15% from non-wind technologies, as of 14 May 2008, the Planning

Service has granted planning permission for wind farms that have a combined generating capacity of more than 400 MW.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for her response. She will be well aware of the unfortunate criticisms that not enough wind-farm applications are moving through the system and that those that are do not move quickly enough. To date, how many applications have been granted, and how many are currently with the Planning Service?

The Minister of the Environment: To date, planning permission has been granted for 31 wind farms, incorporating some 272 turbines, with a generating capacity of more than 400 MW. A further 47 wind-farm applications are in the system, and those propose an additional 472 turbines, with a total capacity of 1,213 MW. The total number of wind turbines proposed and extant is 744, with a potential generating capacity of 1,613 MW. To date, only one application for a wind farm has been refused planning permission. Developers have withdrawn a further three applications.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for the Environment recently heard from the organisation that represents the wind-turbine industry that draft PPS 18 was produced without there being any consultation with the industry. The organisation also said that, had there been consultation, a few — how shall I put it — glitches could have been avoided along the way.

Nevertheless, I understand that, since then, the Minister, having met a representative body from that grouping, has decided to set up a working group. Will the Minister outline that working group's role and remit? How will it help to develop draft PPS 18?

The Minister of the Environment: I held two recent meetings with representatives from the wind-turbine industry, at which they again alleged that they had not been consulted on draft PPS 18. In fact, they had been consulted. The industry body, the British Wind Energy Association, sat on the draft PPS 18 stakeholder group, which agreed the terms of reference for the draft SPG. That engagement was over and above the current public-consultation process, and I look forward to receiving the wind-energy industry's consultation responses.

The Member is correct: when I met the wind-energy industry, I was keen for it to continue dialogue with the Department. To that end, a meeting will take place very soon between those in the Department with responsibility for draft PPS 18 and those with responsibility for the draft SPG. I hope that that will prove a fruitful exercise.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her responses to the two previous questions. She said that the SPG would be designed to assist developers. However, does

she agree that others have identified problems with the guidance on how the wind-energy industry relates to them? Does she accept that there is a particular problem with suggestions in the guidance about ensuring that turbines be smaller than is now economically viable? That would result in a proliferation of turbines, rather than fewer, more economical ones.

The Minister of the Environment: The Member's last point is very important, and it is a point that I wanted to take on board in discussion with the two groups that came to see me. Their point is that, under the SPG, smaller turbines can be built; however, more of them will be needed. The problem was that small turbines were no longer produced, only bigger turbines. I welcome such detailed engagement with the industry, and the Department will take on board all SPG-related issues. I am sure that the Member will agree that it is important to have landscape guidance when deciding where to site wind farms.

The Department is trying to provide certainty by making it immediately clear to the industry, simply by consulting the supplementary planning guidance, whether a wind farm can be built in a particular area. That was the drive behind the SPG. However, I take on board the comments of Members, and those from the wind industry.

New Homes in North Down

2. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the number of new homes required for north Down under BMAP. (AQO 3581/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The potential housing yield in north Down in the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) is approximately 6,000, excluding houses in the countryside. Strategic housing land supply for the plan area was considered at length at the recent public inquiry held by the Planning Appeals Commission. As part of that process, the Planning Service, in January 2007, presented to the inquiry a paper setting out its approach to addressing the housing deficit arising from the uplift in regional housing growth indicators.

In June 2007, the Planning Service published a further paper, which assessed the appropriateness of specific sites that had been the subject of objection with regard to meeting additional housing supply needs. These are now matters for the Planning Appeals Commission to consider, and on which to report back to the Department.

The BMAP public inquiry finished on 2 May 2008, and the Planning Appeals Commission has indicated that it will report back to the Department in early summer 2010. An indication of the final potential housing yield in north Down cannot be given until that time.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for that response. Does the Minister consider that the proposed timescale for the adoption of BMAP is acceptable in the vastly changing environment in which we live?

The Minister of the Environment: That timescale has been given to me by the Planning Appeals Commission. As the Member will appreciate, I have absolutely no control over that. There is, however, sufficient capacity within existing development limits in the north Down area to ensure a supply of housing land over the next five years. It is no secret that the area plan system — be it working or not working, as the case may be — is not fit for purpose. That is why it forms part of my planning reform agenda; and, as I said this morning, I hope to come to the Executive with that White Paper in the near future.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the number of new homes required for Foyle under the Derry Area Plan 2011?

The Minister of the Environment: I do not have the details to hand, but I am happy write to the Member with them.

Dr Farry: Returning to BMAP, and its relevance to changing circumstances, is the Minister aware of potential increased interest in back-office accommodation in the North Down constituency that tries to address the problem of many people commuting into Belfast, polluting the atmosphere as they go, and spending a lot of time in their cars? How can BMAP respond to that increased interest in office accommodation to ensure that we have a robust —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members are reminded that it is questions, not statements. Therefore, I will ask the Minister to respond to your question.

The Minister of the Environment: As I said in my previous answer, the area plan system, and the current timescales for the preparation of development plans, are certainly not satisfactory. Although I remain committed to delivering the current development plan programme as quickly as possible, I have become increasingly concerned about the time that it takes to prepare development plans in the current framework, and the inability, as the Member suggested in his question, to be flexible.

Issues change when different plans come forward, and there is no flexibility in the current structure to deal with those issues; that is why they are part of the planning reform agenda. I am sure that the Member will look forward to seeing what we intend to do about that issue when it arises.

Sanctions for Polluting Waterways

3. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to increase the severity of sanctions

imposed on individuals or businesses that repeatedly pollute rivers or other waterways. (AQO 3613/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The sanctions imposed for causing environmental damage are entirely a matter for the courts. However, taking into account the independence of the judiciary, on three occasions since 1996 the Department has taken up with the Northern Ireland Court Service the level of fines being imposed and the fact that some fines do not reflect the severity of an incident.

To date, the maximum fine of £20,000, under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, has not been imposed, with the average fine imposed in 2007 being less than £2,000. However, the steps that the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) is taking on better regulation will provide more protection than might otherwise be achieved by raising the limit on fines. The proposed establishment of an EHS-wide environmental crime unit is part of the programme of better regulation, and it will provide a greater focus on serious or repeat offenders. Technical or minor offences will be dealt with through a wider range of administrative penalties and sanctions.

Mr Burns: I wish to draw the Minister's attention to the frequency with which the Glenavy River is polluted. Does the Minister agree that fining large companies a few thousand pounds for repeatedly polluting our waterways is nothing more than a slap on the wrist, which they simply ignore?

The Minister of the Environment: As I said, the level of fines imposed is essentially a matter for the judiciary, and I am sure that everyone in the House respects its independence. However, with my better regulation agenda and the establishment of the new agency, we will have an agency-wide environmental crime unit. We will look at ways in which to deal with that issue in the agenda of environmental crime, including education visits, compliance visits, having better regulation, and, if necessary, taking enforcement action. As the unit will be risk-based, it will deal with polluters who are failing to comply with the regulations and how they should be held to account. Acting proportionately and having education first will bring about the understanding and respect for the environment that is needed in Northern Ireland.

3.15 pm

Mr Buchanan: An EHS-wide environmental crime unit sounds good, but will it target people who deliberately pollute our environment?

The Minister of the Environment: Since its formation in 2003, the Environment and Heritage Service's waste environmental crime team has investigated 5,779 incidents of illegal waste activities. The team has secured 299 convictions, resulting in more than

£670,000 in court fines, 13 prison sentences and four confiscation orders, totalling £832,000.

The Environment and Heritage Service's water management unit has investigated 13,967 reports of water pollution. Members are becoming increasingly concerned that water pollution is not being addressed effectively. An agency-wide environmental crime unit will raise the importance of the issue to the same level as that of waste environmental crime issues. The agency-wide environmental crime unit will provide a better solution to our problems, particularly in relation to water management. We can build on the success of the existing waste environmental crime unit.

Mr Cree: Many people agree that penalties are inadequate — they are much lower than in Europe. In Turkey, for example, a repeat offence means that the fine is doubled; if the offender repeats the offence a further time within a five-year period, a multiplier effect applies. Will the Minister examine the Turkish model, with a view to imposing a more rigorous enforcement regime here?

The Minister of the Environment: We are considering introducing proportionate regulation for repeat offences. I am happy to consider the Turkish model, but the Member must understand that there is something in this country called due process. Therefore, when the EHS, or the environment agency as it will be known from 1 July 2008, takes a case to court it is then a matter for the courts to decide how to deal with the issue. Many Members would support more effective fines; however, that is, essentially, a matter for the judiciary.

Plastic Bags

4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she will take to reduce the use of plastic bags. (AQO 3641/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In March, the Chancellor of the Exchequer outlined that, if there has been insufficient voluntary progress, he will introduce legislation to impose a charge on single-use carrier bags. The UK Climate Change Bill will include enabling powers to impose a charge on the use of plastic bags.

My officials have liaised closely with their counterparts in GB on the initial details of that legislation and the possible implications for Northern Ireland. Although it is too soon to gauge what will transpire as a result of the Chancellor's statement, it is an important development that the Department is monitoring closely.

In the meantime, my Department continues to support voluntary initiatives that aim to reduce the use of plastic bags. The UK-wide agreement with major retailers is the main ongoing initiative and aims to reduce

the overall environmental impact of carrier bags — paper and plastic — by 25% by the end of 2008.

Furthermore, schemes such as Bags for Life and the Do You Really Need a Bag? poster campaign — introduced by major supermarket chains to reduce plastic-bag usage — are good examples of how consumer behaviour can be changed to decrease the use of plastic bags.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Recently, the French Government outlined their target to eradicate the use of plastic bags; does the Minister agree with such a measure? If the finalised Climate Change Bill does not include a tax on plastic bags, will the Minister take appropriate action?

The Minister of the Environment: As indicated in my initial answer, the Bill will grant an enabling power, which allows us to decide how to progress. However, the legislation is at an early stage. Last week, I had an interesting conversation with Justin King, the chief executive of Sainsbury's, about plastic bags. He outlined that, if plastic-bag use is banned, the problem is simply displaced to other types of container.

In the Republic of Ireland, sales of plastic kitchen-bin liners increased after the introduction of the plastic-bag tax. We must consider that issue in the round and examine plastic, paper and cardboard waste in order to ensure that the problem is not simply displaced.

Mr Gardiner: Plastic-bag taxes have been imposed in cities around the world such as San Francisco, Dakar and Dubai. Current estimates suggest that more than 13 billion bags are in circulation in the United Kingdom. As usual, neither the Minister nor her Department have released any statistics for Northern Ireland. What is the point of raising awareness of plastic-bag problems through a film if no specific action has been taken? Will the Minister consider that situation urgently and introduce relevant legislation?

The Minister of the Environment: As I have already indicated, the Climate Change Bill will introduce an enabling power, which the Department will use to decide how to progress. I am sure that the Member wants us to deal with the entire issue of waste and not concentrate simply on small supermarket plastic bags.

The levy in the Republic of Ireland was introduced to change consumer behaviour and tackle plastic-bag litter; it was heralded as a tremendous success. However, as I have already stated, the sale of plastic kitchen-bin liners and the usage of paper bags has increased. Therefore, there is no point in getting het up about the use of plastic bags if the result will be displacement of the problem. We must adopt a balanced, sensible approach.

Mr Gallagher: Despite the problem with bin liners, does the Minister agree that the initiative in the

Republic of Ireland was a resounding success? Although the Climate Change Bill is at an early stage, can the Minister outline a date on which the public can expect an end to the use of plastic bags?

The Minister of the Environment: The Courtauld commitment, to which I referred in my initial answer, deals with plastic bags. Many people are now using bags for life or are being asked whether they need a bag, and such voluntary contributions are worthwhile. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in Scotland in 2006, after detailed consideration, it was decided not to go for a plastic bag tax. The reason that Scotland did not impose a bag tax was, as I have already outlined, because of the displacement that occurred in the Republic of Ireland. The Member said that the initiative in the Republic of Ireland had been a success, albeit that it resulted in a move towards larger plastic bin liners. I do not see any benefit in getting rid of small plastic bags only to end up with bigger plastic bags lying along the hedgerows of our countryside. The issue must be dealt with in a sensible and holistic manner.

Review of Road Safety

5. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment when the review of road safety will be completed and made public. (AQO 3643/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Three reports on progress on road safety are being prepared before the planned introduction of a new road safety strategy in 2010. An annual report for 2006 is largely complete. It examines progress during 2006 against objectives, including the targets and action measures in the current road safety strategy. I anticipate that that report will be available in early July.

A review of the first four years of the road safety strategy, from 2003 to 2006, is also being prepared. That review examines in detail casualties by road user group, causation factors and casualty trends. Such a report has not been produced before and has required significant work. I anticipate completion of that review over the summer.

Most important will be a review up to and including 2007. Supported by additional new research, it will be important in preparing a new strategy, indicating the key issues that must be addressed. Unfortunately, we faced delays in receiving the validated casualty statistics for 2007. My Department does not expect to receive those data before the autumn, although that could change. It may be the end of the year before the report can be completed.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer, and I look forward to the completion and publication of the road safety

strategy. What contacts has she or her officials had with the Southern road safety authorities to inform her strategy?

The Minister of the Environment: We met Noel Dempsey, the Minister of Transport, at last week's North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting on transport and had a discussion about road safety, and, particularly, the mutual recognition of disqualification between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, which continues to be a difficulty. We will continue to press that issue. The tragic road deaths in Donegal at the weekend of two people from Toome show again that we must continue to co-operate with the Republic of Ireland on road safety. Most people will welcome that co-operation, and the fact that this year, the road safety strategy in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland has resulted in a lower death rate in both jurisdictions than at this time last year.

Mr Beggs: In developing the road safety review, what discussions did the Minister have with relevant groups, particularly about the importance of speed reduction in the prevention of accidents? Is she satisfied with the current level of interest from schools through her Department's educational road safety officers and other schemes to improve road safety, such as the Safe Routes to Schools project?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member will know that speed reduction is not a matter for my Department; it is a matter for the Department for Regional Development. However, we have a good relationship with that Department. We recently responded to its consultation on road speed, and we will continue to do so. The Minister for Regional Development and I sit on the road safety working group alongside the Assistant Chief Constable of the PSNI, and we have asked the Ambulance Service and the Fire and Rescue Service to send representatives. That group works closely together, and that is the proper way to do things. As everyone knows, a death on our roads affects a great many agencies, and it is right to take that matter forward.

The education programme in schools is going very well indeed. Our education officers could visit many more schools if we had the resources to do so. The education officers do an excellent job, and they are very well received by the schoolchildren.

Mr P J Bradley: Will the Minister confirm that, in the interest of road safety throughout Ireland, the review will examine the introduction of metric speed limits in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of the Environment: Again, as that is a speed-related issue, it is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development, and the Member may wish to direct his question to that Minister. However, if it is helpful, I understand that any decision on setting a date for conversion to metric units of measure-

ment would be made on a United Kingdom-wide basis, and no decision has been taken yet on that matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Driving Test Centres

7. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she has taken to ensure the conformity of all MOT test centres to a common and comparable standard. (AQO 3600/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) examiners are all skilled and technically qualified motor mechanics. All new entrants to the vehicle examiner's role undergo four weeks' intensive training, combined with weekly checks to ensure that they have gained the necessary understanding. The training course is devised to ensure that all staff are provided with the knowledge and skills to work effectively in the role. The course has been externally accredited by the Institute of the Motor Industry. Successful trainees shadow a more experienced colleague for a further week before being fully programmed to test vehicles.

Examiners are accompanied in the live test environment and assessed against key criteria. Trained auditors from the agency's quality unit conduct quality checks on all vehicle examiners, and line managers also conduct quality checks on the vehicle examiners in their own centres.

In addition, the agency has retained its ISO 9001:2000 accreditation for the administration, supervision and delivery of practical driving test and vehicle inspection activities for all classes of vehicles and supporting functions. DVA is the only provider of vehicle inspections in the UK to hold that accreditation.

Mr Kennedy: Is the Minister prepared to investigate apparent inconsistencies, which have been reported to my constituency office, between testing centres in several key elements of the vehicle test? Will she widen the scope of any such investigation to include all such centres in Northern Ireland, if there appears to be substance to the claims?

The Minister of the Environment: I will investigate any claims that are brought to me by Members. I wait to hear about those claims. They will be investigated rigorously and thoroughly. The various centres all seem to have pass rates of around 80%. However, if the Member wishes to refer specific incidents to me, I will be more than happy to take them up.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her earlier comments. The House and the business community were extremely disappointed by many aspects of the Varney Report. However, Sir David Varney said that some services, including vehicle testing, could be more

productively run in the private sector. Does the Minister have any plans with regard to that recommendation?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member is absolutely right; the recent Varney Report questioned whether some services that are currently delivered by the public sector would be more productive if they were in the private sector. One such service was vehicle testing. However, the Executive must consider the Varney Report before any decision is made on the way forward. In the meantime, DVA will continue to seek ways of improving its productivity and quality of service to customers. I am sure that discussion of that issue will take place around the Executive table.

Mrs M Bradley: Does the Minister plan to publish annually the results of all driving centres and the results of car tests?

The Minister of the Environment: I have the statistics to which the Member referred, and I will give them to her in writing after the House rises today.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Locally Produced Banknotes

1. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what representations the Executive has made to the UK Treasury in relation to locally produced banknotes. (AQO 3640/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): The Executive have made no representations to the UK Treasury in relation to locally produced banknotes. Currency — that is coinage, legal tender and banknotes — is an excepted matter under schedule 2 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and thus it falls within the supervisory and regulatory framework provided by HM Treasury, the Bank of England and the Financial Services Authority.

3.30 pm

Under the present legislation, commercial banks have to cover their commercial note issue by making lodgements with the Bank of England for only part of any given week. That provides those banks with a commercial advantage as they have access to funds for reinvestment in short-term money markets that are equivalent to the surplus between the value of their note issue and the sums that they have lodged with the Bank of England.

The problem with that arrangement is that it exposes the holder of such commercial bank notes, as creditors of the banks, to the risk of losing the face value of the notes if the relevant bank was to become insolvent, as

there could be insufficient funds lodged with the Bank of England to cover the value of the notes issued.

A consultation exercise, on proposals to enhance the protection afforded to the holders of such banknotes, concluded recently. However, it is an excepted matter, and there is no compelling reason to engage in that process at this stage.

Mr Hamilton: The Consumer Council, in its recent investigation into banking charges, revealed that the cost benefit to local banks was not necessarily passed on to local consumers. Has the Minister derived any benefit for local consumers in the local banks issuing their own banknotes?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There would be no advantage per se to the Northern Ireland citizen. There could be a benefit to the customer of a bank if that bank were to use the profits that it makes from the advantage created by the issuing of its own notes, for the purpose of reducing bank charges, ATM charges, and so on. However, if one compares the charges of Northern Ireland banks with banks in England, there is no empirical evidence to suggest that those profits are being passed on directly to customers.

The more important aspect is to ensure that should a bank become insolvent, there is the required protection for everyone in Northern Ireland who has banknotes — that there is enough value with the Bank of England to cover the face value of those notes.

Mr McClarty: Will the Minister acknowledge that with the introduction of the euro and the demise of the punt in the Irish Republic, the sense of acceptance of locally produced banknotes has increased in Great Britain?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have had less difficulty using Northern Ireland banknotes in GB than in the past largely because those notes have the word “pound” on them. People recognise that most of the other countries in Europe are using the euro, so it has become less of a problem.

I point out to the Member, however, that English banknotes are not legal tender in Northern Ireland, as many people think they are. The only legal tender in Northern Ireland is UK coinage. English banknotes are not legal tender in Scotland, nor are Scottish or Northern Ireland banknotes legal tender in England or Wales.

Mr Burns: Will the Minister give us his assessment of the large variety of banknotes that are in circulation in Northern Ireland? Would he like to see Northern Bank, Ulster Bank, Bank of Ireland and First Trust Bank issue a single, standard version?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That will not be a matter of my choice or, indeed, the choice of the banks concerned. The consultative paper that is being considered by the banks is likely to lead to them

attempting to get a compromise with the Government, who are keen to protect the consumer by having us all use Bank of England notes. A compromise position has already been agreed with the Scottish banks — whether that compromise is accepted by the Treasury is something quite different.

It is to the banks' financial advantage to produce banknotes because they do not have to cover the full value of the notes with the Bank of England and can use the additional funds in the short-term money markets.

Public Procurement: Fair-Trade Practices

2. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to ensure that fair-trade practices are included in procurement contracts. (AQO 3665/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland procurement policy applies to all Northern Ireland Departments, their agencies, non-departmental public bodies and public corporations. In March 2006, my Department issued a policy guidance note on the procurement of Fairtrade products by Northern Ireland Departments. That guidance defines fair and ethical trade and details a range of products currently recognised as Fairtrade products. It also provided contracting authorities with advice and guidance on the actions that they can take — under EU procurement rules and procurement policy — to ensure that fair-trade practices are included in procurement contracts. That is set in the context of existing UK and Northern Ireland sustainable development policies.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. What is the Minister doing to encourage the use of Fairtrade products in his Department and other Departments in the Executive?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That question is, perhaps, more relevant to procurement contracts for catering services and supplies, which provide the greatest opportunity to procure such products. All recently renewed catering service contracts specify that Fairtrade products must be used for internal meetings and official hospitality, and that such products should be available as an option for staff to purchase in tuck shops and staff restaurants. However, the latter requirement is demand-led and, therefore, has commercial implications for the suppliers should staff not wish to purchase such products.

EU law prevents procurement practitioners from taking certain actions. For example, they cannot frame contract specifications on the basis of fair or ethical trade requirements. EU procurement rules require that

social labels do not define the end product in terms of characteristics or performance.

Lord Browne: Will the Minister indicate whether any steps can be taken to encourage the procurement of locally produced food?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My officials and officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have developed guidance to encourage the procurement of locally produced food. That guidance provides procurement practitioners with practical advice on developing procurement specifications that will deliver fresh seasonal produce and encourage healthy eating. Local producers will be able to compete to supply food and catering services.

Due to EU procurement rules, we cannot specify Northern Ireland-grown products. However, specifying freshness, and so on, can help local producers to compete better. We have regular meetings with local producers to organise awareness sessions, which are targeted, particularly, at agrifood businesses that can compete for contracts that are due in the following 18 months.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Does the Minister acknowledge that sustainability is the core feature of fair trade? What action has he taken to increase traceability and sustainability requirements, which would also assist local producers in tendering for Government contracts?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member is correct and, indeed, sustainability, equality and economic factors are at the centre of our procurement policy. The Procurement Board takes all those issues into consideration and its membership is fully signed up to ensuring that we get the best value for money.

Public Procurement: Social Objectives

3. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how his Department is pursuing social objectives through its public procurement policies. (AQO 3668/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland procurement policy, which was agreed by the Executive in 2002, commits to the delivery of best value for money. The definition of “best value for money” allows for the integration — individually or collectively, as appropriate — within the procurement process, of social, economic and environmental objectives, which are the three pillars of sustainable development.

The Procurement Board, which I chair, has produced guidance that is aimed at policy-makers and procurement professionals across the public sector on how to integrate

equality and sustainable-development considerations more effectively into the procurement process.

The guidance will be launched on 29 May and will be supported by appropriate training.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Bearing in mind what the Minister has said about procurement roles, and his reference to the three pillars of sustainable development, can the Minister confirm that the procurement guidelines will be mainstreamed across the board, and that a specific methodology will be applied to ensure that social requirements in procurement contracts are utilized when procuring, for example, services, hardware or even office space?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am aware of the Member's interest in this subject, and she has questioned me on this issue in the past. Although her question is good, her timing somewhat sucks, because the guidelines will be launched on 29 May. I will ensure that she gets a copy.

Professor Chris McCrudden is a member of the Procurement Board. He is regarded as something of a champion in that area of activity, and he has published on the matter. He is outspoken and capable. I know from chairing a meeting of the Procurement Board that this matter is of great concern to him. Therefore, there is someone at the heart of the process who will push forward those issues. If the Member wants to learn more about him and the issues that he has raised, she can purchase a copy of his book 'Buying Social Justice: Equality, Government Procurement, and Legal Change'.

Mr A Maginness: The Minister's answer was interesting. I know that guidelines will be produced on 29 May, but have there been discussions with the social sector in respect of procurement? Is there anything in the guidelines that will assist procurement in that sector?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There has been widespread consultation. The guidelines have been approved by the Executive, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland will launch them. The Northern Ireland Executive spend about £2 billion a year, and it is only right that they get the best value for that money. The Executive and the Assembly have adopted a Programme for Government that sets out a number of cross-cutting themes, including the issues that have been referred to: equality, the economy, and others. If we can advance our agenda through procurement, we should do so. There are many ways in which the Executive can advance their overall objectives by using procurement as a lever.

Dr Farry: Is the Minister aware of concern among local small and medium-sized enterprises about the difficulties of accessing local procurement contracts? EU competition rules should be respected, but can a review be carried out to ensure a level playing field for both local businesses and international competition?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am aware of that problem. Companies that are based in my constituency frequently tell me of products that they believe are as good as, if not superior to, those purchased through the existing system. However, because they are small or medium-sized businesses, they find it hard to compete for the scale of the available contracts.

Those meetings allow potential suppliers to team up with others to make partnership bids in such areas. However, the situation must be examined closely, and we must question whether some of the contracts should be broken down to make the business area more accessible to small businesses.

3.45 pm

Representation in Civil Service Recruitment

4. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what groups have been identified as being under-represented in applications and appointments to each grade in the Civil Service, in the past two years. (AQO 3580/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Civil Service has taken steps to encourage applications from Protestants for administrative and junior management grades; from females for senior management grades and some professional and technical disciplines; and from people with disabilities and ethnic minority communities for all grades. Initial analysis shows that some progress has been made, but my officials plan to carry out further in-depth analysis of recent recruitment competitions later this year.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his response. It is hoped that his response, which will now be in the Hansard report, will be studied by all those who try to fly in the face of the reality that we see in the Civil Service year in, year out. The Minister said that the competition results will be known later in the year. Is that likely to be late autumn? Subsequent to the publication of the competition outcomes, what consideration is likely to take place?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member for East Londonderry is known to be an enthusiastic campaigner on those issues. It is likely that the outcome of the current recruitment competitions will be known in the autumn. Therefore it will not be possible to carry out a full analysis until then. It is hoped that the Member will be encouraged by the 10% increase in applications for administrative assistant (AA) and administrative officer (AO) grades from the Protestant community, which shows that the mechanisms put in place have encouraged greater uptake. However, the big question is whether the percentage of appointments will be relative to the number of applications made. In the past, they have, but we will only know

whether that has followed in this recruitment competition when we are able to analyse the outcome in the autumn.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that women and Catholics continue to be under-represented in the senior grades in the Civil Service? Will he detail what measures he has taken to rectify that situation? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That question could have been put with more force some years ago, because the under-representation has been addressed. There is still a disproportionate number of Protestants in the senior ranks of the Civil Service, but it has reduced markedly to a level that is within tolerances that cause less concern. Furthermore, it is not within the range that occurs in favour of Roman Catholic applicants for AA and AO grades in particular.

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister state what he is doing to address demographic trends in the age community balance, which are already concerning some Departments in how they deal with community balance? How will he encourage the students from Northern Ireland who have decided to study in GB to apply for Civil Service jobs?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I did not catch the beginning of the Member's question, so I hope that I have gleaned enough from the latter part. The creation of a more stable and peaceful society is playing an important role in attracting back the skilled people who want to join the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The public sector in Northern Ireland is, by and large, better paid than the private sector — a factor that was highlighted by Sir David Varney in his recent review. That imbalance is causing difficulties for the recruitment policies in the private sector.

The House will be aware that, in parallel with Workplace 2010, we have been considering the dispersal of public-sector jobs. That issue is now being considered by Sir George Bain's review team. That may allow us to locate jobs elsewhere in the Province, which would have an impact on other issues, such as religious balance and the territorial demographics of Northern Ireland.

Review of Public Administration: Job Locations

5. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline how the changes associated with the Review of Public Administration will be taken into consideration in the current review of civil service job locations. (AQO 3663/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The implementation of the review of public administration could potentially result in the relocation of some public-sector jobs. The recognition of that fact created the momentum for the work that is under way, which

involves reviewing the policy on location. The changes resulting from the RPA are being considered by the independent review that is being chaired by Professor Sir George Bain, who, I understand, has met representatives of all Departments concerned. Therefore, I expect his report to take account of recent developments and their implications for public-sector employment.

However, I should make it clear that although the RPA is an important part of the review, the review's terms of reference are much wider and relate to the public sector as a whole. That said, the recommendations made by the Bain team are likely to refer to the RPA, and if its report is accepted by the Executive, it will provide an opportunity to influence the final decisions about the RPA bodies, as and when those decisions are made.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for his reply. The Minister has acknowledged that many Civil Service jobs and work practices have been, and will be, centralised, and that many major towns in Northern Ireland may see a reduction in public-sector jobs as a result of the RPA. What action is the Minister taking to ensure that public-sector jobs are, and will be, retained in my constituency of Newry and Armagh?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is nothing that concerns me more than keeping up the number of jobs in the Member's constituency. He will have to recognise that, when the review team considers the matter, it will examine the balance across Northern Ireland as a whole. The review team will recognise that we are dealing with the whole of the public sector, not just Civil Service jobs, which probably make up only about 10% of the public sector.

The new bodies that will be established as a result of the RPA will create opportunities to consider locations throughout the whole Province. However, I am aware that all Members have a particular interest in a constituency or in parts thereof. Therefore, I warn Members that if we resort to bidding for the jobs on a constituency basis, we will end up with Members from 17 constituencies being unhappy and Members from one constituency being pleased. We must consider an overall strategy, which is what the review team is doing. The Member can keep praying for Newry and Armagh, and we will see what Sir George Bain produces.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his reply. He rightly referred to the opportunity to consider the location of the new bodies that will be created as a result of the review of public administration, which will, hopefully, not be located only in the Belfast area.

However, as the Minister mentioned, the wider issue of the centralisation of the existing Civil Service must also be tackled. Workplace 2010 is an opportunity for a shake-up that can lead to a redistribution of jobs. When considering the requirements for a central location in Belfast, will the Minister ensure that the Stormont

estate will be the starting point for those considerations? Any job in a Department that does not need to be located on the Stormont estate could potentially be located anywhere else.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not wish to pre-empt the review panel's recommendations, but a strong argument exists that Belfast, as our capital city, should be where Departments' headquarters are sited. Departmental headquarters sit more appropriately in a capital city.

The Member should remember that we are talking about a very small percentage of public-sector jobs overall. I recall an occasion on which a Member rose to his feet to call for more public-sector jobs for Omagh and it was pointed out that Omagh, per economically active person, had more jobs than anywhere else in Northern Ireland. We are looking at public-sector jobs, and Belfast does not have the highest per capita representation.

However, I do recognise that opportunities do exist. I am particularly mindful of that, because if Northern Ireland does achieve economic growth in areas in which we are hoping for growth — namely, financial and business services and IT — firms are more likely to come to the east of the Province. They will probably set up either in the Newry corridor or the Belfast area. Therefore, if more jobs are created in those places, a stronger case can be made for the centre and west of the Province's benefiting from some of the jobs that may be displaced.

Sir George Bain will no doubt consider all the strong arguments. I expect there to be a full discussion in the Executive and in the House when his report becomes available.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I join Mr Kennedy in praying for Newry and Armagh. Will the Minister ensure that important factors such as building the regional economy, tackling social disadvantage and ensuring equality of opportunity will be central to the review of the relocation of Civil Service jobs?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I wish Mr Brady and Mr Kennedy every success with their prayer meeting, whenever and wherever it should take place. We shall see whether the Lord answers their prayers in due course.

The factors to which the Member referred must be considered, because they are important. However, many more factors must also be considered, and we set out those factors in the remit that we gave to Sir George Bain and his panel. Those other factors include the need to consider value for money; the need to place staff where they are of greatest benefit; a recognition that skills for certain jobs must be available; and the need for a place to have a certain mass of population to

deal with certain office sizes. All those factors go into the mix, but I reiterate that the factors that the Member outlined are indeed important.

Maze Project: Economic Appraisal

6. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he will make a determination on the affordability and value for money of the Maze project. (AQO 3614/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have now shared with Executive colleagues my Department's analysis of, and conclusions on, the value for money and affordability of the Maze project. I have also provided them with my views on the present proposals. I have invited them to consider those views alongside other additional material when we come to consider the issue in the Executive.

Mr T Clarke: Can the Minister indicate how much had been set aside in the Budget to fund the Maze project, and whether that money can be used for any other projects?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My recollection is that we set aside £70 million for stadiums. I do not believe that we identified any particular project for which that Budget allocation was to be used, so it is available for the Maze project should the Executive decide to proceed with it. Equally, it would be available for other stadiums should the Executive pass a business case for them.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Regulation of Pharmacy Profession

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the work of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in regulating the pharmacy profession over the last eighty years; supports the conclusions of the "Future of Pharmacy Registration, Regulation and Representation in Northern Ireland" document; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to update the society's statutory framework accordingly.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the opportunity to offer the Alliance Party's support for the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in regulating the pharmacy profession's work over the past 80 years. That work has served the community in Northern Ireland extremely well over the years, and the Alliance Party has every confidence that the years ahead will also be well served if the conclusions in 'Future of Pharmacy registration, regulation and representation in Northern Ireland' are accepted. I expect the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to agree to update the Pharmaceutical Society's statutory framework in the near future.

The document makes a strong case for the superiority of the Northern Ireland regulatory model over its equivalent across the water because of the separation of the inspection function. If it were not for the initial start-up costs, Northern Ireland's system could have been implemented in Britain.

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

4.00 pm

Therefore, the practical implications of pharmacy regulation in Northern Ireland require — to some extent — a Northern Irish solution. That is why the Alliance Party has always promoted and supported devolution for Northern Ireland. We are concerned about how the guiding principles for the rest of Britain will apply in Northern Ireland, bearing in mind the different regulatory framework there. However, it will be down to the Minister — who I am glad is present — the Health Committee and the House to ensure that the pharmaceutical industry is properly regulated and supported.

We should be thankful that the system in Northern Ireland has worked well since the early 1900s. We should continue to build on the strengths of that system, and the Alliance Party strongly supports the retention of the departmental inspectorate — we see no need for another independent body.

The Alliance Party calls for clear procedures for the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and will work with other UK healthcare regulators, as well as

those in the Republic. We also urge the Minister to keep this issue under review.

Recently, as part of the Building Bridges campaign, I had the pleasure of joining staff behind the counter of Gabbies pharmacy in Killyleagh and helped to supply people from a busy population with their prescriptions and many other healthcare requirements. I assure Members that a pharmacist's work is extremely demanding, and I congratulate all those pharmacists who contribute to a good Health Service for all in Northern Ireland. I encourage all Members to get behind the counter of their local pharmacy to see the work that is done. A pharmacy is not just, as it used to be called, the local chemist — it provides a wide range of valuable services within the Health Service. I support the motion.

Mr Buchanan: Over the past 80 years, the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has been successful in regulating the pharmacy profession. Established by the Pharmacy and Poisons Act (Northern Ireland) 1925, the society maintains a register of over 1,800 pharmacists and over 500 registered premises in Northern Ireland. It is a legal entity and, under the Pharmacy (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, has powers to deal with any matters that arise.

However, the future of pharmacy in Great Britain, as outlined in the White Paper and the Health and Social Care Bill, is a matter of grave concern and does not represent a positive way forward for the continuation of the good pharmacy practice that we have enjoyed in Northern Ireland for many years.

Suggestions to change the model in Northern Ireland, which is separate and distinct from that of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, are ludicrous when all other areas of health have been devolved and are overseen by a Health Minister. Any move to replace the local regulatory and professional functions with a centralised system would significantly inhibit the Minister's ability to develop pharmacy at a pace and manner that not only reflects the overall strategy for healthcare in Northern Ireland, but meets the requirements of the profession and the patients.

It is wise to take note that the effectiveness and uniqueness of the system in Northern Ireland has been acknowledged and complimented by Dame Janet Smith. In her report of the inquiry into the Shipman murders, she stated:

"It seems to me that there is much to be said for an inspectorate, like that in Northern Ireland".

That speaks for itself. It is clear that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland is already strides ahead and is at the cutting edge of pharmacy inspectorates in comparison to its counterparts in the UK. Such exemplary inspectorate arrangements must be retained and enhanced while maintaining pharmacy

regulation and registration in Northern Ireland. That would continue to safeguard patient safety, the operation of effective devolution, patient and public involvement and confidence and the continuous development of the pharmacy profession.

Although I welcome the Minister's delay until the system, as proposed in the White Paper for GB, is up and running, I am concerned by the stance adopted by the UUP as outlined by John McCallister in the House today. It is time that John declared where he really stands on this particular matter. It is too important an issue to be fudged. The current system must be maintained in Northern Ireland.

I call on the Minister to confirm his intention of retaining pharmacy regulation and representation in Northern Ireland, and to update the legislative framework of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland accordingly. Until legislative change is implemented, important enhancements that are required to be made by the society cannot take place.

I support the motion, and I call on the Minister to inform us when he intends to update the legislative framework.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and my party colleague Sue Ramsey has already said that Sinn Féin fully supports the motion. Many points have been made, and I do not intend to repeat them.

I received a document from the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, which was valuable in informing me about the debate. I assume that other Members also received the document, which notes that — and this point has already been made — the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland works with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland. That is a valuable engagement. One issue that they address together is counterfeit medicine smuggling. Perhaps a more important and valuable issue that they work together on is the mutual recognition of qualifications and prescriptions. That kind of engagement between the societies is priceless, and it is well articulated in the document presented to us.

The document proposes a model that includes parallel structures, and outlines the relationship between the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and the adjudication process. The adjudication process is particularly important; it is linked to fitness to practice and how issues of concern would be addressed.

The society perhaps needs to be a bit clearer about what it finally wants implemented. My reading of the document was that it has not totally established what is required from the adjudication process. I may, though, have read that incorrectly. However, the bones of what would be a valuable structure are outlined in the document.

That document was certainly valuable in aiding my understanding of the issue.

I will finish by referring to the last three bullet points of the summary of the key benefits of the model:

- “It provides a strong local vehicle for stakeholder input and planning;
- It maintains a strong local voice and identity for pharmacy;
- It provides for a structure whereby professional development, revalidation and fitness to practise can be delivered in a local context reflecting local needs”.

What I particularly liked about those three points was the emphasis on the words “local” and “strong”. I support the proposals, certainly on the strength of those last three bullet points, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Shannon: The Pharmaceutical Societie O' Norlin Airlan leuks aboot mair nor 1,800 chemists an mair nor 500 shaps the length o' the province. They hae gien a dual heftin an' owre seein' role fer mair nor 80 yeirs an hae done sae tae a heigh stannart — a stannart at wus remarkied oan bae Dame Janet Smith wha alloood i hir speirin intae report hoo hit wud bae a benefit tae the hale United Kangdom gif the cost o' bringin' hit in wusnae sae heigh.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland represents over 1,800 pharmacists and over 500 premises across the Province. It has provided a dual support and inspectorate role for over 80 years, and has done so to an exemplary standard — a standard that was recognised by Dame Janet Smith. In her inquiry report, she said that that standard would be beneficial to the entire United Kingdom if the cost of implementing it were not so prohibitive.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland does not claim that everything is perfect, nor that no changes are needed. It recognises that there should be a distinct difference between those who offer support and those who evaluate and process difficulties and adjudication. The proposals that the society has made reflect the spirit of the White Paper. However, those proposals also retain the strengths for which the system in Northern Ireland is renowned.

The proposals separate the adjudication and inspection roles, and allow for clear leadership while providing a voice for the profession and the public. For that reason, the proposals advocate the setting up of an independent statutory committee that would oversee the inspectorate and establish the needed dividing lines. That would ensure that the society would always be accountable to the Minister and to his Department.

This issue must be legislated for in a way that ensures that local problems are handled locally by people who understand the people and the needs that are peculiar to Northern Ireland. Although it is an integral part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland

is a distinct entity, with needs that differ from the other countries in the United Kingdom. In the same way that our essential needs are the same, the approach taken in some areas must be different from that taken in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Take, for example, a patient with diabetes. The patient must be treated — that is correct — but not only must it be determined which type of diabetes the patient has, and whether treatment must be a control of diet or insulin injections, the dosage will also differ from patient to patient. It is the same concerning the regulation of the pharmacy profession — Northern Ireland has different needs to those of the mainland. It is my reasoned consideration that the recommendations of the society be taken on board by the Health Minister.

The proposals argue for a council or board that will consist of pharmacy registrants and lay representatives — that is vastly important. As I have said, it is crucial that the local voice be heard. In all probability, that would be severely muted if Northern Ireland were to amalgamate with the mainland in this circumstance.

It is clear that the devolution process gave accountability back to the people of Northern Ireland. It is imperative that it be kept there. It seems prudent that something that has the capacity to affect the health of so many — and the provision of health services — should remain firmly in the hands of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the Province.

The old saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, comes to mind when considering this situation. It is clear that the Minister must consider carefully what is best for the patients and the profession in the Province before he implements any changes. He must also recognise the changes that the society proposes to implement in order to ensure that we have the most efficient and effective system possible.

In the same way that the Bain report on legal services in Northern Ireland recommended that the Law Society of Northern Ireland should remain separate from the rest of the UK due to the distinct system here, the structure employed in that situation would also be beneficial to the pharmacy profession in the Province.

4.15 pm

The report is well reasoned and well structured, and gives clear reasons for the Province’s not taking on board the recommendations of the White Paper. Our system is already superior to that of GB — a fact that is universally acknowledged. Unlike his Executive colleague Caitríona Ruane, I ask the Minister not to eradicate something that has worked well for years, when a couple of adjustments would do the job. Furthermore, I ask him to listen to those who have been doing their jobs well for the past 80 years. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland should be

allowed to do what it does best, which is to ensure that our healthcare professionals and patients receive the best advice, medication and help available. That will be done by employing the society’s recommendations and not those in the White Paper. I support the motion.

Dr McDonnell: I support the motion. Pharmacists, and the pharmacy profession generally, are key components of our healthcare system. Having worked with pharmacy colleagues for many years, I vouch for the fact that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland sets a very high standard. It also sets expectations that those standards will be lifted to a still higher level. Given half a chance, the society will make an even greater contribution to our healthcare system than it has done in the past.

Many minor investigations and checks — such as blood pressure — could be carried out at pharmacy level, or perhaps mechanically, as people seek more personal involvement in their healthcare. Aside from simple tests, pharmacists are in an excellent position to provide advice and education for patients and the general public.

I echo what my friend from Strangford Mr Shannon said: if it is not broken, we should not try to fix it. The Minister may have good reason to look at the situation, and he is right. However, he will forgive us for urging him not to be too keen to fix something that is not broken. I see no reason why the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland could not continue to work in close partnership with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. However, I question whether the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland needs to be entirely submerged in the proposed general pharmaceutical council. Local regulation has worked well for 80 years, and we should not be over-enthusiastic about that invitation.

The current independent position of our pharmacy profession should remain. It allows tremendous ability to use the best of our resources in the most flexible way. Responsibility for healthcare — and for all that pharmacists deal with — is devolved, and we can make that work better. The Minister and his Department should involve pharmacists and the pharmacy profession more in our healthcare.

Public safety is of a high standard and has always been guarded by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland. Indeed, I have been on the other side of the fence, and I know how tough the society can be. Time and time again, some of my pharmacist colleagues have fallen foul for one minor reason or another, and, time and time again, the Pharmaceutical Society is down on them like a ton of bricks. I am not sure whether any general pharmaceutical council could do better — in fact, it might do worse, because it would be 300-odd miles away. A pharmaceutical society, properly

structured and organised, and based in University Street, knows everything that is going on in the bounds of Northern Ireland.

As someone who sat on the opposite side of the table at times, I am in a position to speak highly of the society's competence, efficiency and professionalism. With a little effort, patient and public involvement could be increased and public confidence in the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland could be improved.

Much potential exists to provide more locally enhanced services, and the Assembly can take many such initiatives. I paid close attention to the point that was made by my learned friend from West Tyrone Mr Buchanan. He quoted Dame Janet Smith as saying that the Shipman case could never have happened in Northern Ireland because of the high level of organisation in the pharmaceutical industry here.

Before you interrupt me, Mr Deputy Speaker, I strongly support the motion.

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

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Recently, I met representatives of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, and I listened with interest to their proposals for the future regulation of pharmacy in Northern Ireland. Some 520 pharmacies are registered with the society, of which approximately 40% are branches of multiple outlets. Of almost 2,000 registered pharmacists, 400 are employed by hospital trusts, health boards and Government.

Over the past 80 years, pharmacy has changed radically, and pharmacists are in a particularly responsible position. In addition to supplying medicines, they have key roles in advising the public on the safe and effective use of medication, and supporting other health professionals in improving the management of medicines. In Northern Ireland, they dispense some 29 million prescriptions per annum, at a total cost of approximately £400 million, and a further £100 million is spent in hospital practices.

Medicines are, therefore, an ever-present technology in the Health Service. They are potent substances with the potential to cure and kill; some 25% of health-related litigation concerns medicines. Given that medicines are highly regulated, those who prescribe and dispense them must also be appropriately regulated. I have a public duty to ensure patient safety, and the public has a right to expect that the regulatory processes are free from professional interest or possible interference.

When I met representatives of the society, they were keen to address any concerns that I had about their proposals, and I acknowledge the effort that went into their paper 'Future of Pharmacy registration, regulation and representation in Northern Ireland'.

I want to clarify from the outset that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has two responsibilities: professional regulation and professional leadership. In any modern regulatory body, that represents a conflict of interest, as clearly set out in the White Paper 'Trust, Assurance and Safety — the Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century'. I am, therefore, left with two concerns.

First, I find it difficult to see how the public interest would be independently served by the society's proposal that the same organisation retain the regulatory and leadership functions. The conflict of interest was recognised by other health professionals, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, other allied health professionals, and so forth. They separated the leadership and regulatory functions, and they will maintain that separation so that they can concentrate on one or the other. Furthermore, my colleague John McCallister recognised that the society's proposals do not go far enough in separating the functions of regulation and leadership.

Secondly, the society suggested that local regulation by the society would be better than UK-wide regulation, but offered no substantive evidence to support its view. Indeed, the evidence from other health professionals, who operate on a UK-wide basis, suggests the opposite. Doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, radiographers, dieticians and so forth, opted for UK-wide regulation. It is important that a regulatory body sets standards for the profession in the interests of the public. To allow a local body to do that while articulating its own interests would compromise public protection.

I am awaiting the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence's independent review of the society's performance. The council believes that separating regulatory and professional leadership functions is fundamental. I expect that if that separation is to occur, the report will recommend the need for a substantial overhaul of the society's arrangements.

It must be remembered that the need to modernise professional health regulation has arisen as a result of several high-profile cases in which the public were let down either by existing disciplinary processes or by the lack of controls to prevent abuse. We are all aware of the Shipman case; indeed, several Members mentioned Dame Janet Smith's inquiry and the conclusions that she reached. It is important to reflect that she complimented the Department — or rather, she complimented the Department's inspectorate system — rather than the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

As public representatives, we recognise that a fundamental principle is involved. The regulation of all healthcare professions has been the focus of attention in the aftermath of the Shipman case, and the Government

White Paper 'Trust, Assurance and Safety — The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century' focused heavily on how to improve patient and public confidence in our health professionals, particularly where safety and public risk are concerned. Several of that White Paper's recommendations are being implemented in the Health and Social Care Bill, which has reached its Committee Stage in the Lords. That Bill was debated in this House in January 2008 when I moved a legislative consent motion, which was agreed to unanimously.

In dealing with the regulation of healthcare professionals, the Health and Social Care Bill provides for independent adjudication and the application of standards for fitness to practise. In future, the councils of healthcare regulatory bodies will comprise lay majorities. The civil burden of proof will be used; responsible officers will be appointed to handle certain issues; a stronger, more independent role will be provided in expert advice and professional regulation; and for pharmacy, a general pharmaceutical council will be established. The professional body for pharmacists here — the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland — and its Great Britain equivalent have regulatory and leadership roles. England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands have all opted to separate those functions in favour of first, a general pharmaceutical council for regulation and secondly, a college-like body for professional leadership. The basis of that separation is to support the safety of the public so that there is no conflict in providing public protection and advocating professional interest.

Although the society here has lobbied to be preserved as a regulatory and professional body, Members may be interested to know that such an opinion is not the unanimous view of those in the profession. Some in the profession have encouraged me to choose a UK-wide regulatory arrangement and to support a more focused, professional leadership role for the society in Northern Ireland. With the increasing presence of national multiples in pharmacy in Northern Ireland, a common regulatory approach makes sense, given that pharmacists move around the four home countries.

There are compelling attractions to that approach. It would create a robust regulatory system that operates across these islands and through which we can all benefit from combined expertise and resources. At the same time, it would allow the society here to evolve into a new professional leadership body that is better equipped to play its part in the development of policy and services to suit our population in the twenty-first century. Such an approach creates a clear opportunity to preserve the interests and identity of Northern Ireland.

An oversight group to establish the general pharmaceutical council has been set up. Having received an update on the formation of the proposed

council, I have decided that it would be premature to make any decisions before it has been formed and has established its protocols to deal with devolved matters. The chairman of the oversight group has made it clear to me that devolved matters must be addressed in any new arrangements. The group has also determined that a general pharmaceutical council would report to each of the devolved Administrations that it covered and would have a presence in those countries. In developing new arrangements for the future, my Department will continue to work with the society and other relevant bodies to ensure that patients and the public are protected fully at all times.

Although future regulatory arrangements are my ministerial responsibility, I am conscious that the profession must address important professional leadership matters. This is, therefore, an important time for the pharmaceutical profession, which I want to see develop a strong leadership, advocacy and representative body in Northern Ireland that plays a full part in support of the delivery of an important and challenging health and social care agenda.

4.30 pm

I emphasise that I will delay a final decision until the general pharmaceutical council in Great Britain has been formed. The Assembly has already given its unanimous approval to include the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, should I so decide. I am grateful for its support. The separation of regulatory and leadership roles in the public interest is crucial. I am acutely conscious of my responsibility to ensure public safety.

Finally, professional leadership will be critical to the entire process. I am conscious that the pharmaceutical profession is not as one on the matter; some of its members prefer preservation of the status quo, while others prefer a UK-wide model. I have, therefore, afforded further space for that debate to take place in the profession. I want to ensure that Northern Ireland has a strong voice and representation in any future arrangements. I continue to provide the opportunity for my Department and the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland to work together towards a positive solution.

Mr Easton: I wish to apologise on behalf of my colleague Mrs Robinson, who has had to leave the Chamber unexpectedly due to family circumstances beyond her control.

It is interesting to note that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland has existed since 1925. It was in operation when the new state of Northern Ireland and its devolved Parliament were in their infancy, and, indeed, for a considerable time before the construction of Parliament Buildings at Stormont. During changing times, the Pharmaceutical Society of

Northern Ireland has always been a positive and professional body.

The Province is privileged to have outstanding pharmacy services. It is vital, therefore, that, as the Assembly begins to discuss future arrangements, it puts firmly on record the debt that is owed to several generations of pharmaceutical professionals, who, throughout many years, have served the Province's people in an exemplary, dedicated and professional manner.

In normal circumstances, I would be happy to support any action that strengthens east-west links with other parts of the United Kingdom. However, it is important to judge each case on its merits and to seek the best way forward for all of Northern Ireland's people. The great advantage of having a local pharmaceutical society is that it can respond directly and quickly to local needs, using all the skills and experience of local people, who have given years of service in a unique setting. Northern Ireland's system is excellent. The Assembly should be reluctant to take action that may not represent a positive way forward for Northern Ireland.

In past discussions, Assembly Members have requested that consideration be given to why something that is not broken should be fixed. The devolved Assembly has a significant advantage in that it can collectively design a system under the direction and guidance of the local Minister. That should ensure that the regulation, restrictions and representations of Northern Ireland pharmacies will be best served by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland's system has always been separate from that of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, which inspects, regulates and represents pharmacists on the mainland. The system is more effective because of the unique way in which its inspection role is separate from the society. That great advantage was acknowledged by Dame Janet Smith in the Shipman Inquiry report, which has been mentioned by other Members during the debate.

Northern Ireland is different because it shares a land border with another European state. That brings particular challenges that require sensitive solutions under local control. I am persuaded by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland paper that states that any move to replace its local regulatory and professional functions with centralised systems would not be in the devolved Administration's best interest as it seeks to develop pharmacy at a pace and manner that reflects the overall healthcare strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland's proposals indicate a confidence that to achieve both the spirit of the White Paper and to deliver effective

devolution we need a model for the pharmaceutical profession that mirrors and reflects the needs and political realities of Northern Ireland.

The model that it proposes separates the adjudication, inspection and investigation roles while creating clear leadership for the profession and providing a strong, clear voice for patients and public.

The Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council are examples of where that model has been successfully applied, and both cases support the view that solutions tailored to local conditions offer the best way forward.

In conclusion, I reiterate my support for an independent Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland that will safeguard patient safety, deliver effective devolution, inspire continued patient and public confidence and enable the continued professional development of pharmacists.

There has been quite a bit of comment from Members on the issue, most of whom seemed to be singing from the same hymn sheet. My colleague Iris Robinson said that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland offered excellence in governance, provided more freedom and should remain separate from the rest of the UK. She said that it would be foolhardy to do away with the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in its local context.

Sue Ramsey said that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland safeguarded patient safety and would help the Executive; she also said that we should take on board what professionals say.

It is hard to tell what John McCallister was saying. He said that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland was a role model for the rest of the UK and that the Health Minister needed to investigate further any proposals for change. It seems that Mr McCallister was sitting on the fence, which is hardly surprising — the Scarlet Pimpernel of the Health Committee usually sits on the fence.

Tommy Gallagher said that the devolved institutions are an important model that reflects the realities of Northern Ireland. He mentioned that we have a land border with the Republic of Ireland and that a local body is better than a UK-wide body.

Kieran McCarthy said that the Northern Ireland model is superior to any other.

My colleague Tom Buchanan said that there are more than 1,800 pharmacies and more than 500 premises operating as pharmacies across Northern Ireland. He said that the Northern Ireland system was strides ahead of other systems.

Claire McGill said that she wanted to see closer co-operation with the Pharmaceutical Society of

Northern Ireland and the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland.

My colleague Jim Shannon praised the standard of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and mentioned the number of pharmacies and premises.

Alasdair McDonnell said that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland was a key component of the Health Service in Northern Ireland and that it could make a greater contribution in future if left alone.

The message of “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”, was also reiterated by Jim Shannon.

The Minister said that he had met the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland and that the regulation and leadership functions are a conflict of interest for it. He said that the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland’s proposals did not go far enough. He talked about a centralised system and maintaining identities; there seems to be confusion over how he intends to achieve those. He said that he will delay his decision and will await further reports. The Health Committee will be waiting to hear what he comes up with.

Most Members have a clear position on that, and I hope that the Health Minister will take that position on board before he makes a final decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the work of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland in regulating the pharmacy profession over the last eighty years; supports the conclusions of the ‘Future of Pharmacy Registration, Regulation and Representation in Northern Ireland’ document; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to update the society’s statutory framework accordingly.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker.*]

ADJOURNMENT

Neighbourhood Renewal in Foyle

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 seven minutes.

Mr Durkan: This Adjournment debate is timely because it comes shortly after many community groups in Derry have been notified about their standing with funding in the new period of neighbourhood renewal. The SDLP recognises that much good hard work has gone into preparing for the further development of neighbourhood renewal. Good hard work has been done by the North West Development Office and by people in various neighbourhood partnership boards who have had to prepare and peruse documents in preparation for this phase of neighbourhood renewal. Good work has been done by many groups that continue to provide good-quality services on the ground, often in hard-pressed areas with ill-resourced means. Those groups have been trying to prepare their case for the future funding framework for neighbourhood renewal.

However, many people are frustrated and disappointed with the outcomes and how they affect their group. It should be recognised that the funding framework at least gives many groups the opportunity to go forward with a guarantee of three-year funding. That allows groups to be able to plan their future on a strategic basis, and it means that projects have been put forward that are based on well-discussed and fully agreed local priorities. Those priorities have been brokered by a variety of groups that are working together locally in area partnerships, and they also involve the statutory sector. There is much good in the thinking behind bringing long-term planning and funding stability through neighbourhood renewal.

However, many groups are disappointed because they have not qualified in the decisions that have been made for the guarantee of three-year funding. A number of groups have been promised one year’s funding in the hope that they can make other arrangements in the meantime. A number of groups fall into a third category in which funding will continue until August 2008. People want to know exactly what took place when the decisions were made about those three categories. They want to know whether the decisions were taken locally at the level of the North West

Development Office and the local area partnerships. If those partnerships are to be given a strategic mandate, people want to know how far they are in control of the decisions that are meant to reflect their agreed local priorities and purposes.

Suggestions have been made in some of the local media that the Minister for Social Development has decided to cut funding in certain areas or for certain groups. People want to know the level at which decisions were made and the full background to those decisions. I touched on that when I mentioned the long-standing work that has taken place in planning for neighbourhood renewal.

Many of the groups that have been given indications that they will receive one-year funding are so-called city-wide groups. On a number of occasions, the SDLP has raised the issue of so-called city-wide groups not only during devolution but during direct rule, when many such issues started to appear. The work of quite a number of groups, charities, service providers and others is not conducted on a locality-specific basis that ties them neatly into one particular neighbourhood partnership. We have long made the case that neighbourhood renewal is a welcome policy with real strategic focus. When the Government produced the policy of neighbourhood renewal in 2003, all parties welcomed it, but they did not believe that it should be the only show in town for future Government funding and support for the community and voluntary sector.

Consequently, while people wanted a targeted, strategic approach in areas of most deprivation, they also wanted to be assured that other funding support would be available for work that took place with target groups of Government policy outside of those areas.

4.45 pm

Many groups were told that they had one year's funding; however, although relieved not to face the immediate difficulties that others face, they must now ask themselves longer-term questions, such as whether it is viable for them to secure alternative funding sources within a year. They are beginning to realise that the circumstances that led to current decisions are a consequence of other Departments not coming through on policy and funding commitments.

In the same way that neighbourhood renewal should not have been the only show in town; the Department for Social Development's policy should not be a stand-alone one, and it should not be funded alone either. If neighbourhood renewal is to work, it requires traction and engagement from a variety of statutory agencies in several Departments that are meant to work for people living in areas of deprivation. Throughout the neighbourhood renewal process, an emphasis was placed on the need for other statutory agencies to become involved and for other Departments to play

their part. However, when it comes to the bit, we find that many of those other Departments have not followed through on their funding commitments or with the complementary packages that are required to make neighbourhood renewal work. Although that is currently more apparent in Derry, in the future, it will become apparent in one location after another. Therefore, this matter should interest people other than those in Foyle.

I understand the pressures on other Departments, and Members know why some of those Departments have not made good on their neighbourhood renewal contributions — they are facing budgetary squeezes. The comprehensive spending review is predicated on 3% efficiency savings, and, as the SDLP predicted at the time of the Budget, many Departments are delivering their so-called efficiency savings in the form of cuts in support to the community and voluntary sector.

Furthermore, trusts that existed previously are disappearing as a result of the review of public administration. Many that had developed regular funding lines to the community and voluntary sector in local areas — often, for instance, using slippage money during the year — and had established many service-level agreements with providers of key services are disappearing as a result of streamlining. Consequently, when people are told that money is not available from DSD's share of neighbourhood renewal, they do not have those other doors on which to knock.

While I expressed those concerns on behalf of groups that have been told that funding is available for a year and are unsure about what will come after that, the ones who are experiencing the most disappointment are those that have been informed that they have only five month's more funding. Many of those groups were told — in good faith — that they would have funding for at least a year. That information was based on the assumption that funding would be found from other Departments or agencies that would pay their share to help to make neighbourhood renewal work. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

People want to know why that situation came about. What was the timescale between people being told — albeit by word of mouth, and in good faith — that they would be OK and being gunked by the outcome that they would not be OK? Furthermore, although I am not sure whether the other Departments and agencies indicated that they would not be making good on the money to the local partnerships or to the development office, when did those outcomes become known to the Department and the Minister?

People want to know why they were being told one thing by the neighbourhood partnerships, and possibly by the development office, and yet something else happened. They want to know at what point the system

was alerted to the fact that things were not working out as intended. If the groups in the third category are not now being funded by the Department for Social Development because other Departments did not providing their share of the funding, then the issue arises as to whether the notional amount being made available on behalf of DSD for the groups is still available. Has the money been reallocated elsewhere or is it available for further allocation now?

As the overall outcome is being considered, it can be seen that a lot of the groups in category three deal with children, women, youth and community measures. If that is the unintentional fallout from neighbourhood renewal, is there any means of remedying the situation? Are there resources available that can be used in a play-off way to try and make good the situation and mitigate the impact of decisions in those areas?

Has the geographical impact been fully assessed? I hope that the outcome will be proofed to see whether more needs to be done to improve particular areas — not least the Galliagh area, which has had a lot of media coverage. Many groups there have a good track record, but Galliagh is not the only location where people are feeling the pressure — I have heard from people in Creggan and from other groups also. Is the overall outcome going to be proofed to see if its impact matches the policies, targets and principles espoused for neighbourhood renewal?

The Minister has already indicated her vision for neighbourhood renewal — that it will be administered and determined at local government level. Does she have any further thoughts or plans about that? People want to know that neighbourhood renewal is not just going to be good for the groups that are guaranteed three years' funding; they want to know that it is going to be robust and reliable. Will the Minister tell us whether she will be making efforts to secure more commitment from her ministerial colleagues and their Departments? Although neighbourhood renewal has been embraced as a cross-cutting programme in the Programme for Government that everyone would support; that support has not been evident in the decisions and allocations that have been seen in Derry.

I have mentioned the impact of RPA and the Budget; however, there is also the absence of Executive programme funds, the non-departmental cross-cutting funds that were used by the previous Executive to support the community and voluntary sector when it faced the crisis of gap funding. When the women's sector in Northern Ireland faced particular difficulties, Executive programme funds were used — those means no longer exist and cannot be used now.

Will the Minister state whether she will be using the interdepartmental group that is meant to be working on neighbourhood renewal to challenge the other Depart-

ments on their lack of follow-through in the north-west area and to see if that is their intended pattern when it comes to neighbourhood renewal elsewhere? If it is, then joined-up Government is not working, and the promises and commitments made in the Programme for Government are sounding very hollow.

The Programme for Government stated that children and young people would be a priority, and yet we are seeing here, as we have seen elsewhere, that there is an absence of real funding for real services. The Department of Education has not been able to continue the extended schools programme, even though the Assembly was told, at the time of the Budget, that the Department was being given the money to do so. It is clear that the Department for Social Development has inadequate funding for neighbourhood renewal and inadequate commitment from its fellow Departments.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Mark Durkan as an cheist thábhachtach seo a thógáil sa Tionól inniu.

I preface my remarks by thanking Mark Durkan for bringing this important topic to the Assembly, and I acknowledge the Minister's presence in the Chamber.

Sinn Féin has long advocated, lobbied for, and supported neighbourhood renewal. For a variety of reasons, over the past few years, the process of rolling out neighbourhood-renewal schemes has been one of uncertainty, delay, fragmentation, and, at times, some confusion. To be fair to the Minister, she has inherited most of those problems, but we have now had a year to put certainty, decisiveness and clarity into neighbourhood renewal. Although there has been some movement in the past week or so, one cannot yet say that certainty and clarity are the order of the day.

The neighbourhood-renewal boards have worked tirelessly to provide such certainty and clarity, but, at times, their efforts have not been matched by those of the Department. However, there have been notable exceptions, and some officials deserve not only praise, but support, for their efforts.

The neighbourhood-renewal boards are due to outline their collective position to the scrutiny Committee in the coming weeks. They will state that the Department has had insufficient drive to steer the matter through Government. They will also seek to meet the other scrutiny Committees to see how they intend to pursue their responsibilities for the neighbourhood-renewal schemes.

The Minister's decisions of the past week or so about the groups in Derry can be described, at best, as a mixed bag. For the groups that are concerned, her decision has meant the removal of support in areas where need is greatest, whether that involves early years or pre-school provision in Ballymagroarty or

Creggan, or services for older citizens and women in Galliagh. Indeed, we are all aware of the publicity surrounding the Good Morning North West project. All those groups have been told that their funding will cease in August.

I know that the Minister will argue — correctly — that the Department for Social Development does not have sole responsibility for many of those services. That view has support in the neighbourhood-renewal boards and with the affected groups. However, the Minister should take the opportunity today to outline first, the steps that she has taken to date to bring this matter before the Executive and secondly, her intentions for the future. As far as the groups are concerned, if the services are deemed to be vital, the Department should have informed them of the progress that has been made with the other Departments, which are not accepting responsibility. The groups will seek an explanation from the Department as to why that was not the case.

The groups have made it known to the public — and this is their view — that the Department told them that they were no longer eligible for funding, end of story. To offset that today, the Minister should ask the Department to do what was outlined to me at a meeting that was held in Derry last Thursday night. The Minister should explain to the groups, in writing, why each individual group is not the responsibility of the Department under the neighbourhood-renewal programme. Furthermore, she should let them know which Department she considers to be the lead Department and provide a progress report of the contact that she has had with other Departments. That will allow the groups to start dialogue with the relevant Departments, and it will bring transparency to the decision-making process and allow for better planning and better usage of resources in the future. To facilitate that process, I ask the Minister to provide funding for the groups concerned until March 2009, which is an extension of seven months. Crucially, that will allow sufficient time for dialogue between the individual groups, the community and the lead Departments to find a strategic plan for the way forward. The Minister should announce her decision publicly and as soon as possible.

I read Mark Durkan's comments in today's 'Derry Journal' article. I urge him not to adopt the mantra that this problem is not the SDLP's fault, but everybody else's. However, I accept that his remarks in the House today were far more measured than those that appeared in the article. In the past few weeks, Sinn Féin has not fallen into the trap of making the simplistic argument that this situation is all the Minister's fault. That would be easy, convenient and perhaps even have some credibility with the public, but that is not the route to ensuring the continued provision of those essential services. I will not allow myself to fall into that trap, but I believe that it is appropriate that Mark should lift

the trap so that in future, none of us points the finger and says that the problems is everyone else's fault but our own. Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. I thank Mark Durkan for securing the topic for debate today. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on an issue that has caused so much concern in our constituency.

5.00 pm

I remind Mark Durkan that it was he who once advised us all not to fix the blame, but to fix the problem. Mindful of those words of wisdom, I was intrigued that the Member spent several days blatantly ignoring his own advice. Rather than getting on with addressing the problem that faces neighbourhood renewal, the Member has insisted, as my colleague Raymond McCartney said, on telling everyone who would listen that it was not his fault but everyone else's. It might be said that the Member has been "Durkan and diving".

Sinn Féin stands ready to help to resolve the issue. My party is committed to neighbourhood renewal. We know the devastation that DSD's decision to withdraw funding will have in areas such as Derry, and, as Mark has said, in others. In an area of high deprivation, the loss of vital community infrastructure is a blow from which we might never recover. If it is to be successful, neighbourhood renewal must be a genuinely cross-departmental programme.

Neighbourhood renewal is not the responsibility of DSD alone. Nevertheless, the Minister cannot simply wash her hands of those groups and services that are deemed by her to fall under the remit of another Department. What is needed from the Minister is leadership. She should launch a comprehensive process of engagement between herself, community groups and relevant Departments. She should seek to create the type of buy-in from other Departments that would allow neighbourhood renewal to continue. Such a buy-in is essential, and is what joined-up Government means. The Minister must take the lead in that process, and it is my understanding that the various neighbourhood renewal boards feel that that is what has been sorely lacking.

Meanwhile, I urge the Minister to provide extended funding to the affected groups until next year, as my colleague Raymond McCartney said. That will give those groups the breathing space to work out that process of dialogue and engagement, which will, hopefully, lead to a strategic way forward in which all departmental Ministers and others play their part.

Many of those groups were originally told that they would have a year's grace before the funding cuts came into effect. In a reply to one of the five questions that I submitted after meeting many of the groups last week, the Minister told me today that the Department agreed to continue to fund, for up to one year, groups

that deliver neighbourhood renewal services and activities that fall under another Department's statutory responsibility, while officials seek clarification with the relevant statutory bodies on long-term funding.

Many groups and organisations interpreted "for up to one year" as "a year". Therefore, getting only three months' funding has sent shock and awe across the community and voluntary sector. The correspondence that those groups received last week effectively slashed that deadline, and many vital organisations and services were told that, as of 31 August, they were on their own. That was a death warrant for those groups, and it is a death warrant for many essential community services such as preschool provision and services for women and the elderly. Perhaps that is why the media — and who are we in Derry to judge — dubbed the Minister the Grim Reaper. I do not want to go down that road, because, as my colleague Raymond McCartney has said, I have no doubt that the Minister, like all of us in this Chamber, does not want to see those groups and services being lost to already disadvantaged communities.

Therefore, I urge the Minister to rethink this decision, to provide the extension of funding, to enable all the work that is being done, and to help us all to work together to fix the problem. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs M Bradley: Neighbourhood renewal was seen as a life-enhancing tool to boost community spirit, to give a new lease of life and to aid improvement in health and welfare. The past few weeks have seen intense media interest in the changes to DSD funding strategies. That has been no surprise, because, for some time, the consensus among community groups in their requests for funding has been that funding should be streamlined and, as a general rule, issued for longer periods than an annual allocation.

I must stress, however, that there is a need for pressure to be brought on all Departments, to shoulder the responsibility of delivering funding to the community groups that are suffering because they do not meet the criteria as laid down by DSD.

In the run-up to today's debate, it has been almost impossible to miss the outcry by the various groups that will effectively close their doors on 31 August 2008. There are stories about pensioners who will miss their daily telephone calls, and I, and my party, will fight to bring about a more intense service for older people. The reduction in funding is the result of a Programme for Government that is delivering the opposite to what it was supposed to deliver. The Programme for Government and the Budget are clearly unfit for purpose. Incidentally, the SDLP voted against the Programme for Government and the Budget and was lambasted for doing so.

Thus far, the funding reduction is attracting attention for stinting services; however, the four chairpersons of the neighbourhood partnership boards issued a joint statement welcoming the essence of the approach. Those groups, whose operations do not directly relate to the criteria, must be given the right and an open pathway to apply to other Departments that have responsibility pertaining to their activity.

I call on the Executive to reassess their approach and to ensure that all Departments with an area of responsibility should be instructed to access and deliver the appropriate level of funding. Without apology, I call on the junior Ministers to ensure the reinstatement of the children's fund, which my party leader, in his capacity as Finance Minister, set up.

Some of the groups that are suffering under the current strategy are child-orientated and naturally fall within the remits of the Education and Health Departments. Last week, we debated a motion on the extended schools funding, and we were told that the education budget would be all-inclusive. Yet, one of the most fundamental benefits to schools is about to be extinguished at the Minister's behest.

Things must change, and the Minister of Finance and Personnel must take note of the issue. Departmental Ministers should be more than aware of the poisoned chalice that has been offered to the third sector.

On behalf of the many worthwhile groups in Derry and elsewhere, I urge the Executive to take a fresh look at the way in which they do their business, to make the most of the grass-roots-up approach that has served us all so well and could continue to do so in the future.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank Mr Durkan for securing the Adjournment debate. The debate has been on the cards for some months now — it did not simply happen as a result of the press coverage in recent days. Mr Durkan was concerned that the issue around funding for neighbourhood renewal schemes needed to be resolved.

Community groups in Derry have been doing a superb job for many decades, and they have brought enormous benefit to our communities. They bring great benefit to people of all ages, from many backgrounds. The groups have been a lifeline to people in the most disadvantaged circumstances. They have delivered services that, in advanced societies, would be mainstreamed and delivered by Government.

The job of providing the necessary services to rebuild communities and to provide individuals and families with various kinds of support has been carried out by community groups, led by committed community workers. However, many of those workers now feel that they are being abandoned. They see revenue streams drying up, and they are faced with the prospect of closing their doors on the communities that they have been serving so well for so long.

There has been a great deal of publicity around the Good Morning Galliagh project, which is one of the many projects that have been unsuccessful in their bid for funding. The Naiscoil na Rinne project provides important educational programmes to parents and children in the Irish-speaking community in Derry, but it has also been unsuccessful in its bid. That project should be funded, as it has a social and educational development remit. It delivers value for money, but, once again, there are no Executive programme funds and no children's fund to which they can apply.

We always knew that, as various European funding was being redirected and reprioritised, things would become more difficult for community groups.

Community groups had, naturally, hoped that many programmes would be funded by our own Exchequer. Given the services provided by those groups, such an expectation was not unreasonable. Various Departments were supposed to fund neighbourhood renewal programmes; in many cases, that has not happened. Although the Budget was meant to eclipse all other Budgets, that money was not provided. At that time, the SDLP warned that those programmes would destroy community development; although that view was rubbished, it is now clear that we were correct.

The SDLP — as Mary Bradley and Mark Durkan outlined — wants the Executive to re-establish the Executive programme funds and the children's fund. The SDLP set up those schemes through its previous Executive mandate. However, after restoration of the Assembly, the largest parties withdrew those programmes. We want all Departments — not solely the Department for Social Development — to use moneys from the neighbourhood renewal fund.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the politicking and the major propaganda programme conducted in the Chamber by a particular party. By voting in favour of the Programme for Government and the Budget, that party voted to eradicate the Executive programme funds and the children's fund. That party supported the priorities, and this is the effect of that decision. Furthermore, that same party now blames everyone else for the resulting mess. It should stand by its decision and the aftermath or admit its mistakes. All the money that is available through the neighbourhood renewal fund, particularly in Derry, will be spent on the community sector. The SDLP said, at that time, that hardship would arise from the Budget and that Government priorities were wrong — we were right, and that is a tragedy for the community sector and the people it serves.

Sinn Féin talked about a “death warrant” and labelled the Minister for Social Development the Grim Reaper. Neighbourhood partnerships have been established to consider benchmarking, protocols and

priorities strategically, and it was those groups that established them. A collective, cross-departmental response is required to ensure acknowledgement of the valuable work conducted by thousands of people in the community sector, particularly in the Foyle constituency, which has helped people to cope during difficult times.

The Executive, and other Departments, must make a commitment to help those groups. Moreover, everyone involved in politics must strive to improve people's quality of life. Several projects have ceased because other Departments have not committed fully to neighbourhood renewal.

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I thank my party leader, Mark Durkan, the MP for Foyle, for giving the Assembly the opportunity to discuss the implementation of neighbourhood renewal in Foyle. I thank the other Members for their contributions. However, some contributions were more constructive than others; some were realistic, down to earth and recognised the real issues, whereas others simply attempted to duck the issues.

In 2003, all Departments signed up to neighbourhood renewal, a strategy that aimed to close the gap between the quality of life for people in the most disadvantaged areas and the rest of society. The Executive — all four parties — continued to support neighbourhood renewal as their flagship programme for tackling deprivation. Mark Durkan, Pat Ramsey and Mary Bradley highlighted the fact that other Departments and statutory agencies have not committed to the programme. Again, I urge them to make that commitment.

Furthermore, I sent letters to ministerial colleagues some months ago urging them to buy into the neighbourhood renewal programme. A ministerial subcommittee, led by me, which comprises senior representatives from other Departments, has already been established, and I have, verbally, requested that commitment. A further meeting of that subcommittee will ensure that financial commitment to neighbourhood renewal is translated across all Departments.

5.15 pm

The neighbourhood renewal strategy identified the need to move away from an ad hoc, project-by-project approach to tackling disadvantage towards a more planned, long-term and integrated method. Just about everyone agreed that we could not go on endlessly extending the life of projects, regardless of whether they were hitting the spot, at the expense of supporting new and more focused community endeavours.

I agreed to a policy of refocusing in order to get more impact from our interventions. I was determined, however, that if we were to go down that road, it would be essential that actual funding decisions should involve other Departments that share executive responsibility for the strategy. Perhaps, more importantly, I was also

determined that decisions would be taken locally and would reflect the localised strategic priorities that the neighbourhood-renewal partnerships identified. For that reason, I stayed out of individual decisions and delegated that work to officials in the Derry office, in close consultation with the four neighbourhood-renewal partnerships in the city. Therefore, they were involved in the decisions.

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister for Social Development: No. I have little time, and I wish to continue.

As a result of that work, those projects that tackle the core causes of disadvantage in neighbourhood-renewal areas will now, for the first time ever, be offered three-year funding contracts. I know that that announcement has been well received by many in the wider community sector. Others, unfortunately, have been disappointed to learn that their projects, for which funding has already been extended on an ad hoc basis at least once, will not receive funding beyond August 2008. I want to emphasise the point, however, that they will have other opportunities to offer new projects.

There was also an intermediate project category, for which Departments such as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning will normally play the lead role. Where those Departments indicated a willingness to fund projects in the medium term, my Department was prepared to extend funding for a further year. Where Departments indicated no strategic interest in such projects, funding from my Department would again end after August 2008.

I know that decisions on projects in that category have caused some disappointment, particularly as they have had a disproportionate impact in certain parts of Derry. Quite a lot has been said and written, some of it highly exaggerated and dramatised. However, the fact remains that the prioritisation of the projects has the support of the relevant neighbourhood-renewal partnerships because they were directly involved.

I was particularly pleased to see that the chairpersons of the four neighbourhood-renewal partnerships in Derry issued a press release last week that supported my Department's approach and acknowledged that local partnerships are now influencing decisions about the delivery of key services. Those representatives of the local community also highlighted the vital need for the entire Executive to embrace the neighbourhood renewal strategy.

I ask other Members — namely, Mr McCartney and Ms Anderson, both of whom contributed to the debate — to ask their Sinn Féin ministerial colleagues to buy into the neighbourhood renewal strategy, because funding is required from the Department of Education and the Department for Regional Development. I will

ask my Ulster Unionist ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Employment and Learning to buy into neighbourhood renewal, and I will ask the same of my DUP ministerial colleagues, because a collective approach is required to pump-prime and help communities and to alleviate disadvantage and deprivation.

I reiterate the point that my officials have engaged with other public bodies over time to explore how they might provide long-term support for community-based services relevant to priorities identified under neighbourhood renewal. I assure all my colleagues in the Chamber that funding is not being withdrawn from neighbourhood renewal in Derry, nor is it being cut back. The tighter focus on supporting services that deal with priority needs means that funds will now be released to support new projects that better address the core causes of disadvantage.

My colleague Mark Durkan asked whether money would be taken out of Derry as a result of that decision. I wish to reassure him that Derry will not lose out as a result of the refocusing of funding. That funding will be used for projects in Derry.

In the run-up to this discussion, Mr Durkan requested a meeting with me — he and Mr Pat Ramsey and Mrs Mary Bradley were the only MLAs who did so — and he asked me to proof the outcomes from the refocusing exercise against the strategic objectives that were identified in the neighbourhood renewal areas. I am happy to give that commitment.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister named three Members as the only people who asked her for a meeting. I submitted a letter to her Department requesting a meeting, and I want the Minister to acknowledge that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order; it is a point of clarification.

The Minister for Social Development: I am happy to clarify that. Mr McCartney's request related to the first phase, when I extended funding at the end of June 2007. I acknowledge —

Mr McCartney: I sent you a letter a week ago, Margaret.

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

The Minister for Social Development: I accept what Mr McCartney said. That letter has yet to be drawn to my attention, but no doubt it will be, and I hope to be able to respond to it.

I emphasise that much more work must be done. I will continue to challenge other Departments to put the alleviation of poverty at the top of their agendas. I

expect every Member of the Assembly to do the same, because the purpose of neighbourhood renewal is to tackle disadvantage and deprivation and, in so doing, build communities. However, that requires everybody's support, endorsement and pump-priming. I will continue to address the needs of those born into disadvantage.

My only desire in this area is to ensure that neighbourhood-renewal spending will have the maximum impact on deprivation in Derry. I wish to strengthen the local element in decision-making for the future. My colleague Mr Durkan referred to neighbourhood renewal in the context of the review of public administration. As Members will know, all funding of that kind — and I wish to emphasise that — will transfer to local government under the review of public administration.

I have already said that I wish to build on the relationship with local government and to use partnering arrangements to better engage existing councils in neighbourhood renewal before the implementation of the reform of public administration in 2011. Therefore, I will be creating pathways in the interim, and I wish to engage councils in pilot projects whereby they will be able to implement neighbourhood-renewal projects and area-based regeneration at the best level, namely that of local government. That means that the work will be done by local authorities, and the Department will give them the budget to do it.

I am committed to developing Derry — its housing, its regeneration and its community sector. I fully acknowledge the role that the voluntary and community sector in Derry has played over many difficult decades.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister must draw her remarks to a close.

The Minister for Social Development: I assure the House that I will always give Derry its fair share.

Adjourned at 5.24 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 2 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Appointment of New Clerk to the Assembly/Director General

Mr Speaker: The Assembly Commission has asked me to announce the appointment of Mr Trevor Reaney as the new Clerk to the Assembly/Director General. Mr Reaney will take up the post by 1 September 2008.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Child Maintenance Bill

First Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to introduce the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07], which is a Bill to amend the law relating to child support; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services (Mr Newton): I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern and deep disappointment at the planned closure of, and service changes to, certain local Post Offices; approves the report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider, and make proposals for, partnerships that could enhance the economic case for viable local postal services; and agrees that it should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion.

The Assembly first debated this issue on 21 April 2008, and, on that occasion, Members from across the Chamber expressed concern. Indeed, the week following that debate, an Ad Hoc Committee was established to consider ways to enhance the viability of local postal services.

I pay tribute to those Committee members who took the initiative on the matter. The Committee had a short period of time in which to take evidence and to produce recommendations. I acknowledge the contribution of those members and their deputies for their hard work on and commitment to this important matter. Several members went out of their way to ensure that a quorum was present for the evidence sessions; indeed, some drove a considerable distance to be at the meetings.

Many organisations and individuals provided oral and written evidence to the Committee, and I thank them all for responding at such short notice. I thank the Assembly staff for their professionalism and diligence in supporting the Committee's work.

It is worth pointing out that Post Office Ltd has acted as the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform instructed and that as a result, the Committee felt that the whole process has been seriously flawed.

Given that post offices are a reserved matter, the Committee calls on the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform to suspend the closure and network-change programme to allow Post Office Ltd to consider innovative alternatives fully. Those alternatives include collaboration with Departments and agencies and with organisations such

as citizens advice bureaux and the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland.

In planning the closures and network changes, there appears to have been little recognition of the fact that Northern Ireland is different to the rest of the United Kingdom in that it has a more rural population, poorer road networks and public transportation systems, and is recovering from many years of conflict.

The Committee heard evidence that suggests that the access criteria that Post Office Ltd used failed to recognise the unique socio-political situation of some communities in Northern Ireland, particularly the urban.

The Committee has serious concerns about the access criteria and the statistical methodology that Post Office Ltd used. The statistical analysis that was applied to the UK population as a whole did not reflect regional variations, such as those in Northern Ireland, where the population is affected more adversely by the closures than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

The definitions used for the terms “urban” and “rural” were not those that are normally used in Northern Ireland, which has some of the highest levels of social deprivation in urban areas. The Committee urges Post Office Ltd to ensure that, wherever possible, the national thresholds for access in urban and rural areas are applied fairly and equitably.

The Committee was amazed to learn that the distances that Post Office Ltd determined to assess the criteria were measured as the crow flies, perhaps giving a new slant to the term “pigeon post”. The distances that were measured were between those post offices that are earmarked for closure and those that will remain open, rather than between people’s homes and the new post office — that is, the real distance that customers will have to travel.

Although the consumer body Postwatch stated that its representatives walked the new routes, the Committee saw no clear evidence that the fact that steep hills, a lack of footpaths, or infrequent or no public transport could have a significant effect on people who do not have a car had been considered.

It is worth noting that several issues emerging from the evidence sessions perturbed the Committee. A recurring concern was that the six-week deadline for responses to consultation on the implementation of closure was much too short. Furthermore, Post Office Ltd had only three weeks in which to consider those responses and to firm up its decisions. I am sure that Members will agree that that is clearly not sufficient time. It can be assumed, therefore, that either Post Office Ltd did not expect many responses, or that it had little intention of heeding them. That is incredible, given the potential impact of closures, not only on vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society but on small businesses and retailers in affected areas.

Post offices are often at the very heart of communities. Post Office Ltd appears to have paid little or no attention to the impact of post office closures on elderly and disabled people. The post office is frequently their only social outlet — a place where they catch up on news; get information on benefits; access their money; and, crucially, are known by staff who would notice if they had not called to collect their benefits or pensions. Pat McFadden MP — speaking on the BBC’s ‘Politics Show’ yesterday — acknowledged the social aspect of post offices. Post Office Ltd recognises the social role of post offices and, yet, it diminishes that role without providing an obvious replacement.

Those in receipt of benefits and pensions — who are, furthermore, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our society — rely most heavily on post offices. Post Office Ltd has not acknowledged the difficulties that closures will create for people with mobility problems, who may have to encounter busy roads and garage forecourts or go to post offices with difficult wheelchair access. Moreover, longer queues and strange areas can be distressing for vulnerable people.

The Committee found that Post Office Ltd had not given enough consideration to the impact of closures on the viability of other businesses in affected areas, or on businesses that host a post office that has been nominated for closure. A serious concern was that, although small businesses should be encouraged to develop by the use of eBay and the Internet, such businesses would suffer unduly from post office closures. Those businesses rely on getting to the local post office, quickly and easily, to send and collect parcels. Having to travel further and queue longer will cost those businesses time — and, in business, time is money.

It is well known that businesses feed off each another by increasing each other’s footfall. Post office closures are likely to affect neighbouring shops; fewer people will be in the area to collect benefits and pensions and, therefore, will not pop into the other shops to buy goods. That domino effect will be particularly relevant in rural areas and could lead to the closure of a village’s last remaining shop.

Another recurring theme of the evidence sessions was the proposed closure of profitable post offices. Parkhall post office, in Antrim, received an award in 2007 for having the highest sales growth in the entire United Kingdom. Incredibly, however, it is one of the post offices marked for closure. In my constituency of East Belfast, post offices were encouraged to invest to facilitate customers.

The Committee is not naive. It appreciates that post offices must change to reflect the needs of the modern world. However, Post Office Ltd should consider alternatives to post office closures. For example, the Committee assessed the viability of one-stop shops

that would deliver a range of services such as a citizens advice bureau kiosk, local-council services and health services. The Committee believes that the closure and change process should be suspended until more consultation and research has been carried out, to ensure that —

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

The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services: The changes needed, and the resulting services, must reflect the needs of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland.

12.15 pm

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I declare an interest: I am closely related to someone who runs a rural post office. However, that post office is not earmarked for closure or for a change to the services it offers. Let the record reflect that.

The motion refers to planned closures and to changes in the services offered by existing post offices. I want to keep that in the minds of Members. Mr Newton referred to the hard work of the Committee: I thank him for that, and I pay tribute to him for his work as the Chairperson of the Committee. At the meetings I attended, Mr Newton made sure that each member was heard, even if our remarks were parochial. On occasions, I made particular points about post offices in west Tyrone and Mr Newton tolerated them.

The criteria used by Post Office Ltd were flawed. During some evidence sessions, the Committee pointed out that there was insufficient transport to rural post offices. However, we discovered that it was not simply rural transport that was needed for a visit to the post office; people were — evidently — expected to visit their post offices by helicopter or plane. The access criteria used by Post Office Ltd used distances that were measured as the crow flies. I want to put that on the record. In my view, that is totally unacceptable.

In some of the documents we received, circles were drawn on maps: perhaps we should have picked up from those circles that the Post Office Ltd was measuring distances in that fashion. In the documentation that I read — and I did not read all of the documents — there was no mention of measuring distances as the crow flies.

I had difficulty with another aspect of the process, which was that Post Office Ltd had requested those postmasters and postmistresses whose working practices were subject to change to subscribe to a confidentiality clause so that they could not speak about it. That is intolerable. If there are to be post office closures and changes to the services on offer in existing post offices, it is important that Post Office Ltd is upfront and transparent about its proposals.

Mr D Bradley: The Member referred to the possibility of post office closures. Is she aware that if the Government do not award the contract for the Post Office card account to Post Office Ltd in 2010, it is estimated that a further 3,000 post offices may close as a result? Does she agree that all Members should make representations to ensure that the Post Office card account remains with Post Office Ltd?

Mr Speaker: The Member can have an extra minute.

Mrs McGill: Thank you. I will respond to Mr Bradley at the end of my speech because I have some points to make. If I do not get an opportunity to respond to him, I will speak to him outside the Chamber.

The Committee discovered something else during the evidence sessions — when we were fighting against post office closures we discovered that if one post office were spared closure, another would have to close instead. I found that approach unacceptable.

Perhaps I should have picked it up at the meetings that we attended elsewhere and in the presentations that we received. I definitely found that distasteful. Post Office Ltd did not tell us about that before. I remind Members, therefore, that if a post office that is earmarked for closure does not close — due to a submission — another one will close in its place.

I told a postmaster and postmistress who run a post office that is earmarked for closure about that arrangement, and they were speechless. They could not believe that if they were successful in their fight to retain their post office — and they will know where they stand after tomorrow's announcement — another one would close in its place. They do not want that to be the case; they do not want to be working against other post offices.

Dominic Bradley mentioned the future; we must ensure that something is in place that we can all live with. I have a couple of other points. One is —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs McGill: All right. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Burnside: I welcome the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, as other Members have. I am pleased that the Parkhall post office in south Antrim has got a reprieve. That reprieve is due to the tremendous campaign from the local community and political representatives, and to the effective consultative programme that was carried out during the process.

Sometimes, consultation is a waste of time — a con job. Early in the campaign, we asked that there be a proper consultative programme. Antrim Borough Council produced an economic assessment of the area and stressed that there should continue to be three post offices in the greater Antrim area. Last year, Parkhall was the star post office in performance and customer

service. We, therefore, expressed our arguments and received the support of the local community. Tomorrow's announcement will, I believe, state that the Parkhall post office will continue to operate.

Consultation is sometimes a con job, but in this case it was pleasing. The Post Office deserves credit for carrying out the consultation and listening. I know that the Post Office is under threat and that it has to make money, but all public bodies that have a national parameter should listen to the community. A number of post offices can be saved if they are economically and financially viable and if they continue to offer a service to the local community.

Post offices are especially important to old people. Some old people in Parkhall would have been left stranded between the post office in the centre of the town and the other one in the town, so I am pleased that Parkhall got a reprieve.

I welcome the report and the work that has been done by the Ad Hoc Committee. Furthermore, I praise the postmistress and her colleagues in Parkhall for achieving a satisfactory outcome to the consultative process.

Mr Burns: The proposals to close up to 96 post offices are unwelcome. The policy dictated by the British Government for a mainly urban society does not suit us. The proposed closures will have a devastating effect on villages and small rural communities. I was concerned that the six-week consultation period was too short, and it suggested that the Post Office and the Government in London did not want to spend much time listening to what people have to say.

I agree with my South Antrim colleague Mr David Burnside that, although the time was short, the tremendous campaign to save the Parkhall post office brought the whole community together. Parkhall post office serves a side of the community at the fast-expanding end of the Antrim town area. The post office has won awards, and it provides everything that one might ask of a post office. It has disability access and easy parking, and it has won awards. The people who run Parkhall post office have put a lot of effort into it, and it was disappointing for them to find it on the list for closure. A tremendous campaign has been fought to save that post office.

Instead of cutting back on the number of post offices, we should try to add to the financial services that they provide. The Post Office must offer more to the community.

Mr D Bradley: I agree with the Member that the Post Office should offer more services. Measures can be introduced to provide further support to post offices. Is the Member aware that many post offices across England, Wales and Scotland are eligible for business

rates relief? For example, in Wales, post offices with a rateable value of £12,000 or less are eligible for relief. Post offices with a rateable value of £9,000 or less receive 100% rates relief, and those with a rateable value between £9,000 and £12,999 receive 50% rates relief. Does the Member agree that a system such as the Welsh scheme should be introduced in Northern Ireland in order to support our existing post offices?

Mr Speaker: The Member has one minute added to his time.

Mr Burns: I agree entirely that a rates relief scheme would help the survival of some post offices, as long as it is provided on an even playing field. Many people from rural communities would be absolutely devastated by the closure of the post office in their area. The local post office is one of the most important parts of a rural community — it is the hub of such communities. Many post offices now operate from the local shop, which, in some cases, also serves as the petrol station. That may be the only shop in a village community, and the closure of the post office may threaten the shop's viability, and it could mean that the hub of that community is lost.

It is bad enough that people living in rural communities get up at about 7.00 am, get into their cars and leave the rural community to drive to their place of work, because they are forced to do their business elsewhere, and then return to their community at 6.00 pm. If the services provided by the post office are no longer available in their community, more and more people will be forced to do business elsewhere.

The idea that the Post Office provides a social service is dropping further and further off the agenda. Ways and means should be found to provide financial help for post offices that are serving the community. The Post Office should not be a profit-driven organisation.

Ms Lo: I have been campaigning against the closure of the Lisburn Road post office and have found unwavering support for its remaining operational, having received over 100 letters of support from local residents and businesses. I have visited residents in the area, who unanimously expressed grave concerns about the potential loss of the post office. I am particularly concerned at the impact that the closure will have on elderly members of the community, who rely heavily on the services provided by the post office.

I have visited the post office in question and witnessed at first hand the constant stream of trade that it receives, with virtually every customer giving great praise to the service and staff. The Lisburn Road post office is a family-run business that has been in operation for more than 15 years. It is a well-established hub in the Lisburn Road community and provides services that are often above and beyond the

Post Office remit, while maintaining an enviable level of revenue.

12.30 pm

At a recent public meeting, people voiced their anger over the proposed closure. Owners of several local businesses said that were the Lisburn Road post office to be closed, they would lodge their daily takings at a bank rather than use the nearest available post office.

The Lisburn Road post office continues to be viable. Its revenue levels remain healthy — around £70,000 is banked there each week. Therefore, there is a great deal of dismay as to why such a successful business should be closed.

I share the view of many local residents that the assessment criteria that determine post office closures are too rigid. The Post Office should adopt a more holistic approach to determining closures. To make an assessment based simply on statistics, rather than to undertake a genuine consultation that takes account of local opinion, is not reasonable. It is also not sufficient for the Post Office to justify its proposed closure schedule in that way.

Instead of closing post offices, a cultural change in the provision of their services is needed. Services should be expanded and made more flexible, in order to meet local communities' needs. We could learn lessons from the Republic of Ireland, where a postal service that was previously in deficit has been turned into a profit-making one. We could also adopt best practices that are used in England and other parts of the world.

The Post Office is a very good brand, which local people trust. We should make use and take advantage of that. Instead of shrinking services, we should consider post offices working in conjunction with other service providers, such as social services and the Citizens Advice, to promote public information, provide forms and assist with tax returns. Rather than closing post offices, we should be promoting them.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, support the motion. For many years, the post office network has been the hub of rural communities. For young mothers and the elderly, local post offices have been a place of social activity. They benefit many small, rural shops economically. The announced changes to the network — with imminent closures being proposed — will affect both rural and urban areas. The proposed changes have not only torn the hearts out of small villages and towns but have caused widespread concern among businesses, rural communities and political representatives.

The Post Office's methodology for deciding which post offices should close, and which should be affected by changes to opening hours and service provision, is

open to speculation and much criticism. The fact that the consultation period was not extended beyond the six weeks that the Ad Hoc Committee, and others, requested is greatly disappointing. It would appear that the Post Office planned the closures first and then set its criteria for closure. In other words, the cart was put before the horse. The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee, Mr Newton, has highlighted those issues. Analysis from the Assembly's Research and Library Services indicates that Northern Ireland will be poorer as a result of the changes.

One hundred per cent of Northern Ireland's population live within six miles of a post office. However, whatever methodology is used, Northern Ireland still does not meet four of the remaining five access criteria. Even using the crow-flies methodology, only 75% of Northern Ireland's population live within one mile of a post office, which falls far short of the 90% target recommended by the UK Government.

There is poorer access to post offices in Northern Ireland than in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Therefore, is it not ironic that, although the postal service is in crisis due to financial cuts, the chief executive of the Post Office earned £3 million last year? That questions the integrity of the reasons that were given for the closure of post offices.

In West Tyrone, there were proposals to close one post office and to change the operation of 11 others to part-time status. I am happy to announce that the decision to close that post office has been overturned — an announcement will be made tomorrow. However, it is important that post offices be allowed opening hours that meet the requirements of people who live in the area, particularly in rural areas.

Although much is said about equality and rural proofing in the House, the proposals from Post Office Ltd fly in the face of such sentiments. I support the motion.

Mr Armstrong: The motion addresses an important matter that affects many people in Mid Ulster and Northern Ireland. I am pleased to speak in support of the motion. I was a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services, and I pay tribute to the work of the other members and the support staff.

The vast majority of people want to retain local post offices because they like to know that one is available to them. That is even true for people who do not use a post office but, nonetheless, regard it as part of the fabric of community life. That is particularly true in rural communities, where the village shop, the post office and the village school are all regarded as institutions that are worth preserving.

No one can reasonably expect Post Office Ltd to run a large number of post offices at a loss, but I have serious concerns about the way that it handled the

announcement that 42 branches in Northern Ireland will close and that others have been earmarked for outreach services.

There has not been sufficient recognition of circumstances that are peculiar to Northern Ireland. The six-week consultation period was not long enough to allow a meaningful response, and, therefore, gave the impression that the closure plans were a done deal — it was a case of Post Office Ltd going through the motions.

I am also concerned about the lack of understanding that was shown on circumstances that are unique to Northern Ireland in the identification of the post offices that will close. In rural parts of England, it might make sense to close a post office where there are others in close proximity. However, the history of Northern Ireland means that there are many areas where people are nervous to travel — even short distances — to avail themselves of shops and other services, because they are seen as hostile and unsafe areas on account of community identification.

Before legislation is introduced, it must be equality proofed. What would the equality impact assessment have been on the likely impact that the closures would have on the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society? I am particularly concerned about the impact that the closures will have on rural areas, where people will have to travel to another village or town to access a post office. What if the elderly, the disabled or young mothers in rural areas do not have access to a car or the same level of public transport that is available in urban areas? More attention should have been paid — and still must be — to the retention of post office services in other businesses and organisations, such as availability of the electoral register, driving licence and passport applications, and banking services.

Those would have a great impact on young people, because post offices are looked on as places that older people frequent. Facilities for young people no longer exist, despite young people being the backbone in making many places successful. Post offices have an image problem, in that — as I said — they are viewed as businesses for older people. Services need to be retained, and the facilities that young people want to use should be provided.

I support the motion and endorse the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services.

Mr Irwin: I mentioned previously in the Chamber that there are proposals to close two post offices in my constituency at Battlehill and Eleven Lane Ends. There are also proposals to reduce significantly the opening times of post offices at Loughgall and to operate mobile services in other locations such as Cladymore, Lisnadill and Jerrettspass.

The proposals represent a significant change in how Post Office Ltd views the existing service provision. There is no doubt that rural communities in particular will suffer in my constituency. I am deeply disappointed that Post Office Ltd refused to extend the deadline for consultation submissions, because I feel that the entire process was rushed and did not provide enough time for local people to comment.

I agree entirely with the Committee's report that the three-week consideration period — during which time the responses to the consultation would be deliberated on — could not make for a meaningful and structured position on which Post Office Ltd could proceed.

In my largely rural constituency, little regard was given to the impact that such proposals would have on elderly and less mobile people. The Committee's report bears that out. The report's recommendations represent a common-sense approach that seems to have been lacking in that taken by Post Office Ltd. It is not too late for Post Office Ltd to halt its proposals and to give the entire issue greater consideration. Surely the consumer and the facility owners deserve no less.

It concerns me that, with further changes to the network envisaged for 2011, we could be faced with a repeat performance by Post Office Ltd. Again, I agree with the Committee's report that a much greater degree of investigation and consultation must precede any further proposed changes.

In my area, the local post office is more than just a shop. It is a vital part of the rural infrastructure. As studies elsewhere have shown, there is a need to expand the role and remit of post offices to provide the community with a greater range of services.

The closure of post offices and the inconveniencing of elderly and less mobile people is an unwelcome approach. I urge Post Office Ltd to reconsider.

Mr Dallat: This is the second or third time that I have taken part in debates in this and previous mandates on the vital issue of post offices. Up until an hour ago, I believed that I would be making the winding-up speech, but that facility has been withdrawn.

The post office is the hub of the rural community. It is also the life of suburban, socially disadvantaged areas, some of which are under the hatchet of closure.

Post offices in Northern Ireland are remote from decision-makers in Britain. We need to find a way to take control of decisions that affect not only post offices but everything else that depends on them, including small rural shops, convenience stores, butchers' shops and bakeries. All such businesses are sustained by the existence of post offices. We can lie down and allow them to die, or we can get up and fight for their survival.

The report has a number of interesting recommendations, all of which I support. If we do not have faith in what we are doing, and if we do not have a belief in, and vision for, the future, I am afraid that more speeches on this issue will be given in the Assembly next year, the year after, and so on.

We cannot allow announcements about closures to go unheard. To be honest, it will be a big fight, because, on 31 March 2008, we were more or less told that post offices are closing.

Indeed, last Friday, some of us received emails that totally ignored the fact that the debate would be taking place in the Assembly today. Other announcements are to be made later this week. For a fledgling Assembly that has pledged itself to fight for the survival of rural areas and socially deprived suburban areas, that was not a nice way to be treated; it was contemptible to say the least.

12.45 pm

Post Office Ltd could easily have considered the examples in other parts of the world where post offices have been given serious work to do. For instance, Government services in Japan are handled by post offices, and passports constitute a significant amount of post office business in Australia and the Republic of Ireland. In some parts of the world, there are partnerships between post offices, the voluntary sector and financial institutions, which fulfil another requirement — delivering services to the people who are most socially deprived.

In this country, 8% of people at the lower end of the social spectrum have no access to banking. In recent years, services developed by Post Office Ltd have contributed to the lowering of that figure. Throughout this island, there are fine institutions in which the vision and commitment of people has transformed how things operate. In particular, I mention credit unions — organisations that I have been associated with for many years. In the 1960s, they were set up in the most socially disadvantaged areas, with little prospect of profit. However, as services developed, people participated in them and supported them. Post offices should not end their lives by being gradually culled until none is left.

Those who know the history of post offices will be aware of the Penny Black stamp and the stagecoaches. The service has a fine history, but its existence is under threat. A number of postmasters have been in touch with me because they have heard through the grapevine that they are next on the hit list. If any criticism is to be made of the Committee's report, it is that the National Federation of SubPostmasters did not have an opportunity to contribute. However, I fully understand why that was not possible, and I commend

the Chairperson for the excellent job that was done in the time available.

It seems that this work is only beginning, rather than being completed. We need much more time to ensure that we have the opportunity to save a very important institution that has served us for many years.

Mr T Clarke: Like others who were members of the Ad Hoc Committee, I was very pleased to be involved in the process to examine post office services. The experience was more than eye-opening because of the in-depth work that was undertaken to consider the criteria that were — allegedly — applied by Post Office Ltd in relation to the planned closures.

It was amazing to discover that Post Office Ltd had already decided on the number of post offices that would be closed before it applied the criteria to certain post offices. In my eyes, that means that the entire process was flawed. The number of post offices to close should not have been determined before taking into account the criteria, the distance factors, and those who would be affected by the decisions. The process was flawed from the outset.

Then there were the viability factors relating to money; one of the most important of which was the Government's statement on how many millions of pounds were being lost on the service year on year. However, in my area, one of the post offices earmarked for closure boasted of making a profit. Post Office Ltd insinuated that post offices were costing money, yet many of the post offices earmarked for closure are making profits.

Dr W McCrea: While honouring the embargo that permits Post Office Ltd to announce its decision regarding the Parkhall post office in Antrim, I ask my honourable friend if he agrees that Councillor Smyth, Councillor Graham and the community association did an excellent job — and set a wonderful example to all — by presenting a solid case in a professional manner via a public meeting that allowed parties from across the spectrum to come together and take a united stand with the council?

It is now up to the community to continue to actively support the post office in that area.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr T Clarke: I concur with the Member's remarks. When Barbara Roulston from Post Office Ltd came to the Ad Hoc Committee, she referred to the public meeting held in Parkhall and the strong feeling conveyed there.

To return to the other criteria, research was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Assembly that called into question the distances between the post offices — something that was referred to at public

meetings. When Post Office Ltd came to the Committee, it questioned the results of that independent research. However, when the Assembly researcher met Post Office Ltd, it was found that Post Office Ltd was measuring distances as the crow flies, whereas the researcher's results were based on global positioning systems (GPS) and the actual distances that people have to travel. That shows that the process has been flawed. Post Office Ltd's main aim was to axe 42 post offices — 96, including those that will be replaced by outreach services — and did not take into account the social impact on communities. It was oblivious to the viability of the businesses involved, many of which could go to the wall when those post offices are closed, resulting in small shops being taken out of our local communities.

The process has been interesting. I commend the work of the Committee and all those who gave evidence and put forward suggestions as to what could be done if we were faced with a similar situation. I support the motion.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Speaker, call upon no man suddenly.

I welcome the report of the Ad Hoc Committee and pay tribute to those Members who served on it and to the officials who carried out important work. I share the concern of other Members about the predetermined nature of the recent consultation exercise undertaken by Post Office Ltd. I met senior executives of Post Office Ltd on at least two occasions to discuss the proposed closures in my area and the new arrangements, including mobile units for many of the smaller outlets.

Post Office Ltd is due to announce its final recommendations tomorrow. However, I fear that the two proposed closures in my area will proceed and, if that is the case, it is to be regretted. I pay tribute and put on record my compliments to the owners and operators of those sub-post offices for their dedicated service over many years. The local community will be disappointed if those closures go ahead.

A great many operators of sub-post offices have made major contributions to community life over the years. Many of those are small, family-orientated and family-run businesses. As an example, I told the House about the sub-post office in the hamlet village of Jerrettspass, which has been operated by the Porter family for generations — almost 100 years. The reduction in services there will probably mean that the viability of that post office will have to be questioned, and the Porter family may not be able to carry on the work that it has undertaken on behalf of the entire community. That would be a great pity.

I join Mr Dominic Bradley in expressing my concern that the contract for the Post Office Ltd card account is up for consideration. That has the potential

to create a serious, if not fatal, impact on the future viability of many post offices.

In the village of Loughgall in my constituency, a considerable campaign was mounted against the curtailing of services. I pay particular tribute to the local group that presented an excellent counter argument to Post Office Ltd's proposals. It remains to be seen how successful that campaign was. There is speculation that an increase in the hours that are provided by the mobile unit in Loughgall will be granted. However, the logic of the decision to reduce the profile of Loughgall sub-post office is seriously flawed.

I directly encourage local people, not only in my constituency of Newry and Armagh, but throughout Northern Ireland, to be more active in their support for, and use of, their local post offices. If they are not, I fear that the spectre of a further programme of closures and rationalisation will loom large in the not-too-distant future, and I am sure that every Member would oppose and deeply regret that.

Mr Attwood: I join my colleagues in congratulating and commending the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services, particularly given that they had a tight time frame within which to work.

To continue the theme that John Dallat and Danny Kennedy introduced, about this time last Friday, I received a call in my office from people who had heard that the decision about one post office had been made. Last Thursday night, the manager of that post office was told that the appeal process had concluded and that it had been unsuccessful. As other Members mentioned, that was some three or four days before the House had the opportunity to debate this important matter. Therefore, Post Office Ltd made its decision in advance of the debate, of the report's publication, and of any consideration of the unanimous view of Members, who speak on behalf of the public in the North.

In a high-handed and, as my colleague John Dallat said, "contemptible" manner, Post Office Ltd usurped the proper authority — for what it is worth — of the Chamber. I am not as coy as some Members. We all know who made that decision, and I ask them: who the hell do they think they are? I know that I may be sailing close to the wind by asking that, but it is a fair question. Why was a small group of people able to act in a unilateral and high-handed manner, in advance of hearing the views of those who speak for the community in the North, on a matter as representative of the nature and character of a society as the provision of post offices and public services generally? I hope that Post Office Ltd will give deep consideration to the consequences of making such a statement about the authority of the House, as it did when it made decisions in advance of the views of the House becoming public.

I want to put on record why some of the decisions are so flawed. I will use one decision as an example, as did other Members; that which was made on the post office on Blacks Road, which is in the Suffolk area of West Belfast. It is quite clear that, in making the original decisions, the Post Office did not take into due regard the vision and aspiration for a shared society in the North.

1.00 pm

There is no more graphic example than the proposal to close the Blacks Road post office, which sits in West Belfast on what is essentially an interface between a growing nationalist community and a declining and vulnerable unionist community. It is clear that, in coming to its decision in respect of that post office — a decision that, it has now told the post office manager, will not be changed — the Post Office did not take into account what it is like to be a vulnerable and declining unionist community, which, despite all its experiences, has somehow survived over the past 40 years in the constituency of West Belfast. It did not take into account the statement that could be made about that area: that a growing nationalist community and an existing unionist community could use a shared facility in what is, in essence, a *de facto* interface.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that a similar situation exists at Carlisle Circus? It is likely that the post office there will be axed, and that is equally deplorable.

Mr Attwood: I concur with that. I anticipate that the Post Office, as shrewd and calculating as it is, will acknowledge the issue of a shared society by keeping open one or two post offices that might measure against that standard, while, as my colleague Mr Maginness has indicated, going ahead with the closure of other post offices — especially in urban areas, and especially where there have been civil conflict and sectarian tensions — and not acknowledging the need to make a broader statement, given the nature and character of our society, about the need to have shared services in those particular areas.

That issue is compounded in the Blacks Road case by the ludicrous suggestion that an old woman on the Blacks Road, or a woman pushing a pram, can somehow cross the Lisburn Road, a main arterial road, to get to Dunmurry, and, worse than that, cross the exit and access roads of the busy M1 motorway. That is how ludicrous the Post Office has been in respect of the Blacks Road. On the one hand, it does not recognise the needs of a shared society, and on the other, it is saying to vulnerable people that they should walk a mile across some of the most treacherous roads in this part of the world.

I ask the Post Office to think again, but, if it does not, I say to the DUP that, if it feels it necessary to vote through the terror legislation due to come before the

House of Commons in 10 days' time — and I hope that it does not — it should get something in return, by getting the relevant British Minister to order the Post Office in Northern Ireland to rescind its decision.

Lord Browne: I support the Ad Hoc Committee's call for the Post Office to suspend all closures. There is no doubt that the proposed closures will affect and disadvantage vulnerable people in cities and towns and, indeed, right throughout the countryside.

As some of my colleagues have stated, there are alternatives to the proposed closures. Those should have been fully explored before any decision was taken. Decisions that have a local impact have been taken at Westminster without due consideration of the effects that those decisions will have on local communities. I know that many communities in Northern Ireland will be aggrieved by the Post Office's proposals to close 42 branches and to limit services in a further 44 branches. That equates to 18% of the post office network in Northern Ireland, and that figure is significantly higher than the United Kingdom national average.

If the proposals go ahead, my constituency of East Belfast will particularly suffer. Of the proposed 10 closures in Belfast, three are in East Belfast.

I refer to the post offices at Orangefield, Belmont and Summerhill. Indeed, the Victoria area of East Belfast, which has the highest proportion of elderly people in the city, is one of only two areas in Belfast that face the closure of two post offices. For example, 15.4% of households in the Belmont ward are occupied by lone pensioners and 37.4% are occupied by one or more persons who have a long-term illness.

There is strong public feeling about those closures. Recently, all of East Belfast's representatives attended a public meeting on the closure of those post offices, particularly the Belmont branch. Over 200 members of the public were present. That shows how strongly the people of the area feel about the matter.

The proposed closure of those three post offices in East Belfast — Summerhill, Orangefield and Belmont — will affect over 20% of the area's population. It will seriously affect over 2,000 pensioners and almost 1,800 people who are physically disabled. One could ask whether that contravenes section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which seeks to ensure that disabled people are given the same opportunities as those who are not disabled.

As Members are aware, post offices are not only used by people to buy stamps and to post letters. Nowadays, they are used for many other services: International Datapost; Parcelforce; US dollars; and US, euro and sterling travellers' cheques are all in demand. In addition, particularly in East Belfast, those three post offices provide photocopying and fax

services to a significant percentage of the community who have no other access to those facilities.

Surely, instead of withdrawing those invaluable services, the Post Office should develop its business in order to provide other services, such as passports, motor tax and ATMs, to name but a few. The Post Office should also consider ways to provide joined-up services, such as community pharmacies. I understand that, in Saintfield, the local post office has successfully co-located with its neighbouring pharmacy, which has resulted in mutual benefits that include increased usage and reduction in overheads. Why has the Post Office not endeavoured to evaluate all those options before taking the decision to close those extremely valuable community services?

The post offices at Orangefield, Belmont and Summerhill not only provide invaluable services to the people of East Belfast, but, as I am sure that I will hear from other Members, they are communities' focal points, which offer security and a friendly environment to the most vulnerable people. There are many reasons to keep local, community post offices open. Surely, before any final decision is taken, the Government should evaluate seriously all the alternatives to closure and listen to strong public opinion. I support the Ad Hoc Committee's report.

Mrs Long: First, I want to put on record my thanks to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee, the other members, the Committee's staff and researchers, and the various groups who provided evidence, which is an important part of the process.

All Members recognise that the current crisis is not of Post Office Ltd's making. The Government's policy has reduced the number of unique services that are available through post offices and, in doing so, has limited the viability of branches. They have also limited the amount of subvention that they are prepared to make, without any regard to the social impact of post offices. That contrasts particularly with their attempts to shore up banks that have entered into risk by their own volition. Although they are prepared to shore up those banks, the Government are unwilling to make comparatively tiny subventions in order to keep post offices' socially necessary services viable.

The Post Office is, however, responsible for the strategy that it has adopted to deal with the crisis. I accept that it must operate within its budget and become sustainable. However, the only strategy that it seems to consider is that of closure. Clearly, it has learnt nothing from the past. The previous round of closures in East Belfast delivered nothing but continued decline, which, as has been mentioned, is evidenced by the fact that three further closures are proposed for East Belfast.

Post Office Ltd has reduced its effective customer base over time by reducing the number of post offices and increasing the distances to — and the complicated journeys between — post offices. Post Office Ltd has accelerated the change and the decline in its services. It has diluted the personal touch that is a hallmark of post office services, and which people value.

I suspect that, after the new round of closures, services will enter further decline. There will be no post office along the main route between Hollywood, in North Down, and Strandtown, in my constituency of East Belfast. There will be no post office between Dundonald village, in the Strangford constituency, and Ballyhackamore, in East Belfast, along the main arterial route. Huge swathes of East Belfast will be left with no services.

Lord Browne: During the last round of cuts, Knocknagoney and Knock Road post offices were closed. Does the Member agree that those closures will be followed by others, if this situation continues?

Mrs Long: I concur with that entirely. That is one of the reasons that has left such a huge suburban population without post office services.

The report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services states:

“There is uncertainty surrounding the future of the post office network after 2011.”

I suspect that that is a rather optimistic view. Uncertainty about the future of post office services beyond 2011 is inevitable if closure remains the only tactic that is used to try to make the business work.

Other Members have reflected on the fact that the access criteria were applied using as-the-crow-flies distances. That is bad enough in an urban area, but, in a rural constituency, measuring distance as the crow flies can take one mile off a real journey. It is ludicrous to imagine that pensioners will climb through hedgerows and walk across fields to get to their local post office by the route measured by Post Office Ltd.

It is also worth bearing in mind that no one starts their journey at a post office — the distances are measured from one post office to another. Lord Browne has already referred to Knocknagoney post office. When it closed, much of its business was transferred to Belmont post office, at Belmont Church Road, which is about one and a half miles away. An additional mile is being added to those journeys. Therefore, people have considerable additional distances to travel.

In at least two of the three cases in East Belfast, the only alternative post office that is served by a bus route is not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). The only one that is DDA compliant is not accessible by bus. In the case of Summerhill post

office, there is no bus connection between the arterial route on which it is located and the arterial route where other services are effective and accessible.

Those who are most vulnerable and most excluded from society are, again, being hit the hardest. We were all angry about the consultation, which focused on which offices were to close, not whether offices were to close. That has deliberately pitted community against community during the process.

I suspect that there was an implied threat, which was more for the benefit of those in elected positions than it was for the local communities. If a Member campaigns too hard for a post office in his or her constituency, he or she may well carry the can for another closing. At least we have resisted the temptation to become overly concerned about that.

The short period of consultation on which post offices should close was clearly insufficient. More than 1,000 people contacted me before the consultation closed. That figure is now steadily creeping towards 1,500. Many people are still writing to me.

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

Mrs Long: Mr Speaker, I thought that I would receive additional time for taking an intervention.

Mr Speaker: I apologise; that is correct. Please continue.

Mrs Long: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The short time for deliberation suggests strongly that Post Office Ltd was not intent on a major change of its processes or on taking on board strategic matters that were raised.

Many post offices that are earmarked for closure are co-located with other businesses, which are dependent on footfall. That applies not only in rural constituencies, but in urban areas where short, small nodes of shops exist, which are also dependent on footfall. Those businesses, and the services that they provide, are now also under threat.

It is important that we unanimously support the report. We must also proactively engage with central Government at Westminster and with Post Office Ltd in the next few years to ensure that we are not in the same position in 2011.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

1.15 pm

Mr Shannon: I congratulate the Ad Hoc Committee on its excellent report, which makes sensible and helpful recommendations. I support the report's content.

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

I am aware of the fact that my Strangford constituency has not been the constituency worst affected by proposed post office closures. In April, I expressed disappointment in the Chamber that Ballyhalbert post

office was to have a reduced-hours schedule. That was to be introduced despite the fact that my enquiries about the breakdown of business at Ballyhalbert post office found that 28% of its trade comes from holders of benefits cards; 28% is mail-related; 20% comes from conveniences and services; 8% comes from bill payments; 2% comes from foreign-currency exchange; and 14% comes from banking.

This was clearly a wide range of facilities being used that would impinge on the needs of every day of life of any community. It was sum of interest that Talbotstown has three hundred customers a week and when I pressed the decision-makers on its viability they did not have the figures, but they did say that when there were three hundred customers, that viability is based on the amount of customers but on the value of all transactions.

A wide range of facilities, essential for the daily life of any community, is provided there. It is interesting to learn that Ballyhalbert post office has 300 customers a week. When I pressed the decision-makers on its viability, they did not have the figures. However, they said that viability is based not on customer numbers but on the value of all transactions. They conceded that they were prepared to be flexible with opening hours, that opinions should be given during the six-week consultation period and that they would review the decision after six months.

Now that that six-week period is up, a decision has been reached to extend the opening hours by an extra four hours. That is not what I had hoped for, and it is certainly not what the community had hoped for. I put the point to Post Office Ltd that Ballyhalbert post office is not only viable but is an integral part of life in the village. Given that Ballyhalbert has grown three times in size, an active post office is needed, especially considering the fact that Ballyhalbert's redevelopment potential is being explored through the Ards and Down area plan. I, therefore, urge a review of the decision, because neither I nor the community is convinced that the decision was made solely on the basis of cost.

The service van that looks after post offices in the area goes down the Ards Peninsula through Ballywalter, and it passes Ballyhalbert to get to Portavogie and Portaferry. Where exactly is money being saved? The van drives through Ballyhalbert, so a detour of only 100 yd is needed to reach its post office. In order to get elsewhere, the van must pass Ballyhalbert post office, of which an expanding community makes good use. Surely that is a case for its retention and enhancement. Such matters must be taken into account.

There is a real need for partnerships to be set up. Partnerships would increase the economic viability of Northern Ireland's post offices, and that would allow the retention and enhancement of services, which are

indispensable to so many people. The Committee's report made, and expanded on, that point. The chief executive of Citizens Advice said that two choices are available — either free up post offices to allow them to operate commercially and to compete properly or recognise that a universal postal service is an important part of the social infrastructure, and apply cost-benefit analysis to subsidise it accordingly.

The second choice should be made. Instead of a half-hearted approach to post offices, dedicated investment is necessary. Such investment would, undoubtedly, bring not only financial returns but social returns. It cannot be overestimated just how much elderly people, especially in rural areas, depend on post offices. The funds are not available to bail out post offices continually, but we have three years in which to devise a business plan to enable the Post Office to stand on its own feet and provide for the community.

The report is well written, and, if its recommendations are adopted, it is clear that post offices in Northern Ireland have a future. Therefore, it is vital that the Assembly embraces the report. It is time for Members to nail their colours to the mast and offer their support, in order to ensure that post offices are considered not as being deadweight but as being essential. All must be done to explore ways to make post offices as much of a success financially as they are socially. I support the motion and the report's recommendations.

Mr Savage: On 21 April 2008, I spoke in the House on the cuts in local postal services, and I highlighted the impact that those cuts would have on the rural community.

As a rural dweller, it is my pleasure to speak again on behalf of other rural dwellers. Over the past six weeks, I have been privileged to sit with other Members on the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services, and I thank the Chairman for the professional way in which he conducted matters on that Committee.

The Committee could, and perhaps should, have covered much more ground; however, in our deliberations, time was the key factor. With that in mind, I do not understand how the Post Office considered six weeks to be sufficient consultation time. Sadly, six weeks only provided the Post Office with an opportunity to cut and run, and Members must never allow such a thing to happen again. I call on the Post Office to do the decent thing — more importantly, the right thing — and consult for longer and more widely in Northern Ireland before deciding on post office closures.

I am proud of the fact that we are part of the United Kingdom; however, on this occasion, there are certain factors that make us unique. The Post Office simply cannot make brushstroke decisions about the make-up of our society's cities, towns and villages. Northern Ireland is not identical to other parts of the United Kingdom. What about equality and freedom of choice?

The Post Office has not fully considered the consequences of post office closures, which will have a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable people in our society.

With the proposed closures, we are witnessing the slow death of community life. The Post Office appears to be more concerned about profitability and productivity than practicalities. Post offices were designed, first and foremost, to provide a service. Sadly, that ethos has gone to the wall, leaving postmasters with an uncertain future. The key question still to be answered by the Post Office is about how essential services will be provided for those who are most in need. Such fears are sincerely held, and post office closures will further erode community cohesion.

Senior managers in the Post Office are awaiting the outcome of this debate; therefore, I ask them to pull back from the brink and give further consideration to enhanced shared services. Everyone — whether they live in Belfast, Banbridge, Donaghacloy or Portadown — requires the use of a local convenience store, a pharmacy and a post office. Rather than the Post Office putting its head in the sand and proceeding with ill-conceived and poorly managed closures, it should consider incorporating post offices in local convenience stores and pharmacies.

I am intrigued to know what the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive have been doing about post office closures, and I trust that junior Minister Donaldson will brief the House about that. I trust also that the Post Office will learn about its mistakes from this debate and, in future situations, will handle matters more professionally and with more integrity than it has shown to date. I am sorry to say that the debate has highlighted the fact that we have little control over post office closures. We cannot allow such circumstances to arise again.

Mr G Robinson: I shall begin with a simple question. Is the Post Office sure of its facts and figures? I ask that because of inaccurate information in the list of post offices due to be closed. Drumraighland post office, in my East Londonderry constituency, is listed as being in the Strabane District Council area. It is actually in the Limavady Borough Council area. That is enough justification to call on the Post Office to withdraw its current plans immediately, re-examine its hit list of post offices for closure or outreach services and bring proposals to the Assembly and the public that are accurate and include a substantially expanded consultation period. I urge Members to examine the list for similar inexcusable errors in their constituencies.

Given that that scenario is most unlikely, I will defend those people who, due to the proposed closure of post offices, will lose a vital service as well as the heart of their community. Indeed, they may lose their jobs.

During a meeting that I attended between Post Office Ltd representatives and my party colleagues, I was thoroughly disillusioned by Post Office Ltd's concentration on everything except the fact that the closures will affect people. They failed to appreciate that the services that post offices provide are for and about people and that the changes that are being planned will affect people. It may have escaped their notice that not everyone drives a car and that bus services in rural areas may be restricted to one or two a day. Not everyone has a bank account into which benefits can be paid directly, and not everyone wishes to use the modern technology that could enable them to access their money.

Bearing that in mind, I conclude that those plans suit only Post Office Ltd and that it is operating without giving much thought to the customer. Of the four branches that are earmarked for closure in East Londonderry, three are in rural locations. Their closure would be a tremendous blow to those areas.

We cannot overestimate the level of inconvenience that the proposed closures will cause to rural populations. That is especially true for those who have no transport or who have medical problems. As well as the older people and the infirm being inconvenienced by the proposed closures, at the other end of the age range, young mothers who visit post offices for benefit or catalogue payments or for mobile phone top-ups, for example, will also be affected. The common factor between the two groups is that the proposed closures will result in an immense inconvenience for them both. Having to take a bus or taxi to the nearest post office represents a reduction in household income. At a time when energy bills are soaring, the proposals will result in the most vulnerable and income-fragile people in society being worse off financially.

A good example in my constituency is Millburn post office, which serves a diverse area. The population that that post office serves covers the complete economic and social strata of society, conducting over 1,000 transactions a week. It is situated opposite a school and is on the perimeter of a major public-housing area. It is beyond comprehension how the closure of that branch can be justified; indeed, Postwatch agrees with those sentiments.

I cannot — and will not — support needless closures and what are, effectively, cuts in benefit. I do not believe that Post Office Ltd has considered fully the ramifications of its proposals. The Assembly must ensure that Post Office Ltd is made fully aware of the consequences of its flawed proposals, and especially of the effects that those recommendations will have on a rural population that includes retirees and those who do not have transport.

The six-week consultation period is woefully inadequate. It must be extended to at least twice that to

enable local communities to prepare fully their cases to support the retention of their local post offices.

Mr T Clarke: Although there is a six-week consultation period, is it not important that Post Office Ltd considers the merits of all cases, regardless of the duration of the consultation period? I know that the House is debating the motion today, but minds have been made up and a decision has been made already about the closure of post offices. Whatever the length of the consultation period, it should be meaningful, and Post Office Ltd should listen to the concerns that are being raised.

Mr G Robinson: I agree.

Given that I have doubts about the accuracy of the information, I called earlier for the proposals to be withdrawn and for new ones to be produced. I repeat that call in the strongest possible terms.

It is a matter of great urgency that this unacceptable situation is addressed. In supporting the motion, I hope that Post Office Ltd will take note of our conclusions and act accordingly in the ways in which I have suggested. I remind Members that the closures could result in job losses for some post office staff — I am opposed to that. I hope sincerely that the Post Office is not deaf to the opinion of the Assembly, as it was to the suggestions that were made at the meeting that I attended. I support the motion and the recommendations.

1.30 pm

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I shall begin by summing up the remarks that Members have made today. The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services, Robin Newton, said that post offices are at the heart of all communities, both rural and urban. He noted that the social aspect of those services is crucial and must be taken into consideration, and I could not agree more. I pay tribute to the Chairperson for his fine work.

My party colleague Claire McGill said that the criteria that were used during the process were flawed. She added that public-transport timetables should have been taken into consideration when making decisions on closures, but that they were not.

Mr Burnside pointed to a meaningful outcome of the consultation process. He claimed that Parkhall post office had been saved from closure because communities had gathered evidence in support of it, and that that had made a difference. That is an example of good community planning, and it shows a way forward for people in the North. Communities can work together and present evidence, but they must do so at an early stage — that is the crux of the matter. It is essential that the information be presented early, and that people are allowed to process it.

Thomas Burns also talked about the campaign to keep Parkhall post office open and said that the entire community had come together to save it. A similar campaign was launched in my constituency of South Down, with mixed results. The post office in Attical, a rural area, is to be saved. In Killough, a decision was made to extend the opening hours of the service. Therefore, when communities come together, they can make a difference. However, a consultation period of at least 12 weeks would have been needed for all communities to make a difference.

Anna Lo said that the viability of the busy Lisburn Road post office was clear to be seen. She said that there was a contradiction in the process because, although the post office was viable in the community's eyes, Post Office Ltd seemed to be working under a different set of criteria. Again, she felt that the social element of the service should be recognised in the criteria, and she also mentioned the need for an expansion of services.

Mr Buchanan talked about the major gaps in the services offered by post offices in the North, compared to those offered in England, Scotland and Wales. He felt that it was essential to rural-proof any decisions. Billy Armstrong said that the North has different needs that must be taken into consideration.

William Irwin felt that the consultation process was not long enough, and that there could be larger cuts in services, possibly in 2011. He also mentioned the need for an expansion in services. In the build-up to 2011, it is vital that the Committee continues its work in some capacity to help in community planning and to continue to process information regularly.

John Dallat mentioned how rural businesses are sustained by post offices. He highlighted the importance of fighting for the survival of post offices and of forming partnerships. He said that the work needs to continue.

Trevor Clarke stated that Post Office Ltd had decided how many post offices were to close before the communities had even had a chance to express their views. I agree that that was wrong. Danny Kennedy was disappointed that, in his view, the outcome of the consultation process was predetermined. He called for the public to support post offices by using their services — I echo that call. There is no point in people simply jumping up and down about the closure of post offices — everyone, whether in rural or urban areas, must make a conscious effort to use the services.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. I did not notice this point being mentioned today, so I want to make it now: Post Office Ltd said that some post offices had only 30 customers a week. The Member has called for people to support post offices, and I also encourage people to do so. However, in some instances, Post Office Ltd has decided to close post offices that had between 1,200 and 1,600 customers a week. Again,

that showed that the process was flawed. I support the Member's remarks about the need to use post office services.

Mr W Clarke: I thank the Member for that point.

Alex Attwood said that the concept of a shared society was not taken into consideration.

He talked about Blacks Road post office, and how statements received from people in that area were not, in his view, taken into consideration.

Member Browne spoke about the need to expand the services provided by post offices, and about the high number of disabled people in the North. Naomi Long talked about the major subsidising of banks compared to post offices. She said that the criteria were flawed, and that public-transport timetables were not taken into consideration. She added that businesses are dependent on the footfall from post offices.

Jim Shannon talked about Ballyhalbert post office; I agree with him that the draft area plan, and its forecast for an increase in housing, should have been taken into account.

George Savage said that rural communities will suffer as a result of these proposals, and called for further consultation. He also asked what OFMDFM is going to do with regard to this report. George Robinson said that, in his constituency, errors had been made in the process. He pointed out that not everyone has a car, and that getting public transport to a post office will cause great hardship, particularly to the most vulnerable.

I think that I have covered most Members' comments. This has been a very interesting debate. The proposed post-office closures and changes to services affect many people across the North of Ireland. They affect businesses and individuals in rural communities and towns and cities. The Ad Hoc Committee was established in response to the Assembly's concerns about the closures and their impact. The Committee had a short time in which to report. As a result, its considerations were not as exhaustive as they could have been. Nevertheless, oral and written evidence was taken from key stakeholders, and from individuals whose communities are affected by the closures.

Public responses were received from people in Groomsport. The Committee also received a presentation from Wandsworth community group, which showed the impact of post office closure on people in east Belfast. The Rural Community Network talked about the effect on people in small towns and villages, as well as in more isolated areas.

The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Local Postal Services: The Wandsworth community group, to which the Member is paying tribute, is in my constituency. One could not but admire how the group went about its consultation in that every MLA for the

area and a number of councillors, along with representatives of every other aspect of civic life in east Belfast, including businesses, schools, parents and users of the local post office, were invited to a public meeting. More than 200 people packed the meeting at which the Wandsworth community group was charged with the responsibility for taking the matter forward.

Despite what would be regarded as a best-practice case in consultation, there is still no indication that, having been through that process, the post office that the group was representing will be saved from closure.

Mr W Clarke: I concur with the Member. That approach is a template that other communities should use.

The Committee also heard evidence from Help the Aged and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, both of which were concerned about people with disabilities, and older and vulnerable people. The business community was represented by the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association. The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, the Federation of Small Businesses, and NILGA provided written evidence to the Committee. If I remember correctly, NILGA received 18 responses from local authorities in a week, which the association felt was unprecedented in so short a time. That shows how vital post offices are to local authorities.

Post Office Ltd gave evidence to the Committee to support its proposals. Recognising the Committee's concerns, its staff met Assembly officials to clarify the statistics that it used. Postwatch addressed the Committee on its role in ensuring that the needs of post office users would continue to be met.

I want to add my thanks to those of the Chairperson of the Committee, to all those who took an interest in this issue and who helped the Committee in its work. Reflecting on what has been said in — *[Interruption.]*

Give it another minute.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has 10 minutes.

Mr W Clarke: I will have to race on then.

I commend the report to the House and ask Members to approve it and to agree that it should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses its concern and deep disappointment at the planned closure of, and service changes to, certain local Post Offices; approves the report of the Ad Hoc Committee set up to consider, and make proposals for, partnerships that could enhance the economic case for viable local postal services; and agrees that it should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform as a report of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Report of the Committee on Procedures on Committee Systems and Structures

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 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 on Procedures (Lord Morrow): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee on Procedures into Committee Systems and Structures.

The report is the first major piece of work to be brought to the Assembly by the Committee on Procedures. It sets out its detailed consideration of the operation of Committees in the Assembly.

Before I introduce the report to the Assembly, I thank everyone who gave evidence to the Committee, including the officials and elected members in other legislatures who so kindly took the time to meet us, thus allowing a comparison of practice and procedures elsewhere. The report examines key areas, but it makes only two recommendations, which says a great deal. The systems and structures, practices and day-to-day workings of Assembly Committees are robust and seem to be working well, and the Committee saw no need for change for change's sake.

I will briefly cover the areas in which the Committee saw no need for change, before moving to examine the two key recommendations. The Committee spent considerable time in discussing how many Members should sit on Committees. Research carried out in October 2007 showed that more than 70 Members sat on three or more Committees, and that figure was of major concern. Based on the experience of our Members, which was gathered in a survey, and on information gleaned from our visits to other legislatures, the Committee on Procedures felt that it would be difficult for Members to carry out their Committee roles effectively if their time and energy were split between competing priorities. However, when the Committee examined the same figures in April 2008, it noted a dramatic decrease in the number of Members sitting on multiple Committees. It was apparent that party management had stepped in to address that concern. Although the amount of time that Members spend on Committees is in excess of other legislatures, the Committee is content that no reduction in Committee membership is necessary at this stage.

Furthermore, the Committee examined the issue of substitutes and weighed the potential benefits and weaknesses. Although it recognised that there would be benefits in allowing substitutes, the Committee recognised that that could lead to a loss of continuity, a

breakdown in composition and, ultimately, a reduction in the effectiveness of a Committee. Although those weaknesses could be addressed by putting in place robust procedures, the decision of the Committee was to not allow substitutes at this time. However, they have not been ruled out completely. The Committee has taken a holding position, and it may revisit the issue in the future.

The Committee on Procedures took a similar approach when considering the possibility of using rapporteurs in Committees. Although there was some consensus on their usefulness, the Committee had concerns regarding the time and resources necessary to support such a role. There were also concerns that the political impartiality required to conduct such a role might place unrealistic demands on Members. On the basis of the Members' survey, the Committee also agreed that no change was required to the times and days on which Committees meet. However, it agreed it would revisit the issue if the number of Committees meeting on plenary days were to increase. The Committee will keep a close eye on the issue and revisit it if necessary.

I come to the Committee's two main recommendations, which relate to joint committees and quorums. The Committee explored the issue of quorums in some depth and concluded that it found merit in a proposal that Assembly Committees might operate with a smaller quorum in certain limited circumstances.

The rationale was not based on Committees having difficulties achieving quorums, and the decision will not provide them with the excuse to meet routinely with four members. Allowing for a smaller quorum in certain instances reflects the circumstances in other legislatures and, more importantly, enables Committee work to progress. For example, Committees are being encouraged to hold meetings outside Parliament Buildings as a way of engaging with people who may have difficulties attending Stormont. However, such visits can take up an MLA's entire day, and often this impacts on the quorum of the other Committees of which the MLA is a member.

1.45 pm

The issue could have been addressed by reducing the size of Committees or by allowing substitutes. However, the simplest solution was to provide for a quorum of four members in limited circumstances, which is similar to the procedure used in other legislatures, such as the Scottish Parliament. In practice, the measure will allow Committees to commence a meeting with four members, provided that that meeting will solely hear evidence from witnesses. Amended Standing Orders will make it clear that Committees operating with a reduced quorum cannot make decisions or take a vote.

Finally, the Committee is recommending the introduction of joint Committees, which would enhance scrutiny of issues that fall within the remits of two or more Committees. Where there is joined-up government, there should be joined-up scrutiny. It is not envisaged that joint Committees will be permanent Committees; they will meet, do their job and disband and, therefore, will be similar to Ad Hoc Committees.

The Committee has set out the three options in the report that it has examined in detail. We have thoroughly examined the logistics of those options and have considered areas such as membership, proportionality, chairing, quorums, voting, decision-making, reporting, staffing, resourcing and so on.

The Committee favours two of the options. The first option is to allow two Committees to meet jointly. There are major practical weaknesses in that option, such as room size and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to participate. However, the Committee believes that those weaknesses can be overcome through discussions. For example, meetings could be held in the Senate Chamber or in locations outside Parliament Buildings.

The Committee also supports the concept of a joint Committee that comprises a specified number of members drawn from the membership of the relevant Committees. We have considered details such as membership, chairing, decision-making and reporting and have concluded that the option is workable. Members are already familiar with the concept, and such a Committee would operate in a similar manner to an Ad Hoc Committee. The major difference is that Ad Hoc Committees are established to undertake work that falls outside the remit of Statutory Committees and Standing Committees. For example, an Ad Hoc Committee to investigate suicide and self-harm was considered unnecessary because the issue was within the remit of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

The third option is for subcommittees to meet jointly. Although the Committee has not ruled out this option, we do not favour it. During our scrutiny of the option, we examined procedural issues and the benefits of creating such a model. We examined whether such a subcommittee could take evidence jointly, agree a position and make reports to the Assembly. The Committee concluded that joint subcommittees could only take evidence. Subcommittees do not have the power to agree positions or produce reports, and the Committee on Procedures does not wish to alter that principle.

The Committee has not reached a final decision on which option, or combination of options, will be selected. At this stage, the matter has been left open deliberately to allow us to hear Members' opinions

during the debate and, subsequently, draft Standing Orders accordingly.

In responding to those options, Members may wish to think of examples, such as a joint committee on national parks. Were a proposal for a national park to be put to the Assembly, its consideration would fall equally to a number of Committees and would require joint scrutiny. Setting up an Ad Hoc Committee would not be suitable, because the expertise lies with the members of the relevant Committee. However, the facility for a joint Committee could enhance the scrutiny role of the Assembly Committees.

I look forward to hearing the opinions of other Members, and I commend the report to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don tuairisc. I apologise for arriving late and missing some of the Chairperson's comments. I welcome the publication of this report.

Mr S Wilson: Tut-tut.

Mr McCartney: Thank you, Sammy, for reminding me that I was late.

The Chairperson outlined the work undertaken by the Committee on Procedures in this inquiry, and he is to be commended for the way in which he steered the Committee through weeks of deliberations. It is work that we could describe, at best, as mundane. It certainly required a great deal of attention, but no headlines were created by the Committee as it prepared its report.

I would also like to place on record the efforts of the officials, whose professionalism, and keen eye for detail, was exemplary.

Mr S Wilson: I am glad that the Member has given way. He was commenting on how mundane the issues were; they have clearly been regarded as very mundane by the Members of the party to my right, who have been so exercised by the report that they have come in their masses to participate in the debate.

Mr McCartney: It is either that or they are considering the offer of a pact with the Member's party. Perhaps there are tensions elsewhere this afternoon.

The main recommendation of the report was the proposal for joint Committees in circumstances in which areas of work overlap, or where two Committees come together to make a better recommendation. It is a practical proposal, which should help with the smooth running of the Assembly, and it should be supported. The recommendation on quorum is straightforward and practical, and avoids the prospect of a meeting falling because the number of members present slips to four. The Committee felt that big decisions should not be taken in such a circumstance, but a quorum of four would allow for the smooth running of other business.

The Committee examined other aspects of Committee working, such as size and composition, and will undoubtedly return to the work that was carried out on those matters in future; however, the broad thrust of the report is one that the Assembly should support. Sinn Féin welcomes it and will support it in future. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome the report and commend the efforts of the Chairperson and the Committee Clerk, who did an excellent job of steering the Committee through the considerable amount of work that had to be done to produce the report. The work of the Committee on Procedures may not be regarded as the most politically exciting, but nevertheless, for a functioning Assembly and, particularly, a new Assembly, it is important. It is necessary that the systems of the House are the right ones and that they meet our needs.

I support the two specific recommendations in the report; that the quorum should remain at five, but should be four under limited, non-decision-making circumstances; and the introduction of joint Committees to deal with certain issues, which is a sensible and necessary proposal. As the Chairperson said, the precise mode of working of those Committees has yet to be determined; that will entail further work for the Procedures Committee.

There were other issues about the size of Committees. There was a degree of attractiveness about the idea of reducing Committees to nine members. We all accept that Committees of 11 place a considerable burden on members.

When we compare the level of Committee membership here with that in other legislatures, it is clear that there is a significantly greater burden here than in most other places. Although the ways in which the Assembly works demand that Committee membership remains at 11, we will need to return to that issue, particularly if the overall number of MLAs decreases, which many Members agree is necessary.

The SDLP was keener than others on the use of substitutes. We could see significant advantages for that at certain times, although the operation of a system of substitutes would have to be clearly defined. The party was sorry that that view did not prevail, and it accepts that there was no consensus for change. However, I would not be surprised if the Assembly were to reconsider that issue in the future, and I hope that it will do so.

Similarly, the SDLP argued strongly for the use of rapporteurs, because it saw merit in their use. The use of rapporteurs is widespread in other legislatures, and I wish to draw Members' attention to that, because there must be good reasons for it. A rapporteur is a member of the Committee who is charged with researching an

issue and is provided with the necessary administrative and professional research support to do so. That might apply, for example, if a Committee did not wish to produce a full-scale report but thought that some work on an issue would be valuable, or if the Committee was unsure of the way in which to proceed on a topic and thought that some preliminary research might be useful. Indeed, as often happens, if a member had a significant interest and expertise on an issue, it might benefit the Committee if he or she researched that topic. Again, I hope that the Assembly, through the Committee on Procedures, will be willing to return to that matter in the future.

The Committee's useful work has produced a valuable report, and I support its specific recommendations.

Mr Neeson: I support the report's content and recommendations. I thank the staff, particularly the Committee Clerk, for all their hard work. I greatly appreciate the role that the Chairperson played in guiding members through the sessions.

It is appropriate that the Assembly is considering Committee structures at this time. All Members had an opportunity to have input into the report. There was consultation further afield, especially with other elected institutions, including Westminster, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and Dáil Éireann. That shows clearly the willingness of this Assembly to recognise the benefits that can be gained from the experiences of other places.

Most Members had no appetite to change the number of members on each Statutory or Standing Committee, despite the fact that individual Members served on two, or even three, Committees. That demonstrates the level of Members' commitment to ensuring that the Assembly works well.

There was widespread agreement on the establishment of joint Committees to deal with issues of common interest. For example, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has been considering renewable energy, although the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has overall responsibility for energy issues. The Chairperson, Lord Morrow, has already spoken about whether membership of joint Committees should involve all Members. We can establish Committees with fewer members, but, as the Chairperson said, that remains to be agreed.

The Committee also considered the use of rapporteurs to advise Assembly Committees, closely based on the European model. However, the majority of Members were opposed to that. I speak as someone who has served on the European Union Committee of the Regions and who currently serves on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, and I can see merit in the rapporteur system.

That, and all the other issues, can be revisited in the future; I commend the report to the Assembly.

2.00 pm

Lord Browne: Like others, I welcome the recommendations in the report and thank all the staff whose advice was invaluable during the extensive deliberations.

I welcome the recommendation that the Assembly endorse the creation of joint Committees and that the quorum remain at five members, but that Committees be able to carry on with fewer than five members but not take votes.

I appreciate that the exercise was designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly. However, as this Assembly has been in existence for just over a year, it would have been wrong to have introduced too many radical changes. With the passage of time, as Members — especially newly elected Members like me — become more familiar with their remit and develop working relationships, many of the issues that were considered could be revisited. I would be pleased to have assurances on that. For example, would it be in order for all Members not holding ministerial or junior posts to be encouraged to sit on at least one Assembly Committee?

I support the report and thank the Chairman for conducting the proceedings in a most professional manner.

The Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison

Group (Mr S Wilson): I am glad to take part in this debate, which has captured the imagination of the whole House. At least the members of the Committee got on well and can come in here and congratulate each other on the excellent job that they have done.

As the Chairman of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group, I welcome the report. It is something that the Chairmen of the various Committees have discussed at two or three meetings, and we looked in detail at the key findings and recommendations of the group.

One thing that has come out of discussions in the Chairpersons' Liaison Group is that, by and large, the Committee structure is working quite well, with no major issues or difficulties arising since the restoration of the Assembly. That is probably one of the reasons why there are no major restructuring proposals in the report. The Committee structure seems to have been working reasonably well, and that is down to the excellent work of the Chairmen and many of the members.

I note that, as Lord Browne mentioned, there are some in this Assembly who have so far not deigned to serve on Committees, and I hope that that will be rectified in the future.

A Member: Name them.

The Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group: I am sure that we all know who they are.

I want to deal with two of the recommendations in this report: the joint Committees and the reduced Committee quorum in limited circumstances, which should help to enhance and improve the operation of the Committees.

The liaison group supports the introduction of joint Committees and believes that it will assist, as other Members have said, in considering issues that fall within the remit of two or more Committees, so enabling those things to be dealt with on a more joined-up basis. We look forward to the early introduction of detailed procedures for their operation.

I know that the Education Committee, which I chair, overlaps a lot with the Committee for Employment and Learning — I am sure that work concerning secondary education and further education would be improved if there could be occasions when those Committees met jointly. The national parks issue has also been mentioned.

The recommendation that the quorum should remain at five but could, under limited circumstances, be reduced to four is sensible and practical. On occasions, witnesses appearing at Committees have had to wait because a quorum had not been achieved. That does not reflect well on the Assembly, and any measure that can be taken to avoid such embarrassment is welcome. Although the Chairpersons' Liaison Group does not wish the quorum to be reduced to a level that enables Members to abdicate their responsibilities, the limited circumstances in which the quorum could be reduced — as outlined by the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures — provide a sensible compromise.

As to when Committees should meet, it was the view of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group that that decision should be left to the Committees to make. Such flexibility is desirable and ensures that Committees respond to the needs of individual members and the situations that they have to deal with. We agreed that there was no need to reduce the size of Committee membership, introduce substitutes or rapporteurs, or change voting arrangements. I support the Committee on Procedures' report.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I will make a further point. It is important that Committees are able to scrutinise the work of Ministers. Therefore, last Friday, the Committee for Education was surprised that the information necessary to assess and comment on departmental in-year monitoring bids was not made available to it. That happened in spite of the Committee for Finance and Personnel's recommendation that all in-year bids should undergo Committee scrutiny before going to DFP. Such situations must not arise on a continual basis.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr Storey): I place on record my

appreciation to the Chairperson, members and staff of the Committee on Procedures for the way in which this enthralling report has been presented to the House — it has clearly caught the imagination of Members, the country, and the general public alike. That said, the significance of the issue should not be diminished. The Committee on Procedures has an important role to play in ensuring that procedures of the House are carried out to the best working of the Assembly.

My colleague Lord Morrow said that the report contains a small number of recommendations. Significantly, it is not recommending changes in many areas. As Mr S Wilson — the Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group — pointed out, the Assembly is generally working well. I wish to emphasise that Committees are busy and are struggling with their workloads on many occasions. However, the Committee on Procedures deems the systems and structures that are in place to support Committees to be robust and fit for purpose. The aim of the two recommendations in the report is to reinforce those support structures.

The recommendation on joint Committees is the most innovative one. Mr McCartney regards the introduction of joint Committees as a practical recommendation that the Assembly should support. Mr O'Loan views joint Committees as sensible and necessary. Mr Neeson referred to the co-operation of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on energy from renewable sources and suggested that a joint Committee could be established with smaller numbers.

Lord Browne and Mr S Wilson also value the recommendation on joint Committees. It is rare that an issue has such cross-party acceptance in the House; perhaps we are moving towards consensus. The survey of MLAs carried out by the Committee on Procedures showed a high level of support for joint Committees. Investigation leads us to believe that joint Committees will increase Committees' scrutiny role and, thus, increase the accountability of the Executive.

That is important for the Assembly. Increasingly, more and more cross-cutting issues arise that require joint scrutiny of Government actions. The report notes that there are three potential models. The Committee on Procedures wanted to hear the thinking of Members on each model before it decided which combination of the three to allow for in Standing Orders. As we have heard, there are advantages and disadvantages to each of the models, but the scope which may be provided by joint Committees is too valuable for us to lose.

Mr O'Loan recognised the attractiveness of reducing the size of Committees and made the point that the Committee will return to that issue in the

future. I want to place on record that that will take place. The Committee came close to recommending a reduction in membership from 11 to nine. In the course of its visits to look at best practice, the Committee found that most other legislatures ask elected Members to sit on only one Committee, or a maximum of two: that was a startling revelation and had a real impact on the Committee's thinking. The belief is that it is best for the individual elected member to focus on one specific area and build up expertise. In that way, elected Members can make a bigger impact. To have members on a particular Committee simply because it needs bums on seats is a slightly scattergun approach. However, there was no real desire among Members or political parties for a reduction in the size of Committees, but that is not to say that the issue will not be revisited at some time in the future.

I turn to the issue of days and times of Committee meetings. On its visit to the Scottish Parliament, the Committee was most impressed by the way in which parliamentary time was organised. The Scottish system allows for one-and-a-half days of Committee and one-and-a-half days of plenary session, allowing two days for constituency work. I hope that Members absent from the Chamber are in the Building and not working in their constituencies. All Members will agree that time is precious and a scarce resource for any MLA.

What is attractive about the Scottish system is that it uses time effectively and efficiently, and serious consideration was given to introducing a similar model here. The Committee decided against it because such a radical readjustment of parliamentary time is probably better done at the beginning of a mandate, and there was no real demand for change from Members or political parties. The survey of MLAs showed a desire for flexibility, but the Committee believes that that can be achieved by better internal management and that no change to Standing Orders is required. If a number of Committees decide to meet on plenary days, the Committee on Procedures will revisit that decision. The current system copes with two Committees meeting on plenary days, but it may not be efficient if a number of other Committees begin to meet on Mondays or Tuesdays.

Mr McCartney regarded the recommendation to reduce the quorum as a practical suggestion that will allow for the smooth running of Assembly Committees. The Committee on Procedures spent some considerable time deliberating on that issue. Its recommendation is based on good practice elsewhere and will enable the work of Assembly Committees to be conducted more efficiently. In this mandate, Committees have found no difficulty in achieving a quorum. Nevertheless, the Standing Order will be very tightly defined. It is not an excuse to operate a Committee on a quorum of four: a

reduced quorum is to be used only in limited circumstances and will not become common practice.

Mr O'Loan made the point that the Committee was keen on the use of substitutes, but if such a system were to be adopted, it would require careful design. He wanted to see that considered at a later stage. He also recognised merit in the use of rapporteurs, since the practice is widespread elsewhere, and he gave some good examples. That might be something that the Committee would like to explore later. Mr Neeson also recognised the value of using rapporteurs.

2.15 pm

The Chairperson of the Chairpersons' Liaison

Group: Does the Member accept that the use of substitutes can severely impair the continuity of Committee business and that regular use of substitutes can prevent Committees from doing their work properly?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on

Procedures: I agree with the Member, and the Committee expressed similar concerns when it was considering the use of substitutes. It is imperative that all Committee members be focused on the issue that is being investigated or deliberated on. I, therefore, accept Sammy Wilson's concerns.

The possible introduction of substitutes and rapporteurs was considered carefully and, for the moment, just as carefully ruled out by the Committee on Procedures. I stress "for the moment", because, as stated in the report, the option to revisit the viability of their introduction has been left open if the situation changes in the future. The main concern on the use of substitutes is that with them comes the potential for loss of continuity and breakdown in the composition and effectiveness of the Committees. For the time being, therefore, there will be no substitutes — and that is in respect of Committees; not the Northern Ireland, or any other, football team.

If substitutes are permitted in the future, it will be on the basis that parties will be allowed one substitute per Committee and on the observation of tightly defined circumstances that will be introduced. For instance, a substitute will be used only if a member or someone in his or her family is ill; if a member cannot attend a meeting because of severe weather; or if there is a major constituency emergency that requires his or her attention.

Similar thinking was applied to rapporteurs. Although their use appears inviting, on the surface, it would be time- and resource-consuming for any MLAs who take on such roles. As we saw during a visit to the Irish Republic, the use of rapporteurs is also fraught with difficulties. Some of the members of the Committee on Procedures know elected Members of other legislatures who act as rapporteurs, and they were able to inform the Committee of the benefits and downsides of their use.

The report is based on sound evidence that has been gathered from witnesses, research, a survey of Members and visits to other legislatures. The Committee's two recommendations will strengthen the support systems that are in place for Committees. I commend the report and its recommendations to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee on Procedures into the Committee Systems and Structures.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will be aware that Question Time will commence at 2.30 pm. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until that time.

The sitting was suspended at 2.18 pm.

On resuming —

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Review of Prescription Charges

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the cost benefit review into the current system of prescription charges. (AQO 3743/08)

8. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review of prescription charges, including when he expects to publish results and bring forward proposals. (AQO 3742/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 1 and 8 together.

As I indicated in my response to AQO 2774/08, I have received a report from the prescription charge review group and am considering carefully the options that are presented in it. I hope to be in a position to say more on that issue in the next few weeks.

Mr Lunn: Will the Minister consider drawing up proposals for a simplified system to ensure that everyone who receives incapacity benefit receives the free prescriptions to which they are entitled?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review has been extensive. Members are aware that there is a list of medical conditions that qualify for exemption. A problem with the current system is that that list was drawn up in 1968 and is, consequently, out of date. We can discuss, and argue about, the other exemptions that exist, but a review is being conducted. I am examining how to progress the issue, and I expect to be able to say more in the next few weeks.

Mrs Long: I apologise to the Minister for arriving late. I have raised several issues about prescription charges with the Minister, including exemptions for people who have long-term medical conditions. More recently, the cost of continuing medication for students

was brought to my attention. Is the Minister considering that issue in the review?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review is extensive and examines exemptions for various reasons, such as age, medical condition and income. As I said in answer to the previous question, the medical conditions list dates back to 1968, which was 40 years ago. The review is extensive, and I am considering it carefully and examining the cost attached to each option. As I said, I will be in a position to return to the House to make a full statement in the next few weeks.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How does the Minister intend to address the hardship that is experienced by many low-paid families that have to pay for prescription charges and the impact that that has on areas such as west Belfast, which have higher than average rates of ill health and lower than average wages?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: That is one of the reasons that I commissioned the review. The Health Service is supposed to be from the cradle to the grave and be free, so there is a problem with charging people for medicines. I am examining all the options that are available across the whole gamut, and economic hardship is one factor that must be addressed.

Mr McCallister: In a previous answer, the Minister said that the medical conditions list had not been updated since 1968. Will he assure the House that that list will be pivotal in the review process, given that circumstances have changed dramatically in the past 40 years?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The remit of the prescription charge review group includes reviewing that list, which is one of many options that I am examining.

Ambulance Call Times

2. **Dr Deeny** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proposals he is bringing forward to ensure that time spent on recording ambulance call times does not have an impact on the care provided by ambulance crews. (AQO 3746/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has advised me that information on ambulance response times is generated electronically by means of radio status and code messages, which are transmitted by ambulance crews and recorded automatically by the Ambulance Service's command and control system.

The codes are transmitted by pressing a button at various stages of the operation; for example, when the call is made, on arrival at scene, and when the ambulance

is clear. That is not a time-consuming activity, and it does not impinge in any way on patient care.

Dr Deeny: I thank the Minister for his response. Patient care should always come before administration.

Up to 25% of ambulances in the west may not meet the required standard. During one incident, a door literally fell off an ambulance. Will the Minister ensure that the entire fleet of ambulance vehicles will be brought up to — and maintained at — the acceptable and required standard?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 132 accident-and-emergency ambulances in the system. A total of 67 of those are crewed, which leaves a balance for standby and backup. They are maintained to a higher level than manufacturers' specifications. When vehicles leave the depot, they are properly maintained.

There has been a problem with investment in that area over the past number of years, which is a matter that I am seeking to address.

Mr Buchanan: The Minister may be aware that the morale of ambulance crews that serve Castlederg, Omagh and Enniskillen is at an all-time low. That is because crews are moved about in an effort to provide piecemeal cover, with staff often having to travel in excess of 150 miles during any shift, without having looked at a patient. What is the Department doing to address that matter, and to ensure that facts and figures are no longer manipulated in order to make everything appear as though it is OK? Only by addressing that problem will a safe service be provided for the people of west Tyrone, Fermanagh and Enniskillen.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I regret the tone of Mr Buchanan's remarks about figures being manipulated as though that were a routine matter in the Ambulance Service. I deeply resent that, on behalf of the ambulance crews.

I am not aware that morale is at an all-time low. I recently visited an ambulance headquarters and met a number of crews, and I did not get that impression. It is easy to make such remarks if someone adopts a particularly negative frame of mind.

Last month, I announced additional ambulance cover for Fermanagh and west Tyrone, which included a new ambulance for Enniskillen and one for Omagh. The Castlederg ambulance station operates on a 24/7 basis; a first-responder service is being developed; and a paramedic thrombolysis pilot that has been under way since March 2007 in the south-west will be rolled out across the region in 2009. Furthermore, the Ambulance Service and the Western Health and Social Services Board are working on a costed action plan that will enable those improvements to be implemented.

All of that is in addition to the investment that has already been made in that area, including the additional 24/7 accident-and-emergency ambulance that has been in place since August 2006, for which 11 additional staff were recruited and trained. I am sure that the Member is aware of that.

Other investment includes a new accident-and-emergency ambulance that has been in operation since January 2007; an intermediate-care crew that has been in place since July 2006; and two paramedic rapid-response units that are operational between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm. Furthermore, a new ambulance deployment point has been in place at Fintona fire station since March 2007; two intermediate-care vehicles were commissioned in the Omagh area and have been operational since February 2007; and, a paramedic-led thrombolysis pilot scheme to deliver clot-busting drugs to heart attack victims was introduced in March 2007.

That is a comprehensive list of investment. In addition to that, as I said in an earlier answer, I want to invest strongly in the Ambulance Service in the near future.

Mr Gallagher: I thank the Minister for that information. Will he inform the House of the number of vehicles that his Department plans to use for the rapid-response unit? Furthermore, will he give us an idea of when the recently announced first-responder initiatives will be in place?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A total of 18 rapid-response vehicles are currently in place. The Department is working towards a strategy to increase that number. It is anticipated that a first-responder system will be implemented in the near future, although I do not have a specific date for the Member.

One of the key aims of the first-responder system is to get help to patients as quickly as possible. Ambulance crews aim for a target of reaching the patient within eight minutes of being dispatched, which is achieved 70% of the time. Time is of the essence, and the rapid-responder units will consist of people who have suitable experience. If they live close to the patient, they can be called and dispatched earlier. The Department is very keen on that system, which I want to see implemented as quickly as possible.

Attacks Against Healthcare Staff

3. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on reducing the number of physical attacks against healthcare staff. (AQO 3731/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In June 2007, I launched a campaign that clearly spelled out a zero-tolerance message. Since

then, each health and social care trust has put in place accountability arrangements for staff safety. Additional measures have been introduced.

I intend to introduce two new pieces of legislation that will help to further reduce the number of attacks on healthcare staff. The first is provided for in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008. That will allow certain staff to remove those who create nuisance or disturbance from hospital premises. The second involves the creation of a new criminal law that will make it a specific offence to assault or impede healthcare workers in the course of their duties. Draft proposals for that legislation have already been drawn up, and are currently being considered by the Northern Ireland Office.

Mrs M Bradley: I thank the Minister for his reply. Can he confirm that the legislation that is about to be introduced will also ensure the protection of staff who work in mental-health hospitals, in view of the aggressive behaviour that is sometimes seen in that sector?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mrs Bradley makes a pertinent point. Although the protection of healthcare workers is a reserved matter, I can confirm that the new legislation will make it a specific offence to assault or impede healthcare workers in the course of their duties — that includes all healthcare workers, wherever they are based.

That is in line with the type of protection that is afforded to police and fire services, due to the special demands of their work. Over recent years, the number of attacks on healthcare staff has risen dramatically. However, the number of attacks has plateaued over the last year and is now fairly stable. That number is still far too high, so the Department is doing what it can to reduce it. The legislation will play a part in that.

Of those attacks, 6% take place in accident-and-emergency units; 19% take place in general hospital wards; and 75% take place in mental-health-community and home-help settings. From those figures, it is obvious that most attacks occur in mental-health areas. Therefore, those are key areas in which staff require protection.

Mr McClarty: Over recent months, staff at the Causeway Hospital in my constituency have been subjected to some appalling physical attacks. I thank the Minister for personally intervening to try to prevent those attacks.

Can the Minister provide an idea of when he hopes to introduce the two pieces of legislation to which he referred? In the interim, will he continue to take steps to ensure that staff are and will continue to be protected?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I thank Mr McClarty for those remarks. I know that staff at the Causeway Hospital — and other hospitals — are grateful for his support.

The first piece of legislation — which is provided for in the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 — has just received Royal Assent and will come into force early next year. Owing to the fact that the protection of healthcare workers is a reserved matter, the other piece of legislation is with the Northern Ireland Office for consultation. The Department will be ready to make progress with that legislation once that process has been completed.

Mr McCarthy: Is the Minister aware that some attacks on healthcare workers go unreported? What practical methods can the Minister put in place to accommodate people who were assaulted but did not report the incident?

2.45 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is difficult to deal with the situation when attacks are not reported. A director with specific responsibility for staff safety and for taking supporting action in cases in which staff have been attacked has been appointed in each trust, and we have taken several steps to encourage staff to report attacks.

As the legislation stands, if staff are attacked, they have to take the prosecution case themselves. In future, under the proposed legislation for the protection of healthcare workers, that responsibility will move to the employers and the trusts. We must deal with that important piece of work, because it is unfair that healthcare workers who suffer attacks are individually responsible for prosecutions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Child and Adolescent Mental-Health Services: Training Places

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many training places are available for those seeking to work in child and adolescent mental-health services. (AQO 3733/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A wide spectrum of training is available for those who wish to work in child and adolescent mental-health services. Therefore, it is not possible to give a definitive number of available training places. The service is multidisciplinary and covers a wide range of specialisms. The Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency provides training in child and adolescent psychiatry that typically lasts three years of a six-year psychiatry course. There are nine specialist registrars in training in Northern Ireland, and the agency has confirmed that 16 places are available — eight for core psychiatry training and eight for training in year four and beyond. There are 117 commissioned undergraduate mental-health nursing

places, and some of those nurses will undertake further specialist training to enable them to work in child and adolescent mental-health services.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that training places are available. Does the Minister believe that there are still insufficient inpatient places in specialist treatments for children and adolescents who suffer from mental-health problems?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have announced already that we are currently building two new units for child and adolescent mental-health services. The first of those buildings, which will provide 18 places in the adolescent unit — for 14- to 17-year-olds — will be ready in 2009-2010, and that will be followed by the child-and-family centre, which will provide 15 inpatient beds. That is an important piece of work that dovetails well with the Bamford recommendations. The Bamford Review sees most of that provision providing support in a community, rather than an institutional, setting, and the new units are geared along those lines. There are around 400 vacancies in mental-health and learning-disability nursing, and I am seeking to address that issue.

Mrs I Robinson: We all agree that there must be investment in training and recruitment if services are to be improved. Rather than dishing out expensive drugs to young people, how many new psychologist posts have been created to provide talking therapies for them?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As far as the provision of such a service is concerned, I am governed by the Bamford Review. A Bamford implementation process is under way. I attended a meeting of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety last week, and the Executive Committee have approved the implementation process. It is the blueprint for the future. In this comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, we are aiming for a 13-week minimum wait for psychotherapy; a reduction of 15% of those who are resident in mental-health hospitals; a reduction of 10% in mental-health admissions; and 200 multi-professional staff for community mental-health teams. I have read that list out before, but it is important to remind ourselves that we are investing in those services and that we have a current budget of around £187 million for mental-health services. As a result of the final Budget settlement, extra money of around £26.6 million is being added, recurrent in year three. In addition, we will need investment further down the line.

However, the combined amount provides my Department with the capacity to make a solid start on the implementation of the Bamford Report.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister assure families in north

and west Belfast that past failures to provide prompt and appropriate intervention during periods of great stress and distress in young people's lives are being addressed? Both are areas of high deprivation in which there are high rates of youth suicide.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Member is aware of the mental-health strategy, through which several measures are in place. Families play a key role in the implementation of the suicide strategy. Funds have been allocated to those strategies, and I have made several announcements on suicide over the past year.

In addition, the Health Committee recently published a report that I have described as being of huge significance and to which I will give a detailed response, because it contains several good ideas. I agree with the Member that north and west Belfast are suicide hot spots, but the problem extends far beyond those areas; it is region-wide.

Rathlin Island Residents: Healthcare Needs

6. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will visit Rathlin Island to meet local residents to discuss ongoing health and social care needs. (AQO 3752/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am pleased to confirm that I intend to visit Rathlin Island to meet local residents and discuss their health and social care needs.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I look forward to his visit in the coming months. Will he join me in paying tribute to Sister Nicola McGlinchey, who is the resident nurse on the island from Mondays to Fridays and provides an invaluable service to the islanders? On his visit, will he keep open the possibility of future investment in the island, so that the population can avail itself of a first-class health service?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I researched the island, I was looking forward to meeting Nicola McGlinchey, because she provides a first-class service to the people of the island. They are well served by both the provision of daily cover and the out-of-hours and emergency service. The rising numbers of visitors to Rathlin Island demonstrate its potential, and it would be foolish for my Department to ignore what could develop in the future. I am, therefore, happy to do so.

Mr Storey: I welcome the fact that the Minister has agreed, for the second time, to visit Rathlin Island. I raised many issues about the island in a letter of 30 April 2008, and he replied that he would be delighted

to accept the invitation. At least Members are now doubly sure that he will visit the island. However, I must ask the Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Are you coming to the question?

Mr Storey: I must ask the Minister whether he agrees that there is grave concern on the island. Recent correspondence from the Rathlin Development Community Association referred to an undoubted reduction in the level of service provision. I join the other Member from North Antrim, the Rev Dr Robert Coulter, in paying tribute to Nicola McGlinchey. Will the Minister comment on the most recent evacuation that highlighted the fact that neither the responding —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. You must put the question.

Mr Storey: I will put my question. The recent incident on the island caused grave concern. I ask the Minister, when he visits the island, to address all the issues in a way that satisfies all the islanders that they are receiving the service that the Minister claims is provided to them.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: That is precisely why I am going to visit Rathlin Island.

Mr O'Loan: I welcome the Minister's interest in the island and its community. In conjunction with other initiatives being taken by the Executive, his visit and reassurance will contribute to the island's sustainability. During his research on, and his visit to, the island, will he pay particular attention to the lack of weekend cover for the nurse and to the needs of the elderly population? Elderly people make up a growing proportion of the population, and living on an island means that they have particular health demands.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am happy to give Mr O'Loan those assurances. I am informed that nursing services at the weekend are covered by the trust from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm on Saturday and Sunday and that after that there is an out-of-hours service. Last year, 12 people on the island used that service; a triage service is also available. The island is well supported, but I look forward to speaking to islanders. No doubt Mr O'Loan, Mr Coulter and Mr Storey — and perhaps even you, Mr Deputy Speaker — will be there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I would love to take up that offer. Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Guide Dog Waiting Lists

9. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people registered

as blind have received a guide dog; and how many are on a waiting list for a guide dog. (AQO 3722/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no Health Service waiting list for a guide dog, and there are no figures available on how many people registered as blind have received a guide dog. Guide dogs are provided by the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

Mr Shannon: I cannot say that I thank the Minister for that reply, because it was very negative. Would it not be in order for the Minister to discuss with the association to ensure that the necessary help is provided? Plenty of help is needed. A deputation in the Long Gallery outlined that many people are waiting for guide dogs and that some people have not even been put on the waiting list. What will the Minister do to liaise with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association to ensure that waiting lists are reduced?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am sorry that Mr Shannon finds the reply negative, but his question is for the association that is responsible for providing guide dogs. As I understand it, the Health Service does not fund the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association; guide dogs are provided on a voluntary, charitable basis. I understand that the total number of guide dogs in Northern Ireland is 90 and that there is a small waiting list of about 25 people who are waiting for guide dogs. It is a valuable service that the association provides. I will give the association whatever support I can, but it is the association that runs and provides the service. If it feels that it needs my support, I am happy to listen to what it has to say.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association has carried out sterling work in providing the dogs and the training needed for those who are blind, and it has done that work on an entirely voluntary basis. I share Jim Shannon's concerns, and would like to put on record my sincere appreciation for the work that the association does for people who are blind. What is the Minister doing to ensure that people who are blind or partially sighted are given every support to achieve their full potential?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I agree with Mrs O'Neill. There is a UK vision strategy that my Department supports through the eye clinics and eye clinic liaison officers that work in Northern Ireland. We continue to improve and support those. My Department is also pushing forward the physical and sensory disability strategy for those suffering disabilities. For example, in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, there is an eye clinic liaison officer, an eye help desk, and a low-vision clinic. In the Northern Board area there is similar provision, as there is in Antrim Area Hospital and in

Causeway Hospital; we also provide other facilities, such as low-vision clinics in Newtownards, Bangor and Downpatrick. There is provision, but we can always improve on it. Some 46,000 people suffer visual impairment, and we must do whatever is feasible to give them the support that they merit and require. I certainly do that, with the support not just of the Health Service but also of the Royal National Institute of Blind People and the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Are there specific targets to reduce avoidable sight loss, and what measures are there — including the wider availability of drugs such as Lucentis — for treatment of age-related macular degeneration?

3.00 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A few months ago, I launched a programme to screen for diabetic retinopathy, as one possible consequence of diabetes is visual impairment. Other eye conditions are treated as required. It would be difficult to set targets for a reduction in the number of people who suffer from visual impairment. However, the Department can devise strong policies for conditions such as diabetes that can cause sensory deprivation.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traffic-Calming Measures

1. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department is on target to construct traffic-calming measures in more than 190 streets as set out in the Roads Service Business Plan 2007-08. (AQO 3703/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The target for the construction of traffic-calming measures in more than 190 streets was contained in Roads Service's business plan for 2007-08. That target was exceeded by 14%, with traffic-calming measures being implemented in 217 streets. The target for 2008-09 has been increased to 200 streets. Although it is still the start of the financial year, Roads Service is confident that that target will be achieved.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the Minister's answer. He will be aware of the ongoing request for traffic-calming measures to be implemented in the hamlet of Jerrettspass in my constituency of Newry and Armagh, which the Minister also represents. Will he undertake an urgent review of traffic-calming measures, including the possible introduction of speed limits, on the A56 road at Jerrettspass in order to deal with that request?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member will be aware that the number of applications for traffic-calming measures far exceeds the resources that are available to carry them out. They are, therefore, carried out according to priority across a range of assessments.

I know that the Member has been in contact with Roads Service about Jerrettspass. I can advise him that a traffic survey was carried out there between 15 and 21 October 2007 and that the average speed that was recorded was 56 miles per hour. No contact was made with the police because that average is within the speed limit for the main road. However, having discussed the matter with the Member, I understand that the objective is not that cars will travel within the 60 mph limit but to reduce the speed limit for the hamlet of Jerrettspass. I am happy to engage in further discussion with the Member in order to establish what progress can be made on the matter.

Mr Irwin: In light of the number of applications for traffic-calming measures and, indeed, their necessity, has the Minister considered other measures for Northern Ireland that are similar to the modern methods that are used in England, Scotland and Wales?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department seeks to introduce traffic-calming measures that meet the highest current standards. The Member is quite right: their necessity far exceeds the Department's ability to meet demand, not only in villages such as Jerrettspass but in housing estates, developments, towns and streets in urban areas, from where requests for all sorts of traffic-calming measures are received. Roads Service keeps abreast of developments in Britain and elsewhere that will improve traffic calming and safety on the roads, which is its priority. If innovative measures are being developed elsewhere, I am sure that Roads Service will make itself aware of them.

Mr Burns: What consideration has been given to the implementation of schemes such as the '20's Plenty' campaign, introduced by the Scottish Parliament, for the provision of a 20 mph speed limit outside schools?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of the '20's Plenty' scheme for advisory 20 mph limits and zones in Scotland. My officials have discussed its operation with Transport Scotland and with some local authorities.

However, experiences from there and elsewhere have shown that those more economical schemes are effective only when they have the support of the entire local community and when the roads on which signs are placed do not carry through-traffic.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Francie Brolly to ask question 3.

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Does question 2 not come before question 3? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: My apologies. I call Mr Kieran McCarthy to ask question 2.

Mr McCarthy: I accept your apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Maintenance of Rural Roads

2. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to reallocate funds in the roads budget towards the maintenance of rural roads. (AQO 3755/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I almost escaped Strangford once again.

Members will appreciate that there are many competing funding priorities in my Department's programmes. The Budget that was announced on 22 January 2008 means that funding available for structural maintenance is some £56.3 million, £71.8 million and £70 million a year over the next three years. That is a total of almost £200 million during the three-year Budget period of 2008-2011.

Roads Service gives priority to the main strategic road network and to roads that carry the greatest volumes of traffic. Remaining funds are used to treat other roads, including rural roads, on a priority basis that reflects both structural condition and traffic volumes. In that context, there are no plans to reallocate budgets.

That said, I assure Members that Roads Service will continue to make strong bids for additional structural maintenance funds as part of the in-year monitoring process.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his answer. I also thank him for his recent visit to my Strangford constituency to see for himself the deplorable conditions of the roads there, especially those in the Ards Peninsula.

Does the Minister agree that rural taxpayers are entitled to a reasonable roads service? Will the Minister admit that rural roads have been neglected for centuries, and that the time is right for additional funding for rural roads?

The Minister for Regional Development: I can answer for my Department's performance over the past year, but I cannot stand over what happened to rural roads in the centuries before that.

I agree with the Member that people are entitled to a reasonable standard of road.

As with all Departments, when the budget is not what people initially bid for or seek, we must make do

with limited resources. I am sure that every Minister in every Department would like to have more money to spend, but we receive a block grant from the Treasury. That is the basis on which this institution works. I would prefer to change that at some stage, and I would welcome the Member's support for doing so.

Given that we have to stretch limited resources, we must prioritise roads that experience the heaviest traffic. That means that lesser-used rural roads will not receive the same allocations. Nonetheless, people living in rural areas are entitled to expect roads of a decent standard. Roads Service's target is to provide a decent road service across the rural road network.

Dr W McCrea: Does the Minister understand that people who live in rural communities are unwilling to accept the present situation and the condition of their roads? Does he agree that there must be investment in the improvement and maintenance of rural roads?

I have a simple question for the Minister: how many times do officials from his Department have to be sent out to paint yellow lines around potholes before someone has the sense to fill them with tarmac?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member will know how much money was allocated to Roads Service, because he voted for the Budget. I assure him that my Department's budget is being spent as best as it can. It is spread as evenly as it can be across all the North's rural areas and districts.

If the Member has a problem with certain potholes in his area, he should take it up with the applicable Roads Service division. I assure him that Roads Service operates on a limited budget, which was agreed by the Assembly. It is not as much as I, or Roads Service, would have liked, but we must try to cut our cloth according to what the budget provided.

Mr Burnside: Does the Minister remember the statement that his colleague Michelle Gildernew made on 3 May 2006, in which she blamed the appalling number of deaths on the rural road network directly on decades of underfunding from direct rule Ministers?

Since he has taken over responsibility for the Department, he has spent only 18% a mile of the amount that is spent on road maintenance in England. Does that not make him a worse Minister than his direct rule predecessor?

The Minister for Regional Development: No, I am not a worse Minister. The Member will do well to reflect on the fact that a block grant was allocated from the Treasury, to be distributed across all Departments. That Budget is not sufficient to meet our current needs, resulting in substandard facilities for roads, the rail network and other areas. I want to change that; however, the Member and other Members want to stay in that system, and they think that it is beneficial to the

people of this part of the island. I want to change it, and I look forward to the Member joining me in that. Let us be in charge of our own affairs and of our own Budget, rather than spending what little is given to us by the Treasury.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Mr Francie Brolly for a question.

Mr Brolly: Are you sure? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Bilingual Road Signage

3. **Mr Brolly** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the bilingual road signage policy being taken forward by his Department. (AQO 3800/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has prepared a draft policy for the introduction of a range of bilingual road signs in response to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The issue of bilingual signing cuts across the responsibility of my Department as well as that of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, which has responsibility for the charter, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which has responsibility for tourism. I am considering a draft policy, and I am in discussion with departmental officials about taking the proposals to the Executive Committee.

Mr Brolly: What exactly is the current legislative position?

The Minister for Regional Development: A LeasCheann Comhairle, there was doubt about the legislative powers that were available to my Department. Recent advice from senior counsel has confirmed that my Department has the power to proscribe or permit traffic signs that include a second language in addition to English. However, the proposed signing will need to be proscribed or authorised in accordance with article 28 of the Road Traffic Regulation Order 1997.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that, given that budgets are already stretched, as he said in his previous answer, spending money on new bilingual road signage is an unjustifiable waste of money, especially considering that other Ministers, particularly the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, have not been consulted and nothing has been agreed?

The Minister for Regional Development: I outlined the way in which the proposal will be developed, and it remains to be seen what others will say when the proposal is put to them. Under the proposed policy, Roads Service will erect bilingual signs; however, the responsibility for costs lies with the party that requested them. That is the relevant

district council, or, in the case of Tourist Board-approved signs, the private premises or the owner of the tourist attraction. Therefore, the cost to the Department will not impinge on its budget, to which the previous couple of questions referred.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé dúinn go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí de an aontódh sé liom nach bagairt ar bith iad fógraí dhátheangacha do dhuine ar bith — leoga, a mhalairt atá ann ar fad. Má amharcaimid ar an Bhreatain Bheag, mar shampla, feicfimid go saibhríonn comharthaí dhátheangacha an tír sin ó thaobh cultúir agus turasóireachta de. An aontaíonn an tAire liom go mbeadh an scéal amhlaidh sa chuid seo den tír?

I will translate for the benefit of those who could not follow what I said. Does the Minister agree that bilingual signage, in itself, threatens no one? In Wales, for example, bilingual signage enriches the country culturally and is a major benefit to cultural tourism. Can the Minister provide a more precise timescale for the development of his Department's policy? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Regional Development: I agree with the Member that bilingual signage does not present a threat to anyone. Last week, Minister Poots and I were in Cardiff and, on the way to our meeting, we saw that all road directional and motorway signs there are bilingual, not just those that are specifically requested to be bilingual. That does not seem to pose any significant problems, such as those that have been raised about reading the signs, or issues with decision-making time.

Therefore, that does not seem to be an issue in Wales. Nonetheless, our proposal is for bilingual signs, when they are requested, and I intend to put such a proposition to the Executive soon. Depending on the outcome of that discussion, we will make progress with the matter.

3.15 pm

Impact of Development

4. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how the cumulative impact of development is taken into account by the Roads Service development control section and by Northern Ireland Water in their responses to the planning consultation process. (AQO 3760/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Roads Service's development control section works closely with the Planning Service to develop area plans, and a development's cumulative impact on traffic is considered at that stage. Developers are required to submit a transport assessment form for

proposed developments or redevelopments, and the Roads Service considers such forms during the planning and consultation process. The transport assessment form demonstrates how a development would function with regard to transport and identifies possible adverse impacts. If a development — irrespective of its size — is considered likely to have significant transport implications, Roads Service may request a full and detailed transport assessment through the Planning Service. In that analysis, the impact of developments that have extant approval must be taken into account. Developments still under consideration are not taken into account in the analysis.

During the planning consultation process for new developments, Northern Ireland Water informs the Planning Service about the availability of water and sewerage services. Such advice is based on the capacity of the sewerage system and associated waste-water treatment works and the availability of supply from the water-distribution system. It also takes account of development in the area, the level of environmental compliance and the investment programme for water and sewerage infrastructure. Although Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water are consultees in the planning process, decisions on whether to approve or refuse planning permission are taken solely by the Planning Service.

Mrs Long: Although I thank the Minister for his answer, the area-planning process to which he referred is at too high a level to handle small, cumulative developments that have a large impact and are the problem, such as back-land development and garden-grabbing.

In light of the Minister of the Environment's recent circular to her staff emphasising the need to consider localities and the cumulative impact of development more coherently, and given that Northern Ireland Water and Roads Service have informed us that they are still considering developments one at a time and not cumulatively, will the Minister consider undertaking a similar exercise?

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department does consider cumulative impacts. As I said, we are consultees of the Planning Service, and, although we may offer advice about the impact of applications on water services or on the road network, it is not up to us to decide whether an application proceeds. We are obliged to consider extant applications — applications that are live and have been approved — but not those that are in the pipeline.

Perhaps, in conjunction with the reform of the planning process, we could investigate looking at areas holistically and in light of mooted developments. Currently, we consider developments with planning permission — even if they have not been developed.

We are consultees to the process, but we do not dictate how it is carried out.

If the Planning Service wants to take account of possible developments rather than those for which applications have been submitted, we will be happy to work with it.

Mr McCausland: Although Northern Ireland Water and Roads Service are only consulted about individual developments, is there provision in legislation to prevent them from commenting on the cumulative effect of probable further developments?

The Minister for Regional Development: At the moment, we are considering potential developments in the Titanic Quarter, and cross-departmental groups are examining the potential implications for transport and other services. Furthermore, I have written to some of my Executive colleagues about similar potential developments in west Belfast. Therefore, when we are aware that significant portions of land are being zoned for development, or in circumstances such as those raised by the Member for East Belfast in which there is potential for further development on excess land and gardens — although we have begun to close that potential down — there is scope for the Member's proposal to consider existing and potential applications.

There is a precedent in respect of Departments' consideration of major developments that could be translated for developments that are not of such a nature or size.

Mr K Robinson: Has the Minister carried out any assessment of the impact of tarmacking at public and private developments on surface-water run-off, and the contribution that that has made to local flooding events? Have Roads Service and the Planning Service considered the introduction of new, improved porous surfaces, which permit surface water to escape, or the use of straw bales and barriers to slow water run-off on slopes, as is the case in the United States?

The Minister for Regional Development: Question Time can be a great education on initiatives from all over the world. It is incumbent on Roads Service — and on all Departments — to keep themselves abreast of technological developments elsewhere and to ensure that they are up to speed.

The potential impact of development on surface drainage is a material planning consideration, and is considered in the preparation of development plans, and in the determination of planning applications by the Department of the Environment. During the preparation of a development plan, the Planning Service consults on drainage issues with Northern Ireland Water and other bodies that have relevant responsibility.

As the Member suggests, we can always learn from new techniques that are used elsewhere.

Pilot Residents-Only Parking Scheme: Alternatives

5. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to alleviate parking problems in communities which are currently being consulted as part of the Residents-Only parking pilot schemes, in the event of those communities rejecting the proposals. (AQO 3813/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Roads Service has — in response to numerous and ongoing requests from residents and their elected representatives — established a policy to allow the introduction of residents' parking schemes to address the problems associated with all-day commuter car parking in the worst-affected residential areas.

The Member referred to a consultation exercise. That represents the next step of the process, whereby the broad principles of the policy will be applied to specific localities, and local residents will be consulted on the designs for their areas. I hope that the residents of the first five areas where there has been consultation will recognise the benefits that those schemes can bring, so that we can make progress. However, I do not intend to continue the development and implementation of the scheme in areas where it is not supported by local communities.

Roads Service officials are working actively on preliminary scheme designs for a number of other areas where a need has been identified. There is a list of other areas that are awaiting survey and assessment. Should residents of any of the first five areas reject the proposals, Roads Service, with regret, would have to move on to those other areas.

The only practical way to deal with all-day commuter parking in those areas is through residents' parking schemes. I have seen no workable alternative. I am happy to proceed with the schemes in all five of the areas where there has been consultation, as long as they have the support of local communities. The Department's resources would, regrettably, be deployed elsewhere if that support did not exist.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although provision has been made for the charge associated with the schemes to be reduced from £80 to £40 per household in areas of social disadvantage, can the Minister advise Members why there is any charge for such schemes?

The Minister for Regional Development: In answering that question, I hope to explain some of the background to the scheme. Over the past several years, there have been ongoing requests — from residents and their elected representatives — for schemes to stop the plague of all-day commuter parking in residential areas. That has particularly affected the Belfast area,

but also other towns across the North. Those requests were brought before the direct rule Administration at the time. A residents-only parking scheme was consulted on, and the initial proposals included a charge of £80 per household.

I was made aware of the outcome of that consultation when I took up office, and of some of the objections that had been raised, particularly about the cost of the scheme. A cost is associated with the scheme because there is a level of infrastructure that must be put in place in a residents' parking area, including signage, pay-and-display units, additional enforcement, and legislation. I undertook to have that cost reduced in areas that qualify for neighbourhood renewal. However, no money was included in the Roads Service budget to cope with those costs — the schemes were designed to be self-financing.

The reduction of the charges in neighbourhood-renewal areas would mean that it would take many more years for those schemes — if implemented — to become self-financing. Nonetheless, I felt it important to respond to the issue that was raised in the consultation that people in some areas would struggle to meet the charges. I have outlined the reason behind the charges.

I have met residents from some of the areas involved, and the bottom line is that, if residents examine the proposition and conclude that they do not wish the scheme to be introduced, that will be entirely their choice — the scheme will not be imposed on them.

Ms Lo: On 17 April 2008, the Minister issued a press statement in which he said that the introduction of a residents' parking scheme would mean:

"There will be improved traffic progression, which will lead to better access for all, including bin lorries, doctors, ambulances, carers and other essential services."

Public access is clearly a problem in those areas, and it must be addressed. If the schemes do not go ahead there, what plans does the Minister have to deal with that problem?

The Minister for Regional Development: I had the opportunity to meet residents, particularly from the Markets and Donegall Pass, and they told me about ongoing problems that they face. For them, the key problem is all-day commuter parking. Commuters are parking legitimately on streets in the area — they just do not happen to live there — so nothing can be done about it.

However, illegal parking is also a problem. We discussed the matter with residents, and we assured them that we would ask NCP, which has responsibility for enforcement measures against illegally parked vehicles, to patrol those areas and do what it could to stop people from blocking entrances and from parking on corners and footpaths — in other words, ensure that whoever is parked in those areas has done so legally.

Residents tell us that the bigger issue is that people park their cars in the area at 7.00 am or 8.00 am, leave their cars there all day and then return to them at 6.00 pm or 7.00 pm. Nothing can be done about that, because those people are parked legitimately — so long as they are not committing a parking offence, of course. Therefore, a specific scheme must be devised to deal with that issue. Although I argue that the residents' parking scheme is the way in which to tackle all-day commuter parking, we will certainly help to ensure that NCP tackles illegal parking.

Dr McDonnell: I listened to the Minister's answer to an earlier supplementary question, but I was not quite sure whether he was saying that the charges were absolutely necessary. However, if residents' groups have a plan B — a plan that is tailored to suit their particular area — will he consider them? Such plans might vary from area to area.

The Minister for Regional Development: The general proposition for residents' parking was put out for consultation about a year before I came into office. We are now involved in a specific local consultation on schemes that are designed to suit specific areas, many of which are in the Member's constituency. I have had the opportunity to speak to some of the residents in the affected areas. Thus far, no one has approached me with an alternative scheme. Through consultation, our policy idea has been developed over the past number of years. I have not heard of a better scheme or one that might more effectively tackle the problem.

I appreciate the situation in which people in those areas find themselves. It is not of their making — no one is suggesting that it is. The scheme does not represent a tax on residents who park outside their front doors; rather, it is designed to create space for local residents by stopping people who should not be in those areas, or who do not reside in those areas, from parking outside other people's front doors.

I am happy to talk to residents and to listen to the feedback from the consultation process. I had the opportunity to speak to elected representatives at the launch of the consultation process for the first five proposed residents' parking schemes. The consultations in the five individual areas are ongoing, and, as I said, I am happy to hear feedback. However, I have not heard of any proposals for an alternative scheme. Indeed, residents in many other areas have expressed an interest in implementing the scheme as it is currently devised.

We wanted to tackle first the areas in which the all-day parking problem is worst. I hope that some of the five affected areas will sign up to the scheme. If they do, they will see that it is very effective. That certainly seems to be the experience in Dublin and other cities that have implemented such a scheme.

At present, people who park in those areas all day do so legitimately, unless they are illegally parked on a double yellow line, or in a driveway. In order to differentiate between those who live in the area and those who park there all day, a scheme must be devised, legislation introduced, and a system put in place to tackle that issue.

3.30 pm

Park-and-Ride Schemes

6. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider developing criteria that can be applied when considering the introduction of park-and-ride schemes. (AQO 3815/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: There are 37 park-and-ride sites across the North, providing almost 3,200 spaces. My Department has developed plans for further park-and-ride sites along the strategic transport network, and a number of local park-and-ride sites on the outskirts of Belfast. The proposed sites have already been appraised against a range of objectives, including environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration.

It is proposed that the new park-and-ride sites around Belfast will be roughly 3 km to 6 km from the city centre along the main radial corridors. That is typical of the distance of park-and-ride facilities from other towns or city centres. That distance balances several factors, including the need to avoid potential users' getting stuck in traffic before they reach the site, or the site being so far out that the number of potential users is too small.

The distance from the park-and-ride site to the city centre, and the opportunity to provide priority to enable park-and-ride buses to bypass traffic queues, also have a significant impact on the cost, frequency and reliability of the park-and-ride bus services. The availability of land, planning permission, environmental impact and cost are also assessed for each site.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Renewable Energy in Social Housing

1. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to introduce renewable energy into social housing. (AQO 3780/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): We are investing in renewable energy solutions in the social housing sector. The Housing Executive has recently installed solar water-heating panels in more

than 2,000 dwellings, and has tested different types of renewables through pilot schemes, including such technologies as solar photovoltaic panels, solar ventilation systems, solar photovoltaic and thermal roof tiles, ground-source heat pumps, wind turbines, and wood-pellet boilers.

More could be done for renewable energy in housing. In that respect, I was disappointed that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment ended support for the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund. That was impacted upon by the Minister of Finance and Personnel's decision not to proceed with the proposal to put renewable energy at the heart of building regulations. I understand that, shortly, there will be a new Minister of Finance and Personnel; and, if that proves to be the case, perhaps Mr McKay will consider speaking to the new Minister.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Has the Minister set a target for the percentage of new housing that will have renewable energy? Has she had any contact with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment regarding the need to develop renewable energy technology to ensure that Housing Executive tenants are not over-reliant on oil, and that pushing for the reintroduction of coal fires will stop, given that oil is expected to reach \$200 a barrel by the end of the year?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr McKay for his question. There is obviously some dichotomy in Sinn Féin because a question further down the list asks me to favour solid fuel. I thought that Sinn Féin supported renewable energies. Perhaps Mr McKay can clarify that matter.

I could not agree more with the Member with regard to the credit crunch. As a result of the impact of the credit crunch and rising fuel and power prices, and although I do not have responsibility for energy tariffs, I took the ministerial lead and set up the fuel poverty task force. The task force has four work streams and not only involves making representations to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, but, importantly, dealing with short-term measures and working through the summer to ensure that people keep warm next winter.

I have written to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment asking for the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund to be reinstated. The fund did help, and I will continue to press for its reinstatement.

Mr Hilditch: The solar water-heating scheme has been helpful for people on low incomes, and I heard you say, Minister, that 2,000 systems have been installed to date. Are there any plans to expand the scheme?

The Minister for Social Development: Those issues continue to be explored. The Housing Executive has carried out good work in that respect, but more

could be done. I look forward to the support of all my ministerial colleagues when I make my representations this week in respect of in-year monitoring, particularly for the warm homes scheme.

Mr Kennedy: Research by the Energy Saving Trust suggests that homeowners who install microgeneration technology could feed electricity into the national grid, and that that could cater substantially for the UK's electricity needs by 2050. To that end, Her Majesty's Government announced in June that they would remove all planning restrictions on home-based micro-wind turbines. Has the Minister had any discussions with her ministerial colleagues with a view to implementing that United Kingdom policy in Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Social Development: I would like to consider the matter further and discuss it with some of my ministerial colleagues. I had some initial discussions with the Minister of the Environment, as she has lead responsibility from a planning perspective.

Allocating Funding Based on Objective Need

2. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the benefits and drawbacks of using objective need to allocate funds, as opposed to targeting funds at certain predetermined social or cultural groups. (AQO 3779/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have set three key priorities to guide the work of my Department. They are: first, investment in social and affordable housing and addressing the housing crisis; secondly, building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility; and thirdly, creating vibrant cities, towns and urban areas. In striving to achieve those priorities, my Department is delivering funding and is providing support for individuals and groups on the basis of identified need. Funding is provided through programmes that have established, transparent objectives and criteria and funding procedures. As such, all the funding that my Department provides is allocated on the basis of addressing need.

I detected a change of tack in Mr Ford's question, as he mentioned targeting funds at certain groups, which is at odds with the principle of addressing objective need. Disadvantage takes many forms and impacts on communities in different ways. My Department addresses disadvantage and need as we find it, designing the intervention to best address the specific circumstances. However, the two propositions in the question are not mutually exclusive, and the reason for targeting particular sections of the population or particular issues within disadvantage is that the specific issue can be better addressed through a more tailored intervention than our more generic strategies can deliver. In an environment

where all our budgets are increasingly under pressure, targeting funding for particular needs can often deliver greater value for money than more broad-based interventions. However, targeting must be done within an overall strategy to address disadvantage in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive answer to a convoluted question. Presumably, her intention is to ensure that needs are targeted on the basis of objective need, and not on the basis of some political decision-making by her predecessors under direct rule. I would welcome her assurance that that is what she meant by her answer. Is that the Executive's policy, or is it only DSD's policy?

The Minister for Social Development: I assure Mr Ford and Members of the House that when I talk about need, it is based on objective need as identified by the Noble indices of deprivation, which refer to the 10% most disadvantaged electoral wards in Northern Ireland. Obviously, funding goes to the next level of identified need, namely through the areas at risk programme.

Moreover, I assure Mr Ford that it is a departmental policy to which I want my Executive colleagues to commit. We should not make political judgements, because disadvantage and deprivation is particularly pernicious in certain areas of Northern Ireland and it must be dealt with in a fair and equitable manner.

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined how she intends to allocate funding. Setting that aside, does she accept that there is a legitimate need for funding in a range of communities — particularly, although not exclusively, working-class loyalist communities who have been marginalised and disadvantaged — to ensure that the parasites who live on the backs of those communities are isolated so that the communities can move forward without them?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Campbell, the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, for his question. I emphasise that I intend to target need where it is most pernicious. During the past year, I have visited many working-class communities in loyalist, republican and nationalist areas. The Member referred specifically to working-class loyalist communities. On 10 November 2007, I announced the next stage of the areas at risk programme. Through that programme, many areas received funding. I visited housing estates in Newtownards, Fintona and Derry's Waterside area. All those places — located in working-class loyalist and republican areas — were identified as being disadvantaged. I try to be fair and equitable, and if Members have any issues or details that they want me to consider, I will do so.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Department plan to work with energy companies to develop social tariffs in order to

ensure that people who experience fuel poverty are given the help that they need?

The Minister for Social Development: As I said in response to Mr McKay's question earlier, I do not have the lead ministerial responsibility for energy and social tariffs. However, I established a task force because I am responsible for alleviating fuel poverty. The task force will comprise four subgroups and four principal work streams, which will examine social responsibility, winter fuel payments, and how best to use public money. They will also identify the households that are in most need of help.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is a member of the task force and the work streams and, therefore, will offer its experience and input on the social tariffs. Furthermore, the work streams will comprise representatives from the energy regulator and the Consumer Council, who have an in-depth knowledge of such matters. The four work streams will work throughout the summer to equip me with short-term measures — aimed at keeping people warm this winter — to bring to the Executive for consideration.

Heating Vouchers

3. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department will provide vouchers to low income families who cannot afford heating oil.
(AQO 3798/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Member refers to "vouchers", which, essentially, means money. There is a need to increase this year's winter fuel payment, and Mr McElduff will be aware that, currently, only pensioners receive the payment. However, I have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell, to ask him to increase the winter fuel payment for pensioners and, more importantly, extend the payment to families on low incomes.

3.45 pm

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's response and her attempts to secure an increase in winter fuel payments. I ask her to pay particular attention to low-income families that have children with disabilities. I mention that at-risk group in particular, because the evidence that is emerging from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's inquiry into child poverty points to such families being most at risk of poverty.

The Minister for Social Development: That is the very reason that I wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I want him, the British Government and the Treasury to extend the remit and focus of the winter fuel payment so that it not only includes

pensioners but people who are on low incomes and people with disabilities who are on low incomes. The credit crunch and high fuel prices have an impact not only on those people who receive benefits but on those who are on low incomes.

Mr Cobain: Perhaps, along with the vouchers about which Barry McElduff spoke, we should introduce food vouchers and clothing vouchers; perhaps we should get badges for people that say, "I am poor."

It is clear that this issue requires ministerial and Executive drive. Will the Minister tell the House whether there is any possibility of setting up an Executive subcommittee to deal with the issue of the huge increases in the cost of living over the past few months? Electricity prices are to rise by 14%, the price of gas is to rise by 35% and water charges are on their way. Many people say that inflation here is 12%, not 2.5%. I will be glad if Members on the opposite Benches, including those from Sinn Féin, remember those people when it comes to water tax.

The Minister for Social Development: I set up the multi-disciplinary, interdepartmental task force in order to address the problems created by the credit crunch, rising food prices and the inability of some people to pay their mortgages because of rising power and petrol prices, and to determine short- and long-term measures to alleviate fuel poverty. I will present the task force's report to the Executive after the summer recess.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Where does the responsibility for energy costs lie in our system of devolved Government? Does the Minister have any thoughts about how we might address the ever-rising cost of energy and keep it affordable for those people who are on low incomes?

The Minister for Social Development: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the energy regulator have overall responsibility for energy policy. The cost of energy is largely outside Government control. I have responsibility for supporting energy efficiency in homes. However, there must be a joined-up Government response to the question of fuel poverty. As a consequence, as I said earlier, I have taken the lead in tackling fuel poverty. The interdepartmental task force will report back to me later in the summer. I intend to secure Executive support for a package of short-term measures to help those people presently in greatest need.

The Westminster Government announced long-term measures to alleviate fuel poverty on 30 May 2008. Although those measures are welcome, I realise that it is important to do something in the short term. After I have brought my proposals to the Executive, it will be important that we all work over the summer to ensure that the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged, elderly and disabled people keep warm during the winter.

Jobs and Benefits Offices

4. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans to retain the 35 jobs and benefits offices and the front line services they provide; and what plans she has to centralise some of the functions of these offices. (AQO 3816/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The jobs and benefits offices provide a valuable, joined-up, work-focused service to clients across Northern Ireland. I remain committed to the retention of a strong network of jobs and benefits offices and the front line services that they provide. I am also committed to continuing to work in partnership with the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure the completion of the roll-out of jobs and benefits services across Northern Ireland.

As part of the strategic business review, the Social Security Agency is also developing proposals to enhance behind-the-scenes, back-office processing work as part of a new service-delivery model. The analysis shows that processing staff are spread too thinly across the local office network to assure the continued delivery of a high-quality service into the future. We must consolidate those skilled resources to ensure the availability of a critical mass of staff to sustain that important area of work. The proposals are being subjected to an economic appraisal, in a business case, in order to identify the preferred way forward.

As he is a member of the Committee for Social Development, Mr Brady will know that my officials have already briefed the Committee on the principles and objectives of the strategic business review and on general progress to date.

Following consideration of the business case by the Department of Finance and Personnel, I will put the proposals to public consultation. I anticipate that that public consultation will be complete by the end of the year. I will then consult with my Executive colleagues before making any final decisions on implementation.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat. Given the proposed social-security staff cuts, is the provision of quality front line services sustainable?

The Minister for Social Development: The provision of quality front line services is a priority for which we all should strive, because quality of service to the consumer is of paramount importance. My staff in the Social Security Agency and the Child Support Agency, particularly those at the public interface, have a very difficult job to do. I support them in their work, and I hope to implement the strategic business review's proposals that I outlined in my original answer.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for providing, as always, a detailed response. Pension advisers provide

one of those front line services. In my constituency, pension advisers deliver a vital service to pensioners. Will the Minister assure the House that the role of pension adviser will continue and will not be diminished in any way?

The Minister for Social Development: I am conscious of the role of pension advisers and of the service that they provide to elderly people, in a very professional manner, face to face and telephonically. They deal with people in a good, sensitive, empathetic and sympathetic way. At present, there are no plans to change the role of the pension advisers.

Mr K Robinson: In response to the staff-related recommendation 14 of the Public Accounts Committee's report, the Department for Social Development achieved £0.8 million in efficiency savings in its efficiency-delivery plan by moving staff from an agency to a division in the Department. Will the Minister specify exactly how those savings were made? Will she explain how agency status makes an operation more expensive?

The Minister for Social Development: Mr Robinson must have been referring to the recommendation that is contained in the Public Accounts Committee's 'Report on Northern Ireland Resource Accounts Northern Ireland Child Support Agency Client Funds 2003-04 – 2006-07'.

If I may go back to the beginning, Sir David Henshaw undertook a review of the Child Support Agency in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He said that, at that time, the agency, and the service that it provided, needed to be enhanced and improved in order to ensure better service delivery to children.

As a result of that review, in GB the service was taken at arm's length. I took a different view and decided to bring that service within the Department, because one of the most important things that I am concerned about is to ensure the efficient delivery of that service to parents and, more importantly, to children. We must ensure that children, many of whom may be living in disadvantaged circumstances or in poverty, are given the best possible money and the best possible service.

We must not forget that children are at the heart of the Child Support Agency. I hope that all Members support the service that my staff — and the agency, now within the Department — provide for those children under very difficult circumstances.

Social Housing: East Belfast

5. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the social housing waiting list for East Belfast parliamentary

constituency, and what is the average monthly waiting time for social housing in East Belfast. (AQO 3697/08)

The Minister for Social Development: On 31 March 2008 there were 1,969 applicants on the social housing waiting list for East Belfast. The waiting time varies greatly depending on the applicants' circumstances; however, almost 50% of applicants are rehoused within a year and almost 70% within 24 months.

Mr Newton: I acknowledge that the Minister has made a number of visits to East Belfast, for which I am grateful. The question was really about the number of people on that waiting list, not the number of applications. Each application is made on behalf of a number of people — perhaps three or four people within each application — and that masks the position.

Although I accept the average figures that she has given, will the Minister tell my constituents, some of whom have been waiting for years for the opportunity of acceptable housing, what alternative avenues she is exploring to reduce that unacceptable waiting list?

The Minister for Social Development: I announced on 26 February that we will build record levels of new social homes in the coming years: 5,250 houses by 2011, and 10,000 houses by 2013. That will help all those families across Northern Ireland — in East Belfast, as well as other parts of Belfast — on the waiting list for housing.

I am bringing forward new and affordable housing schemes that will help those people who are currently on the waiting list solely because of the affordability gap created by house-price inflation from previous years. I hope that many of those on the waiting list in East Belfast will be able to benefit from that. The Member will recognise that I am very conscious of the needs of the people in East Belfast, just as I am conscious of the needs of the people in north, west and south Belfast.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the Minister's announcements on the need for additional social housing and her outline of how many houses will be built over the next few years. However, those are only dates, and if you have been sitting on a social-housing waiting list for a number of years — coming from a constituency background, she can appreciate this — that is not enough.

Will the Minister outline the progress that has been made in addressing the chronic shortage of social housing, especially in West Belfast, where over 2,000 families are waiting for their needs to be addressed? Half of them have been identified as being within housing stress.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Ms Ramsey for her question, with its particular relevance to West Belfast. As I said to Mr Newton, the secret in

all of this is that we hope and want to build more social and affordable houses in this period of devolution than were previously built under direct rule.

4.00 pm

The direct rule Administration did not place any particular emphasis on social and affordable housing. When I came into office in May 2007, I was given funding for just over 600 new starts, but, by the end of March 2008, I was able to start 1,595 houses. That represents my commitment to the people of Northern Ireland and to the people who are on the waiting list. The secret is to build more houses in the social-rented sector. I also hope to introduce shared-equity schemes that will aid those who are in the affordability trap, irrespective of whether they live in an urban or rural area. I hope that that will help to assuage the concerns of Ms Ramsey and her constituents.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answers to the previous questions. Bearing in mind the credit crunch and the formidable difficulties in the housing market, what progress can the Minister make in reducing homelessness in Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Social Development: I have some good news on that matter. In the past two years, the number of people who have presented themselves as homeless has fallen from 21,013 to 19,030, which represents a reduction of nearly 2,000. I assure Mr Maginness that further progress can be made through my new housing agenda.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Not-for-Profit Mortgage-Rescue Scheme

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 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 Craig: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme for Northern Ireland, in line with other parts of the United Kingdom.

I welcome the Minister for Social Development to the debate. I also welcome the statement that she made on 26 February, outlining a series of measures to tackle the housing crisis. Those included plans for a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme.

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

The House cannot afford to ignore this issue. Statistics published by the Northern Ireland Court Service in July 2007 indicated that there were 1,540 orders for repossessions in 2001-02. That figure had increased to 2,413 by 2006-07, and continues to rise sharply. The Council of Mortgage Lenders recently predicted that the number of mortgages with more than three months' arrears will have increased by 17% over the course of 2008. In the UK, 170,000 people are in serious trouble with their mortgage and home ownership.

The Northern Ireland housing market has a growing affordability problem — house prices increased by 45% last year. This year's market correction has not entirely helped the situation. Indeed, it has created the further difficulty of negative equity. That is a massive problem, especially considering that 69% of all homes in Northern Ireland are owner-occupied.

Sub-prime lenders and those who deal in secured loans have also caused huge problems in the mortgage market. They are a major contributing factor to Northern Ireland's mortgage debt and repossession problem.

Sub-prime lenders aggressively marketed their products to people with poor credit histories who were unable to afford the credit that they had already. Those people have slipped further and further into debt. Levels of homelessness in Northern Ireland are on the increase, whether we like it or not: over the last five years, they have risen by 48%. Five years ago, there were 14,000 homeless people on the waiting list; this year, there are over 21,000. Repossessions have increased by 38% on last year, and now sit at their highest level since 1991-92, when the entire British economy was in serious trouble.

Mortgage-rescue schemes exist to allow householders to sell their homes and rent them back. In Northern Ireland, there is no option: one has to go to a private company. The problem is that, in the UK, such companies are unregulated. According to the financial institutions, they are perceived not as offering a financial product, but as carrying out a housing transaction. In many cases, these companies do not advise clients to seek independent financial help. There is plenty of evidence of profiteering in that market. People have been offered 20% less than the market value of their houses, and, because of their circumstances, been forced to take that value and move on. Worse still, the rents set by some of those companies are no better than the mortgage repayments that were there at the start of the process. That leads people further and further into debt. Not all the private sector is like that, but such practices do occur.

What are the perceived benefits of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme? I know of four ways in which such a scheme can help. First, it can assist people to remain in their own homes, without seeking excessive profit. If people, deep in debt, can sell their mortgage and rent their house instead, they are saved from two problems: they will not be put out on the street and have their home repossessed; and they will not add to the ever-increasing list of the homeless.

Such a scheme also helps to maintain sustainable communities. The vast majority of repossessions happen in working-class estates, where people have worked hard and purchased their own homes. If there is some form of rescue for people in debt, it will help to sustain those communities.

The next advantage is that, under most of the schemes that operate in the UK, if the purchase of the home realises any equity, the former owners are allowed to use that equity to pay off any debt secured against the home. That can make a massive difference to those who find themselves buried in debt: they can clear their debts with the equity that has been secured from the transaction.

The other side benefit is that, when the system works, lengthy court cases which would have led, no doubt, to misery for everyone concerned, with individuals losing their homes, can be avoided.

The Housing Rights Forum has been deeply concerned about the dominance of the private sector in Northern Ireland: it has called for a not-for-profit scheme to be established. I wholeheartedly agree.

I have dealt with a number of cases in which people, for various reasons — usually health related — can no longer afford to pay their mortgage. Under the current arrangement, such householders can seek a way out of their situation by going to the private sector or, as some have done, managing to get a housing association to

buy their property. According to the regulations in Northern Ireland, the individuals involved have to leave their property, because our system does not allow them to remain there. The person to whom the property is allocated receives it through the Housing Executive's points system; there is no legal way around that. It adds to the tax burden, because the individuals who have moved out of the house are, usually, placed in private rented properties, because there is insufficient public-sector housing and most of that private rented accommodation is paid for by the taxpayer.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I welcome the motion, as tabled by the DUP. The impact of the current crisis in the provision of social and affordable housing has not been lost on Members. The credit crunch that was mentioned during the Minister for Social Development's questions for oral answer will bring even more pressure to bear on vulnerable families and individuals.

As outlined in the research that was provided to Members in preparation for the debate, the Council of Mortgage Lenders estimates that measures taken since December will save 55,000 repossessions this year — 40,000 as a result of the new procedures for dealing with arrears cases, and 15,000 as a result of the direct payment to lenders of the mortgage interest element of income support.

Through the Minister for Social Development, the Executive must recognise the increasing financial difficulties that individuals and families are facing. Those difficulties have impacted on people's ability to obtain or secure their homes. Considering the doubt about the future of the co-ownership scheme — Jonathan Craig mentioned the Minister's statement of 26 February — the House is looking forward to the introduction of the Minister for Social Development's cast-iron proposals. It is imperative that all Members try to provide support and leadership for some of the most vulnerable members of society — most of whom, as Mr Craig said, live in working-class communities.

Collectively, Members must provide the opportunity to pilot such innovative schemes, and, in keeping with the motion, call for an investigation into the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme as one example.

The fact that no detailed schemes have been proposed in the House sends out a message that Members are unsympathetic to the plight that people are facing and the pressures that they are feeling. I repeat my thanks to the Members for tabling the motion, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

As mentioned during Question Time, the constant rises in the cost of living are of great concern to everyone. The rising costs of energy, food and other

essentials have impacted greatly on our already tight budgets. However, the earnings of the majority of the workforce have not increased significantly, and it seems that that trend is set to continue.

Most people aspire to owning their own home at some stage. It is in that context that there are major concerns about unscrupulous private companies that will — and often do — promote and proclaim to offer immediate solutions to homeowners who are in financial difficulty and who are in danger of having their homes repossessed. Such mortgage schemes are offered by private companies. Most of them are unregulated, and they rarely — if ever — advise applicants to seek independent advice about their financial and legal status. Furthermore, unregulated private companies offer little security of tenure.

According to the research provided, most tenant agreements are fixed for a period, after which the tenancy is set on a month-by-month basis, which leaves tenants vulnerable. If private companies decide to terminate a tenancy — as they often do — families are faced with the threat of homelessness.

Not-for-profit mortgage schemes are virtually non-existent here, but I have no doubt that those private companies offering such rescue packages will make their mark here in the not-too-distant future.

4.15 pm

One of the key elements of a not-for-profit scheme involves providing immediate support for people who are in immediate danger of having their homes repossessed. Another key element is that an applicant should have the opportunity to buy back all, or a share of, the property, should his or her financial situation change — that is something that the Assembly will agree with. However, I would include the caveat that the tenant should be able to buy back their share at the market rate that was current at the time of their application.

As Mr Craig indicated, the Housing Rights Forum and many other housing groups and activists have urged the Assembly to engage with organisations such as the Housing Executive and housing associations to establish a public-sector mortgage-rescue scheme. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I support the motion and I urge all Members to do likewise. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Cobain: As other Members have said, in February, the Minister for Social Development announced that she intended to introduce proposals for a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme. Therefore, we are pushing at an open door as far as that particular issue is concerned.

The number of repossessions is increasing at an unacceptable rate. We must not lose sight of the fact that such statistics represent a great deal of personal difficulties for many families who are living in the shadow of repossession. It is critical that people who

are experiencing mortgage difficulties seek professional advice as quickly as possible from those who can give it — Citizens Advice, Advice Northern Ireland, or, if they prefer, their own mortgage lender. As other Members have indicated, people should contact those organisations before they fall into the hands of those who are operating a mortgage-rescue scheme, which can often be a deceptive scheme that leaves the mortgagor worse off than they were before.

Mortgage rescue is an emotive and fraught subject. Many unscrupulous schemes have been operating in the private sector, exploiting vulnerable people who have run into difficulties with their mortgage repayments. It is hoped that the Mortgage Rescue Network, which offers a system of accreditation for good practice in mortgage rescue, will prevent some of the worst excesses by some of the most unscrupulous private-sector operators. The Mortgage Rescue Network runs training programmes for which certificates are awarded, provides standard paperwork written in plain English, offers an emergency fund for distressed tenants and facilitates easy access to mortgage-rescue schemes led by local councils and housing associations and access to debt counsellors. Those improvements are all greatly needed in the private sector.

The bad practices of some equity-release schemes that, in the past, targeted older homeowners, as well as the current horror stories about some private-sector mortgage-rescue schemes, all point to a need for regulation. Ultimately, a state-backed scheme is needed in Northern Ireland to ensure that good practice is the order of the day from day one.

Turning to how a properly-constituted Government-sponsored not-for-profit scheme might operate, it should be noted that many housing associations and councils in other parts of the United Kingdom already offer a shared- or part-ownership option as a solution to mortgage-rescue situations. Under those schemes, the owner can purchase a proportion of the property. The individual then pays a smaller mortgage and a smaller amount of rent, which, in total, should be less than the mortgage that they were paying.

In most schemes, it is possible for the individual to repurchase either full equity of their property or a great proportion of that equity at a later date, as their circumstances improve. Such a sliding-scale or mortgage-ladder method of operating allows the system to be flexible and tailored to individual circumstances, and it should be remembered that all such cases are individual.

It is very difficult to have one scheme that fits all requirements. The preferred model should have a minimum of intervention and should retain an equity stake for the owner. It should also enable quick reinstatement of the owner's original status and

situation once their financial circumstances improve. It is this model that I commend to the Minister.

There are, of course, other refinements needed for any not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme. For example, if the market value of the property is higher than the mortgage, a chunk of equity may be left that could be used to pay off other debts. However, with many properties teetering on the edge of negative equity — if not already in it — that is less likely to apply in the present circumstances.

Such a scheme would reflect the same mode of operation as the shared-ownership schemes in the UK and the co-ownership scheme in Northern Ireland. In many ways, it is a logical extension of it.

The Westminster Government have missed a great opportunity in the present bad economic climate. They should have used the £50 billion made available to banks to create a national mortgage company — much like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in the United States. They could have used Northern Rock — into which they have injected another £25 billion — to deliver the scheme. This would have been a better use of public money —

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

Mr Cobain: The creation of such a company would also introduce much needed competition to the banks cartel that has created the present crisis.

Mr Burns: The credit crunch is affecting people in all walks of life in many different ways. Inflation is rising at an alarming rate and the price of oil is going through the roof. Whether it is the petrol or the diesel that we use to travel to work or the heating oil that we use in our homes, oil is becoming hugely expensive. This expenditure leaves less money available for people to pay for other things — in particular, their mortgages. One of the most important things that people have is their homes, and no one would ever want to see people being put out of homes that have been repossessed.

The Minister should be congratulated for showing leadership on the issue through the creation of a task force to examine the not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme. Furthermore, I know that she plans to meet the Council of Mortgage Lenders later this week to address this problem in our housing sector. With repossessions at a record level, I look forward to hearing about the progress that the Minister has made on the not-for-profit mortgage scheme that she announced earlier in the year.

The scheme is needed and welcomed. However, it should not be designed to encourage overspend in the housing sector, but instead should be used to help people facing repossession. I cannot emphasise enough how bad it must be for those who are in arrears with their mortgage when the dreaded letter arrives telling

them that their home is to be repossessed. Many people get into mortgage arrears through illness or through a change in circumstances from when they first took out their mortgage.

I am very concerned by the rising number of privately run mortgage-rescue schemes. Those companies target those with money problems and seek to make profit from a bad situation. They buy property at much less than the market value and offer short-term rental agreements. That is immoral. A not-for-profit scheme should help to reduce the number of such private companies. Similar schemes operate in Britain, such as the mortgage-to-rent scheme and the flexible-tenure scheme.

Any Government scheme should provide debt counselling, fast-track people who face having their homes repossessed, pay the market value for homes and allow people to retain a share in their property — a staircase up and a staircase down. The scheme should also provide housing benefit to those who are eligible, so that they can rent back the property. Those who participate in the scheme should also be able to buy their homes back at a later date and be given long-term rental agreements.

I am confident that the Minister plans to introduce imaginative proposals, and I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

Ms Lo: I support the motion and urge the Minister to investigate a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme.

Although we have been concerned about the difficulties that exist for people who want to get on the first rung of the property ladder, we must also show concern for those who have become homeowners but face problems in keeping up with mortgage repayments. With the rising costs of heating, food and petrol, households are under increasing financial strain. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Council of Mortgage Lenders has predicted that repossessions in the UK will go from 30,000 to 45,000 by the end of 2008, which is an increase of 50%. Northern Ireland will have a higher-than-average rate of repossessions — thousands of householders here are at risk of losing their homes in the coming months.

As well as the increase in home repossessions, there has been an increase in unregulated private companies offering mortgage-rescue packages through sale-and-rent-back schemes, which exploit people in vulnerable positions. Such schemes often make people worse off financially and offer only short-term security for people to stay in their home. In reply to a statement that the Minister made in February, I voiced my concern about this exploitation by private companies.

I support the calls from other Members for the implementation of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme in Northern Ireland to allow householders to remain in their property and give them the chance to

buy back their home if their financial situation improves. There are good schemes in England, Wales and Scotland — the mortgage-to-rent scheme in Scotland, which is funded by the Scottish Executive and administered until recently by Communities Scotland, provides a subsidy to a social landlord to buy the property. We should examine that scheme and try to learn from it. In 2006-07, 173 households benefited from the £9 million subsidy, which has been increased to £10 million this year. It is important to learn from the experience of the Scottish scheme.

Any scheme should be targeted at those who are most in need to ensure that it has the maximum impact — there should be certain criteria. The scheme should be flexible, offering either mortgage-to-rent or shared ownership, depending on the circumstances of the applicant. An affordable social-subsidies rent should be charged on the property post-purchase. I urge the Minister to take account of the Scottish example.

Mr Hilditch: I also welcome the motion. As other Members stated, the slump in the housing market and the credit crunch are continuing, and the number of people who have been threatened with repossessions because they cannot keep up with mortgage payments has shot up by some 16%.

4.30 pm

As Mr Craig said, over 38,000 people are on the waiting list for social housing, 20,000 of whom have been assessed as being in housing stress, and over 9,000 of whom are officially homeless. It is, therefore, inevitable that action is required to alleviate the crisis.

Throughout the UK, some councils and housing associations offer mortgage-rescue schemes that buy homes quickly but let the owners rent them back as tenants, or as part-tenants/part-owners. Depending on the terms and conditions of the contract, some options exist to buy back such property when the financial hardship passes. Such schemes are an option for those who experience short-term financial difficulties.

If the scheme is run by a local council or a housing association, there are usually rules on eligibility. For example, it may be available only to people who face a large reduction in income; have not yet built up high levels of mortgage arrears; need to stay in the area for other reasons such as schools, work or needing care and support; and are able to make small monthly payments.

Constituents will want to know whether they can still claim housing benefit after signing up for such a scheme. The answer is yes. In the UK, if people sell their homes but continue to live in them and pay rent, they should be able to claim housing benefit, provided that they can show that they would not have been able to carry on living there had they not sold them. If that is not the case, they will have to wait for five years to be eligible for the benefit again.

What are the benefits of such schemes? Struggling homeowners may be able to stay in their homes and, therefore, avoid the trauma of repossession. Any equity that homeowners have can be released to pay off other major debts, although mortgage debts should always, in such cases, be the priority. The homeowner and the lender avoid the costs of going to court and having the house repossessed.

Some people rent for years and then find themselves in a situation in which they want to own their own homes again. A major disadvantage of the scheme is the restrictive agreement in the contract that they signed, which means that they face the prospect of having to start from scratch on the property ladder. Such issues should be examined in a Northern Ireland context.

The bottom line is that people finance the purchase of their property, but will receive no benefit from the increases in property prices and the equity of the house. Given our housing crisis, the fact that mortgage debt in Northern Ireland is rising faster than anywhere else in the UK, and that housing repossessions via the courts have risen by almost 40% in just six years — a figure that is predicted to increase over the coming months — we, as an Assembly, must consider a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme as an option to alleviate the emergency housing lists. There were over 2,400 mortgage repossessions in 2007, and we cannot allow that figure to increase.

I hope that the Assembly and the Minister for Social Development will investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme in Northern Ireland in line with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I commend the Members who tabled it. The motion is timely because possibly thousands of people face ruin because they are unable to meet their mortgage payments and are in danger of losing their homes.

Unfortunately, any scheme will come too late for the many people who have already fallen foul of increases in interest rates that have seen their mortgage payments rocket beyond their means of payment. Over a long period, people were bombarded with advertisements inviting them to borrow as much as they wanted and to buy into an overinflated housing market. Mortgages were never easier to get as people on relatively low incomes were able to obtain one and were advised that it was the right thing to do by banks, estate agents, building societies and speculators who were rolling in huge profits. That was despite the fact that some experts predicted the dangers ahead. Unfortunately, such predictions fell on deaf ears.

When the collapse did happen, although several financial institutions felt the pinch, their executives did not lose their homes. It was the people who had been

encouraged by them to take out mortgages who felt the pain. Low earners were convinced to buy and are now being traumatised by the prospect of losing their homes. What advice did those banks, building societies or financial institutions offer? In many cases, people were advised to take out a loan to cover the mortgage arrears, and when that falls apart, homes are repossessed. There is something wrong with a system that encourages people to take out a mortgage, then, when times start to get hard, moves to cover the loans by repossessing people's homes.

It is crucial that the Executive establish a scheme that will be effective.

I am aware that the Department for Social Development has been investigating various types of rescue schemes and has been speaking to a wide range of agencies and organisations about the best way to move forward.

I am sure that all Members have spoken to people who are at their wits' end and who feel that they have nowhere to turn because of the situation in which they find themselves. Even now, financial agents are trying to convince many people that borrowing again is the only way to get out of their situation. The sooner a conclusion is arrived at, and a scheme implemented, the better.

Homeowners who are in financial difficulties can become targets for private companies that claim to offer the opportunity to stay in their homes and find immediate solutions to their problems. The growth in the number of those profit-making organisations is of some concern. They are not regulated by the Financial Services Authority, because it does not consider those bodies to be offering a financial product, but merely buying a property and renting it back. Their advertisements are not scrutinised for inaccurate or misleading information.

Privately run schemes often purchase homes below the market rate, and homeowners can lose as much as 20% of the true value. Shelter revealed that landlords are able to seek evictions when the fixed-term contracts end, merely by serving the correct notice. That may leave the householder homeless. Shelter has had experience of a number of clients who lost out financially and risked future homelessness by selling their homes to mortgage companies.

The not-for-profit housing market is a very small sector that operates several different services. In England, Shelter stated that flexible-tenure schemes can be an effective way to prevent homelessness, because they provide assistance to households at a time when they might be struggling to meet mortgage payments. Those schemes also allow people to remain in their homes.

The benefits of those schemes include householders being able to stay in their homes and in their community,

therefore avoiding the trauma of repossession and homelessness. Allowing those people to stay put would also contribute to the sustainability of those communities. Any equity could be released to pay off other debts, and lenders would avoid having to pay the costs associated with going to court and repossessing a home.

In England and Wales, those schemes are run by local authorities, housing associations, mortgage lenders and others. When local authorities and housing associations run those schemes, criteria are usually applied to determine the eligibility of householders. Those criteria take account of the ability of the householder to face a large reduction in income. They also consider cases in which people have not built up high levels of mortgage arrears, and cases in which people need to stay in an area due to other commitments such as school-age children or family support. In addition, they consider whether people are able to pay small monthly payments.

The danger is that setting eligibility criteria that are too restrictive could have an impact on the people whom the schemes are designed to help. That could lead to the same result, as people could be forced into the arms of the private sector.

The Minister needs to tell the Assembly when her Department will initiate a plan that will offer a way out of this cul-de-sac for the thousands of people who, unless we act now, face the repossession of homes, financial ruin and homelessness. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs I Robinson: I congratulate my party colleagues for securing this debate, which could have significant implications for homeowners from all parts of Northern Ireland.

Owing to the fact that the economy has continued to falter over recent years — as the credit crunch continues to deepen across the globe, and as the price of energy continues to spiral — it was inevitable that Northern Ireland would not remain immune from the effects. Of all the issues that they currently face, the significant rises in the cost of living are at the top of the agenda for families across the Province.

Crude oil recently reached an all-time high of \$135 a barrel. It now costs in the region of £600 for 900 litres of home heating oil. That represents a rise of 277% from 2002. At the same time, the price of petrol and diesel has also reached an all-time high. Diesel now costs almost £1·30 a litre, while unleaded petrol can cost £1·12 a litre.

It should be pointed out that, excluding fuel tax, the UK has the cheapest fuel in the EU, but, thanks to the Labour Government's oppressive taxation, we have the most expensive. As a result, the increased costs have been passed on to the consumer. It was recently revealed that the average household must now pay an extra £900 a year for its food. Last week, it was revealed that the cost of food has increased by almost 16% since

January 2008, with 13p in every pound now being spent on food. That has added £514 million a month to the nation's grocery bill.

The cost of energy is no different. Northern Ireland Electricity announced a 14% increase in costs, with a further rise due in the autumn, and Phoenix Natural Gas announced recently a 28% increase in its costs. The cumulative effect of those financial pressures is stretching the budgets of households to breaking point. The growing number of bankruptcies and individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs) is set to continue.

In 2003-04, there were 582 bankruptcies and 360 IVAs registered in Northern Ireland. By 2006-07, those figures had doubled to 1,008 and 736 respectively. Unfortunately, it is expected that the figures for 2007-08 will be even greater, given that the credit crunch had not bitten in those previous years.

Recently, Gordon Brown's ropey management of the UK economy has, more or less, depended on consumer spending to keep the country afloat. It was necessary for people to spend themselves into debt in order to fill his coffers. The Chancellor is now faced with the prospect of greatly reduced consumer spending and a growing crisis in the housing market.

Many people are coming to the end of their fixed-rate mortgages and are finding new products much more expensive. Bills are greater than ever before. Many families are struggling to cover their debts while still having enough money on which to get by. Therefore, I have no qualms in adding my voice to the motion, which calls for the Minister for Social Development to investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue plan for the people of Northern Ireland, similar to that operating in other parts of the United Kingdom. I support the motion.

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I thank the DUP members on the Committee for Social Development — and their DUP colleague — for tabling the motion. It gives us a timely opportunity to examine the issue of a specific mortgage-rescue scheme for Northern Ireland. I also thank the other Members who contributed to the debate. If my response fails to address any of their specific points, I will be happy to write to them separately.

The motion calls on me to:

“investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme”.

As far as the motion is concerned, I am happy to say that I am already well ahead of the game. When I announced the new housing agenda earlier this year, I made it clear that I wanted to support people who are striving to stay on the housing ladder. I said that I wanted to establish a mortgage-rescue scheme and that, by the summer, I would introduce detailed proposals on how I would do that. Although I still intend to publish

those detailed proposals for full consultation in the coming months, I am happy to give Members some indication of what our scheme may look like, while addressing some of the concerns that have been raised today.

I said at the outset that today's debate was timely. That is the case on two counts. During the first quarter of this year alone, 754 applications were made to the courts here for repossession orders. That represents a 33% increase on the same period last year. Given the difficult economic conditions that we are experiencing, and that Mrs Robinson outlined, we can only assume that that trend will continue throughout the rest of this year and into the next.

Many Members, including my party colleague Mr Burns, referred to the problems of the credit crunch. We all know that those are real problems, but they are real problems for those who are directly experiencing them.

However, we are not alone. The number of repossession orders in England and Wales is expected to rise by over 50% this year. When I was in America earlier this year, I was shocked to learn that over 1.6 million families there will have their homes repossessed.

4.45 pm

Although the problem is not unique to our shores, I am determined that the solution will be. I examined different schemes not only across Great Britain, as called for in the motion, but further afield. When I was in America recently, I took the opportunity to observe how the problem was being dealt with there. I also listened carefully to the views of housing experts here, particularly those from the Housing Rights Service in Belfast, who work day in, day out with those who are in danger of losing their homes.

I am satisfied that, having taken all the issues into account, my Department now has the basis of a scheme that will be unique to Northern Ireland and tailored to meet its specific needs. Carál Ní Chuilín requested unique, innovative solutions, and I intend to provide them. I plan to introduce a mortgage-to-rent scheme for homeowners who can no longer afford to buy their homes. A housing association will purchase eligible homes and rent them to their former owners, and that will ensure long-term security of the scheme's affordability and of the lease.

Mr Cobain was correct in saying that one scheme will not fit all. For those who struggle to meet the full mortgage on their property, I will introduce a scheme that works in a similar way to co-ownership, but in reverse. I will allow housing associations to buy a stake in the house and convert it to an affordable rent. That allows the family to retain some ownership in its home and have the prospect of buying it all back if, and when, its circumstances permit.

Mr Craig was correct that a new scheme will help to create more sustainable communities, and I want to ensure that that happens. So many times in the past, the Assembly has articulated its wish for more sustainable communities, and all Members agree that that is what they want.

However, that is only one aspect of what the mortgage-rescue scheme will seek to deliver. For those who fall behind in their mortgage payments, the best, and by far the easiest, way to avoid a repossession order is to seek help and advice sooner rather than later. The earlier the advice is sought, the more solutions there are available. My colleague Mr Burns emphasised that people need to receive good independent advice, and I concur with him. Therefore, I will insist that all applicants to the mortgage-rescue scheme seek the specialist advice that is already offered freely by a range of providers. I intend to ensure that the best advice and support is available.

However, the financial institutions and lenders also have a role to play, which is the second reason for the debate being timely, as I am due to speak to the Council of Mortgage Lenders in Belfast tomorrow afternoon. The inescapable fact is that many of today's problems were caused by some lenders, usually sub-prime lenders, who encouraged people to borrow more than they could afford to pay back. The sharp increase in the number of repossessions today is the price being paid for the bad lending — and bad borrowing — of yesterday.

In the past four years, the average price of a house here rose by 74%, and the corresponding mortgage increased by 61%, but the rise in the average income was nowhere near as much. Based on those figures, it can be no surprise that more and more people are in danger of overcommitting themselves. Tomorrow, therefore, I will ask the Council of Mortgage Lenders to work with me on the problem, which, based on Members' contributions today, is what the Assembly wants me to do. I will specifically ask the council to look sympathetically on those who default on their mortgages in the coming months, as the effects of the wider economic problems, such as higher fuel, food and energy prices, hit people harder. I will ask the council to examine how it communicates with its customers when the potential for them to default on their mortgage is first identified.

I think that they can be persuaded that patience and compassion is not only the right approach but, over time, makes good business sense. I was pleased to see that the motion called for the establishment of a not-for-profit scheme to be investigated, and I would support nothing other than that.

Mr Craig mentioned private schemes. I have become particularly concerned at reports of private

companies who offer their own brand of a sale-and-rent-back scheme. Those schemes may be helpful for some clients, but, frankly, I am concerned that consumers are not being given the opportunity to make well-informed choices, during what are undoubtedly difficult and trying times for them. Members may be interested to know that the Office of Fair Trading is looking into those sorts of transactions, and we can expect its report by September. Personally speaking, I would like to see those companies regulated, but in introducing our own not-for-profit scheme, we may be able to do better than that, and remove the current vacuum in which they can operate so freely.

Our plans will obviously require funding. Although I have some modest resources, my budget is tight, so I will be submitting a bid later this week to the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an additional £5 million to fund the mortgage-rescue scheme. It is a new scheme to Northern Ireland, and one that is needed now more than ever before. I ask the DUP Members who tabled the motion whether they will prevail on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that that funding is forthcoming.

As I said earlier, I will publish my detailed proposals in the coming months. I am confident that, as a result of today's support in the Assembly, I can make a strong and convincing case for funding.

Before I conclude, I will deal with the detail of the scheme, about which David Hilditch and Carál Ní Chuilín had some queries. They both raised issues concerning housing benefit, the value of homes if bought back by their former owners, and other issues. I will publish that level of detail in the coming months and will, of course, consult widely on those plans. Those issues will be addressed as part of that consultation.

I welcome today's motion, and it goes without saying that I welcome a strong vote of support for the work that I have already undertaken to deliver the proposals. My proposals, if properly funded — I stress that point — have the potential to make a very positive impact on the lives of so many families who are facing tough times. They come through the doors of all our constituency offices to explain their affordability problems and the difficulties that the credit crunch and higher food, fuel and electricity prices create. Moreover, many are in receipt of low incomes when compared with similar groups of people who live in Great Britain.

I have outlined clearly what will be contained in the not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme. I look forward to further discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders tomorrow, and I will be bringing further detail on the matter to my colleagues later this summer.

Miss McIlveen: It is unusual for me to be involved in a debate in which everyone is in agreement, in particular the Minister. Nevertheless, I thank all Members who

spoke for their positive contributions. It is particularly timely that such a matter comes before the Assembly. At a time when an economic crisis looms and when money is becoming increasingly tight, the people look to us to provide leadership. The people of Northern Ireland want to see what their local devolved Administration can provide for them. Certain polls suggest that we have yet to win over a significant proportion of the electorate when it comes to what we can do in the House. We have yet to prove to those people that we can do more than would have been achieved under direct rule.

For me, a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme would send a clear message that the Assembly can make a difference.

Sub-prime lenders bring forward more than half of the UK's repossession orders, despite accounting for just 6% of total mortgages. Given the squeeze on that specific sector, it is hard to envisage anything other than an increase in those figures. As the Assembly has heard, people who have poor credit histories and even those who may have missed payments on a car, for example, generally have no alternative but to turn to such lenders to purchase a home. The payments on such mortgages are higher; sub-prime lenders will argue that that is because they take a greater risk on those mortgagors, given their poor credit histories. According to the rating agency, Standard and Poor's, more than one in five borrowers with sub-prime mortgages in the UK have already fallen behind with their payments in the first quarter of the year.

As we have heard, difficulties are not confined to sub-prime mortgagors. A considerable number of those who have sub-prime mortgages are coming off cheap fixed-rate deals and will encounter what is euphemistically known as "payment shock". It is expected that there will be a 50% increase in repossession applications on sub-prime mortgages, and that was referred to in the debate. My party colleague Jonathan Craig pointed out that house prices in Northern Ireland increased by 45% between July 2006 and July 2007. Since then, house prices have fallen dramatically. According to figures that have been released by Nationwide, there has been a fall in prices of around 13%.

There was a rapid rise in house prices during the so-called boom. Now, those prices are falling. All Members referred to the spiralling costs of living. Fuel costs are increasing, as is the price of food. The president of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) anticipates that a barrel of crude oil could cost \$200 when, only a year ago, its cost hovered at around \$100. The price currently stands at \$127 per barrel. Food prices have increased dramatically. In 2008, inflation on food prices has hit almost 16%. Members are aware of NIE's recent announcement that electricity prices in Northern Ireland are to rise by

approximately 15%. As Members have stated, salaries have not increased to keep pace. Essentially, Northern Ireland is faced with the potentially explosive cocktail of negative equity and dwindling disposable income.

The Assembly is aware of the critically low number of available social-housing units. Surely, the proposal will assist in dealing with that. If a family loses its home, that will, naturally, add to the — already long — housing list. According to the Minister, when she outlined the housing agenda for Northern Ireland, 38,000 people are on the waiting list for social housing. The Assembly simply cannot afford for that number to increase, and must do all that it can to minimise any further escalation.

Members have heard figures for repossession applications in July 2007, which, compared with those for 2001-02, have risen from around 1,500 to 2,400. It stands to reason that they will rise further during 2008. Members have pointed out that a certain amount of leeway for negotiation exists throughout the process. However, such leeway may be limited by a lender who is under pressure in financially pressured times. A well-run Government-backed scheme can give a little more assistance to families who negotiate their way to staying in their own homes. It may also result in a better value being obtained for the home. Many houses that are repossessed are sold at auction and do not obtain their true market value, whereas, through such schemes, homes are purchased for open market value, less the value of required repairs.

Open market value being paid for homes means that families who are in financial difficulty, whose homes are in negative equity or have little in the way of equity, will be in the minimal amount of financial hardship as a result of defaulting on their mortgage repayments. The prospect of families being a further £10,000, £20,000 or £30,000 worse off than would be the case if such a scheme were in place would, inevitably, result in further insolvencies and continued financial hardship.

It has also been highlighted that in excess of 21,000 households in Northern Ireland currently present as homeless. That is a frightening statistic. It is essential that the Assembly does all that it can to ensure that those families keep their homes, especially in situations where children are settled at local schools and when families have put down roots in their areas.

Finally, I thank the Minister for her positive response to the debate and the quest for the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme.

We realise that families in Northern Ireland are not alone in the problems that they face. We appreciate that the Minister is taking into consideration those people's specific needs. We also appreciate that she is looking for a unique scheme rather than one that is replicated from elsewhere.

We welcome the information that she shared with us today. We look forward to seeing the detail of that in the coming weeks. I call on the Assembly to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to investigate the establishment of a not-for-profit mortgage-rescue scheme for Northern Ireland, in line with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Adjourned at 5.01 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 3 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Provisional Out-turn for 2007-2008

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement on the provisional out-turn for 2007-08.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): In June 2007, the Assembly voted to approve the spending plans for 2007-08 that were inherited from direct rule Ministers, and which provided for current expenditure of £8,259,000,000 and capital expenditure of £1,409,000,000 in budgetary terms. Today, I will report on the extent to which Departments have spent the money for which they bid and were subsequently allocated. In headline terms, the underspend by Departments was £177 million in respect of current expenditure, and £76 million in respect of capital investment.

Members will be well aware that, through the Budget, Estimates and in-year monitoring processes, the Assembly continues to spend a significant amount of time and effort debating the funding that is allocated to Departments. That reflects the importance of prioritising the limited funding that is available to the Executive in order to deliver the best possible public services to the people of Northern Ireland. However, Departments often put too great an emphasis on the size of their budget, rather than on the outcomes that they can achieve. Given that imbalance, and the relative lack of robust and timely information on outcomes, the actual expenditure of Departments against their plans must be considered as a proxy for delivery.

There is little point in the best-laid plans being put in place if Departments do not subsequently deliver the planned services, primarily by spending the funds that have been made available to them. Although it is critical that Departments do not overspend, it is equally important to ensure that — to the greatest extent possible, and with due regard to value for

money — the amounts that are provided are spent. Significant levels of underspend imply that fewer services have been delivered than had been planned, and that resources have been retained when they should have been redeployed to improve services in other areas.

In that context, I shall provide Members with detailed figures of the actual spending levels by Northern Ireland Departments in 2007-08, with particular reference to performance against plans. Details of the provisional out-turns for each Department — covering current expenditure and capital investment — are set out in tables 1 and 2, which are attached to the printed copy of my statement.

In my statement of 25 June 2007, I highlighted the fact that the Executive inherited a situation in which, in recent years, Northern Ireland Departments had underperformed when maximising the spend from funds that had been allocated to them. That situation has also been recognised by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, which advocated a 1% target for the maximum underspend rate for current expenditure.

The provisional out-turn returns for 2007-08 indicate that the total current expenditure by Departments was £8.2 billion, which represents real terms growth of 4.9% in 2007-08. However, Departments spent £177 million, or 2.1%, less than had been planned. That headline rate is unchanged from 2006-07, and, given the significant efforts over the past year to improve and raise the profile of financial management, it indicates a somewhat disappointing performance by Departments.

Members will not be surprised to hear that the overall underspend figures mask significant variations among Departments. The Department for Regional Development (DRD) was the best performer, with a 0.9% underspend, and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) was the worst, with a 3.9% underspend. My Department had the fourth-highest underspend at 3.1%; however, that is a significant improvement on the previous year, when it underspent by 10.7%. Although the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) clearly has some way to go to be the example to others that it should be, that improvement on past performance demonstrates the extent of change that is possible with a sustained focus on the issue.

Other Departments such as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) also managed to reduce their underspend rate compared with last year, and I urge them to continue the good work. However, it is disappointing that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), DEL and the Department of the Environment (DOE) performed worse in 2007-08 than

in the previous year. Although all Departments can rehearse excuses and highlight supposedly extenuating circumstances, the simple fact is that either their planning or their delivery mechanisms were deficient.

Although I recognise that some Departments made good progress, in general, Departments are still some way from the ultimate goal of reducing the underspend rate to the Committee of Finance and Personnel's target of 1% or less, and only one Department — DRD — managed to achieve that benchmark in 2007-08. The challenge for other Departments — including my own — is to match that performance level.

In recent years, an area of particular concern has been the spending performances of ring-fenced central funds, which have often experienced substantial levels of underspend. Although the underspend rate for priority funding packages is lower than in previous years, it is still considerably higher than the average for Departments in current expenditure and capital investment. For example, the environment and renewable energy fund underspent by 13.5%, and the children and young people's fund underspent by 4.3% on current expenditure. Those levels of performance justify the Executive's decision, as part of the Budget, to mainstream those funds into departmental baselines in order to engender a greater sense of responsibility in Departments for the associated projects.

That decision also obliged those Departments to consider how much of their increased allocations should continue to be targeted at areas that were previously funded from central funds. It did not mean — as some Departments appear to have suggested — that they could simply take the additional funding, allocate it to something else and then claim that they had no money left to meet pressures in areas that were previously funded from central funds.

Given the greater potential for capital projects to be delayed and their greater propensity to be one-off or innovative in nature, Members will be aware that the percentage underspend on capital projects has traditionally been higher than on current expenditure.

The provisional out-turn returns indicate that Northern Ireland Departments have delivered £1.1 billion in 2007-08 in net investment. That is the highest figure on record, representing real-terms growth of 9.3% on the year before.

The consequence of that level of actual expenditure is that Departments have spent £76 million — or 6.3% — less than had been planned for. Compared with the performance of Departments under direct rule — when the rate of underspend reached 18.2% in 2005-06 — that outcome represents significant progress on past performance.

However, although overall performance is reasonable, that outcome is the consequence of strong performances

by two Departments: DHSSPS and DRD. I commend both Departments on their management of capital projects. Notwithstanding, below that high standard lies a great variation in performance between Departments, ranging from an 8% overspend by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), to a 34.6% underspend by DARD. In total, five Departments had an underspend of 15% or more.

I acknowledge the fact that DFP has performed particularly well as regards capital expenditure, with only DHSSPS and DRD having a lower level of percentage underspend in 2007-08. That is in contrast with the position in 2004-05, when DFP had an underspend of 88.3%, and hence had spent only 12% of its allocated funding.

Although the headline performance is one of continued improvement, as with current expenditure, the position needs to be seen in the context of the substantial amounts of reduced requirements and re-profiling requested by Departments during the year. If Departments are serious about delivering on time the infrastructural improvements set out in the investment strategy, that level of performance must not be repeated in the coming years.

Although I have focused on the importance of avoiding excessive levels of underspend, it is equally important to emphasise that Departments should ensure that they do not overspend against their approved allocations. Unfortunately, two such cases have arisen this year: the Department for Social Development (DSD) and OFMDFM. Although the Executive will, of course, want a full explanation for the reasons for that overspend and will wish to consider the appropriate response, it is also essential that we ensure that, as has been the case in the past, an unreasonable fear of overspend does not drive higher levels of underspend.

I have heard it said many times that one gets shot for overspend, but simply flogged for underspend. However, I believe firmly that we must ensure that there is a proportionate view of those two wrongs. In that context, I ask which is really worse: a small overspend, or a failure to deliver hundreds of millions of pounds of public-service improvements both promised to and paid for by the public, at least in part, through their regional-rate payments?

The answer is, of course, that both are to be avoided, but we must recognise that, if we are to reduce substantially the level of underspend, the risk of overspend will increase. I appreciate that that is a difficult issue, as the principle of avoiding overspend at any cost has rightly been at the heart of public-expenditure control for many years. I will want to consider that issue further with my Executive colleagues, but I am clear that, as in other areas, we

need to be prepared to challenge accepted practice if we are to secure the sort of improvements that the Executive aspire to achieve.

Although I have set out the 2007-08 provisional out-turn position for individual Departments, the Executive as a whole are facing the key emerging issue of equal pay for some grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Although more work is required to establish precisely the level of funding that will be needed to address that problem, it is clear that the costs will be material and will have clear implications for public services here.

One option that we are currently considering is whether some of the underspend declared by Departments for 2007-08 should be used to fund part of the equal-pay claim. That will mean that that funding would then not be available for future years, and hence would have a clear cost as regards the future delivery of public services.

10.45 am

The Executive must, therefore, take great care in balancing the need to ensure fair and equitable treatment for staff with the imperative of delivering the best possible services for all of the people of Northern Ireland. Work on that is progressing, and the Assembly will be given an update later this month as part of the June monitoring statement.

The challenge of financial management manifests itself as not only the level of spend against plans, but as the monthly profile of spend throughout the year. Departments continue to demonstrate a clear profile of steady spend throughout the year, with a significant surge in expenditure towards the year end.

Although there may be legitimate reasons for that, it raises concerns whether that expenditure represents value for money or simply reflects a “use it or lose it” mentality in Departments. Despite concerns regarding underspend, and the timing of access to the Executive’s end-year flexibility (EYF) stock, I prefer the adage that “no spend is better than bad spend”. It is important that Departments recognise that, under the Treasury’s existing end-year flexibility arrangements, although the amounts underspent might not be automatically available in subsequent years, they will be available at some point and are not, therefore, lost to the Executive.

Furthermore, the skewing of expenditure towards the end of the year implies that spending has been delayed. Although that phenomenon is not recognised in the headline figures, months, weeks or even days of delay can be important with regard to public services, whether new textbooks for schools or the repair of potholes.

Although the starting figures on underspend send a strong signal to Departments that they need, substantially, to raise their game with regard to performance in general and financial management in particular, there is an equally compelling message to those Ministers who seek to press for additional funds. Over the past 12 months, I have been subject to subtle, and some not-so-subtle, approaches from Ministers to increase the funding allocated to their Departments. With resources becoming increasingly tighter, I — and, I am sure, my successor — will not countenance the allocation of funding that simply sits unused. That is not acceptable to me, as I am sure that it is not acceptable to Members, or to the general public, who have waited long enough for the return of locally-accountable Government to deliver improved services.

Although I commend the progress that has been made by some Departments in reducing underspend, much more can be achieved, individually and collectively. Although ultimate responsibility for that rests with accounting officers in Departments, there is a role for DFP, Ministers and the Assembly. The steps that have so far been taken to improve financial management skills and raise the priority given to financial issues may not yet have had sufficient time to bed in, and will, therefore, have an impact on the level of underspend for 2008-09 and beyond.

That on its own, however, may not be enough, and other options must be considered to provide a stronger incentive for improved performance. Those include setting targets and sanctions at organisational and individual levels, and taking greater account of a Department’s underspend performance when prioritising funding, or even revisiting the Budget allocations. Moreover, Assembly Committees have a role to play, and I look forward to reports of the challenges from Committees to their respective Departments on their underspend performance.

The Executive has set out a challenging programme of work to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland over the next three years. We must not fall at the first hurdle as a result of an inability by Departments to carry out the fundamental act of spending the funds that have been allocated to them, thereby delivering the planned level of services. Spending plans will be informed by the ability of Departments to spend what they have been allocated, or to make that money available to others as early as possible in the process.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister’s statement, and support its robust criticisms about underperforming Departments. The figure of 2.1%, or £177 million, underspent in current expenditure is

disappointing, and is the highest rate of underspend in the past four years.

That performance is especially disappointing given the tight public expenditure environment and the need to maximise the impact of available resources. The Minister referred to the target that the Committee for Finance and Personnel proposed in its report on the draft Budget for 2008-2011, which advocated a maximum rate of underspend of 1% for current expenditure. The Committee arrived at that conclusion following analysis of previous patterns of underspend here and in other jurisdictions. Experience and practice elsewhere have demonstrated that that target is achievable. Therefore, given the emphasis that the Department and the Committee have placed on robust financial management in Departments, what additional steps can be taken to address the culture of underspend in Departments, which has been inherited by the Executive?

Will the Minister also state how the underspend in his Department has affected delivery of services in 2007-08?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Chairperson and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for taking a great interest in the performance and underspend of each Department. Additional steps could be taken, but some of those might be considered to be too revolutionary to be accepted by the Executive. For example, at one point, I asked officials to rework mechanisms in the Civil Service so that the Department of Finance and Personnel could have a presence in the finance sections of each Department. That would have enabled DFP to obtain a better level of information, because it is only after a financial year is over that DFP obtains a clear picture of each Department's final position.

As has been seen, Departments hold on to money unnecessarily, rather than give it up at an earlier stage to enable it to be spent elsewhere. At an individual level, accounting officers could be made more accountable with respect to underspends — for instance, it could be one of the factors taken into account in relation to bonuses earned in the senior levels of the Civil Service.

However, one option that is open to us all — and which I would consider seriously — is that where there is a pattern of underspending by a Department, it should be taken into account when determining that Department's future year allocations. Indeed, a case could be made for reviewing the allocations for the remaining years in this comprehensive spending review period to take into account the inability of Departments to spend their money.

Therefore, there are several sanctions that we need to consider, because we simply cannot continue to have a situation whereby £177 million that could have

been spent in Northern Ireland in the last financial year was not spent.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his statement. What implications will the out-turn have on the Executive's access to its stock of end-year flexibility? Have any negotiations taken place? If so, what was the outcome? The Minister also pointed out the important role of Statutory Committees, and he will be aware that those Committees are facing difficulties in receiving departmental submissions on monitoring rounds. What can be done to ensure that that situation does not continue?

As a member of the Committee for Education, I ask the Minister for Finance and Personnel to comment on an accusation that was made by the Minister of Education on 20 May during a debate on the extended schools funding programme, when she said that funding for that programme had been cut because DFP had not provided sufficient funds for it.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel raised three issues. First, with regard to end-year flexibility, I said that although a substantial part of my statement focuses on the provisional out-turns of each Department, one pressing issue for the Executive relates to equal pay for some grades in the Civil Service. A significant amount of money will be required to deal with the six years' back pay to which those members of staff are entitled under the law.

We have already begun discussions with the Treasury about receiving an allocation from our underspend for that purpose. If successful, we would retain those funds, which would not be placed into the normal end-year flexibility stock. I emphasise that Members and, in particular, Ministers must be aware that, in the past, we were allowed to keep any underspend automatically, whereas we must now bid, negotiate and argue with the Treasury to receive that funding. It is conceivable that, because UK finances are tight, the Treasury could restrict future allocations if we do not use our allocations fully. Therefore, it is imperative that we improve financial management.

It is a Committee's responsibility to ensure that any papers that it requires are delivered. Committees have a statutory right to receive papers and to summon people to appear before them, and they must be more robust in demanding that information. If Members want me to investigate specific cases, I would be pleased to do so.

Mr Storey mentioned education; I understand that a particular Department of Education programme required funding of approximately £4 million, and the Minister of Education decided — according to the headline in 'The Irish News' — to blame me for allocating insufficient funds. My answer to that is: just

look at the Department of Education's underspend of £50 million. With better financial management, the Department of Education could have conducted more than a dozen of those programmes.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister accept that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was much closer to achieving targets in the two spending areas than most Departments and, in particular, his own Department? Furthermore, does he agree that, because revenue reflects a pattern of need whereas capital is a planned process, tackling capital underspend should be easier and, therefore, is a more disappointing result?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The figures show that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety had the highest underspend of £54·8 million, whereas my Department had an underspend of £6·1 million. However, that outlines the amount only, and the Member's reliance on percentages illustrates the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's massive allocation. I recall a debate during which I was told that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety needed to receive an extra £300 million a year; it is difficult to swallow that point if the Department returns £55 million at the end of the year.

However, I commend the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for its record on capital allocation, which, as the Member said, is more difficult to control because legal planning and other issues can make it difficult to achieve the appropriate out-turn. Therefore, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety shows mixed results — a large underspend of its resource but a good capital expenditure out-turn.

Mr O'Loan: Given the demand and support for renewable energies, the environment and renewable energy fund's underspend of 13·5% will cause disappointment. However, the public will welcome the news that the Northern Ireland Assembly's allocation was underspent by £3·4 million, which is 7·6% of its budget.

11.00 am

I commend certain Departments for their very good results. I wonder whether it is easier for some than others. For example, one can envisage that DRD can spend rapidly on roads maintenance; we all accept the great need for that, and that is an area in which spending can get going quickly.

I accept the Minister's comment that no spending is better than bad spending. Nevertheless, is there a model that Departments can replicate — namely, have in readiness meaningful schemes to use up budgeted funds — or can he say anything else about best practice that would prevent underspend and overspend?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Let me start where the Member finished. The expenditure should all be planned; it should not be about holding things back that can be pulled out suddenly at the last minute if there is a bit of money left over. Departments should have plans in place to spend the money that is allocated to them. They should not keep money in reserve that can be pulled out of the hat at the last minute.

The whole idea of a budgetary process is for Departments to look forward to what they want to accomplish during the following years and to utilise the funds that are necessary to achieve their targets. There should be plans for the expenditure of all that money. If a Department discovers that it is falling behind, as can happen in the case of capital funding and in resource funding, it must free up the money as early as possible in the financial year so that other Departments can use it — or, indeed, it can bid to use the money for another purpose. That is a matter of financial planning; it is not simply a case of having something in a back pocket that can be pulled out if there is a bit of money left over.

I share the Member's disappointment at some of the high levels of underspend on renewable energy. I hope that mainstreaming those funds, rather than having them in the Executive priority funds, will help us to deliver better. Although some departmental underspend levels are bad, they are all better than the priority funds had been, which are somewhat detached from the Departments.

The Member also asked whether it was easier for some Departments to reach their targets than others. He is right; we all see roadworks staring to appear more frequently in the last few months of the year as DRD uses up its allocation. That is no bad thing, however, because that work must be done. In that case, I am not so worried about the upgrade and the curve, because it is not simply a case of taking on work that would not otherwise be done. That work should be done, although the money for it is being used up at the end of the year.

DRD's record is exceptionally good, both in revenue and capital terms, and it has been able to plan its programmes well on both accounts. I hope that, to some extent, on the capital front, that is down to the assistance that was provided by a previous Minister, who introduced a preparation pool so that schemes would be prepared and ready to move as soon as funding was available for them.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

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

Dr Farry: First, in what may be his last appearance at the Dispatch Box as Minister of Finance and Personnel, I acknowledge, on behalf of the opposition, the Minister's contribution in that role. Although we

may not have agreed with every decision that was taken, I certainly respect his mastery of his brief.

Does the Minister see any correlation between the levels of current underspend and the Departments that are making bids under the monitoring rounds? Does he see the monitoring rounds as a means of enforcing a greater degree of discipline on Departments? How does Northern Ireland compare with the latest figures from our counterparts in Scotland and Wales, and the UK as a whole?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not sure whether I should refer to the Minister as “the Government Minister”.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his kind remarks. I, at least, am one of those who recognises the importance of the role of an opposition. I know that many of the Member’s criticisms are merely synthetic because of the role that he has in opposition, and that he feels that he has to make those comments. *[Laughter.]*

The Member is right to draw attention not just to the issue of underspend at the end of the year, but to link it to the in-year monitoring rounds.

Let us not forget that money that is given up during the course of the year, as well as money that is left over at the end of the year, is money that is not going towards expenditure that was planned at the beginning of the year. If one adds the amount that was given up during the in-year monitoring rounds to the end-year flexibility figure, one ends up, effectively, with underspend of £400 million. The original budgets that were set out at the beginning of the financial year have been underspent by about 4% or 5%.

The figures are worse for capital spend, because only about 60% of the planned capital expenditure actually took place.

Mrs I Robinson: As has been said, table 1, attached to the printed copy of the Minister’s statement, indicates that the underspend in the Department of Health was £55 million. The Minister has already confirmed that that money has been lost to Northern Ireland’s public expenditure. How can that underspend be reconciled with the Health Minister’s claim, during the Budget process, that his Department was underfunded by £300 million? Bearing in mind that those who work in the mental-health sector — the Cinderella sector — are crying out for resources, particularly in the areas of suicide and self-harm and units and beds for children and adolescents, does the Minister agree that that is an abysmal showing on the part of the Health Minister?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are two issues. First, let me make it clear that the funds are not lost to Northern Ireland plc, as things stand. We

can seek the return of those funds, and they should be returned to Northern Ireland. It will be up to the Executive to determine how they distribute end-year flexibility when they get it.

Secondly, the Department of Health is a massive Department. It receives half of the overall Budget for Northern Ireland, and it must filter money to a series of organisations. Therefore, it faces massive financial-planning issues. However, many people are waiting for hip replacements or heart bypasses, for example, and they may have been told by the professionals that the money is not available for their treatment. If they hear today that there is a £55 million underspend in the Health Department, they will ask questions.

It is the job of the financial planners in the Health Department to ensure that they plan better to ensure that they use the money that is allocated to them. Simply asking for more money achieves nothing if they cannot use the money that has already been allocated.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. All Members will share the concerns that the Minister has just outlined about departmental underspending and the effects that that has on essential front line services. I was glad to hear his comments about Assembly Committees exercising a more proactive role in scrutinising their respective Departments’ budgets, especially in the run-up to monitoring rounds, where they can have an impact. Will the Minister comment on any direct effect on front line services to the public that resulted from underspending in the Department of Finance and Personnel?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: By asking PEDU to examine one particular area of the Department of Finance and Personnel’s responsibility, I have indicated an area in which I think that there can be improvements. It is probably unnecessary for me to say more than that.

As the Member will know, she and I could identify areas in which improvements could be made in any Department. If Departments are handing back money at the end of a financial year, we must ask why that money was not used to improve the services that we give to the community. These are very large sums. I recognise the difficulties that accounting officers and others face in ensuring that the plans that are set out at the beginning of the year — or, in some cases, three years in advance — are implemented.

If our plans cannot be fulfilled, we must do better to ensure that funds are reallocated to where they will be of use.

I accept the Member’s point about the Committee for Finance and Personnel. The target for the general level of underspend is about right — Departments should aim for an underspend in the region of 1%. Other Governments have achieved such levels of

underspend; the Scottish Government, for example, reached a 0·1% underspend. I would be nervous about such a tight position, but the example shows that underspend targets can be achieved, with proper planning. We must raise our game to ensure that the public get a return for the money that they hand over in payment of their rates bill.

Mr Weir: The Finance Minister indicated that underspend figures are set against February's final-plan position. Will he advise how Departments have performed against what they were allocated at the start of the year?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will be happy to provide the Member with a table showing detailed figures for each Department. As I indicated to Dr Farry — Mr Weir's fellow Member for North Down — overall, Departments fulfilled only 60% of their intended capital expenditure, and about 95% of their resource or revenue expenditure. If we have had to reallocate funds within departmental in-year monitoring rounds, the underspend figure is really 5%, rather than 2%.

Mr McClarty: In light of the Minister's response to Mr McCallister's question, does he not accept that it is much more difficult to forecast revenue spend? For example, DEL's expenditure on programmes is dependent on the decisions of individuals.

The Minister rightly draws attention to his Department's 3·1% underspend — the fourth highest of all the Departments. The Minister conceded that his Department has some way to go before it can set an example that others should follow. Will the Minister provide the House with some detail on how — and when — his Department aims to achieve the Committee for Finance and Personnel's target of 1% underspend?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not sure whether I have misinterpreted Mr McCallister or whether the Member misspoke during his initial remarks. It is more difficult to get close to zero underspend for capital than for revenue. Capital expenditure is very difficult to predict because it is subject to so many variables. Capital schemes are innovative by nature and, therefore, it is more difficult to develop a curve showing the trajectory of capital expenditure. Capital spend is often subject to the Planning Service, and the process is not always as prompt as we would like. Capital expenditure can also be subject to legal, roads and tendering issues. For example, tenders are often not within what we are prepared to pay, and there has to be a re-tender.

Lots of things can go wrong in capital spend; revenue spend is much more predictable. Therefore, we should be able to get closer to our underspend target for revenue expenditure. That is not simply my general belief — statistics prove that to be the case. Underspend

figures for past years show that capital underspend is significantly higher than revenue underspend.

The Member's second question referred directly to the Department of Finance and Personnel. The trajectory under direct rule indicated a worsening situation in the Department of Finance and Personnel. The level of underspend increased from 7·1% in 2004-05, to 9·1% in 2005-06, to 10·7% in 2006-07. The trajectory is going in the other direction and has been reduced to 3·1%.

With hard work, the position has been turned round. Far from being critical of my officials, I recognise that they have reversed the trend in my Department and been able to reduce the underspend.

Those figures relate only to current expenditure. With respect to the capital budget, the underspend in 2004-05 was 88·3%; in the following year, it was 73·4%; the year after that, it was 18·3%; and now I have reduced it to 4·6%. Therefore, I take the applause from the Ulster Unionist Benches for transforming the situation in the Department of Finance and Personnel.

11.15 am

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with the other Members who have spoken. The public will not care about the reasons for the £177 million underspend, come the back of numerous debates in the Assembly.

In answer to a previous question, the Minister said that the money would not be lost to the Executive with the passing of time. Can he explain that to us? I believe that the money will be lost to Departments, for it will be transferred to the central fund.

Does the Minister believe that senior civil servants in all Departments take their talents and experience with them when they move from one Department to another? The permanent secretary of the Department of Health previously worked for the Department of Finance and Personnel. Where did that all go wrong?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We could have a long debate about that last point.

The Member is absolutely correct that as soon as there is an underspend in any Department, the money is lost to it. The £55 million underspent in the Department of Health is lost to that Department. It will stay in the Treasury. The Executive will have to bid for the return of all the money underspent in this financial year from the Treasury. If we cannot persuade the Treasury to release that money to settle the equal pay issue, I suspect that the Treasury will want to spread the return of the money over a number of years. As the money comes back to Northern Ireland, the Executive can allocate it. The Executive will receive bids from the Department of Health and from other Departments. If a Department has an underspend, there is no

guarantee that it will get that money back. It will have to bid for it, as will every other Department.

Mr Hamilton: After encouraging indications earlier in the year, and in the monitoring rounds, of improved financial management in Departments, there has been a deeply disappointing out-turn from some Departments. That makes a compelling case for application of some of the sanctions described in the Minister's statement. Will the Minister confirm to the House that he will consider making senior civil servants ineligible for bonuses if their Departments continue to underspend so badly?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I hinted earlier that the award of a bonus must reflect good value given by an individual in his public service. If ensuring that the public service fulfils the plans laid by the Executive is a key objective, then it must be a factor in how well that person has performed. The Member's suggestion that it should be the only factor and the whole bonus should depend on it is draconian, but it is certainly one factor and, therefore, the bonus should reflect to some extent the ability of the accounting officer to meet the targets that have been set.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his statement. Has the impact of the Northern Ireland Civil Service equal pay policy been factored into the underspend figures?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It has not. The figures that I have outlined are the provisional out-turns for the Departments based upon the allocations made to them. The underspend of £177 million leaves us with two arguments that might be deployed against the Treasury. The first is that direct rule left us with the problem of equal pay, and therefore, the United Kingdom Government should stump up to remedy that. Secondly, if they are not prepared to do that then we should be able to use some of the funds that were not spent to deal with the costs that we will incur in back payments to meet equal pay requirements.

Mr B McCrea: There appears to be a significant difference of opinion between the Minister of Finance and Personnel and others about whether capital expenditure or revenue is the most difficult to forecast. I ask the Minister to demonstrate his command of the detail and explain how in the Department for Employment and Learning — which he mentioned — more than two-thirds of the original £733 million produced an underspend of less than three-quarters of one per cent. That position is highly acceptable. Does he agree that the underspend occurred in demand-led areas, which are difficult to forecast?

Does he also accept that planned overspend was reduced to try and meet the budget? Does he consider that that reduction had an adverse effect on the profile, which, I see from the chart, peaks at the end of the

financial year? Does he think that the party-political-bickering that we see, in which one Department plays off another, is helpful as regards collective responsibility? Will he explain to the people of Northern Ireland why the Minister of Education appears to have a £50 million underspend but cannot find money for extended schools? That inconsistency can be applied to any Department. Why is that being allowed to happen under our financial regulations?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Let me settle the issue, because it is not merely about the Member's opinion or mine. There is statistical evidence, and the statistics are fairly stubborn. The Member can put whatever excuses he wants into the ether, but the figures show the reality. There are significantly higher amounts of underspend in capital expenditure than there are in resource expenditure.

Mr B McCrea: Why is that?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will inform the Member of the reasons again, because I suspect that he needs to be told three times before he understands. First, it is more difficult to predict capital expenditure because the projects involved are often novel, one-off experiences. Departments are unable, therefore, to benefit from a learning curve or by drawing on the knowledge of previous capital expenditure projects. Secondly, capital expenditure relies on planning, tendering, legal issues and a Department's ability to get workmen on and off site in a given time.

In the 2007-08 financial year, there was an underspend of 2.1% in resource expenditure and 6.3% in capital expenditure. That should tell the Member something — it should tell him that since the underspend of capital expenditure is greater, it is more difficult for Departments to spend their full capital expenditure allocation.

I do not look at out-turns as being a case of comparing one Department with another, because I acknowledge what a Member for North Antrim Mr O'Loan said. Some Departments find it easier than others to use up money at the end of the year, and the Department for Regional Development is such a Department. Contrary to being party political, I commended the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on its capital expenditure. It was able to return a low level of underspend.

It is not right for Basil McCrea to point the finger at the Minister of Education and accuse her of being a terrible Minister because £4 million could not be found for a project although she had an underspend of £50 million, while saying that his Minister had an underspend of £55 million, which is all right.

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please allow the Minister to respond.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have been fair in distributing criticism where it is due, and that criticism must be directed at departmental financial planners. It is not the Minister of Education or the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who carry out departmental financial planning — they crack the whip and ask what the out-turn figures will be, and whether the Department will meet its requirements. We have to be even-handed. No Department, with the exception of DRD, has done well in its current expenditure underspend — I did not notice that the Minister for Regional Development had just arrived. *[Laughter.]*

The Department for Regional Development was the only Department that managed to get its spending within the target figures that were set by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Mr Ross: Several Members mentioned the debate on extended schools that took place in the House. During that debate, the Minister of Education indicated that, on numerous occasions, she had written to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to request additional funding. Will the Minister of Finance and Personnel state whether he responded to those requests?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I believe that, on four occasions, I responded to requests that were made during the Executive-level discussions — I was going to call them negotiations — that take place between Ministers. I met the Minister of Education on many occasions, and she indicated the needs of, and her aspirations for, the Department of Education. The money that was allocated to that Department was increased as a result of each of our discussions. Indeed, the Minister can point out that her Department had one of the highest levels of increase in its budget. It seems that the Department of Education has more money than it can use and will therefore have to reduce its underspend in the next financial year or it will be one of the Departments whose future spending patterns will have to be reviewed.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has made much of his call for efficiency, for funds to be directed towards front line services, and for an end to bureaucracy in our system. I support that fully, as does my party. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that if we are to curb the underspend in the Department of Education, we must achieve all the aforementioned goals? Does he also agree that one way of doing that is to establish the education and skills authority, as proposed by the Minister of Education?

Furthermore, does the Minister agree that if that authority were introduced, there would be a more-refined, leaner, keener machine that would ensure that money is spent? That would also allow for capital-

build programmes to progress. I am aware of one of capital-build programme with an allocated budget of £21 million that has been delayed because of the bureaucratic system within which we operate. Therefore, does the Minister of Finance and Personnel agree that we must establish the education and skills authority and start making changes in education?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not intend to get too involved in the policy issue, but I remind the Member that, although there are always ways of doing things cheaply, we must do things to the highest level in order to get the best return. For instance, if there were three bodies rather than one education and skills authority, it could be argued that that would allow a closer on-the-ground scrutiny of what was going on, resulting in savings being made. However, the financial outcome of such an undertaking is the kind of issue that we can leave the economists and others to argue about.

We must recognise that every Department provides services, that those services must be provided in a way that offers the best value for money and that, often, that way is not the cheapest option. We must get the best value for money and cut out waste. It rattles me significantly that, at the end of a financial year, we find ourselves with £177 million unspent, while members of the public want improved services and have been denied the services that they desperately want and need. That is not a satisfactory situation, but it should not provoke an argument among Members, because the only issue that we should be concerned with is how to get a better return at the end of the next financial year.

Rather than worrying about how much has been spent by any one Department, we should be concerned about ensuring that the underspend is reduced and that the ratepayers and taxpayers of Northern Ireland get the best value for money.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Transport Sectoral Meeting

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Regional Development that he wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral meeting.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report about the fifth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in the transport sectoral format, which was held at the *Tí Chulainn* conference centre in Mullaghbane, County Armagh on Wednesday 21 May 2008.

The Executive were represented by Arlene Foster MLA and I, and the Irish Government were represented by Noel Dempsey TD. The Environment Minister, Arlene Foster, has approved the report, and I make it on her behalf.

11.30 am

The Council noted and welcomed the progress that had been made since the last meeting in December 2007 and the chance to meet to discuss opportunities for cross-border co-operation on strategic transport planning and road safety.

The Council discussed the positions of the A5 north-west gateway to Aghnacloy and A8 Belfast to Larne road projects, and noted the progress that has been made. I advised the Council that the A5 project is on target to achieve its first significant milestone — preliminary route corridor assessment — by late 2008. It is anticipated that the preferred route will be selected by mid-2009, and the draft statutory Orders published by late 2010. Beyond that, it is anticipated that a public inquiry will be necessary. Subject to satisfactory progress through the statutory procedures, construction could commence by 2012 and be completed by 2015. The Council also noted that several key milestones have been agreed, which can be aligned with the timing of payments from the Irish Government.

On the A8 project, I advised the Council that development work is in progress on the proposal to provide 14 km of dual carriageway between Belfast and Larne. I confirmed that that project is also on target to achieve the first significant milestone of preliminary route corridor assessment later this year. Overall delivery is anticipated on a similar timescale to the A5 project.

The Council noted and welcomed the continuing progress on the Irish Government's proposals to

replace the two cross-border bridges at Annaghroe and Knocknaginny on the Tyrone/Monaghan border. Monaghan County Council has appointed consultants to develop the design, and information evenings for the public were held in County Tyrone and County Monaghan in March. The issue of full community consultation on the proposals before the bridges open was raised by the Environment Minister and discussed. A further opportunity for public consultation will arise when the bridge design proposals are submitted for planning approval. The Council welcomed that progress and commended the excellent cross-border co-operation to date at official level.

The Council noted that Louth County Council has appointed consultants who have begun a technical study on the construction of a bridge at Narrow Water — public consultation took place recently in Louth and Warrenpoint. The technical study, environmental impact statement and preliminary design work will be completed by the end of 2008.

I reminded the Council that Roads Service has employed consultants who have undertaken a feasibility study for a Newry southern relief road, which would link the A2 Warrenpoint Road to the A1 just south of Newry. That study is also due to be completed later this year, and further reports on both projects will be presented to future NSMC transport sectoral meetings. The Council welcomed the close co-operation between officials on those projects, which it looked forward to continuing as the work on both studies progresses.

The Council reviewed the progress since the last meeting on proposals for improving the Belfast to Dublin rail service. It noted that the two railway companies have considered options for redeploying additional existing rolling stock on the Belfast to Dublin line, which could improve the frequency of the service. Both railway companies are finalising proposals in the form of a costed business case, which will be presented prior to the next NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format.

The Council welcomed the commitment from the Department for Regional Development to improve the railway line from Belfast to Derry. Ministers noted that the Department for Regional Development has agreed to undertake a study to consider the long-term social, physical and economic redevelopment of the railway throughout the north-west. Once the study is complete, its findings will be brought to a meeting of the NSMC in transport sectoral format, at which stage consideration will be given to a study of improved public-transport links with Donegal.

The Council noted that City of Derry Airport had begun work on the runway safety improvement scheme, which is supported by £14 million of funding

from the two Governments. Already, over £3 million of grants has been paid to Derry City Council. As a precondition of the grant scheme, Derry City Council is required to commit to a programme of reform for the governance of the airport. The Council noted that a commitment had been given to incorporate the airport into a company wholly owned by the local authority, followed, within an 18-month period, by the sale of the company, either outright or with Derry City Council retaining control of the airport land through a long-term lease. The Council noted that, in addition to the grant aid scheme, Derry City Council has funded the construction of a new taxiway and extended the aircraft parking apron.

The Council noted the progress that is being made in reducing road deaths by the authorities on both sides of the border. It welcomed the continuing co-operation between the authorities on advertising, publicity and road safety in border areas and noted the potential for further liaison on key road-safety issues, such as drink-driving limits, road-safety strategies and cross-border enforcement. Ministers also requested an intensification in the work on a bilateral agreement on the EU Convention on Driving Disqualifications to ensure that it is brought into effect by late 2008 or early 2009.

The Council noted that preparations are under way for a cross-border rural community transport project, which is expected to commence before the end of 2008. That project will involve community transport groups in the Fermanagh and Cavan border region. A report on the evaluation of the pilot scheme will be presented to a future NSMC meeting in transport sectoral format.

The Council discussed sustainable transport, and noted that the Department of Transport has launched a paper entitled '2020 Vision — Sustainable Travel and Transport' for public consultation. The Council also noted that a number of initiatives on sustainable transport are being progressed by the Department for Regional Development.

The Council noted that officials met to share information and experience and to explore measures to promote sustainable transport. It looked forward to receiving specific cross-border pilot projects on sustainable transport for consideration at future NSMC meetings in transport sectoral format.

The Council noted the ongoing work and studies being undertaken on rapid transit in Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway. It welcomed the ongoing discussions among officials about sharing information and co-operation on that issue.

Ministers welcomed the presentation from the Confederation of British Industry/Irish Business and Employers Confederation Joint Business Council on

the findings of the report 'Freight Transport Report for the Island of Ireland'. Ministers agreed that officials should consider the recommendations of the study that are relevant to the NSMC transport area and should report to a future meeting.

The Council agreed to meet again in October or November 2008. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain): I thank the Minister for his statement.

Is the real problem with the Belfast to Dublin rail service not related to the trackbed, rather than rolling stock? Unless work to the trackbed is conducted, there is little point in spending money on faster trains, which will not be able to run at full speed. That has been a problem with the Belfast to Derry/Londonderry line. I am sure that, like us, the Minister does not want to see such problems repeated on the Belfast to Dublin line.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Chairman is correct to say that we need to improve the service and the system of rail network across the North and across the island generally. Of course we want to improve the Belfast to Dublin railway line. That not only involves investment in the rolling stock, but investment in the track itself. There are a number of problems with the track between Belfast and Dublin that cause the service to be slower than we would like.

The general objectives are to provide more a frequent, faster and more comfortable service. In doing so, we hope to improve the usage of the service. One study that we considered recently estimated that, within 30 years, 40% of the population of Ireland will live on the eastern corridor between Belfast and Dublin. Such a statistic could be used to argue for investment in the rail network along that corridor, both locally and on the intercity network.

Iarnród Éireann and NIR (Northern Ireland Railways) are preparing a business case to present to a NSMC meeting that will outline a range of options and associated costings about how to improve across a range of areas, including frequency, speed and comfort. We have asked for that report to be delivered to us in advance of the next NSMC meeting, which will enable us to consider and discuss the options, rather than simply receive them at that meeting. I look forward to receiving that, and to the continued support for increased investment in rail from the Committee for Regional Development and the Assembly generally.

Mr Wells: Does the Minister recall that, just before he took high office, he, I and all the Assembly Members for South Down and Newry and Armagh signed a document in Newry stating that a southern

relief road was essential to relieve congestion in that city? If so, does he believe that that is still the case?

The Minister stated that negotiations are ongoing for a bridge at Narrow Water, near Warrenpoint. Will he offer an assurance that, should that project proceed, it will in no way prejudice the prospect of having a southern relief road that is required for South Down and Newry and Armagh? Such a road will relieve the chronic congestion that is currently strangling Newry.

The Minister for Regional Development: I have no difficulty in standing over what I signed up to. I believe that there is an urgent need for a connection between the port of Warrenpoint and the M1 motorway between Belfast and Dublin. Such a connection is essential for the port and its continued expansion, and for the southern part of Newry into South Down to relieve traffic congestion.

Despite what the Member might like, I will not fall into the trap of saying that those projects are in competition with each other. Even before I assumed what he referred to as “high office”, I always avoided the notion that the Narrow Water bridge project was competing with the southern relief road project.

Louth County Council is currently conducting a study in relation to the Narrow Water bridge project, and the Roads Service is conducting one in relation to the southern relief road. Officials from both of those projects are sharing information with one another, and both studies are expected to be completed by the end of this year. They will then be put before the next NSMC meeting, and we will see where that takes us. I am committed to trying to reduce the traffic congestion on the southern side of Newry. I am also committed to improving the access to Warrenpoint port because that is an essential economic driver for that region. I have also expressed my support for the idea of a bridge linking the communities in County Louth and County Down. We will consider what the two studies produce, and we will see where that takes us.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline what progress has been made in relation to sustainable transport on an all-island basis? Will he also outline what initiatives are being progressed by the Department regarding sustainable transport?

With your indulgence, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I also ask the Minister whether the issue of public transport using biofuels was discussed at the NSMC meeting.

The Minister for Regional Development: I will answer the Member’s final question first — it was not. However, that is not to say that that issue could not feature on the agenda of a future NSMC meeting.

Sustainable transport is something that is very important to us. I strongly feel that there is an all-Ireland dimension to travel, and I support the need to deepen cross-border co-operation to address sustainability issues and meet the challenges that lie ahead.

At a time when the amount of traffic on roads continues to increase, we need to work together and contribute to CO2 reductions by seeking opportunities to address congestion and encourage more environmentally friendly travel. Officials, North and South, have met to share information and experience, and to explore measures to promote sustainable transport. I am keen that behavioural-change projects that are already in place in the North — such as the promotion of walking, cycling, public transport, car sharing and park-and-ride facilities — could assist the South in the development of its sustainable travel and transport action plan.

The meeting noted plans to jointly undertake pilot demonstration projects and studies that will lead to more sustainable travel on both sides of the border. At a future meeting, we look forward to hearing the results of how those projects could be expanded further for the mutual benefit of both North and South.

Mr P J Bradley: I welcome the Minister’s statement this morning. I also welcome the report on the ongoing efforts to improve the Dublin to Belfast rail link. Both Governments must continue the work to upgrade that very important track, because, until we receive a fully recognised Euro rail link, that is a target that both Governments should aim for.

I imagine that the Minister expects me to raise a question about Narrow Water, so I will not disappoint him. I welcome the fact that the project was profiled at the meeting on 21 May 2008. The report gives me encouragement, and I welcome the response that the Minister gave to Mr Wells.

At the last meeting that I had with officials in the Republic, I was given nine indicative dates. As the Minister mentioned, two of those have already passed. However, the dates that I was given included 28 February 2010, which is the date for the tendering process; and August 2011, which is the date for the completion of the work. Will the Minister assure me — and others who will benefit greatly from the provision of the bridge — that he will work to achieve those stages by those dates, or even advance them if possible?

The Minister for Regional Development: Due to his keen interest in that project, the Member will be aware that the study was undertaken by Louth County Council; it was not done by the Department for Regional Development. The dates that he mentioned were shared with him by those who conducted the study on behalf of Louth County Council.

I have read further press announcements in relation to that project. I often think that Narrow Water bridge would have been built a long time ago if it were built on press releases. Nonetheless, we are where we are with that project. In one of the Member's press releases, I also note that he said that DRD was not doing enough to assist that project. DRD has not been asked to do anything by the people conducting the study. I asked Roads Service officials to share information with the people conducting the study on behalf of Louth County Council.

My answer remains the same as it was to Mr Wells; let the studies be completed and then we will see what propositions are put to us. We will certainly respond as positively as we possibly can.

Mr Neeson: I am delighted that the issue of the A8 Larne to Belfast road was discussed at the meeting, and the fact that public consultations are ongoing currently. Will the Minister indicate what the estimated timescale is for the completion of that project?

11.45 am

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in my statement, the first milestone will be to identify the route corridor, which will happen shortly. As the Member knows, that will go out for consultation, and we will then have to identify the preferred route option. Unfortunately, those processes take time, because a proper assessment of, and consultation on, all the routes is required. Whatever route is suggested, as with any significant road project, a public inquiry will be inevitable, because people will object to some aspect, be it their access to the road or the impact that that will have on people's property or land; that will take time. However, the process is expected to follow the same timescale as the A5 Derry to Aghnacloy route, with commencement by 2012 and completion by 2015.

Mr Moutray: Given that journey times on the Belfast to Dublin rail link are often more than two and a half hours and, indeed, in the past, have taken as long as five hours, what analysis has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of the Minister's efforts to improve the efficiency of the service?

The Minister for Regional Development: We strive constantly to improve efficiency. However, bad experiences are heard more often than good, normal, run-of-the-mill experiences. Several parts of the line have been identified that slow down the journey, one of which is between Lurgan and Lisburn. Access into Connolly station on the Dublin side is an issue because of congestion with the local intercity service. Several issues have been identified.

At the previous NSMC meeting, we had a presentation from Iarnród Éireann and Northern Ireland Railways. We had hoped that the business case that we had requested would be presented at the

Mullaghbawn meeting, but that did not happen because it required more work. However, we have asked for the business case to be presented to us in advance of the next NSMC meeting so that some analysis can be conducted, and we can respond at that meeting. We want to improve the service — frequency, speed and comfort — and thereby increase the number of passengers who use the service. It is hoped that the business case will identify a range of options and the attendant costings, and we will then have to find the resources. However, the business case will identify what must be done, and at what level, to improve the service. The improvement of the service is the constant goal of the Department and NIR.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the fact that there will be a report on the community-based rural transport pilot scheme in the Fermanagh/Cavan area, have there been any discussions to extend that scheme, if successful, into other border areas?

The Minister for Regional Development: The fact that community-based rural transport is considered a pilot scheme suggests that we anticipate and hope that it will be successful.

A range of issues has been identified about difficulties in the provision of cross-border rural transport. The pilot scheme is focusing on identifying the potential demands and barriers, which include logistic, legislative and procedural issues, for the provision of cross-border rural transport. We hope that the operation of the scheme between Fermanagh and Cavan will identify the obstacles.

We are reasonably sure of some of the obstacles, but pilot schemes are effective in examining how schemes work and what inhibits their full and proper working. We intend to address whatever difficulties are thrown up as a result of the pilot scheme and to use that experience to introduce other schemes that will benefit from learning about the obstacles that were faced and overcome in the pilot scheme. The intention is to use that experience to roll out schemes in other cross-border areas.

Mr G Robinson: In his statement, the Minister referred to the bridges on the Tyrone/Monaghan border. Although they are not in my constituency, will the Minister assure the Assembly that full public consultation will be undertaken at every stage of the process, particularly on the design of the bridges at Annaghroe and Knocknaginney?

The Minister for Regional Development: Yes, the bridges were discussed at the meeting, and the Minister of the Environment raised the specific concerns of the local community on the re-opening of the roads. Undoubtedly, when roads have been closed for a lengthy period, their re-opening will create some

disturbance in that area. Minister Foster asked Minister Dempsey to talk to Monaghan County Council to ensure that whatever further consultation the communities in that border area deem necessary will be fully undertaken.

A quantity of information has been distributed, but some people felt that they did not have a full opportunity to examine, and express their views on, the proposals. However, Minister Dempsey assured us that Monaghan County Council will ensure full consultation with local people at each stage of the process and, if people want additional information, the council will accommodate them.

Mr McCallister: This morning, I am reassured that, should the projects for a bridge at Narrow Water and a southern relief road end up competing on budgetary terms, at least the Minister has signed up to the latter and has pledged to honour that commitment.

The Minister accepts that there has been widespread local opposition, on both sides of the border, to the bridges linking Tyrone and Monaghan. Will he do everything in his power to address the issues that have been raised on each side of the border? Will he agree to review whether the project should even proceed?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Southern Government would fund the project for a bridge at Narrow Water, and it would be up to the Assembly to fund the southern relief road project, if it were to go ahead. The only chance of the projects competing for a budgetary allocation would be in a united Ireland, in which everyone would share the same Budget. I look forward to the day when such projects compete for funding from the same pool of money.

The bridges were discussed at the meeting, and it was accepted that the re-opening of roads after a lengthy closure would cause some disruption and alter the pattern of people's lives that has been established over the past 30 years, or for however long the bridges have been closed. The Minister of the Environment raised the issue, and it was acknowledged that people — certainly on the Northern side — want more consultation. They want to examine the proposals more fully and be given an opportunity to comment on them. The Southern representatives undertook to speak to Monaghan County Council about facilitating that.

Mr P Ramsey: I, too, welcome the Minister's statement, particularly on road safety. Members are constantly concerned about the continued carnage on the roads, such as occurred in Donegal, only last weekend. A move to a metric system would be of particular benefit to tourists travelling in the border regions. Does the Minister foresee a time of greater harmonisation of road signage?

The Minister has committed to improving the Derry to Belfast railway line. An independent study by the

Northern Corridor Railways Group clearly demonstrates that the sustainability of the line is crucial to the long-term economic, social and environmental stability of the area. When will the Minister introduce definitive proposals on the future of the line from Derry to Belfast?

The Minister referred to a study on a rail link in the north-west. Is that time-bound? Will he use the proposals by the Northern Corridor Railways Group, in conjunction with the Irish Government's study on Donegal, as a template for going forward?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Northern Corridors Railways Group produced its study. It then asked my Department to initiate a study into the social and economic benefits of developing the railway line between Belfast and Derry, and links to the north-west in general. We have agreed to do that, and we will undertake that study as soon as is possible. The Member will be aware that significant investment is already being made between Coleraine and Derry. More work is about to begin, and work has been proposed for the coming years. I identified, and bid for, a £64 million improvement to the track between Coleraine and Derry. That all augurs well for the future of that line.

The study will undoubtedly help, because, as was the case with the Belfast to Dublin line, and our railways in general, we must increasingly make stronger arguments for investment in rail infrastructure, as the population, congestion and pressure on our roads grows. We must return to a system of investing more in our railways. I look forward to the completion of the study to which we have committed. We have also committed to bringing that study to the NSMC, and to using it to kick-start and influence a study into public transport in Donegal that examines how both systems might link up. We are committed to doing that at future NSMC meetings.

The Member asked about road signage. An examination of each and every area in which road safety can be improved will take place. The objective is to try to reduce the number of deaths on our roads. Particular problems exist in border areas, but whether accidents occur because of road signs or because of driver behaviour, which, unfortunately, most deaths on the road are as a result of, is another matter.

The Minister of the Environment takes lead responsibility for developing the road safety policy. My Department will contribute to that policy, and we will happily consider improved signage if it were identified as something that would help.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that there has been substantial progress on North to South road infrastructure, in particular the M1

from Dublin to Belfast and the M2 from Belfast to Derry?

Given its congestion and traffic problems, did any discussion take place on the third main arterial route, which, in part, connects Castleblayney, Keady and Armagh? Given that 70% of road fatalities happen on rural roads, and in the border counties, will the Minister update us on any relevant new measures to reduce that statistic? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Regional Development: Other Members may dispute whether the road through Keady is the third main route. Quite a few people have suggested that the Sligo to Belfast route — the N4 — is one of the main routes, North and South.

To answer the Member's question directly, the matter was not discussed. However, roads projects that cross the border are issues that feature on NSMC agendas. If a particular issue arises, or a case is made for improving that road, I am sure that it will appear on our agenda at some stage.

A range of road safety issues was discussed, one of which concerned mutual recognition. There was a sense that the urgency in dealing with mutual recognition of disqualifications, and in sharing information across the border, should be stepped up. Of course, a range of measures to deal with road safety is already in place. At the previous NSMC meeting, we saw a presentation of the Southern Government's road safety policy. I know that the Minister of the Environment is intending to review the road safety policy here, and to make known her findings in 2010. That, of course, does not prevent the introduction of interim road safety measures, such as advertising, road improvements, education measures, detection, disqualification, and harsher penalties for people who are caught speeding or driving irresponsibly.

All those measures are being undertaken as it is, but a review of the road safety strategy will also take place. A strategy is currently being introduced in the South. That will provide opportunities, particularly in border areas, where it is recognised that there is a particular problem. Statistics show that there is disproportionate number of accidents and deaths compared with some of the other counties across the island.

Sharing information on both strategies will help Ministers to devise further strategies on top of those that already work in order to reduce the carnage further. Bearing in mind that serious accidents have occurred during the past few weeks, with bank holidays in the North and South — which, tragically, always seems to be the case — generally speaking, statistics for the time of year are down, both North and South, compared with previous years. We hope that that remains the case and that those figures can be driven down further.

12.00 noon

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to improvements that have been made to the southern relief road. As regards tourist traffic, 100,000 extra tourists have come to Northern Ireland in the past year, and it is quite clear that a large number of them are from the Republic of Ireland. Are steps being taken, not only to improve the southern relief road at Warrenpoint, but to provide a bypass or similar road improvements at Ballynahinch and, indeed, at Downpatrick, which will, ultimately, open the door towards Strangford? That is my idea. I am sure that the Minister would be disappointed if I were not to mention Strangford at some stage.

My other question relates to the bilateral agreement on driving disqualifications. Has any progress been made between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on the issue of disqualified drivers? Many in the Chamber believe that it is important that, when someone is disqualified from driving in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, the same rule applies in the other jurisdiction. I want confirmation on whether progress is ongoing on that issue.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Ballynahinch bypass is identified in Roads Service's forward planning schedule. I am not sure about a bypass for Downpatrick. I met some of Downpatrick's councillors to discuss the traffic through the town and improvements that could be made, and we identified some options by which the flow of traffic through Downpatrick could be assisted.

Of course, increased tourism brings increased traffic. On one hand, increased tourism is a welcome development. However, it brings associated problems. I am sure that many tourists who come to the North will want to visit Strangford Lough and to see the beauty of that area. So, a bypass for Ballynahinch has been identified. The Department will continue to work to improve road networks away from major, key roads, on which there is already a high degree of focus.

As regards the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications, there was, as I have said, a sense during the discussion that the matter is largely between the Minister of the Environment and Minister Dempsey. Certainly, there was a sense that both Ministers wanted some urgency to be injected into discussion on the issue and that they felt that progress has not been made as quickly as, perhaps, it could be. The matter has been the subject of constraints that are associated with the normal processes of policy development and implementation, including public consultation in both jurisdictions. I understand that several technical and legal difficulties have also been encountered. Mutual recognition of penalty points has also proven to be a complex and difficult issue. It is

expected to be some time yet before all the obstacles to implementation can be overcome.

A trilateral meeting on mutual recognition between the Environment Minister and her counterparts in London and Dublin is scheduled to take place in Belfast in June. Certainly, the sense that I got from the meeting was that both Minister Foster and Minister Dempsey wanted some urgency to be injected into the issue. Technical and legal difficulties always occur with cross-border issues. However, my sense of the discussion is that those difficulties are not insurmountable. Ministers want to move ahead and close that loophole as early as possible. A trilateral discussion is scheduled to take place in Belfast later in the month to try to make progress on the issue. London's input is a key element in that discussion.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and the answers that he has already given. I note that the meeting took place in Tí Chulainn. I hope that the Minister showed a good example to the Environment Minister by, at least, cycling, if not walking, to Tí Chulainn on that particular day.

Mrs Foster: Does the Member suggest that I should have walked to Tí Chulainn from Fermanagh?
[Laughter.]

Mr McCartney: No, I meant that the Minister for Regional Development should have shown the Environment Minister such a good example.

I welcome the study that has been carried out on the redevelopment of railways in the north-west. What discussion on rapid transit has the Minister had with his counterpart in the South? What discussions have taken place between officials in both Departments?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, did you cycle?

The Minister for Regional Development: I have to confess, a LeasCheann Comhairle, that I did not. Anyone who knows Sturgan Brae, which comes out of Camlough, heading towards Crossmaglen, will understand that it would require more than my legs to get up it on a bicycle.

I take on board the Member's point about sustainable transport. Dublin has experienced the Luas rapid transit system, and several other cities across the South, including Waterford, Limerick and Galway, are considering rapid transit propositions. We were able to share with, and hand over to, Minister Dempsey the outcome of the feasibility study that was carried out on Belfast. We provided the highlights of that study, which was welcome to his Department, given that those other cities are being considered.

On 15 May 2008, my officials made a presentation on the findings and recommendations of our feasibility report to colleagues in Dublin, and they agreed to continue the discussions as the project progresses. I understand that the Southern Government are

considering the feasibility of bus-based rapid transport systems for Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh ráiteas an Aire, agus gabhaim buíochas leis as. Is maith liom go raibh an cruinniú ar siúl i dTí Chulainn, nó tá mé féin ar dhuine dá bhunaitheoirí. Is maith go bhfuil an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas ag baint úsáide as áiseanna pobail. Ba mhaith liom fosta tagairt áirithe a dhéanamh don bhóthar faoisimh ó dheas ó Iúr Cinn Trá, nó beidh ról tábhachtach ag an bhóthar sin ag fuascailt fadhbanna tráchta an Iúir.

I thank the Minister for his statement, and I welcome it. I welcome the fact that the meeting was held in Tí Chulainn, as I am one of the founders of that centre. I am glad that the NSMC is making use of community facilities.

The southern relief road in Newry will have an important role in solving the traffic chaos in Newry. The Minister said that further reports on the feasibility of the southern relief road will be presented to the NSMC later this year. Will he ensure that the study, in addition to examining the benefit to Newry city and south Down, will consider the potential benefit to both jurisdictions in that the road will facilitate better links between Warrenpoint port and Dublin port? Will he ensure that the study considers the fact that Warrenpoint handles a considerable volume of port traffic that Dublin port cannot presently handle? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Regional Development: I was delighted to host the meeting in Tí Chulainn, and it is beneficial that, where possible, Government business, particularly North/South meetings, makes use of community facilities, which rely on that business more than some of the other venues that have been used. It is a good venue, and all who came to it got a real sense of the beauty of the south Armagh area and were made welcome, which was also beneficial.

I notice that the Member's namesake and colleague Mr P J Bradley has left the Chamber. It is similar to a Punch-and-Judy act; one Member supports the southern relief road and the other tries to harangue me over the southern relief road and supports the construction of a bridge at Narrow Water. Nonetheless, all politics is local, and even parties are able to divide along local lines on such projects.

The idea of a southern relief road is important not only for the port of Warrenpoint and for the southern side of Newry but for the connection onto the A1/M1 north, which will make a connection towards Dublin and the other ports. Warrenpoint has a key role, and we have one eye on the issues of port traffic generally on the eastern side of the island.

Dublin has capacity issues, and there are, perhaps, development plans for the ports at Greenore and Braemore. The ports at Warrenpoint, Belfast and Larne

are all well placed to try to enhance, and share, business with other ports. From my attendance at a couple of ports conferences, I have noticed an increase in co-operation among the ports across the island, and I am encouraged by that co-operation.

Warrenpoint port is important strategically to the region that the Member and I represent and to the eastern seaboard generally, and I am fully aware that a link road between the Warrenpoint-to-Newry dual carriageway and the main Belfast-to-Dublin road would be hugely important to the port and its ability to do business both North and South.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. *[Interruption.]* Last week, members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure were presented with a beautiful orange badge on which the word “Tá” was written. I understand that tá means “yes”, and, therefore, I am doing my bit to promote the Irish language.

I welcome the Minister’s detailed report, but I am disappointed that, as yet, there has been no mention of the anomaly between North and South on concessionary fares for people aged 60 and over. As usual, the North led the way for people aged 60 and over. Given that we have friends and relatives over the border, will the Minister pursue equality for everyone on the island, so that everyone aged 60 and over — rather than over 66, as it is across the border — can avail themselves of free public transport as soon as possible?

The Minister for Regional Development: I thank the Member for his commentary and use of Irish. He raised several issues. First, there was an anomaly anyway — even when the concessionary fares applied to people aged 65 and over — because the South’s concessionary fares applied to people aged 66 and over. Therefore, there was already a one-year anomaly. Given our intention to reduce the concessionary-fare age limit to 60 in the autumn, an even greater gap will be created between here and the South.

I must point out that the policy in the South is the responsibility of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and not the Department of Transport. Therefore, the North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral meeting was not the occasion on which to discuss such a matter. Obviously, although reducing the age for eligibility to the concessionary-fares scheme from 66 to 60 would have financial implications for the Government in Dublin, I, and people aged 60 and over throughout the island, would welcome such a policy. However, in the first instance, it is a matter for the Irish Government. Nevertheless, I am content to raise the matter in order to achieve some degree of harmonisation. As I said, there are budgetary implications for the South, and, in the final analysis, it will be a matter for them to decide.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Progress Report on the Independent Review into the Outbreak of Clostridium Difficile at Antrim Area Hospital

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety that he wishes to give a progress report on the independent review into the outbreak of clostridium difficile at Antrim Area Hospital.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): I shall update the Assembly on the independent review’s progress on the outbreak of clostridium difficile in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

During the debate on 4 March 2008, I said that the situation required an urgent response and immediate action. My first priority was to ensure that the outbreak was contained and that other health and social care trusts were taking all possible steps to minimise the risk of clostridium difficile outbreaks in their hospitals. I announced that I had asked the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) not just to carry out an independent review into the circumstances of the outbreak in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust but to examine the measures being taken by all trusts to reduce healthcare-associated infections.

I set terms of reference to ensure that the review would be rigorous and would have all the powers and expertise necessary to investigate the outbreak thoroughly and examine all five trusts’ management of, and clinical response to, clostridium difficile infections. It was important for the review to be conducted quickly, and I asked the independent review team to report to me on its findings by the end of May.

I have now received the review team’s interim report. The report is, of necessity, interim because the outbreak has not been declared over. From the outset, I have made it clear that the review will be conducted in such a way as not to hamper staff’s efforts to contain the outbreak.

12.15 am

Over the past 12 weeks, the RQIA team has made substantial progress on its independent review. On 30 May, members of the review team reported to me in person, and I received the team’s written report on 1 June. To date, the team has completed its investigation into the other four trusts’ actions to reduce clostridium difficile rates. The team has also gathered substantial documentary evidence from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, and it carried out a validation visit on 30 May. Further important work must be carried out

before the RQIA can deliver its final report, and I will return to that matter.

I met members of the review team on 30 May, and they commented on the tremendous dedication of all staff in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and their efforts to contain the outbreak. They acknowledge the immense pressure that staff have been under. I witnessed that dedication when I visited the trust, and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff. They have worked tirelessly, under extremely demanding conditions, to bring the outbreak to an end. Members should also be reassured to hear that the management of the outbreak is being taken very seriously by everyone in the trust, from the chairperson and the chief executive right down to the cleaners who work on the wards. People at all levels are working hard to ensure that infection control is given the highest priority. The RQIA team has also commented that the chief executive and the medical director of the trust — indeed all the staff — have been very open.

I am pleased to report that there is evidence of progress in containing the outbreak. The month of May saw the lowest number of cases of any month this year, and the severity of the illness has eased. It is still too early to say that the outbreak is over; that improvement must be sustained. To that end, a team is being set up to ensure that policies, procedures and practices for healthcare-associated infections are fully embedded across the trust area. We will continue to monitor the position until we are sure that the measures being taken by the trust are really working and that the outbreak is over.

The independent review team's report is wide-ranging and important. It makes 36 recommendations that cover four key areas: governance; infection control; laboratories; and pharmacy. Overall, the team has reported that all health and social care trusts have made good progress towards the implementation of effective control measures to reduce the risk of *clostridium difficile* infections.

The team has given the reassurance that all five health and social care trusts recognise the need to prioritise actions to minimise healthcare-associated infections in general and *clostridium difficile* in particular. It has further reassured that all the trusts are working to achieve the target that I set last year of an overall reduction of 20% in the number of *clostridium difficile* cases in hospital patients aged 65 and over by March 2009, and to introduce a programme of action to ensure that plans and procedures are in place, in line with recommended guidance, to reduce the rate of *clostridium difficile*. In addition, the team points to the skilled and committed staff who are working in infection-control teams in laboratories and pharmacies. The team also highlighted many examples of creative local initiatives to prevent and control infection, and

good working relationships between all those involved in infection-control measures across the trusts and boards.

As one would expect, there are challenges for the trusts. In particular, the RQIA recognises that the five trusts were established recently, and, as is normal when dealing with the merging of any complex organisation, they are busy managing the detail of the mergers, including the harmonisation of policies, procedures and practices. The review team identified shortfalls in staffing levels in key professional groups, such as microbiologists, antibiotic pharmacists and infection-control nurses. The team also commented on a wide variation in the quality and condition of hospital facilities, which reflects the age of some of the buildings. In addition, it recommended improvements in the IT systems that support infection prevention and control, especially for surveillance and antimicrobial resistance. The review team comprises leading experts in the fields of *clostridium difficile* and healthcare-associated infections.

I will now consider the report in more depth, and will take seriously its recommendations and findings. Some issues will need to be addressed more urgently than others, and my Department, and health and social care organisations, will give those priority.

We have not been standing still while awaiting the report. The Department has worked with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust at every step in order to support its efforts. We agreed recently that there would be value in bringing in more external expertise. To that end, we have enlisted the support of the National Health Service's cleaner hospitals team. The team visited the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on 7 May 2008 and set about identifying areas for improvement, and making recommendations to help to bring the situation under control.

The trust has established an action plan in order to address the issues that have been raised, and the cleaner hospitals team will return to the trust on 4 June 2008 to see how well the plan is working. A member of the team will join my Department's service delivery unit for two days a week for the next few months. Their role will be further to assist the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to end the outbreak, and to work with other trusts to improve infection prevention and control.

We will never be able to eradicate healthcare-associated infections. However, there must be sufficient controls and systems to minimise the risk to patients. That is why I announced in January an extensive range of measures to tackle the so-called hospital superbugs. An additional £9 million will be invested over the next three years to improve patient safety and to reduce the spread of infections such as MRSA and *clostridium difficile*.

New initiatives to tackle healthcare-associated infections include single rooms for new hospitals in order to improve hygiene and privacy; a rolling programme, which is under way, of unannounced hygiene inspections of all hospitals; restrictions on hospital visits, which I announced this morning; a dress code for healthcare staff, which is being introduced; a regional hand-hygiene campaign to encourage healthcare staff and visitors to wash their hands; MRSA screening for high-risk patients; additional funding to set up rapid-response cleaning teams at all hospitals; and funding for a pharmacist in each trust area to work with clinical staff to promote safer prescribing of antibiotics.

There are policies already in place to tackle healthcare-associated infections including the Changing the Culture action plan and the ward sister's charter, which aim to reduce infections and to give nurses the power to create a cleanliness culture in their wards. My Department is also convening a committee to tackle the problem of antimicrobial resistance.

In addition, last September, I announced new targets to reduce MRSA by 10% and clostridium difficile by 20%. New leaflets for the public on hand hygiene have been distributed to hospitals. Enhanced staff training on infection reduction is ongoing, and extra funding was provided for the appointment of five infection-control nurses for trusts. Those measures are intended to ensure that all staff have the skills, training and equipment that they need to reduce the spread of healthcare-associated infections. More importantly, they should also help to restore public confidence in the health and social care service.

I said that this is an interim report, because the review team cannot have full access to the affected wards until we are sure that the outbreak is over. I have, therefore, given the review team an extension for delivering its final report. That extension does not mean that anyone is less committed to ending the outbreak or to improving infection control across Northern Ireland — quite the opposite. We are determined to get to the root causes of the outbreak. I have asked the review team to produce its final report as soon as possible after the outbreak is over, and it is expected to deliver the report by the end of July.

The review team is determined that the best way to discover the cause of the outbreak is by a root-cause analysis, which is a retrospective inquiry to identify how and why an incident happened. The purpose of that approach is not to apportion blame but to identify preventable factors and the lessons that must be learned. Once the team has completed that review, it will review the Changing the Culture action plan, and it is aiming to complete that job by the end of October.

I acknowledge the work of the review team and the fact that it has delivered such a substantial and important report in a short space of time.

During discussions on the clostridium difficile outbreak at the end of last year, there were calls for a public inquiry. At that time, I said that I was minded to hold such an inquiry. However, my first priority was to ensure that the outbreak was contained and that other health trusts were taking every possible step to prevent clostridium difficile outbreaks from occurring in hospitals. I did not take that step lightly, nor did I take it without the expert advice of the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Michael McBride.

The situation required an urgent response and immediate action, and I believed that a public inquiry could not deliver that. In fact, a public inquiry at that time would have served only to deflect staff from their vital work in trying to reduce and control infections, such as clostridium difficile and MRSA. That would have put patients at risk, and I cannot and will not do that. Furthermore, a public inquiry could not have delivered so much in such a compressed period.

As I have said before, it is not possible to eliminate healthcare-associated infections completely, but we can and must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to them. That means that no case of infection is regarded as acceptable, and the response to each new case is immediate and urgent.

Healthcare-associated infections cause pain and distress to patients, and the outbreak has led to a loss of public confidence in our health and social care service. It is clear from the RQIA's interim report that healthcare staff at all levels take the matter very seriously and are working extremely hard, often under severe pressure, to reduce the spread of such infections.

My Department is considering the interim report carefully, and its recommendations, in particular, which require a region-wide response. Infection, prevention and control are everyone's business, and the inquiry shows the value of co-operation in making healthcare safer and restoring people's confidence in their healthcare system.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mrs O'Neill):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish that I could welcome the Minister's statement, but, unfortunately, it is lacking in detail and substance. At the heart of this issue is the fact that more than 40 people have died from hospital-acquired infections. Families of the deceased and others who have contracted hospital-acquired infections want and deserve answers.

People have cancelled their surgeries and hospital visits because of fears of acquiring such infections, yet the Minister is discussing an incomplete inquiry.

According to the Minister, the report makes 36 recommendations to improve current standards and practices in hospitals. However, neither I, as Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee, nor any other Member have received a copy of that report. When will we receive a copy of it, and when will the 36 recommendations be implemented?

If we want to restore public confidence in the Health Service, we must see action, and we must see those recommendations implemented. It has been six months since the first outbreak was discussed in the House, and we still do not have answers for people. When will those people get answers?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I explained to the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee this morning, I have only just received the report. I will share the report with all Members later today, and Mrs O'Neill will be able to examine it more closely then.

There are key messages in that report, which we are considering. One of the key messages concerns the state of our hospital buildings. It is very difficult to keep old buildings up to the levels of cleanliness of new ones. There is a shortage of pharmacists who are skilled in the application of specific types of antibiotics to deal with particular infections. Furthermore, there is a shortage of microbiologists and a need for infection-control nurses. With the benefit of hindsight, those people should have been in place. However, this is a recent phenomenon, and we are working and moving quickly to try to deal with it.

I have already put some measures in place, such as the Changing the Culture action plan. I also announced further measures, to which I referred in my speech, including restrictions on hospital visiting, a dress code for staff, a regional hand-hygiene campaign and MRSA screening for high-risk patients, among other measures.

Those measures are working effectively, as is the raft of other measures, such as single rooms and newbuilds. As I reported to the House previously, environmental cleanliness audits and unannounced inspections are now in place. After consideration, the review team did not disagree with the introduction of those measures. However, as its role requires, the team has identified gaps.

Mrs O'Neill is correct; we must increase public confidence, which has been knocked since the incidences of healthcare-associated infections. We understand — or at least accept — that we can never eliminate those infections; we can, however, restrict them to the absolute minimum level.

12.30 pm

Mr Easton: Will the Minister outline how many new cases of *clostridium difficile* were identified at

Antrim Area Hospital last month? Is sufficient funding in place to implement the 36 recommendations to reduce *clostridium difficile* levels? What measures are in place to screen hospital staff who might carry the infection?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Expert advice suggests that screening for *clostridium difficile* is not helpful. For example, a large proportion of over 65s — approximately 30% — carry *clostridium difficile*. When symptoms emerge, we must react, instigate isolation and control the infection. At Antrim Area Hospital, the number of deaths has decreased from February's peak of 14, to three in March, two in April and two in May.

If we can restrict deaths to that level, the outbreak can be declared over. However, we must reach a point at which no new cases are emerging. The number of new cases has decreased from 20 in January 2008 to 10 in February, 17 in March, 18 in April and three in May. Therefore, the numbers are tailing off, but it takes time to reach the point at which we can declare the outbreak over. The problem is that the review team cannot complete its inquiry until the outbreak is over. We cannot remove staff from isolation wards to deal with the inquiry team's queries until we are confident that the outbreak is over — otherwise lives will be at risk.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: On behalf of my constituents, I congratulate the Minister on introducing initiatives to contain and eliminate the *clostridium difficile* outbreak. I pay tribute to the staff — particularly in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust — who have worked hard to combat *clostridium difficile*. During my numerous visits, I witnessed the work conducted by the chief executive of that trust, Norma Evans, and her team.

Does the Minister agree that staff must not be deflected from their duties? Will he commit to offer the future support that is necessary to eliminate the problem of *clostridium difficile*?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I assure Rev Coulter that I will leave no stone unturned in my quest to tackle that problem. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has worked hard and adopted a dedicated approach. I have visited the isolation ward and talked to staff; one could not fail to be impressed with their serious approach to their work.

There is a shortage of the skilled infection-control nurses, antibiotic pharmacists and microbiologists that are required. I will consider a human resources strategy to determine how to deal with that situation. The more serious consequences in the Northern Trust area, particularly in Antrim Area Hospital, as the Member is aware, have been caused by the new and virulent *clostridium difficile* 027 strain.

Mrs Hanna: I welcome the Minister's update. I have met the review team, and I appreciate the time that it spent in informing me of its work. Although progress has been made, and we are aware that the lowest number of deaths as a result of the infection was recorded in May, we are still concerned that the infection is ongoing.

The Minister mentioned that the RQIA process highlighted the staffing shortfall. Is that being addressed? Are infection reductions and ward inspections being recorded in order to ensure that the maintenance of high standards is continued?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Several unannounced inspections have taken place already. They have been recorded, and reports have been issued. The consequences of and responses to those reports will also be issued. Unannounced inspections have taken place at Craigavon Area Hospital, Belfast City Hospital, Downe Hospital and Altnagelvin Area Hospital. That work will continue.

We must address the staffing situation, and I am putting resources in place as necessary. For example, there will be a pharmacist in each trust area to work on this particular area. Microbiologists also play a key role. The microbiologist in Antrim Area Hospital impressed me strongly when she spoke to me about the need for a microbiological approach to the identification of both the infection and the correct antibiotic to deal with it. We must move away from the broad-spectrum antibiotics that are the root cause of so many problems.

When infection breaks out, we must control it. In order to do so, we must have skilled infection-control nurses, but we must also change the infection-control culture, from the cleaners through to the chief executives and the chairmen. We must have the right culture at the root of everything that we do.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his report. However, it will not be of much comfort to people who, over the past while, have lost loved ones as a result of this outbreak. The report contains 36 recommendations, and another Member asked whether the Minister would have the funding to put those recommendations into practice as quickly as possible.

In the report, the review team identified the shortfall in staffing levels. I am concerned about the Department's policy to achieve 3% efficiency savings over the next three years under the RPA. That will commit the Department to further staff reductions. If the Minister goes down that road, will that complicate matters further and make it more difficult to overcome *clostridium difficile*?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have no choice but to go down the road of the 3% efficiency savings. Over and over

again, Members have reinforced to me the need for efficiency. I heard a discussion this morning between the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on that issue. It is important to point out, for example, that the Department's underspend last year rose above 1% precisely because of its efficiency.

The Department overachieved in savings on the drugs budget to the tune of £20 million more than was anticipated. That skewed our figures over that 1% underspend, so instead of being the best-performing Department as usual, it was the second-best. That information is contained in a letter to Mrs Robinson, which I will circulate to all Members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; I know that they will be interested in that.

Although we have been successful in achieving efficiencies, not all efficiencies have to come at the expense of staff.

We anticipate achieving reasonable efficiencies in our drug budget, because it runs to about £400 million a year through chemists' shops and pharmacies.

As for staffing, we need staff with the right skills, and there are gaps that we must fill. The phenomenon of healthcare-associated infections appeared suddenly. Although *clostridium difficile* and MRSA have always existed, the sudden rise in their incidence has taken the system by surprise in recent years. We must get on top of that, because patient confidence is everything. Anything that detracts from patients' confidence in the Health Service is very damaging to the healthcare of the entire population. We have a first-class Health Service, manned by first-class staff, and I will make every effort to ensure that systems are put in place where they are needed.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I commend him on the work that has been done to try to eradicate *clostridium difficile*. Like the Deputy Chairperson of the Health Committee, I am disappointed that the Committee has not seen the 36 recommendations, and I look forward to seeing them.

At the time of the *clostridium difficile* outbreak, concern was expressed that nursing staff had no proper changing facilities, which resulted in their travelling to and from work in their uniforms. What has the Department done to address that matter? Is the Minister confident that his Department's new initiatives to reduce the spread of infection are adequate, not only to hold infection at bay, but to eradicate it?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new initiatives must be proven. All new initiatives are kept under constant review. For example, I have asked Alice Casey and her independent review team to review the Department's 'Changing the

Culture' action plan straight after completing their current review of the outbreak in the Northern Trust. It is important that we keep on top of the issue and keep the initiatives up to date.

With regard to uniforms, infection control requires protective equipment and clothing. That is essential for protecting the health of staff. I have introduced a dress code for all staff, which will work its way through the system as the trusts implement it. It is patchy at the moment, but we will continue to develop a dress-code policy to ensure that staff are recognisable to people attending hospital and that they are not carrying infection by constantly wearing everyday clothes.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I too welcome the update from the Minister. The RQIA review is mainly an in-house review. Although it can be justified as an urgent response to the outbreak, we should acknowledge the need to address public concerns. I wish to preface my question by commending the dedication and professionalism of healthcare staff and the support and guidance that they have been given by the RQIA.

However, a review such as that by the RQIA does not alleviate public alarm at the perception of falling hygiene standards. Indeed, the RQIA process might even increase the frustration of many who feel that the matter should have been dealt with more openly and transparently.

Six months on, will the Minister acknowledge the high level of public concern, and recognise the need for a public inquiry into what caused the initial outbreak, and why it was so difficult to access accurate, up-to-date information on *clostridium difficile*-related deaths?

12.45 pm

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The review team is an independent body that was recruited in England. Alice Casey and her team possess an impressive amount of expertise. I hope that the Committee will have an opportunity to speak to them in due course. It is 12 weeks — not six months — since we established the review team.

At that time, I also stated that I was minded to have a public inquiry, not least to restore public confidence. However, a public inquiry would take at least a year. Time limits can be set, but, ultimately, the inspector will take as much time as he believes is required. A key element of the inquiry will be to pull staff out of the trust, Antrim Area Hospital, isolation wards, and so on, to give evidence — and those people are busy at the moment. The point that I made was that, at the moment, a public inquiry would have difficulty in doing anything more than to carry out a general scoping of the situation.

I will be advised by Members of the House and of the Committee on whether to proceed with a public inquiry. Essential to restoring public confidence in the Health Service is that the House should state that it has confidence in the system. That would be a major boost. The public must have confidence, rather than anxiety, in the Health Service. If and when we hold a public inquiry, the work that Alice Casey's team has done will prove absolutely invaluable and save months of work.

Mr T Clarke: My question concerns public confidence. Many people, such as the elderly, do not have confidence in the Health Service and would prefer to be treated at home. I was alarmed by the Minister's suggestion that the introduction of a uniform policy is somewhat "patchy". People would see a uniform policy at first hand so — to encourage public confidence — surely, that issue should have been addressed at the outset. Indeed, uniform policy has been discussed on the news, and on 'Talkback' and 'The Stephen Nolan Show' on BBC Radio Ulster.

When visiting hospitals, I have noticed that hand-washing facilities are positioned only on wards. Would it not boost public confidence if those facilities were located at hospital entrances, where everyone would be encouraged to use them?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Hand-washing facilities should be in place both on the wards and at hospital entrances. Our simple and key message is: "Wash your hands". If all visitors and staff routinely washed their hands when entering and leaving hospital premises, there would be a major reduction in the incidence of infections.

I said that uniform policy is "patchy" because it is not consistent throughout the trusts. Hospitals must implement a uniform policy for all staff — nurses, doctors, consultants and so on. They must all be dressed appropriately to ensure that they are not carrying infection. The doctors and nurses are the experts in this matter because they are the people who deal with infections.

I also announced an environmental cleaning programme; indeed, we have already held an environmental audit. Another important measure is the restriction on hospital visits, as outlined in the Changing the Culture action plan. It is not appropriate that anyone can walk into a hospital to make a visit at any time of day or night. That was having an adverse impact on wards, patients and staff. Intensive care units will be subject to strict visiting times in the future. We will also examine meal times and a number of other matters. However, I cannot implement such measures by clicking my fingers; they must work their way through the system.

Given that staff co-operation is essential, they have to be trained and instructed — it is not a matter of

waving a magic wand. I am aware that public interest in the matter has been reflected on the ‘The Stephen Nolan Show’ and on ‘Talk Back’. I have talked on the matter on both those programmes on more than one occasion. We will continue to work on the problem. There is no magic fix for it: it will take work and effort over a long time.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister’s statement, and I commend him for the speed with which he brought it to the House after receiving the report. I join other Members in paying tribute to Health Service staff at all levels. They have worked tirelessly to make good progress on this outbreak in difficult circumstances.

Will the Minister confirm that his decision to set up an independent review has not hampered the efforts of staff? Does the interim report provide any guidance on how we can restore public confidence and educate the public on its responsibilities when visiting hospitals?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I confirm that the review has not hampered the work of hospital staff, and I thank the Member for remarking on how hard staff have worked. They have worked extremely hard, and they are dedicated. At times, certain comments make them feel unappreciated, which is unfortunate. They are doing sterling work. They did not invent the problem, but they are dealing with it for the benefit of patients.

The inquiry made 36 recommendations. I received the report on Sunday, and I will share it with the House before close of play this afternoon so that Members have an early opportunity to see it. I have referred in my speech to several of its recommendations, and I look forward to Members’ responses.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I, along with the Minister and other Members, commend the efforts of healthcare staff.

I see from the Minister’s statement that funding was provided for five infection-control nurses last September. Have they been appointed? Are there only five? Is there one infection-control nurse for the Western Health and Social Care Trust area? Is there one nurse for the Tyrone County Hospital, for example? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A team of infection-control nurses is in operation. Furthermore, one director in charge of each trust area — normally the medical director — looks after and is responsible for infection control. He also has a team of people working on it. The nurses are a key element in the strategy; however, that does not mean that there is only one nurse in each trust area responsible for infection control. The important element is the education of and support for the workforce. There are some 16,000 nurses in the

system, and the Western Trust has its allocation of those nurses, who must be supported. If more support or extra people are required, I will consider providing them. The infection-control strategy involves giving nurses the support that they need, educating the workforce in preventing the spread of infection, and promoting good practice.

Just as we have people in each trust who focus on staff safety and support when staff are assaulted, we also have people in each trust who focus on infection. That does not mean that that is the only work that is being done — far from it.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister’s statement, but it does not contain much detail for people to go on. However, it is a progress report, so it has to be looked at as such. In the Minister’s response to questions on his statement, I detected that he was putting some blame for the occurrence of *clostridium difficile* on patients, their families and everyone else, but it seemed that the Department was washing its hands of any blame. Ultimately, the blame lies with the Department that is running the healthcare service. I do not think that everyone has access to a quality healthcare service, particularly in my constituency of Mid Ulster where people have been told that the local hospital is not safe, but patients are being transferred there.

I congratulate most of the hospital staff, but not all of them. Is the Minister aware that there are consultants in the Antrim Area Hospital who are actually telling families that it is inevitable that an elderly patient with *clostridium difficile* is going to die and that they should prepare themselves for that? That consultant is also directing that the drips and medication be removed; even water is being removed from some patients in what they term the Liverpool pathway to death system. Serious questions must be asked.

Recently, I visited Daisy Hill Hospital, and the facilities that the Minister says should be available in Antrim Area Hospital are not available in Daisy Hill Hospital. There is no isolation facility; four, five and six visitors are permitted into the side ward of a patient with *clostridium difficile*; there are no displayed notices stating that there are *clostridium difficile* sufferers in the ward; and there are no displayed notices instructing people to wash their hands. However, there is a facility at the end of the ward at which people can wash their hands if they wish.

There are serious flaws in the system, and the Minister must take responsibility for ensuring that the patients’ quality of life and care is well attended to. That is particularly important for the elderly.

People — especially the elderly — are not confident that the healthcare facility is to enhance their healthcare and is not merely a pathway to death, as

seems to be the case. Will the Minister respond and ensure that consultants in those hospitals are not preparing people for death and dismissing the protestations of families? The Minister said that there was a reduction in the number of deaths from clostridium difficile. I know why one patient was saved from death. The elderly individual's family was told that the patient was dying, but they protested and got the hospital staff to resume the patient's drip treatment and medication.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please ask a question, Mr Molloy.

Mr Molloy: That was an important point, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister confirm that that is happening in the Antrim Area Hospital?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I repudiate entirely the suggestion that I blamed patients and families. I said that hand hygiene was one of the key steps towards helping to eradicate clostridium difficile, and I have tried to emphasise that. I am not here to apportion blame; I am here to address the issue.

Mr Molloy makes a very serious accusation against consultants in Antrim Area Hospital, and I expect him to back it up by giving me the names of the consultants and the families involved, so that I can carry out an investigation. His remarks are not helpful as far as patient confidence and Antrim Area Hospital staff are concerned. I will investigate those matters and the so-called Liverpool pathway to death. I am not aware of a Liverpool pathway to death system in Antrim Area Hospital or any other hospital. I will take action if Mr Molloy can prove that his accusations are true. Allegations, accusations and assertions are made often, but I do not get evidence. I look forward to the evidence in this case.

I will also investigate the situation at the Daisy Hill Hospital. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is a very good trust. The Member will be aware that Daisy Hill Hospital is one of the hospital buildings highlighted in the report as being long past its sell-by date, and it is difficult to achieve the required levels. However, that is no excuse for inadequate and inappropriate facilities. Hand washing is part of the hand-hygiene measures that I expect trusts to observe.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.59 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.02 pm

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North/South Ministerial Council — Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Meeting

The Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council aquaculture and marine sectoral meeting.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding the recent meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format. The meeting was held at Dublin Castle on Wednesday 21 May 2008. The Executive were represented by Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and myself. The Irish Government were represented by Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. This statement has been agreed with Minister Edwin Poots.

The chairperson of the board of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, Mr Tarlach O'Crosain, and the chief executive of the Loughs Agency, Mr Derick Anderson, presented a report to the Council on developments that have occurred since the previous meeting in November 2007.

Ministers noted that the Loughs Agency is developing plans for the delivery of its marine tourism and recreational fishing strategy and asked the chief executive to formulate a fuller report on that strategy, detailing plans for collaborative work with other bodies, to be presented at a future meeting of the Council.

The Council noted the ongoing work to develop an emergency procedure for the approval of regulations to deal with events requiring immediate intervention for the protection of the fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas. Ministers received a comprehensive presentation on the Loughs Agency's aquaculture and shellfisheries strategy, and, following discussions, agreed that they look forward to receiving a report on its implementation at a future meeting.

Ministers also noted the agency's plan to finalise a management agreement later this year, with a view to

initiating aquaculture licensing in Lough Foyle during 2009.

The Council noted progress on the commencement Orders that are required for a staged and managed introduction of the new powers that are available to the Loughs Agency to develop and license aquaculture and to protect the fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas. Ministers welcomed the agency's legislation implementation plan and noted that NSMC approval will be required for five sets of regulations in June and for a further nine sets later in 2008.

The Council agreed that its next meeting in the aquaculture and marine sectoral format would take place in June 2008, with a further meeting in October or November 2008. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Dr W McCrea): The Council noted:

“the ongoing work to develop an emergency procedure for the approval of regulations to deal with events requiring immediate intervention”.

What emergency procedures does the Minister have in mind so that she can intervene now to ensure that no more boats from the Northern Ireland fleet follow the seven vessels that have been forced to tie up in the past two weeks because of escalating fuel costs? Where are the emergency procedures to deal with such events, which demand immediate departmental intervention? Why can the Minister not find the £1 million for the de minimis scheme, which would represent an immediate intervention, when her Department has underspent its budget by more than £31 million?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The NSMC meeting in aquaculture and marine sectoral format dealt solely with issues that come under the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission's area of responsibility. The Chairman of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's question deals with issues that are outside that area of responsibility. Therefore, it is not appropriate for me to deal with those issues as part of my statement. However, if the Chairman writes to me about those issues, which, I accept, are urgent, I am happy to address them.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

When will the fishermen of Lough Foyle, who have surrendered their drift nets, receive their hardship payments?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In December 2007, the Loughs Agency made the first payments to affected fishermen, which totalled €2.5 million. I was fully aware of the matter,

partly due to lobbying by Foyle MLAs. The second stage of the payment, which totalled €600,000, was paid in April 2008, and the final stage of the payment is expected to occur in spring 2009.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the Loughs Agency's marine-tourism plans in Foyle. Does the Minister know with whom the Loughs Agency is co-operating to implement those plans?

I have some concerns about recreational fishing. Why did no consultation take place with the Loughs Agency advisory forum before fishing was banned on the River Finn? Why is the modern and accessible fishing area at Greenbrae, which is on the River Foyle near Lifford, still not open despite the amount of money that was spent preparing it for fishermen?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Council will receive a full presentation on the marine-tourism strategy at the next meeting. Ministers were informed about the Loughs Agency application for more than €8 million of funding for the strategy and about smaller-scale projects, such as angling development, which are about to receive agency funding. I encourage the agency's chief executive to ensure that those projects benefit both tourists and local people in the areas concerned.

The agency is developing regulations to provide for permit-controlled angling on the tidal River Foyle at the Greenbrae's fishery. The agency expects to go to public consultation on its proposals in the near future, and it is anticipated that those regulations will come into operation in early 2009.

The Member recognised that, in order to conserve stocks, that measure was required. That matter will be the subject of public consultation.

Mr Shannon: Does the Department have any intention to widen the aquaculture initiatives to other parts of the Province, including Lough Neagh and Strangford Lough?

Some concern has been expressed about intensive for-the-plate aquaculture enterprises and the fear that, sometimes, diseases that can result from that industry can infect some native species. Will the Minister advise the House what steps have been taken to ensure that any disease that can result from intensive aquaculture will not, and cannot, reach native fish and species?

My second question perhaps comes under the Minister's remit, as well as that of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Edwin Poots, because it concerns angling and fishing initiatives. We are all aware that fishing initiatives can bring great benefits to the whole Province. Will there be a spin-off from angling tourism and initiatives that would reach far beyond Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The NSMC met to discuss the Foyle and Carlingford areas. During that meeting, the Loughs Agency presented its plans for aquaculture in those areas. Significant potential exists to develop that sector, which is already valuable in both areas.

The transfer of aquaculture-licensing powers to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission will allow aquaculture operations in Lough Foyle to be licensed through the Loughs Agency for the first time. That is an important step to ensure that a transparently good standard of practice in relation to husbandry, hygiene, fish welfare, disease control and environmental impact is in place. Control also exists through regulations under EU directives and aquaculture-licensing conditions.

The aquaculture sector is not punching above its weight. Further potential exists for the European fisheries fund to be used again for aquaculture opportunities.

The Loughs Agency is conducting a review into its licence fees and charges, and decisions on the settlement of fees for the 2009 season will be taken on the basis of the findings of that review.

I am taking questions on what was discussed at the NSMC sectoral meeting; therefore, further issues about licensing should not be discussed during this plenary sitting. However, I am happy to respond in writing to any queries that the Member may have.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure that he wishes to make a statement on the Northern Ireland Events Company (NIEC).

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a further statement to the Assembly about the Northern Ireland Events Company. Members will be aware that, last September, the acting chief executive and accounting officer of the Northern Ireland Events Company notified the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) that he had become aware of a significant overspend, and that the company was in a budget-deficit position.

At the insistence of DCAL, an emergency board meeting was convened on 5 October 2007, and the company was directed by the Department to establish the extent of the overspend, and to provide an explanation as to how it arose. The departmental accounting officer accordingly informed the Comptroller and Auditor General, and I briefed the Executive on 8 November 2007. On 22 November 2007, following consultation with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, I presented a paper to the Executive.

At their meeting on 22 November 2007, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed that DCAL would:

“meet the liabilities of the NIEC as identified by external auditors appointed by the company as presented at today’s Executive and to be verified by the professional financial adviser appointed by DCAL with a view to the company being wound up at the earliest opportunity.”

2.15 pm

The Northern Ireland Events Company was instructed not to enter into any further financial commitments without the express permission of the Department, and that its activities should focus solely on winding up its affairs in an orderly fashion. On 26 November 2007, I made a statement to the Assembly that informed Members of the background to the financial deficit of the NIEC and the steps that had been agreed by the Executive to address the matter.

In my statement, I said that I wanted to implement a comprehensive and authoritative review of the financial affairs of the company in order to enable me to fully assess the position. In addition, I said that I would advise the House further when that position became clearer. I also said that I would commission an independent comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by NIEC and report back to the House, at the earliest opportunity, on the findings of that review.

On 28 November 2007, the Department asked KPMG independent professional financial advisers to carry out a comprehensive and authoritative review of the financial affairs of the company; to advise on meeting the existing liabilities of NIEC and the most appropriate method of winding up the company in an orderly manner; and to carry out a comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by NIEC.

It was anticipated that the report on the independent review of NIEC would have been completed by the end of February 2008. Essential to that review were interviews with board members of NIEC and the former chief executive, in which they were given opportunities to answer some specific questions in relation to their knowledge and understanding of how the deficit arose. Owing to the time that was required to conduct those interviews — and the complex and sensitive matters that were being examined — the report was not completed within the original timescale.

The Department has now received the draft independent review report. It contains matters of public concern, about which Members will wish to be fully informed. I have a duty to ensure that those matters are brought to the attention of this House, and to ensure that they are dealt with rigorously and urgently.

The report contains matters of a sensitive legal and financial nature, on which I sought advice. In making this statement, I must be mindful of the possibility of further investigative work. I do not wish to prejudice the continuing investigations by what I say in the House. As a result of those investigations, certain matters could be referred to the PSNI and, ultimately, to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

Furthermore, matters may also be referred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for further action under companies legislation. As a Government Minister, I do not want to prejudice those further investigations, or the potential for properly holding those responsible to account. I must, therefore, restrict my public comment at this stage. These are serious matters, with potentially serious financial consequences. However, in outlining the key findings of the report, I assure Members that I will be as open and informative as I can be within those constraints and circumstances.

By 31 March 2008, KPMG estimated the NIEC financial deficit to be £1,662,450. That figure excludes non-quantifiable contingent liabilities, and has accumulated since 1 March 2005, when it was £440,337. The deficit occurred because of a fundamental breakdown of controls and procedures at a number of levels. The company began to directly manage and carry out activities in relation to certain events without the knowledge and proper approval of the board, as opposed to the normal

practice of providing grant aid to third parties. In addition, the company did that without the knowledge or approval of DCAL.

NIEC entered into future-years commitments without accounting for such commitments properly, without proper departmental authority to do so, or clear budgetary provision for those commitments.

One contract was entered into as late as last September, one week before the company informed the Department of the financial deficit. That contract permitted the company to run certain motocross events for each year up until 2012.

The deficit was not uncovered for a number of reasons: inaccuracies in the accounts; lack of clarity and understanding of accounting policies; excess funding was drawn down from DCAL; in-year bids were made to DCAL for additional funding; sponsorship and other income was used by the company, and payments were deferred from one financial year to the next.

Under company law, the board was responsible for the company's affairs. The chief executive and, subsequently, the acting chief executive, were accounting officers for the Northern Ireland Events Company for the relevant periods and appear to have enjoyed the full confidence of the board. The chief executive, as accounting officer, had particular responsibility for informing the board on all matters relating to the financial management of the company.

However, the board may have been denied relevant information about the true financial position of NIEC. In addition, the evidence strongly suggests that the board was not sufficiently involved or informed prior to major funding commitments being entered into. There is nothing on the record to indicate that the board was made aware of the substantial financial obligations that were being taken on in the name of NIEC, and there is some evidence to show that by the time the board was consulted, a commitment had already been entered into in some cases. If the board had been more robust in its interrogative approach, it may have been alerted to those issues earlier.

The company's accounting officer also had particular responsibility to ensure that the Department was notified properly of underspends and overspends. It will be a matter of public concern as to why those responsibilities were not properly exercised, and they will be subject to further investigation. Operational controls lie very clearly with the Northern Ireland Events Company's directors and accounting officer. The Department was heavily reliant on both the accounting officer and the directors discharging their responsibilities effectively.

The Department's role was to ensure that the fundamental architecture of governance was put in place. The KPMG report found that although there was

a framework of governance and controls put in place by the Department, there was a breakdown in the operation of those controls and good governance that led to fundamental breaches of extensive parts of the company's constitution, rules and authorities. That led to an estimated £1,662,450, which the company's accounting officers were personally responsible for controlling, being committed on behalf of NIEC without proper control or authorisation. The lion's share of that money was used to finance a small number of motocross-type events from 2004 onwards. The situation was allowed to continue for some time until, effectively, the company ran out of funding in September 2007.

In KPMG's opinion, the management of the company finances, financial reporting and financial controls were poor; the directors did not fully discharge all their director obligations; they placed an over-reliance on the former chief executive and the external auditors, and they delegated powers to the former chief executive without proper controls. The duties set out in the accounting officer designation letters were not performed adequately, and the accounting officer's statement on internal control and reliance on representations at regular monitoring meetings provided the Department with assurances that have proved to be unfounded. The Department did not identify the shortcomings due to the lack of a sufficiently interrogative and robust challenge of the company's accounting officer and the board.

The report raises serious questions about the conduct of named individuals and suggests further investigation. It does not discount the possibility of fraud, criminal activity or civil proceedings, and the Department will need to consider carefully whether it can seek to recover money that may have been obtained unlawfully or payments that have been made on the basis of misrepresentations by certain parties.

The potential for recovery will require careful consideration and, if appropriate, vigorous pursuit. It is, therefore, vital that I, the Department and the House take no action that would inadvertently prejudice those investigations or make any recovery more difficult.

In my statement to the House on 26 November 2007, I reported that the Executive had agreed that my Department should assist in meeting the existing liabilities of NIEC, as verified by an appropriate independent professional appointed by my Department. I can now tell the House that 144 creditors were owed a total of £938,008·87. Of those creditors, 135, or 94%, have been paid a total of £884,221·95. Under the direction of the board, and in consultation with my Department, those creditors that have not been paid are being investigated. Once they are verified, my Department will be in a position to deal with them in the same way as the other creditors.

The Department is also aware that independent financial advisers identified several contingent liabilities on NIEC, some of which are, at this stage, unquantifiable. They include any costs arising from potential legal action and winding-up costs. The board, in conjunction with DCAL, is examining and dealing with each liability and unverified creditor on a case-by-case basis, and legal advice is being taken with a view to resolving, or otherwise, those claims.

As the precise nature and extent of the contingent liabilities remain the cause of some concern, the manner in which the company handles them will have a significant impact on whether the company is solvent or insolvent when it is wound up. Legally, that is a matter for the board of directors in the first instance.

I also reported to the House that an external review had been commissioned of the monitoring arrangements between the Department and other arm's-length bodies for which it is responsible. The review was carried out by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, a professional accountancy body that specialises in the public sector. Its report is being finalised, but I understand that it identifies several areas that require improvement to address areas of weakness in DCAL's sponsorship of its arm's-length bodies. In line with commitments made to the Public Accounts Committee, the departmental accounting officer will progress the report's recommendations as a matter of urgency.

In reporting these matters to the House, I am conscious that significant benefits resulted from attracting major events to Northern Ireland. The rationale for taking such urgent and decisive steps is to ensure that worthwhile events can proceed, but I remain adamant that they must do so within a properly controlled financial framework. Therefore, I have given urgent consideration to the future delivery of the events function and how to ensure that the transition to any new arrangements agreed under the review of public administration (RPA) is managed in a manner that secures the continuity of attracting and hosting major events in Northern Ireland.

Under RPA, the assumption was that promotional activities and events would transfer from DCAL to DETI, where the functions would be discharged by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). Under that arrangement, the company was to be dissolved by the current directors. DETI has indicated that it remains committed, in principle, to the transfer, but that in light of ongoing disclosures, its continued commitment is subject to its being satisfied with the results of due diligence inquiries.

The Executive made the decision to protect, as far as possible, the business continuity of imminent events and those in the pipeline and, in due course, to transfer

the events function to NITB and DETI, subject to my agreement and that of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I agreed that my Department would take on the interim management of the events function. An events unit has been established in DCAL to deal with outstanding grant-funding agreements and outstanding applications made to NIEC to the end of October 2007. Further grant funding programmes have been launched for funding available from the major events fund and the events growth fund.

2.30 pm

Twenty-six applications were received by the closing date of 2 May, and they are being evaluated with a view to grant-funding decisions being made by mid-June. The events unit will not engage in running events directly: that will be the role of appropriately experienced and qualified event promoters and organisers.

Members are aware that the Public Accounts Committee is the Standing Committee of the Assembly that is responsible for examining such matters. That Committee has given early consideration to the Northern Ireland Events Company in its 'Report on Good Governance — Effective Relationships between Departments and their Arm's Length Bodies', dated 24 April 2008. I share that Committee's view that this is one of the most serious failures of control in an arm's-length body in recent years, and I understand that it intends to revisit the matter in some detail once the investigatory process is complete. I am sure that the House will not wish to pre-empt the further investigations required or the findings of the Public Accounts Committee. I am assured that the matter will be examined thoroughly and that the lessons will be learned and applied.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I place on record my Committee's dissatisfaction with the poor level of engagement there has been ahead of today's statement. Many efforts were made today to gain clarification; to gain a briefing for the Committee, or the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, or to even have the Committee furnished with a copy of the statement well in advance of its release to the House. None of those high standards of consultation with the Committee were observed.

How much responsibility does the Department accept for the gross mismanagement of the public finances under its control? Given the way in which the Minister has presented the situation, one could be forgiven for thinking that he is washing his hands of responsibility for an arm's-length body. The Committee was told that the Department is examining all arrangements for non-departmental public bodies to prevent this sort of thing happening again. What has been the outcome of the external review of the monitoring arrangements

between the Department and other arm's-length bodies for which it is responsible to make sure that this does not happen again?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As far as the Department is concerned, significant infrastructure and control mechanisms were put in place, which in turn placed a high level of responsibility on the chief executive and board of the company; and the Department was responsible for monitoring those controls. In reality, the responsibilities were not discharged fully and fell well short of the public accountability requirements envisaged in those infrastructure and control mechanisms.

The control framework that was in place included: establishing the body as a company limited by guarantee; its articles and memorandum of association; management statement and financial memoranda; corporate and business plans; quarterly monitoring meetings; provision of financial information as part of monthly financial meetings and support of draw-down funds; an annual report; and financial accounts.

The Department has highlighted matters of concern relating to its role in monitoring and overseeing the NIEC, and it is considered that the Department was insufficiently assertive in its oversight of the company. The Department placed an over-reliance on the board to meet its obligations under company law and had an over-reliance on trust that the former chief executive was meeting her accounting officer responsibilities. Certain issues relating to the process for drawing down funds by NIEC also highlighted problems.

Mr McCausland: I want to pick up on the point regarding the accountability arrangements because it is clear that the subsequent review has identified a number of shortcomings to which the Minister has referred.

Will the Minister undertake to give a more detailed account to the Committee in due course of the findings that have emerged from the review; the lessons that have been learned; what changes will be put in place, and whether there are lessons for other Departments that deal with arm's-length companies? Is it possible to get some indication of the probable timescale in which there might be some indication of movement on the company's transfer to DETI and the recovery of money outstanding?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Subsequent arrangements that have been put in place are based on the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's recommendations. As Minister, I will engage directly with one of the arm's-length bodies in an accountability meeting this afternoon in order to ensure personally that I am satisfied with the accountability measures that have been put in place.

I am happy to brief the Committee further on the matter and any others that are outstanding after the

debate, should the Committee feel that it is in its interest and that of the Northern Ireland public. Throughout our discussions, however, we must remain cognisant that further investigations on the matter are ongoing and that their outcomes may, in due course, be reported to the police and the Public Prosecution Service. In some respects, I am constrained because although I want to tell the Assembly and the public as much as possible about what happened and how that public money was lost, I do not want to do so in such a way that would impinge upon the forces of law and order taking their due course.

Mr Deputy Speaker: At this juncture, it may be useful to remind Members that although privilege is attached to the House's proceedings, it is only in respect of any potential action for defamation. In the past, the Speaker has reminded Members that that privilege should be exercised responsibly. I urge Members to bear that caution in mind for the rest of the debate.

Mr K Robinson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for that timely warning. I hope that I do not stray across any imaginary line.

It gives me great sadness to be present at the debate and to hear about the Events Company, which did so much to restore Northern Ireland's image and undo, in a constructive way, the damage that was caused during 30 years of terrorism; and to hear that, in that particular instance, the procedures that the Department should have followed to ensure that the Events Company followed the right path in all of those matters were not fully surveyed.

I am particularly concerned by the significant number of creditors who find themselves exposed because of the company's demise. The matter has caused grave concern among Committee members, who are anxious that people who have outstanding invoices are dealt with as quickly as possible. As I recall from the Minister's statement, some 6% have not, as yet, been dealt with. Will the Minister assure the House that they will be dealt with as speedily as possible, so that no one will find themselves financially exposed in a manner that was not of their making?

During the debate, I have listened carefully to the Minister's comments. Faults may or may not have occurred in the Events Company itself: that will be determined by someone else, somewhere else, in the future. However, there is no doubt that the Department's role in the situation has been less than flattering. Surely, if the Minister's Department and others will rely on arm's-length agencies to carry out certain functions on the community's behalf, it is incumbent on the parent Department to ensure that it not only covers all of the angles that it should cover, but any that a logical, careful civil servant, departmental official or Minister ought to cover in the public's interest.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As regards the 6% of creditors that are still outstanding, those who provided genuine services and are shown to have acted in good faith with a verifiable contract in place will be paid. I will give that assurance. However, I do not believe that the House or the public want anyone to be paid when that is not the case.

Ultimately, we must be absolutely sure. To have dealt with the issue and paid 94% of creditors is good, although the matter of outstanding individuals with genuine claims should be addressed as quickly as possible.

The Member raised the valid point that the Government and the Departments are heavily reliant on arm's-length bodies to carry out functions on behalf of the Government. That involves expenditure of large amounts of public moneys, and the case of the Northern Ireland Events Company has brought into stark focus the potential for such arrangements to go wrong. The Northern Ireland Events Company involved fairly modest spending in comparison with other arm's-length bodies, so that should represent a significant wake-up call to Government about the practices and processes that are in place when arm's-length bodies conduct affairs on behalf of Government. As Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I am conscious of that. Every other Minister must also be conscious of that, and attention must be paid to that issue.

Mr P Ramsey: Notice of the Minister's statement was received only half an hour before the start of the plenary session. That is not fair to Members, who need to prepare for such statements. The Minister said that he would be happy to come before the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, but the short notice that Members were given of his statement means that he will have to do that, because the Committee will need to examine areas that were not covered during the debate.

The Minister said that the company committed to a contract to hold motocross events in each year up to 2012. How much money was committed, and is the contract still legally binding on the Department? The Minister said that the lion's share of a sum of money was used to finance motocross events from 2004 onwards. How much was allocated to those events, and how many events or organisations were involved?

I agree with Ken Robinson's comments. A cloud has been placed over the ability to prepare and advance events in Northern Ireland, which had been done well through the capacity and expertise of the Events Company.

Is the Minister confident that events of the same nature can be delivered? He referred to the major events funds and the events growth fund. How much money is available under those funds, compared with what was available from the Events Company during the same period? All those groups now face a difficulty because the Events Company had a capacity to access

private or sponsorship moneys to assist in match funding the events. Is the Minister confident that the same types of events, which have brought international acclaim to Northern Ireland, can be delivered?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I will make available in writing to the Member the amount of money that was offered to the motocross events up to 2012. The expenses and the deficit were run up between 2004 and 2007, and were largely, but not exclusively, based on annual motocross events, the running of which the Events Company took responsibility for.

The events budget, which is now managed by the Department, is £1.6 million — the same amount that was available to the Northern Ireland Events Company. That is not decided on the basis of matched funding; in most instances, we would like considerably more than 50% matched funding to come from the events. We seek to ensure that events that are good for Northern Ireland can happen with as little support as possible from the public purse, and that those events can continue to grow.

That is what we are about. We are not about giving out large amounts of money just for the sake of securing events; we are about supporting events that are close to economic viability, when, perhaps, our support might secure their ongoing viability.

2.45 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement, but I must reiterate what my fellow Committee member Pat Ramsey and the Committee Chairperson said about the lack of time that we have been given to read it. First, is the Minister satisfied that sufficient control was exercised by the Department in relation to the Northern Ireland Events Company? Secondly, is the Minister satisfied that the correct people were appointed to the company in the first place, and have appointment procedures changed or been revised since then?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In hindsight, no. However, that will also be the case in the future, no matter which regime is in place. Appointments will be made by Government or arm's-length bodies that will prove not to be the best appointments.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure was responsible for monitoring the Northern Ireland Events Company, and it was not robust enough when carrying out its duties. Criticism of the Department will be extrapolated when the Public Accounts Committee undertakes its work.

Mr Shannon: As we all know, particular events promote, and give status to, the Province, and securing such events was the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Events Company. Nevertheless, no one can deny that that company's actions have blotted our reputation, and the financial deficit of more than £1.66 million is,

in itself, totally unacceptable and particularly worrying. The Northern Ireland Events Company and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure cannot stand blameless for what happened.

The Minister stated that he wants a "comprehensive and authoritative review". To those Members who made snide remarks, I say that, as soon as the Minister was made aware of the problem, he initiated a full investigation. Members know that, and today's statement to the Assembly is part of that investigation. The Minister deserves great credit for the manner in which he has responded by initiating the investigation and ensuring that all evidence has been brought to the Chamber, and other Members are aware that he responded positively.

Is there any evidence of fraud, will there be further investigations, and has the inquiry that the Minister mentioned earlier unearthed more concerns? Furthermore, will the Minister confirm whether actions have occurred that are contrary to company law and that may warrant further investigation, and what measures have been put in place to ensure that similar problems will not arise again? That is just one question, with a couple of amendments and add-ons.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is your choice whether to answer, Minister.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thus far, there is no clear, substantive evidence of criminal intent or gain by anyone involved. However — and that is a fairly major "however" — there is sufficient evidence of fraudulent activity to warrant further investigation. As part of any further investigations, the Department must consider whether it can seek to recover moneys that may have been obtained unlawfully or payments that were made on the basis of misrepresentations by certain parties. Therefore, it is vital that we continue to consider those matters.

The independent review also found several irregularities in the company's financial and payment-related procedures that give cause for concern. Those include: the use of credit cards by certain members of the company's executive; the procurement of services; company record keeping, including bookkeeping irregularities; unusual, or possibly irregular, payments; the payment of commission to members of staff; and an unauthorised £200,000 overdraft in a bank account that was not disclosed to the Department. Those potentially serious matters require full investigation.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister's statement mentions creditors, an issue that Ken Robinson raised earlier. Perhaps the wording in the statement is incorrect — or perhaps I have read it incorrectly — but it says:

"Those creditors that have not been paid are being investigated by the NIEC, under the direction of the board and in consultation with my Department".

I read the draft independent review report, and I have listened to the Minister's comments today. Is he saying that he has confidence in the NIEC investigating the 6% of its creditors who did not receive any payment? The investigation will take place under the direction of the board and in consultation with the Department, but I take it that that was the process that was followed all along, when the company was in operation. Does the Minister have confidence in the NIEC's ability to carry out that investigation? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The responsibility for what happened lies with the NIEC and its board. Under the circumstances that the Department has arranged, I do have confidence in the NIEC's ability to deal with those issues. The Department has asked independent financial experts to carry out that investigation on behalf of the NIEC. That work has been overseen by a senior civil servant in the Department, who has spent huge amounts of time with the company and who has been engaged with the independent financial advisers virtually full-time. It is not a case of the matter being dealt with by the NIEC that ran up this particular deficit, as such; rather, the NIEC will be provided with the expertise and help to ensure that the mess with which we have been left can be dealt with professionally and for the public good.

Miss McIlveen: Has the matter been reported to the police?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: No clear, substantive evidence of criminal intent or gain by anyone involved has come to light as yet. However, there may be sufficient evidence of fraudulent activity to warrant further investigation. We have consulted the PSNI and have passed the draft report of the independent review of the NIEC to it for its consideration. The report has also been passed to DETI for consideration of possible action under company law, which may have some impact on the company's directors.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister satisfied that the Department's responsibilities for monitoring the NIEC were properly carried out, given that months went by without the Department seeking monthly accounts and that it failed to act on other financial information provided to it when it should have done? This disaster could, arguably, have been avoided had the Department carried out its responsibilities properly. Can the Minister assure the House that the report is not an attempt to make a scapegoat of some people in order to exonerate the Department from its responsibilities?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not seeking to exonerate the Department from the responsibility that should be placed on it. We can certainly identify who played a role in this matter — the

accounting officer, the directors and the board members all had a significant role to play. However, the Department also played a significant role, and I am not in denial about that. The Department did not engage robustly enough in the processes in which it was involved. It had evidence that the Northern Ireland Events Company carried out previous work well, but it did not robustly challenge the company's other engagements. As a consequence of good faith, the situation was allowed to develop.

There were periods when the Department was not quick enough to look at the accounts or to keep on top of everything that was happening in the Northern Ireland Events Company. As a result, we have ended up in this situation. I do not blame the Department for that — the blame lies elsewhere. However, the Department had a role to play in not being robust enough.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. In response to a question from Ken Robinson, the Minister spoke about arm's-length bodies, lessons learned, and, obviously, lessons for the future. I am mindful of that in asking my questions, because I know that the Committee will be more than interested in his response. There are three main questions that the Minister needs to answer for the Assembly — not today, perhaps, but in the future.

First, how was the matter able to go undetected? Reading the Minister's statement, it looks as though it was detected when representatives from the NI Events Company walked in, put their hands up and said that they had run out of ideas on which to spend money and that they could not go on any longer.

Secondly, where in the Department should the matter have been spotted? In other words, who was responsible, and I do not mean an individual, because this is not about individualising. Where in the system should someone, somewhere along the line have realised that there had to be something wrong with the company, given the way that it was spending its money?

Finally, when should the matter have been spotted? We need a clear answer to that. It should have been spotted, for example, two or three years ago. The investigation should examine the NI Events Company from its inception, because if credit cards were being used wrongly, in order for there to be a proper inquiry, we need to find out when that started and when it ended.

Therefore, if there are to be arm's-length bodies to run Government — and the Minister has said that there will be — we will at least know how to spot the mistakes.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I indicated that the Department needed to be more robust. Perhaps if it had been more robust in its engagement, the matter could have been notified when the first

significant deficit was run up, which I think I quoted at £440,000 in, I believe, 2005. If I am incorrect, the figure will have been noted in the Hansard report. Had the monitoring processes been carried through, the Department should have become alert to what was going on at that early stage.

In summer 2006, two whistleblowers came to the Department and drew to its attention matters with which they were not satisfied about the running of the Northern Ireland Events Company. One of those whistleblowers came to me, by arrangement with Ian Paisley Jnr, to bring those matters to my attention, and that person repeated what had been said to civil servants. At that point, I started to seek more information on the Northern Ireland Events Company, to which greater attention was paid. That brought us to the point where, in September, the matter became public knowledge.

It is clear that the Events Company was operating with a considerable faith from the Department. That faith was misplaced. As a consequence, the Department, the Government and the public in Northern Ireland have had their fingers burned. The affair has been very damaging for Northern Ireland, and the steps that we have taken to ensure that genuine creditors are paid and that we are in a position to organise more events is the best that we could have put in place in the circumstances.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister's revelations are deeply disturbing on a host of levels. In his statement, he said that the board was over-reliant on external auditors. However, when other elements of his statement are examined, not only has £1.6 million gone awry but:

"there were inaccuracies in the accounts; a lack of clarity and understanding of the accounting policies"

And, as he said in response to my colleague Jim Shannon, an overdraft of £200,000 was secreted in another bank account. Did the company's external auditors give any warning to the board or to the Department that things were going so severely wrong?

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

3.00 pm

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The company's external accountants prepared annual accounts for each of the three years concerned, and the deficit was reported inadequately in those statements. There are questions about whether the accounting standards, practices and policies adopted by the external accountants were accepted standards, practices and policies in some instances. Indeed, some of those questions could not be answered in the review without having access to the accountants' working papers, and, on the basis of legal advice, the auditors have refused access to those papers. Such access may have provided answers to some of the questions that have arisen.

The issue is being referred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which has the power, under companies legislation, to investigate such matters. However, it is a matter of concern that the company got an unqualified clean bill of health from the auditors.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have been focusing on finances and their use, but will the Minister consider initiating a full investigation of the behaviour of everyone in the Events Company, including how contracts were meted out and how events promoters were dealt with? I am aware of one case in which a promoter of one important event is severely aggrieved and feels discriminated against. I am not sure where the discrimination came from, but the promoter is very aggrieved by the treatment received and has suffered serious financial loss as a consequence. I am still dealing with that case.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of similar cases. Ultimately, the Department's responsibility is to identify the financial loss to the public and how that happened. The Department must also identify whether there is potential to seek redress for the loss or to go to the Public Prosecution Service and bring about an appearance before the courts. Those are all important steps.

Many people will have grievances with the Events Company. I am not sure whether those grievances can ever be satisfied, but we must focus on what is deliverable.

Lord Morrow: My question is similar to that of Dominic Bradley. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement, and for going into such detail. I recognise that there are certain things that he cannot discuss at this stage, but he did say that KPMG estimated the financial deficit to be £1.6 million by 31 March 2008. He went on to say that the deficit has accumulated since 31 March 2005, when it was close to £500,000. What was the deficit at 31 March 2006?

Although the situation did not occur during his time as Minister, I am sure that he shares our concerns that the matter was not been dealt with long before now. When does he envisage a final investigation and completion of the report? It is in the interests of the Assembly and, indeed, the general public that this matter is concluded quickly and to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is a running total. Therefore, the figures are available, and I will ascertain them for Lord Morrow.

As I indicated, the deficit was almost entirely related to the motocross events that were organised latterly by the Northern Ireland Events Company. As the situation developed, it seemed that the company was throwing good money after bad. Given the good

work that took place over a long period to bring quality events to Northern Ireland, it is sad that the organisation of a small number of events — and the close association of the Northern Ireland Events Company with those events — resulted in so much damage.

Mr Craig: The House will be interested to hear that a company of consultants has circulated a flyer boasting that one of its directors is the former chief executive of the Northern Ireland Events Company. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board — with whom the company has recently secured a contract — is listed among its clients. Given those facts, will the Minister inform the House about the role that the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board played in the Northern Ireland Events Company? Given the continuing connection that exists, can Members have any confidence that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board would be able to fulfil the responsibilities of that important role?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Mr Alan Clarke was appointed to the Northern Ireland Events Company on 6 June 2002; he is also chief executive of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. The role of the directors of the board is in the public domain, and I have reiterated that the board did not carry out its functions to the standards expected. Although I do not want to pre-empt any Public Accounts Committee investigation, I will be interested in the results of such an investigation.

The House will be alarmed that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board would be prepared to engage with a company in which the former chief executive of the Northern Ireland Events Company is a director — particularly given the fact that the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is on the board of that company and has a good knowledge of the situation. Members can draw their own conclusions, but the matter will not go away. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I will have to consider the issue when then the proposed transfer to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board takes place.

Mr Ross: I share other Members' concerns about the deficit of £1·6 million to the public purse. The Minister's statement suggested that the board might have been unaware of the company's true financial position. How is that possible?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The board appears to have failed to meet the requirements of public accountability as laid out in the management statement, financial memorandum and companies' legislation. Furthermore, the board appears to have delegated substantial authority to the former chief executive/accounting officer and, indeed, to the former acting chief executive/accounting officer, with a lack of adequate controls, such as the requirement to establish an audit committee and internal audit programme.

The financial controls and procedures were inadequate, and that contributed significantly to the board's lack of awareness of the developing problems. The board relied on the chief executive, DCAL and external auditors to provide support in those areas. However, the fundamentally weak control environment was the responsibility of the board and the accounting officer under the provisions of the management statement and financial memorandum, and under companies' legislation.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Mesothelioma, etc., Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: 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 deals with the powers to make statutory rules. I remind Members who intend to speak that they should address their comments only to the amendment. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points of the Bill. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Clauses 1 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (Commencement)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): I beg to move the following amendment: In page 6, line 38, at end insert

“(2) An order under subsection (1) may include such transitional provision or savings as the Department considers necessary or expedient in connection with bringing any provision of the Act into operation.”

Clause 12 allows the provisions of the Bill to be brought into operation by commencement Orders, except clauses 12 and 13, which will come in to operation upon the granting of Royal Assent. This is a technical amendment to clause 12 of the Bill, and does not introduce any change in policy. It will enable the Department for Social Development to include, where it is considered necessary or expedient, transitional provision or savings in commencement Orders made under that clause. It will ensure that the Department for Social Development will be able to legislate on the same basis as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under corresponding provisions in the Westminster Bill.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Campbell): I thank the Minister for her explanation of the amendment. As Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, I will take the opportunity to say a few words about the Bill and the Committee’s scrutiny of it during its Committee Stage.

The overall aim of the Bill is to introduce an integrated system of registration and regulation, as well as supervision and support, of registered charities. In particular, the Bill will provide a definition of “charity” and “charitable purpose”. It will establish — *[Interruption.]*

I apologise; I am on the wrong Bill. I will take my seat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will call you again, Mr Campbell, as the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I apologise for my mistake, Mr Deputy Speaker. We are dealing with the Charities Bill as well as the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill today.

The Committee examined the issue of mesothelioma for some considerable time, and has no objections or issues to raise in connection with the Bill. A considerable volume of representations were made about mesothelioma, but, again, no issues have been raised in connection with the Bill.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I concur with Mr Campbell. In the past two days, however, two queries have come to light in relation to the Bill, which, I am sure, the Minister will be able to deal with briefly. The first was about whether it had to be definitively proven that an individual had contracted mesothelioma in order that compensation could be paid. The second query was about savings, which could be affected by the amendment.

The award of compensation over a certain amount to a person receiving income support or pension credit may have an impact on that person’s future entitlement to benefit. That situation may only affect a small number of people, but it does seem to be a contradiction in terms that a person who receives compensation intended to alleviate suffering in the final period of his or her life because of mesothelioma may, in fact, be caused a degree of stress if their benefits, and those of their dependants, are affected. Go raibh maith agat.

3.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister assure the House — because it is an important public matter — that the bureaucracy involved in administering the funds will be so limited as to easily facilitate those who are afflicted by that terrible condition and to enable payments to be made easily and in a timely fashion?

Mr Neeson: I welcome the legislation. Almost 10 years ago, the late Mr Robbie Brown from Carrickfergus founded the organisation, Justice for Asbestos Victims. That prompted me, together with the late Mr John Kelly, to propose a debate on the subject in the Assembly.

At around that time, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment set aside a sum to compensate former employees of Harland and Wolff who had contracted the disease while working for that company before privatisation. Will such compensation be affected by the legislation, and, if so, how will it be affected?

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the legislation. My question has already been asked, so I will not use up the House’s time by repeating it.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Committee members for their support, I am grateful for it. I am also grateful that, across the Assembly, there has been a positive approach to the legislation.

As I made clear, the amendment is purely technical and does not involve a change of policy. Savings provisions are used for a variety of purposes; for example, to preserve existing law or to make clear that existing rights are not affected by new legislation. Transitional provisions are used to make special provision for the

application of the legislation to the circumstances that exist when the legislation comes into operation.

I wish to address the issues that Members raised. Mickey Brady asked about the eligibility test. A simple medical diagnosis by the person's general practitioner or local doctor is all that is required to prove eligibility.

The lump sum is disregarded for 52 weeks in respect of claims for income support and housing benefit, and it is disregarded indefinitely in respect of state pension credit. Members will recall that when I discussed the legislation at its Second Stage last week, I said that the disease had a long gestation period, and, once diagnosed, sufferers had a short life expectancy. Unfortunately and sadly, that life expectancy is about nine months. If a person happens to live longer than 52 weeks, and his or her GP indicates that that is likely to be the case, the money can be protected by placing it in a trust fund.

I assure Sean Neeson that the lump sum that is guaranteed by the Bill will not affect other forms of compensation. It may be recovered from subsequent compensation; however, that will not affect the claimant *per se*.

My colleague Mr Maginness raised general issues, and asked me to assure the House that all payments will be made in a timely, ordered and expeditious fashion. I wish to reassure the House, and the general public throughout Northern Ireland, that my Department has geared itself up to implement the Bill on enactment.

It is most important to me, my officials, people who are deeply affected by mesothelioma and their families that bureaucracy must not prevent or hold up the expeditious payment of such bills. The aim of the legislation is to have a simple benefit, paid within weeks of medical diagnosis, and that diagnosis is the sole eligibility requirement. I assure those people who have been in contact with MLAs during the past few days that that is the case.

I will make absolutely sure that that work is carried out upon enactment and implementation of the Bill. Anyone who has been affected by mesothelioma, or who has a family member who has been affected, should contact my officials immediately. That will ensure that cases can be fully investigated and that payments can be made in an expeditious manner to help those affected by this vexatious and sad issue.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Charities Bill

Consideration Stage

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

There are four groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendments No 1 and No 2, which deal with issues relating to the public-benefit test. The second debate will be on amendments No 3, No 42, No 43 and No 44, which deal with the designation of religious charities and other religious matters. The third debate will be on 57 technical amendments. These amendments deal with changes to company law, auditing and accounting matters, and other technical changes, together with the opposition of the Minister, for technical reasons, to clauses 52, 104 and 159. The fourth debate will be on amendments No 38, No 39 and No 40, which deal with the level of financial thresholds applying to charities.

I remind Members intending to speak that, during the debates on the four groups of amendments, they should address all the amendments in each particular group on which they wish to comment.

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

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Meaning of "charitable purpose")

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):

I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 2, line 29, after "belief in" insert "one god or".

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 3, page 3, line 41, leave out "disbenefit" and insert "detriment". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

The Minister for Social Development: It is helpful that the 66 amendments are grouped in this way. It should help to ensure a more coherent debate and make the best use of Assembly time. All the amendments that stand in my name have been discussed in detail during the Committee for Social Development's clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. I am pleased that the Committee was able to reach consensus on all 66 amendments, and I thank its Chairperson and members

for their diligence and patience in dealing with such a substantial Bill.

There are two amendments in this group, and they relate to the meaning of “charitable purpose” and the “public benefit” test. Amendment No 1, to clause 2, will allow for a better explanation of the broad definition of “the advancement of religion” as a charitable purpose. Amendment No 2 will replace the word “disbenefit” with “detriment” in clause 3, when determining whether a public benefit has been provided. That amendment should ensure a better understanding of the “public benefit” test. It also reflects the wording used in recent guidance that the Charity Commission for England and Wales issued.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Campbell): I believe in being far-sighted, but I was probably too far-sighted today. *[Laughter.]*

I thank the Minister for her explanation of the amendments, which have been helpfully grouped.

I take this opportunity to say a few words about the Bill, and the Committee’s scrutiny of it. The Bill’s overall aim is to introduce an integrated system of registration and regulation, as well as supervision and support of charities. The Bill provides a definition of “charity” and “charitable purpose”. It will also establish a charity commission for Northern Ireland and a charity tribunal for Northern Ireland. It will create a register of charities, provide for a new form of charitable body — the charitable incorporated organisation — and deal with the regulation of charities and public charitable collections.

We need to create a modern legal framework to support and encourage a vibrant and diverse third sector, which plays such an important role in the lives of people in Northern Ireland. It provides vital services, strengthens communities and is often a powerful advocate for the marginalised. For a considerable time, the third sector has called for reform of charity law. It wants registration, regulation, supervision and support of charities. The public also want regulation that will protect them from bogus charities and associated fraudulent or criminal activity. The Committee believes that the Bill will provide all those measures.

The establishment of a charity commission is particularly welcome. The commission will have both an advisory and regulatory role. At all times, it should pay particular attention to its duty to regulate fairly and proportionately. It is of utmost importance that, where possible, bureaucracy be minimised and charities not hindered from carrying out their work because of an unnecessary bureaucratic burden.

The Bill’s Committee Stage commenced on 16 January, and the Committee conducted a detailed scrutiny of it. As a result, several amendments were

proposed. The Committee and the departmental officials established from the start a good working relationship, which paid dividends when it came to agreeing amendments. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister for agreeing to table the amendments that Committee members proposed. I also wish to put on record the Committee’s thanks and appreciation to all the Committee staff and departmental officials for their commitment and assistance during the Committee’s scrutiny of the Bill.

The Committee considered the Bill and related issues at 15 meetings between 31 May 2007 and 1 May 2008. During the Committee Stage, 53 written submissions on the Bill were received, and the Committee took oral evidence from 12 organisations. The Committee is grateful to those who gave oral or written evidence; it is of the utmost importance that, as a legislative Assembly, we take on board the views of those whom new legislation will affect. Listening to the views of those directly involved is essential if we are to develop and introduce better policy.

The Bill also introduces enabling powers to make regulations in a number of areas, including annual statements of accounts, annual reports and annual returns by charities. The Committee looks forward to receiving and scrutinising the policy proposals for those regulations, and it is hoped that our dealings with the Department on forthcoming regulations will be as productive and positive as they have been on the Bill.

3.30 pm

The Minister outlined the nature and purpose of the first group of amendments, which relate to public benefits, and I do not intend to cover the same ground. Amendment No 1 is intended to give clarity to the definition of religion. The Committee was content that the definition of religion recognised a variety of faith groups in respect of the advancement of religion. However, it was concerned that the definition, as drafted, did not specifically include a “belief in one god”, although it accepted that it did not preclude it. For the sake of clarity, the Committee decided that the definition of religion should state that it includes a “belief in one god”.

The Committee was also concerned about the use of the word “disbenefit” in relation to the public benefit test, hence amendment No 2. Members accepted that the word “disbenefit” was ambiguous, ill-defined and vulnerable to exploitation. The Committee noted that it was not used in the public benefit guidance issued by the Charity Commission for England and Wales — “harm” and “detriment” were used instead. The Committee agreed that clear, unequivocal and accepted language should be used, and recommended that “detriment” replace “disbenefit”.

One important concern was highlighted by consultees about the public-benefit test, and, more specifically, about what constitutes public benefit. In response to that concern, the Committee emphasises the need for benefits that are not tangible or measurable — such as spiritual benefits — to be recognised by the commission in determining whether a charitable purpose is for public benefit. The Committee considered that it was not necessary to table an amendment to that effect. However, it intends to scrutinise carefully the proposed guidelines on public benefit to ensure that spiritual benefits are accepted and recognised by the new charity commission as constituting public benefit. The Committee supports the first group of amendments.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her explanation of the amendments. I will address amendment No 2 and amendment No 3. There was much discussion about the use of “disbenefit”, because it did not make sense to a lot of people — in fact, I had never heard the word before. The Committee decided that “detriment” was a more appropriate word to use in the legislation.

A lot of evidence was taken from religious groups, and there was a misapprehension among those groups that their charitable status would be affected. Amendment No 3 has reassured people. Although it may not satisfy all of the people concerned, it is hoped that it will satisfy the majority of those people who had reservations about the criteria that designated religious charities are expected to meet.

I thank the Committee and everyone else who was involved in the progression of the Bill, because it has been a long and arduous process. The Bill has 186 clauses and nine schedules, so the Committee had a lot of work to do. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Cobain: I support the Bill and the first group of amendments. The Charities Bill is welcome and necessary. The legislation covering the regulation of charities in Northern Ireland is out of step with that of our British counterparts and with the new charity law that is being introduced in the Republic of Ireland. The Charities Bill will bring Northern Ireland up to speed.

The people of Northern Ireland are generous and supportive of charities, and we have an excellent charity sector that supports some of the most vulnerable people in society and further afield. However, to date, the charity sector has been regulated by a disjointed and often complicated legislative framework that, in many ways, has been ineffectual for the charities and for the public’s confidence in how charities are run. I am pleased, therefore, that the Bill introduces a regulatory framework that, while mirroring many aspects of our British counterparts, is moulded to the distinctive circumstances of Northern Ireland.

As has been stated, the Bill provides for a statutory definition of “charity” and “charitable purposes”, the establishment of the charity commission for Northern Ireland, a new charitable incorporated organisation, a register of charities, and provisions to deal with the regulation of charities and public charitable collections.

One of the main purposes of the Bill is to give the public confidence that charities are legal and that the money that those charities receive is used correctly and has been collected properly. Good regulation is crucial for ensuring that legitimate and successful charities are given the protection and support that they need; consequently, the thrust of the Bill has been widely supported by the charity sector. Equally, we must ensure that unscrupulous people, who, in the past, have used the cover of a charitable label to promote illegal activities and collect money for illegal organisations, no longer have the opportunity to do that. I believe that the Bill represents a necessary and modernising step that will see Northern Ireland join the twenty-first century in respect of charity regulation.

The Committee Stage has proceeded extremely well. I thank the Minister and all those who made representations in an attempt to improve the Bill. As the Minister has clearly outlined, the first group of amendments deals with the definition of “charity” and the issue of a public-benefit test. At present, there is no statutory definition of “charity” in Northern Ireland, although the legal concept has been developed through case law for many years.

Amendment No 1 is intended to clarify that the advancement of a religion involves the “belief in one god”, as well as a belief in more than one god.

The Bill sets out the meaning of “charity” and the meaning of “charitable purpose”. Although most charitable groups have been strongly supportive of that move, the Committee received representation from religious groups and groups representing Churches, who raised concerns about the definition of a religion and the use of the public-benefit test. Therefore, amendment No 2 refers to the public-benefit test in clause 3 of the Bill.

According to the original version of the Bill, if a charity is considered to impose disbenefit on the public, that organisation may not gain charitable status. The Committee considered that the word “disbenefit” was too elusive, and could be used against charities whose benefit to society cannot be measured so tangibly, such as spiritual benefit. By tabling this amendment, the Minister has sought to give more legal clarity and assurance to charities that the work that they do cannot be attacked unnecessarily. The removal of the word “disbenefit” and the introduction of “detriment” will ensure that no legitimate charities are

unnecessarily penalised for the work that they carry out. I support amendments Nos 1 and 2.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her work in respect of the Bill, as well as the Committee for Social Development, whose work was particularly well done, and the staff of that Committee, who worked very well in support of Committee members.

This Bill brings much clarity to the legal concept of charitable purpose. This is a timely reform of our law, which has significantly fallen behind the rest of charity law in both Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Clause 2 includes an exhaustive list describing charitable purposes, which I believe reflects contemporary interests and contemporary charitable objectives.

Amendment No 1, proposing the insertion of “one god or” into clause 2, is not, perhaps, absolutely essential. Nonetheless, representatives of the Presbyterian Church, as well as others, raised the issue that we live in a theistic society, where the concept of there being one God is deeply valued. It is fit and proper, therefore, that that should be reflected in the legislation that will govern charitable purpose, particularly given that many people who are involved in charities are motivated by religious purpose. Therefore, it is fit and proper that that amendment be made, and we are grateful to those religious bodies — in particular, the Presbyterian Church — for bringing that issue to the attention of the Committee and the Assembly.

It is proper that amendment No 2 be passed, because the term “disbenefit” is vague and lacks proper definition; the amendment will bring clarity to clause 3. Although the term “harm” emerged as an alternative during the Committee’s discussions, “detriment” is the most appropriate term and reflects the views of the bodies that gave evidence to the Committee. Those bodies were concerned about the use of the term, “disbenefit”.

As the Chairperson correctly said, the term “disbenefit” jars and does not bring any meaning or feeling to the legislation. In the corresponding legislation in England and Wales, the terms “harm” and “detriment” are used — we should use language that is common to other jurisdictions to make our law easily understandable in the context of modern charity law.

As part of the public-benefit test, which is essential to establishing a charitable purpose, it was proper that the Committee decided that spiritual value is as legitimate a purpose as any of the more tangible charitable purposes. It was important and correct that Church bodies and other organisations stressed that point. When the commission determines public benefit, I hope that it takes seriously the points that were made by the organisations that gave evidence — there is a non-tangible spiritual value that is appreciated by people who live in this jurisdiction, and it should be part and parcel of the determination of charitable purpose.

The Minister for Social Development: I am grateful for Members’ contributions to the debate on the amendments in group 1. As I said earlier, the amendments have been agreed by the Committee and will improve the understanding of the public-benefit test.

I assure the Chairperson, Mr Campbell, and all the members of the Committee that the good working relationship and the communication that was established between the Committee and the Department will continue as we work through the implementation of the Bill, namely with the charity commission. I assure the House that the charity commission will come back with consultation on the terms of the public-benefit test.

The public-benefit test is an important part of the new legislation, and the proposed charity commission will have to consult on its guidance for the application of that test. All charities that register with the charity commission will have to demonstrate that they provide public benefit. However, the vast majority of charities currently registered with HM Revenue and Customs for tax purposes will be able to pass that test.

3.45 pm

Mr Cobain discussed the need to have a proper regulatory framework that is in line with what exists in Great Britain. I welcome those supportive comments. My Department has been working with other regulators in Great Britain and in Ireland to ensure the proper regulation of all charities, hence the need for the legislation.

My colleague Mr Maginness raised the issue of spiritual benefit, to which Mr Cobain referred already. I stress that there will be full regulation and full recognition of that issue, and that is why I accepted the Committee’s proposed amendments on the matter. I also had several meetings with various bodies about their particular concerns. I was charged and compelled by their comments.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (The “public benefit” test)

Amendment No 2 made: In page 3, line 41, leave out “disbenefit” and insert “detriment”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 to 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 16 (Register of charities)

The Minister for Social Development: I beg to move amendment No 3: In page 11, line 15, leave out “and” and insert

“(b) if the charity is a designated religious charity within the meaning of

section 165, a statement to that effect, and”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 42: In clause 165, page 133, line 34, after “laid before” insert

“and approved by a resolution of”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 43: In clause 166, page 134, line 15, leave out “10 years” and insert “5 years; and”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 44: In clause 166, page 134, line 16, Leave out paragraph (d). — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

The Minister for Social Development: The above amendments deal with religious issues. My Department and the Committee for Social Development received a considerable number of representations on the issue of designated religious charity status. That status was introduced in clauses 165 and 166 in recognition of the unique governance arrangements that exist in many of our faith-based organisations.

It is intended that those clauses will provide limited exemptions from aspects of the Charities Bill for faith-based charities that meet the criteria for designated religious status. I have listened to the concerns of Committee members, smaller Churches and ethnic minority groups about the proposed criteria that are to be applied. It is recognised that many such organisations also have robust internal governance arrangements. I am pleased that the proposed amendments to the criteria that are to be applied have been agreed with the Committee for Social Development and by the Executive.

Amendment No 3 relates to the registration of charities and will extend to clause 16 to include a separate statement to reflect whether a charity has been granted designated religious status. Amendment No 42 to clause 165 will ensure that any subsequent Order made by the Department to extend exemptions to charities must be approved by resolution of the Assembly. Amendment No 43 will reduce the qualifying criteria for designated religious status in clause 166(3)(c) from 10 years to five years.

That is a reasonable concession that will ensure that new faith-based charities have sufficient time to demonstrate that acceptable governance arrangements are in place.

Amendment No 44 will remove the membership criteria for designated religious status in clause 166(d). That membership criterion previously stood at 1,000 members. However, I accepted that that would disadvantage smaller faith-based organisations. In clause 166, the underlying principle remains that it will be a matter for the charity commission to determine whether designated religious status is appropriate in each case.

Mr Craig: As a member of the Committee for Social Development, I welcome the Charities Bill, which will introduce an integrated system of registration and regulation, including control of charitable fund-raising as well as supervision and support of registered charities. It is good that, for the first time, we will have effective regulation and a statutory definition of charities in Northern Ireland.

When considering these amendments — especially amendment No 43, which refers to clause 166(c) — all members of the Committee understood why it was necessary to have a clause that stated that religious organisations had to be established for 10 years before meeting the religious designation criteria. We all understood the principle; nobody wanted a situation in which an organisation could set itself up, claiming to be religious, and could disappear overnight with people’s money. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland has a history of that happening.

All Committee members clearly understood why a period of time was included in that clause, but we felt that a decade was too long for some organisations and Churches to be established before meeting the religious designation criteria. We suggested that five years was a more suitable period of time. I thank the Committee and the Minister for coming to an agreement on the five-year period, which we all believe is much more reasonable.

That five-year period will still protect the public, because I do not believe that an illegal organisation would set itself up for five years, call itself a religious organisation or Church, and disappear with people’s money; most unscrupulous people do not have that sort of patience.

The Committee was bemused when clause 166(d) was considered. It stated that a Church must have 1,000 members before it meets the religious designation criteria. Perhaps I am bemused because I am a third-generation Baptist who was brought up in a small Church that fiercely protects its independence as a denomination.

When I mentioned independent and congregation-based Churches, many Committee members were bewildered because they were not brought up in that type of background. Northern Ireland has hundreds — if not thousands — of independent Churches, and few, if any, would have met that criterion of having 1,000 congregation members. Unfortunately, that would have automatically excluded those Churches from religious designation protection.

Once the arguments were clearly put to Committee members, not only did they accept them but members asked many of the independent Churches to make their views known, for which I thank the members. Many independent Churches went to the effort and bother of

submitting their views to the Committee, for which they are to be thanked. Those views gave the Committee and the Minister a better understanding of the organisations' perspective on the issue.

I thank the Committee for accepting those arguments and, ultimately, I thank the Minister for accepting them through the Committee. Furthermore, I thank her for the removal of the denominational number requirement. The proposed charities commission will make the decision on a church-by-church basis, and I accept that. Many churches would have been discriminated against, had that amendment not been accepted. I accept and endorse the amendments.

Mr A Maginness: If anyone wants to see the value of the Committee system working in the Assembly, I refer them to the second group of amendments. That reflects the sympathy and concern given to the groups that attended the Committee to give evidence on the issue of designated religious charity status. The deep concerns of those groups were felt by the Committee and, as a result, the Committee was so concerned that it made it plain to the Department and the Minister that amendments were necessary.

Mr Craig detailed the concerns expressed by independent Church groups. It was appropriate for the Committee to take those concerns on board, and it did so by reducing the 10 years to five years, and by removing the necessity for 1,000 members as a criterion for achieving designated religious charitable status. That, of course, is not to say that the Committee did not have thorough discussion on the matter: it did. However, it reached a consensus, and that is important.

The Church groups that had problems must feel satisfied that they not only had the opportunity to make their points, but that their points were considered thoroughly, and taken on board by the Committee, the Department and the Minister, and, I hope, by the Assembly today.

Ms Lo: I endorse what the previous two Members have said on this group of amendments, and I support the amendments. I was one of the Committee members who advocated a change in clause 165.

I particularly thank the Minister for her understanding, for giving time to meet ethnic minority communities, and for asking her staff to meet those groups. On behalf of the ethnic minority community sector, I thank and congratulate the Minister on agreeing to make the amendments.

When the ethnic-minority sector first heard about the criterion for 1,000 members, they felt that it would be totally discriminatory to them. Those small faith groups will, in their nature, remain very small and will never meet a criterion of 1,000 members. They would have been barred for ever from obtaining the designated religious status. They understood that to get that

designated religious status exempted them from only a few clauses; however, to them it was a matter of principle. Why should they, as religious faith groups, be barred from obtaining charitable status? Any group that is founded on faith or religion wants to receive designated religious charity status.

4.00 pm

The ethnic-minority sector viewed the criterion for a group to have been established for at least 10 years before acquiring religious status as extremely difficult to meet and disadvantageous, particularly to newer immigrants to Northern Ireland. I am extremely pleased that the 10-year period has been reduced to a more reasonable five years and that the requirement for 1,000 members has been removed from the Bill.

I support the amendment, and I thank the Minister, the staff and the Committee members, who also support the amendment.

Miss McIlveen: I echo my colleague Mr Craig in thanking the Minister for tabling the amendments to clauses 16, 165 and 166, and I fully support their inclusion in the Bill. The clauses vexed both Committee members and a wide variety of congregations and, needless to say, caused a certain amount of confusion and concern. It is important that the register of charities identifies clearly whether a charity has designated religious charity status, and the insertion of clause 16(4)(b) helps to draw attention to that distinction.

Northern Ireland is peculiar in the number and size of its religious denominations. I welcome the reduction of the 10-year requirement to five years. I also welcome the removal of the requirement for 1,000 members because, as the Minister said, that may have caused disadvantage to some. I am happy to support the amendments.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank all Members for contributing to the debate and raising questions and issues on the second group of amendments. Those amendments arose out of representations from faith-based organisations during the Committee's Consideration Stage, and I was content to table them.

I want to make it clear that any applications for designated religious charity status will be a matter for the new charity commission to consider, but only after a faith-based charity has been registered. The commission will require assurance that charities seeking the exemption have the appropriate governance arrangements in place. Any faith-based organisation will still be able to register as a charity without seeking designated religious status, which is neither a requirement nor automatically granted.

I welcome Mr Craig's supportive comments, and I assure him that the charity commission will be diligent in protecting legitimate charities and the public from

criminal activity. I place that assurance on the record while on the Floor of the House.

My officials and I met several of the main and minority Churches to discuss the criteria for designated religious status. I listened to their concerns and to those of the Committee, and I am pleased to have accepted the amendment. I found meeting all those Church representatives a valuable and enriching experience, because it provided me with information of which I had hitherto been unaware and that I was pleased to receive.

Anna Lo talked about minority faith and ethnic groups, and I am aware of the increasingly important role that they play in society, particularly over the past number of years. I was pleased to table the amendment.

My colleague Alban Maginness made a largely political point, but he also underscored the value of the Committee process and the benefit of positive engagement with the smaller Churches. The fundamental value of the Committee process is in ensuring members' full participation in the line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill and their full engagement with my officials in understanding, commenting on, and providing reasoned amendments to, the legislation.

I agree that it was a very worthwhile and necessary process, and we have seen the benefits of it in the amendments tabled. It demonstrates very clearly to me, and I am sure to all Members of the House, that democracy is working in Northern Ireland and working well for all of the people.

Amendment No 3 agreed to.

Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 17 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. The lead amendment is amendment No 4, with which it will be convenient to debate the other 56 technical amendments in the group. The group also includes the Minister's opposition to clauses 52, 104 and 159 stand part of the Bill.

I call the Minister for Social Development, Ms Margaret Ritchie, to move amendment No 4 and to explain the other amendments and the opposition to clauses in the group.

Clause 27 (*Application cy-près of gifts of donors unknown or disclaiming*)

The Minister for Social Development: I beg to move amendment No 4: In page 20, line 39, leave out "except in so far as the context otherwise requires".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 5: In clause 32, page 26, line 1, leave out subsection (10). — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 6: In clause 45, page 37, line 29, after "Act 1988 (c. 1)" insert

"or Part 10 of the Income Tax Act 2007". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 7: In clause 45, page 37, line 36, after "Act 1988" insert

"or Part 10 of the Income Tax Act 2007". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 8: In clause 46, page 38, line 29, at end insert

"(6) In the case of a charity that is a company, an order under this section may authorise an act notwithstanding that it involves the breach of a duty imposed on a director of the company under Chapter 2 of Part 10 of the Companies Act

2006 (general duties of directors)." — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 52: *The Member listed below gives notice of her intention to oppose the Question that clause 52 stand part of the Bill.* — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 9: In clause 57, page 46, line 30, leave out "recalled" and insert "revoked". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 10: In clause 57, page 47, line 2, leave out

"expenses against a charity, award expenses"

and insert

"costs against a charity, award costs". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 11: In clause 66, page 54, line 31, leave out paragraph (a) and insert

"(a) is eligible for appointment as a statutory auditor under Part 42 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46); or". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 12: In clause 66, page 55, line 7, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

"who is—

- (a) a member of one of the bodies listed in subsection (4A); or
 - (b) a Fellow of the Association of Charity Independent Examiners.
- (4A) The bodies referred to in subsection (4)(a) are —
- (a) the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales;
 - (b) the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland;
 - (c) the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland;
 - (d) the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants;
 - (e) the Association of Authorised Public Accountants;
 - (f) the Association of Accounting Technicians;
 - (g) the Association of International Accountants;
 - (h) the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants;
 - (i) the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators;
 - (j) the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy."
- [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 13: In clause 66, page 56, line 6, leave out paragraph (b) and insert

“(b) amend subsection (4) or (4A) by adding or removing a body to or from the list in that subsection or by varying any entry for the time being included in that list.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 14: In clause 66, page 56, line 9, leave out subsection (10) and insert

“(10) Nothing in this section applies in relation to the accounts of a charity for a financial year if those accounts are required to be audited in accordance with Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 15: In clause 67, page 56, line 17, at end insert

“or

(iii) the accounts so prepared under section 394 of the Companies Act 2006 (duty to prepare individual accounts).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 16: In clause 69, page 58, line 23, leave out from “Part 8” to end of line 25 and insert

“Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46), together with —

(a) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been audited under Part 16 of that Act, a copy of the report made by the auditor on those accounts;

(b) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been audited under section 66, a copy of the report made by the auditor on those accounts;

(c) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been examined under that section, a copy of the report made by the person carrying out the examination.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 17: In clause 70, page 59, line 16, leave out

“Part 8 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”,

and insert

“Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 18: In clause 70, page 59, line 20, leave out sub-paragraphs (ii) and (iii) and insert

“(ii) they have been examined by an independent examiner under section 66(3)(a); or

(iii) they relate to a year in respect of which the company is exempt from audit under Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and neither section 66(2) nor section 66(3) applied to them.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 19: In clause 92, page 72, line 8, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”

and insert

“section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 20: In clause 92, page 72, line 10, leave out “Article 675” and insert “section 1157”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 21: In clause 93, page 72, line 14, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986” and insert

“Section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 22: In clause 93, page 72, line 20, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986”

and insert

“section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 23: Leave out clause 99 and insert

“Consent of Commission required for approval etc by members of charitable companies

99. — (1) Where a company is a charity —

(a) any approval given by the members of the company under any provision of Chapter 4 of Part 10 of the Companies Act 2006 (transactions with directors requiring approval by members) listed in subsection (2), and

(b) any affirmation given by members of the company under section 196 or 214 of that Act (affirmation of unapproved property transactions and loans),

is ineffective without the prior written consent of the Commission.

(2) The provisions are —

(a) section 188 (directors’ long-term service contracts);

(b) section 190 (substantial property transactions with directors etc);

(c) section 197, 198 or 200 (loans and quasi-loans to directors etc);

(d) section 201 (credit transactions for benefit of directors etc);

(e) section 203 (related arrangements);

(f) section 217 (payments to directors for loss of office);

(g) section 218 (payments to directors for loss of office: transfer of undertaking etc).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 24: After clause 99 insert

“Consent of Commission required for certain acts of charitable company

99A. — (1) A company that is a charity may not do an act to which this section applies without the prior written consent of the Commission.

(2) This section applies to an act that —

(a) does not require approval under a listed provision of Chapter 4 of Part 10 of the Companies Act 2006 (transactions with directors) by the members of the company, but

(b) would require such approval but for an exemption in the provision in question that disappplies the need for approval on the part of the members of a body corporate which is a wholly owned subsidiary of another body corporate.

(3) The reference to a listed provision is a reference to a provision listed in section 99(2).

(4) If a company acts in contravention of this section, the exemption referred to in subsection (2)(b) shall be treated as of no effect in relation to the act.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 25: Leave out clause 100 and insert

“Requirement to disclose charitable status

100. — (1) Where a company is a charity and its name does not include the word ‘charity’ or ‘charitable’, the fact that the company is a charity must be stated in legible characters—

(a) in every location, and in every description of document or communication, in which it is required by regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) to state its registered name, and

(b) in all conveyances purporting to be executed by the company.

(2) In subsection (1)(b) ‘conveyance’ means any instrument creating, transferring, varying or extinguishing an interest in land.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 26: Leave out clause 101 and insert

“Civil consequences of failure to make required disclosure

101. — (1) This section applies to any legal proceedings brought by a company to which section 100 applies to enforce a right arising out of a contract or conveyance in connection with which there was a failure to comply with that section.

(2) The proceedings shall be dismissed if the defendant to the proceedings (“D”) shows —

(a) that D has a claim against the claimant arising out of the contract or conveyance that D has been unable to pursue by reason of the failure to comply with section 100, or

(b) that D has suffered some financial loss in connection with the contract or conveyance by reason of the failure to comply with that section, unless the court before which the proceedings are brought is satisfied that it is just and equitable to permit the proceedings to continue.

(3) This section does not affect the right of any person to enforce such rights as that person may have against another in any proceedings brought by that person.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 27: After clause 101 insert

“Criminal consequences of failure to make required disclosure

101A. — (1) Where a company fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 100, an offence is committed by —

(a) the company, and

(b) every officer of the company who is in default.

(2) For this purpose a shadow director of the company is treated as an officer of the company if the failure is to comply with section 100(1)(a) and that person would be treated as an officer of the company for the purposes of the corresponding requirement of regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).

(3) A person guilty of such an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale and, for continued contravention, a daily default fine not exceeding one-tenth of level 3 on the standard scale.

(4) Expressions used in this section have the same meaning as in section 84 of the Companies Act 2006 (criminal consequences of failure to disclose company’s registered name).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 28: In clause 102, page 78, line 3, Leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

“an auditor of a charitable company appointed under Chapter 2 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) (appointment of auditors)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 29: In clause 103, page 78, line 16, after “condition and” insert “relevant”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 30: In clause 103, page 78, line 18, leave out from “company auditor” to the end of line 19 and insert

“statutory auditor under Part 42 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 31: In clause 103, page 78, line 19, at end insert

“(1A) “Relevant accounts” means accounts required to be audited under Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

Clause 104: *The Member listed below gives notice of her intention to oppose the Question that clause 104 stand part of the Bill.* — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 32: In clause 107, page 80, line 2, leave out subsection (1) and insert

“(1) The name of a CIO must appear in legible characters —

(a) in every location, and in every description of document or communication, in which a charitable company would be required by regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) to state its registered name; and

(b) in all conveyances purporting to be executed by the CIO.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 33: In clause 107, page 80, line 10, leave out “subsection (1)(d)” and insert “subsection (1)(b)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 34: In clause 107, page 80, line 17, leave out “documents” and insert

“locations, documents, communications and conveyances”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 35: After clause 107 insert

“Civil consequences of failure to disclose name and status

107A. — (1) This section applies to any legal proceedings brought by a CIO to enforce a right arising out of a contract or conveyance in connection with which there was a failure to comply with section 107.

(2) The proceedings shall be dismissed if the defendant to the proceedings (“D”) shows —

(a) that D has a claim against the CIO arising out of the contract or conveyance that D has been unable to pursue by reason of the failure to comply with section 107, or

(b) that D has suffered some financial loss in connection with the contract or conveyance by reason of the failure to comply with that section, unless the court before which the proceedings are brought is satisfied that it is just and equitable to permit the proceedings to continue.

(3) This section does not affect the right of any person to enforce such rights as that person may have against another in any proceedings brought by that person.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 36: In clause 108, page 80, line 19, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

“(1) In the case of failure, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 107 an offence is committed by —

- (a) every charity trustee of the CIO who is in default, and
- (b) any other person who on the CIO’s behalf —

(i) signs or authorises the signing of the offending document, communication or conveyance, or

(ii) otherwise commits or authorises the offending act or omission.

(1A) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale and, for continued contravention, a daily default fine not exceeding one-tenth of level 3 on the standard scale.

(2) The reference in subsection (1) to a charity trustee being ‘in default’, and the reference in subsection (2) to a daily default fine, have the same meaning as in the Companies Acts (see sections 1121 to 1123 and 1125 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 37: In clause 114, page 85, line 8, leave out

“Articles 51 to 53 of the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 17)”

and insert

“sections 53 to 55 of the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 41: In clause 138, page 105, line 11, leave out “benevolent or philanthropic”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

Clause 159: *The Member listed below gives notice of her intention to oppose the Question that clause 159 stand part of the Bill.* — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 45: In clause 180, page 140, line 22, leave out

“except in so far as the context otherwise requires”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 46: In clause 180, page 140, line 38, leave out

“Article 231 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986”

and insert

“section 390 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 47: In clause 180, page 141, line 29, leave out

“except in so far as the context otherwise requires”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 48: In schedule 3, page 155, leave out lines 33 to 45. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 49: In schedule 6, page 165, line 18, leave out sub-paragraph (2) and insert

“(2) A charity is a ‘parent charity’ if it is (or is to be treated as) a parent undertaking in relation to one or more other undertakings in accordance with the provisions of section 1162 of, and Schedule 7 to, the Companies Act 2006 (c.46).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 50: In schedule 6, page 166, line 5, leave out

“Article 267(1) of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986”

and insert

“section 1161(1) of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 51: In schedule 6, page 166, line 13, after “section 64(1)” insert

“or, as the case may be, section 386 of the Companies Act 2006 (duty to keep accounting records)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 52: In schedule 6, page 166, line 18, after “section 64(1)” insert

“or section 386 of the Companies Act 2006”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 53: In schedule 6, page 166, line 26, leave out sub-paragraph (1) and insert

“(1) This paragraph applies in relation to a financial year of a charity if —

(a) the charity is a parent charity at the end of that year; and

(b) (where it is a company) it is not required to prepare consolidated accounts for that year under section 399 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) (duty to prepare group accounts), whether or not such accounts are in fact prepared.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 54: In schedule 6, page 167, line 7, after “parent charity” insert

“(other than a parent charity which is a company)”. — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 55: In schedule 6, page 167, line 12, at end insert

“(6A) If the requirement in sub-paragraph (2) applies to the charity trustees of a parent charity in relation to a financial year and the charity is a company, that requirement so applies in addition to the requirement in section 394 of the Companies Act 2006 (duty to prepare individual accounts).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 56: In schedule 6, page 167, line 36, at end insert

“(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2), section 64 applies as if subsection (5) of that section were omitted.” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 57: In schedule 6, page 168, line 29, leave out sub-paragraph (7) and insert

“(7) If this paragraph applies in relation to a financial year of a parent charity by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) —

(a) subject to head (b), the appropriate audit provision shall apply in relation to the parent charity’s own accounts for that year (whether or not it would otherwise so apply);

(b) where the parent charity is a company and its own accounts for that year are not required to be audited in accordance with Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46), section 66(2) shall apply in relation to those accounts (whether or not it would otherwise so apply).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 58: In schedule 6, page 168, line 34, leave out “section 66(2)” and insert” —

(a) subject to sub-paragraph (b), section 66(2);

(b) if the parent charity is a company, section 66(2) or Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (as the case may be).” — *[The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]*

No 59: In schedule 6, page 168, leave out lines 42 and 43. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 60: In schedule 6, page 169, line 38, leave out

“Article 397A of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”

and insert

“section 499 or 500 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 61: In schedule 8, page 176, line 7, at end insert

“The Administration of Estates (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (NI 14)

2A. In Article 9 (grant of representation to trust corporation) in paragraph (4)(a) after ‘High Court’ insert ‘or the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland’.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 62: In schedule 8, page 176, leave out lines 22 to 29. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 63: In schedule 8, page 177, line 21, at end insert

“*The Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 1)*

12. In Schedule 3 (disclosure for facilitating discharge of functions by other supervising authorities) —

(a) in the entry relating to the Department, omit the words ‘the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 (c. 33)’; and

(b) at the end add —

‘The Charity Commission Functions under the
for Northern Ireland. Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

The Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)

13. — (1) In section 21(2)(b) for ‘Article 9 of the Charities (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (SI 1987/2048 (N.I.19))’ substitute ‘section 97 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(2) In section 31(4)(b) for ‘Article 9 of the Charities (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (SI 1987/2048 (N.I.19))’ substitute ‘section 97 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(3) In section 1140(2)(c)(ii) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert ‘or section 33 of Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(4) In section 1154(1)(b) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert ‘or section 33 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(5) In section 1154(2) after paragraph (b) insert —

‘(bb) in the case of appointment of a receiver or manager under section 33 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland;’.

(6) In Schedule 1, in paragraph 6(4) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert ‘section 44 or 45 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 64: In schedule 9, page 178, leave out lines 11 to 13. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 65: In schedule 9, page 178, line 16, at end insert

‘The Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 1). In Schedule 3, in the entry relating to the Department, the words ‘the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964’.

— [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 66: In the long title, leave out

“to make provision about the funding of such institutions;”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

The amendments in this group are almost entirely of a very technical nature, and none in any way undermines the policy intention of the Bill; to provide for proper regulation of the charitable sector. The proposed technical amendments fall into three distinct categories. The first category will ensure that parity is maintained following very recent changes to charity and company law in Great Britain. The second category will correct a number of drafting errors in the Bill, and the final category will update some statutory references.

I do not intend to take up Assembly time by providing detailed explanation of those technical amendments. That information was provided to the members of the Committee for Social Development, and I am grateful to them for agreeing to the amendments.

In addition to the technical amendments, this group contains three clauses that I wish to oppose in the Bill. Some issues came to light during the Committee Stage of the Bill, and it was agreed that those clauses should not stand part of the Bill. Clause 52 contains provision that the charity commission may order taxation of a solicitor’s bill of costs for business conducted on behalf of a charity. Advice was received from the Office of Legislative Counsel that that clause duplicated provision contained in the Solicitors (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, and is, therefore, unnecessary.

Clause 104 relates to the annual audit or examination of accounts of charitable companies. That raises a technical issue arising from the enactment of the Companies Act 2006, and the reference to the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 in the clause is no longer appropriate.

Clause 159 relates to the power of my Department to give financial assistance to charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institutions. It is proposed to remove that clause from the Bill, on the basis that it duplicates provision contained in the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

For those reasons, I request that Members oppose clauses 52, 104 and 159 and support the other technical amendments to the Bill.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hilditch): I thank the Minister for her explanation of the amendments and her reasons for opposing certain clauses in the Bill. The vast majority of the technical amendments are necessary to reflect the recent changes that have been made to company law.

The others simply correct minor typographical or drafting errors in the Bill. It is important to note that they do not have any policy impact on the operation of

the charity commission. The Committee supports fully the amendments and the Minister's proposal to remove certain clauses from the Bill.

The Minister for Social Development: I am grateful for Mr Hilditch's contribution on those technical amendments. As I made clear earlier, they do not in any way dilute the overall policy directive to provide for effective and proportionate regulation of the charitable sector in Northern Ireland.

Amendment No 4 agreed to.

Clause 27, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 28 to 31 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 32 (Further powers to make schemes or alter application of charitable property)

Amendment No 5 made: In page 26, line 1, leave out subsection (10). — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 32, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 33 to 44 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 45 (Meaning of "Scottish recognised body" and "England and Wales charity" in sections 43 and 44)

Amendment No 6 made: In page 37, line 29, after "Act 1988 (c. 1)" insert

"or Part 10 of the Income Tax Act 2007". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 7 made: In page 37, line 36, after "Act 1988" insert

"or Part 10 of the Income Tax Act 2007". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 45, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 46 (Power to authorise dealings with charity property, etc.)

Amendment No 8 made: In page 38, line 29, at end insert

"(6) In the case of a charity that is a company, an order under this section may authorise an act notwithstanding that it involves the breach of a duty imposed on a director of the company under Chapter 2 of Part 10 of the Companies Act 2006 (general duties of directors)." — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 46, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 47 to 51 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 52 disagreed to.

Clauses 53 to 56 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 57 (Power in relation to certain English, Welsh and Scottish charities)

Amendment No 9 made: In page 46, line 30, leave out "recalled" and insert "revoked". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 10 made: In page 47, line 2, leave out "expenses against a charity, award expenses"

and insert

"costs against a charity, award costs". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 57, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 58 to 65 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 66 (Annual audit or examination of charity accounts)

Amendment No 11 made: In page 54, line 31, leave out paragraph (a) and insert

"(a) is eligible for appointment as a statutory auditor under Part 42 of the

Companies Act 2006 (c. 46); or". — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 12 made: In page 55, line 7, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

"who is—

(a) a member of one of the bodies listed in subsection (4A); or
(b) a Fellow of the Association of Charity Independent Examiners.

(4A) The bodies referred to in subsection (4)(a) are —

- (a) the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales;
- (b) the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland;
- (c) the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland;
- (d) the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants;
- (e) the Association of Authorised Public Accountants;
- (f) the Association of Accounting Technicians;
- (g) the Association of International Accountants;
- (h) the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants;
- (i) the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators;
- (j) the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy."

— [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 13 made: In page 56, line 6, leave out paragraph (b) and insert

"(b) amend subsection (4) or (4A) by adding or removing a body to or from the list in that subsection or by varying any entry for the time being included in that list." — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 14 made: In page 56, line 9, leave out subsection (10) and insert

"(10) Nothing in this section applies in relation to the accounts of a charity for a financial year if those accounts are required to be audited in accordance with Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)." — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 66, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 67 (Supplementary provisions relating to audits, etc.)

Amendment No 15 made: In page 56, line 17, at end insert

“or

“(iii) the accounts so prepared under section 394 of the Companies Act 2006

(duty to prepare individual accounts).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 67, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 68 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 69 (Annual reports)

Amendment No 16 made: In page 58, line 23, leave out from “Part 8” to end of line 25 and insert

“Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46), together with—

(a) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been audited under Part 16 of that Act, a copy of the report made by the auditor on those accounts;

(b) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been audited under section 66, a copy of the report made by the auditor on those accounts;

(c) where the accounts of the charity for that year have been examined under that section, a copy of the report made by the person carrying out the examination.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 69, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

4.15 pm

Clause 70 (Public inspection of annual reports, etc.)

Amendment No 17 made: In page 59, line 16, leave out

“Part 8 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”

and insert

“Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 18 made: In page 59, line 20, leave out sub-paragraphs (ii) and (iii) and insert

“(ii) they have been examined by an independent examiner under section

66(3)(a); or

(iii) they relate to a year in respect of which the company is exempt from audit under Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 and neither section 66(2) nor section 66(3) applied to them.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 70, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 71 to 91 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 92 (Power to relieve trustees, auditors, etc. from liability for breach of trust or duty)

Amendment No 19 made: In page 72, line 8, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”

and insert

“section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 20 made: In page 72, line 10, leave out “Article 675” and insert “section 1157”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 92, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 93 (Court’s power to grant relief to apply to all auditors, etc. of charities which are not companies)

Amendment No 21 made: In page 72, line 14, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986”

and insert

“Section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 22 made: In page 72, line 20, leave out

“Article 675 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986”

and insert

“section 1157 of the Companies Act 2006”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 93, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 94 to 98 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 99 (Requirement of consent of Commission to certain acts)

Amendment No 23 made: Leave out clause 99 and insert

“Consent of Commission required for approval etc by members of charitable companies

99. — (1) Where a company is a charity —

(a) any approval given by the members of the company under any provision

of Chapter 4 of Part 10 of the Companies Act 2006 (transactions with directors requiring approval by members) listed in subsection (2), and

(b) any affirmation given by members of the company under section 196 or

214 of that Act (affirmation of unapproved property transactions and loans), is ineffective without the prior written consent of the Commission.

(2) The provisions are —

(a) section 188 (directors’ long-term service contracts);

(b) section 190 (substantial property transactions with directors etc);

(c) section 197, 198 or 200 (loans and quasi-loans to directors etc);

(d) section 201 (credit transactions for benefit of directors etc);

(e) section 203 (related arrangements);

(f) section 217 (payments to directors for loss of office);

(g) section 218 (payments to directors for loss of office: transfer of undertaking etc).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Amendment No 24 made: After clause 99 insert

“Consent of Commission required for certain acts of charitable company

99A. — (1) A company that is a charity may not do an act to which this section applies without the prior written consent of the Commission.

(2) This section applies to an act that —

(a) does not require approval under a listed provision of Chapter 4 of Part 10 of the Companies Act 2006 (transactions with directors) by the members of the company, but

(b) would require such approval but for an exemption in the provision in question that disappplies the need for approval on the part of the members of a body corporate which is a wholly owned subsidiary of another body corporate.

(3) The reference to a listed provision is a reference to a provision listed in section 99(2).

(4) If a company acts in contravention of this section, the exemption referred to in subsection (2)(b) shall be treated as of no effect in relation to the act.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Clause 99, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 100 (Name to appear on correspondence, etc.)

Amendment No 25 made: Leave out clause 100 and insert

“Requirement to disclose charitable status

100. — (1) Where a company is a charity and its name does not include the word “charity” or “charitable”, the fact that the company is a charity must be stated in legible characters —

(a) in every location, and in every description of document or communication, in which it is required by regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) to state its registered name, and

(b) in all conveyances purporting to be executed by the company.

(2) In subsection (1)(b) “conveyance” means any instrument creating, transferring, varying or extinguishing an interest in land.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Clause 100, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 101 (Status to appear on correspondence, etc.)

Amendment No 26 made: Leave out clause 101 and insert

“Civil consequences of failure to make required disclosure

101. — (1) This section applies to any legal proceedings brought by a company to which section 100 applies to enforce a right arising out of a contract or conveyance in connection with which there was a failure to comply with that section.

(2) The proceedings shall be dismissed if the defendant to the proceedings

(“D”) shows —

(a) that D has a claim against the claimant arising out of the contract or conveyance that D has been unable to pursue by reason of the failure to comply with section 100, or

(b) that D has suffered some financial loss in connection with the contract or conveyance by reason of the failure to comply with that section, unless the court before which the proceedings are brought is satisfied that it is just and equitable to permit the proceedings to continue.

(3) This section does not affect the right of any person to enforce such rights as that person may have against another in any proceedings brought by that person.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Amendment No 27 made: After clause 101 insert

“Criminal consequences of failure to make required disclosure

101A. — (1) Where a company fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with

section 100, an offence is committed by —

(a) the company, and

(b) every officer of the company who is in default.

(2) For this purpose a shadow director of the company is treated as an officer of the company if the failure is to comply with section 100(1)(a) and that person would be treated as an officer of the company for the purposes of the corresponding requirement of regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).

(3) A person guilty of such an offence is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale and, for continued contravention, a daily default fine not exceeding one-tenth of level 3 on the standard scale.

(4) Expressions used in this section have the same meaning as in section 84 of the Companies Act 2006 (criminal consequences of failure to disclose company’s registered name).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Clause 101, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 102 (Duty of charity’s auditors, etc. to report matters to Commission)

Amendment No 28 made: In page 78, line 3, Leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert

“an auditor of a charitable company appointed under Chapter 2 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) (appointment of auditors).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Clause 102, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 103 (Investigation of accounts)

Amendment No 29 made: In page 78, line 16, after “condition and” insert “relevant”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Amendment No 30 made: In page 78, line 18, leave out from “company auditor” to the end of line 19 and insert

“statutory auditor under Part 42 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie)*.]

Amendment No 31 made: In page 78, line 19, at end insert

“(1A) “Relevant accounts” means accounts required to be audited under Part

16 of the Companies Act 2006.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 103, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 104 disagreed to.

Clauses 105 and 106 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 107 (Name and status)

Amendment No 32 made: In page 80, line 2, leave out subsection (1) and insert

“(1) The name of a CIO must appear in legible characters —

(a) in every location, and in every description of document or communication, in which a charitable company would be required by regulations under section 82 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) to state its registered name; and

(b) in all conveyances purporting to be executed by the CIO.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 33 made: In page 80, line 10, leave out “subsection (1)(d)” and insert “subsection (1)(b)”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 34 made: In page 80, line 17, leave out “documents” and insert

“locations, documents, communications and conveyances”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 35 made: After clause 107 insert

“Civil consequences of failure to disclose name and status

107A. — (1) This section applies to any legal proceedings brought by a CIO to enforce a right arising out of a contract or conveyance in connection with which there was a failure to comply with section 107.

(2) The proceedings shall be dismissed if the defendant to the proceedings

(“D”) shows —

(a) that D has a claim against the CIO arising out of the contract or conveyance that D has been unable to pursue by reason of the failure to comply with section 107, or

(b) that D has suffered some financial loss in connection with the contract or conveyance by reason of the failure to comply with that section, unless the court before which the proceedings are brought is satisfied that it is just and equitable to permit the proceedings to continue.

(3) This section does not affect the right of any person to enforce such rights as that person may have against another in any proceedings brought by that person.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 107, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 108 (Offences connected with name and status)

Amendment No 36 made: In page 80, line 19, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

“(1) In the case of failure, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 107 an offence is committed by —

(a) every charity trustee of the CIO who is in default, and

(b) any other person who on the CIO’s behalf —

(i) signs or authorises the signing of the offending document, communication or conveyance, or

(ii) otherwise commits or authorises the offending act or omission.

(1A) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable on summary

conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale and, for continued contravention, a daily default fine not exceeding one-tenth of level 3 on the standard scale.

(2) The reference in subsection (1) to a charity trustee being ‘in default’, and

the reference in subsection (2) to a daily default fine, have the same meaning as in the Companies Acts (see sections 1121 to 1123 and 1125 of the Companies Act

2006 (c. 46)).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 108, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 109 to 113 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 114 (Conversion of community interest company)

Amendment No 37 made: In page 85, line 8, leave out

“Articles 51 to 53 of the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 17)”

and insert

“sections 53 to 55 of the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 114, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 115 to 121 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the fourth group of amendments for debate. The lead amendment is No 38, with which it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 39 and 40. The amendments deal with the level of financial threshold that applies to charities.

Clause 122 (Power to transfer all property of unincorporated charity)

The Minister for Social Development: I beg to move amendment No 38: In page 90, leave out line 7 and insert

“(b) either —

(i) it does not hold any designated land; or

(ii) the total market value of all designated land which it holds does not exceed £90,000; and”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 39: In page 91, line 31, leave out “the sum’ and insert “any sum”— [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

No 40: In page 91, line 39, at end insert

“(13A) In this section “market value”, in relation to any land held by a charity, means —

(a) the market value of the land as recorded in the accounts for the last financial year of the charity, or

(b) if no such value was so recorded, the current market value of the land

as determined on a valuation carried out for the purpose.”

— [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

This group of three amendments deals with some financial issues that arise from clause 122, which provides powers for the transfer of property belonging to unincorporated charities. The Charity Commission for England and Wales contacted the Social Development Committee to suggest the introduction of a deregulatory measure that deals with the transfer of designated land. Officials from my Department have discussed this matter with the Office of the Third Sector in London and agreed that there was merit in the suggestion. Amendment Nos 38, 39 and 40 to clause 122 will allow for the transfer of designated land of a low value, where the charity commission is assured that the land will continue to be used for the specific purposes on which it is held in trust.

Amendment No 38 will introduce a low-value threshold of £90,000, which aligns to the threshold for small charities in the Charities Bill and the Companies Act 2006. Amendment No 39 will make a minor change to the wording of the clause and amendment No 40 will provide a definition of market value in relation to any designated land held by a charity. Those amendments provide for a more reasonable approach to this issue, and I am thankful to the Charity Commission for England and Wales for bringing this matter to the attention of myself and the Committee.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I thank the Minister for her explanation of the amendments. The amendments provide for an exception for the transfer of designated land, the value of which does not exceed £90,000. In practical terms, that introduces an exception for the transfer of designated land that has very low value. Designated land will still be subject to special safeguards to ensure that it is used for the specific purposes for which it is held in trust. Therefore, the exception will be purely a deregulatory measure and will avoid expensive and time-consuming cy-près proceedings.

I imagine that the amendment will be welcomed by all, particularly the smaller charities. On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I recommend to the House that the amendments be made.

The Minister for Social Development: I am grateful for Mr Hilditch’s contribution to this debate, and for the Committee’s general patience in dealing with some complex and technical issues.

Amendment No 38 agreed to.

Amendment No 39 made: In page 91, line 31, leave out “the sum’ and insert “any sum”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 40 made: In page 91, line 39, at end insert

“(13A) In this section “market value”, in relation to any land held by a charity, means —

(a) the market value of the land as recorded in the accounts for the last financial year of the charity, or

(b) if no such value was so recorded, the current market value of the land as determined on a valuation carried out for the purpose.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 122, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 123 to 133 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clause 134, but I have received notice that a Member wishes to speak on clause 134.

4.30 pm

Clause 134 (Restrictions on conducting door to door collections)

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Ms Lo: I have received correspondence from the Association of Charity Shops — as, I believe, have other MLAs — expressing concerns about clauses 134 and 142, and, in particular, about permits. After talking to the association and to the Committee Clerk, I did not feel it necessary to propose an amendment, although that was the wish of the association. Will the Minister give an assurance that such permits will be open-ended and apply to multiple dates, so that charities will not be overburdened by having to seek a permit each time a collection is sought?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: As Ms Lo said, the Association of Charity Shops contacted all Members with regard to possible amendments to the Bill. The association’s main concern relates to the permitting requirements. Although I have not seen the proposed amendments that were sent to selected MLAs, I imagine that they are not far off the proposed amendments that were submitted to the Committee during Committee Stage. I understand from media reports yesterday that the British Heart Foundation has expressed similar concerns.

Mr Shannon: I am not sure if I was one of those lucky ones who got the email from the Association of

Charity Shops, but I am sure that there are many others in the Chamber who received it.

Charity shops feel that it is unfair to ask for a permit system because house-to-house collections are clearly for the charities themselves. For some charities, house-to-house collections provide as much as 80% of their income. Has consideration been given to that concern, and to the fact that professional fundraisers have to make specific statements about what they do with the money that they collect and for whom it is intended?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: The association got in touch with the Committee during evidence-gathering sessions in February. Further evidence was presented to the Committee in April. The Committee considered the association's concerns, favourable responses that were received on this issue during the consultation period, and the views of the Department. Hopefully, in the next few sentences, and perhaps also through the Minister, further assurance will be given with regard to those issues.

The association wants charity shops to be exempt from permit requirements. The Committee gave full consideration to the relevant clauses and was content that there was enough flexibility around the issue of permits that an amendment to the Bill was not warranted. A charity will be able to apply for a permit once a year to conduct collections every day of the year. The task of applying for a yearly blanket permit is not overly onerous. It will be up to a particular charity to discuss such matters with the commission when it is established, and I hope that the commission will take a pragmatic approach when dealing with this issue.

This legislation is designed not just to regulate and support charities; but to protect the public from bogus charities and criminal activity. Throughout its consideration of the Bill, the Committee was conscious of minimising bureaucracy. It is a matter of striking the right balance between regulation and bureaucracy. The Committee firmly believes that the right balance has been achieved.

The association also raised concerns about the requirement for door-to-door collectors to inform the public who will benefit from the collection, and to provide details on remuneration. The association felt that that was unworkable. The Committee carefully considered that point, and agreed that an amendment was not necessary. In fact, after taking into account all views expressed during the Committee Stage of the Bill, the Committee welcomed the requirement, as it will allow the public to be more discerning as to whom they give donations to.

In its letter to MLAs —

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for giving way. There has been anecdotal evidence — and proper

evidence from the police — that unregulated collections have, unfortunately, been used by some unscrupulous people to line their own pockets instead of for charities.

Does the Member agree that a regulatory system for keeping a register of organisations that make collections, irrespective of whether they are charity shops, represents a huge step forward? Furthermore, that is a huge step forward for the police, and it will build confidence in the community that collections are legitimate.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I thank the Member for his intervention. Those are wise words indeed, and they are also the thoughts of the Committee.

In its letter to Members, the Association of Charity Shops suggested that the Department misled the Committee on that matter. I strongly refute those claims, and, once again, thank the Minister and her officials for their full co-operation and support during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Anna Lo, Jim Shannon, David Hilditch and Jonathan Craig for raising those issues. I, too, received correspondence from the Association of Charity Shops, and I am aware that the Committee gave full consideration to the issues during its clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill and concluded that no amendments were necessary.

The fundamental issue is one of accountability and transparency in respect of charitable giving. Members will be aware of public concerns and media coverage on fraudulent door-to-door collections, and it is important that we protect the public and charities against bogus or non-charitable collections.

The legislation will ensure that the charity commission is fully informed about the nature and purpose of all public collections. I am conscious, however, that we do not wish to impose an unnecessary administrative burden on charities that are involved in legitimate fund-raising activities. It is my judgement, and it was supported by the Committee, that there is sufficient capacity in the legislation to ensure that door-to-door collections by charity shops are not unduly hindered.

Clause 143 provides for the issue of open-ended permits, where necessary. That should address the concerns raised by the Association of Charity Shops. Mr Hilditch was right to say that the issue was raised in the local media this week by the British Heart Foundation. The foundation claimed that it would be required to apply for a separate licence for each charity collection that it makes in Northern Ireland, which could prove to be a considerable burden for the organisation. Again, I assure the House that that will not be the case.

As I have explained, after obtaining the necessary public-collection certificate, organisations may apply for an open-ended permit, which would cover a number of public collections. In my view, that system will achieve a fair and proper balance between the need for proper accountability and the demands on charities that are involved in fundraising through public door-to-door collections.

Jim Shannon and David Hilditch raised the issue of professional fund-raisers being required to make statements. In order to ensure transparency and proper public accountability, it is important that people are aware of what percentage of their donation goes to the charitable cause. Therefore, I assure the House that a statement by the professional or paid fund-raisers is an important part of regulation.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 134 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 135 to 137 ordered to stand part of the Bill

Clause 138 (Grounds for refusing to issue a certificate)

Amendment No 41 made: In page 105, line 11, leave out “benevolent or philanthropic”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 138, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill

Clauses 139 to 158 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 159 disagreed to.

Clauses 160 to 164 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 165 (Application of Act in relation to designated religious charities)

Amendment No 42 made: In page 133, line 34, after “laid before” insert

“and approved by a resolution of”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 165, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 166 (Designation, etc. of religious charities)

Amendment No 43 made: In page 134, line 15, leave out “10 years” and insert “5 years; and”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 44 made: In page 134, line 16, leave out paragraph (d). — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 166, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 167 to 179 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 180 (General interpretation)

Amendment No 45 made: In page 140, line 22, leave out

“except in so far as the context otherwise requires”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 46 made: In page 140, line 38, leave out

“Article 231 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986” and insert

“section 390 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 47 made: In page 141, line 29, leave out

“except in so far as the context otherwise requires”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Clause 180, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 181 to 186 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Schedule 3 (Appeals and applications to tribunal)

Amendment No 48 made: In page 155, leave out lines 33 to 45. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Schedule 3, as amended, agreed to.

Schedules 4 and 5 agreed to.

Schedule 6 (Group accounts)

Amendment No 49 made: In page 165, line 18, leave out sub-paragraph (2) and insert

“(2) A charity is a “parent charity” if it is (or is to be treated as) a parent undertaking in relation to one or more other undertakings in accordance with the provisions of section 1162 of, and Schedule 7 to, the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 50 made: In page 166, line 5, leave out

“Article 267(1) of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986” and insert

“section 1161(1) of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 51 made: In page 166, line 13, after “section 64(1)” insert

“or, as the case may be, section 386 of the Companies Act 2006 (duty to keep accounting records)”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 52 made: In page 166, line 18, after “section 64(1)” insert

“or section 386 of the Companies Act 2006”. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 53 made: In page 166, line 26, leave out sub-paragraph (1) and insert

“(1) This paragraph applies in relation to a financial year of a charity if —

(a) the charity is a parent charity at the end of that year; and

(b) (where it is a company) it is not required to prepare consolidated accounts for that year under section 399 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46) (duty to prepare group accounts), whether or not such accounts are in fact prepared.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 54 made: In page 167, line 7, after “parent charity” insert

“(other than a parent charity which is a company)” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 55 made: In page 167, line 12, at end insert

“(6A) If the requirement in sub-paragraph (2) applies to the charity trustees of a parent charity in relation to a financial year and the charity is a company, that requirement so applies in addition to the requirement in section 394 of the Companies Act 2006 (duty to prepare individual accounts).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 56 made: In page 167, line 36, at end insert

“(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2), section 64 applies as if subsection (5) of that section were omitted.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 57 made: In page 168, line 29, leave out sub-paragraph (7) and insert

“(7) If this paragraph applies in relation to a financial year of a parent charity by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) —

(a) subject to head (b), the appropriate audit provision shall apply in relation to the parent charity’s own accounts for that year (whether or not it would otherwise so apply);

(b) where the parent charity is a company and its own accounts for that year are not required to be audited in accordance with Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46), section 66(2) shall apply in relation to those accounts (whether or not it would otherwise so apply).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 58 made: In page 168, line 34, leave out “section 66(2)” and insert

“(a) subject to sub-paragraph (b), section 66(2);

(b) if the parent charity is a company, section 66(2) or Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006 (as the case may be).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 59 made: In page 168, leave out lines 42 and 43. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 60 made: In page 169, line 38, leave out

“Article 397A of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (NI 6)”

and insert

“section 499 or 500 of the Companies Act 2006 (c. 46).” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Schedule 6, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 7 agreed to.

Schedule 8 (Minor and consequential amendments)

Amendment No 61 made: In page 176, line 7, at end insert

“The Administration of Estates (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (NI 14)

2A. In Article 9 (grant of representation to trust corporation) in paragraph (4)(a) after ‘High Court’ insert ‘or the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland’.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 62 made: In page 176, leave out lines 22 to 29. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 63 made: In page 177, line 21, at end insert

“The Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 1)

12. In Schedule 3 (disclosure for facilitating discharge of functions by other supervising authorities) —

(a) in the entry relating to the Department, omit the words ‘the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 (c. 33)’; and

(b) at the end add —

‘The Charity Commission for Functions under the Charities Act Northern Ireland. (Northern Ireland) 2008.’.

The Companies Act 2006 (c. 46)

13. — (1) In section 21(2)(b) for ‘Article 9 of the Charities (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (SI 1987/2048 (N.I.19))’ substitute ‘section 97 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(2) In section 31(4)(b) for ‘Article 9 of the Charities (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (SI 1987/2048 (N.I.19))’ substitute ‘section 97 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(3) In section 1140(2)(c)(ii) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert ‘or section 33 of Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(4) In section 1154(1)(b) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert ‘or section 33 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.

(5) In section 1154(2) after paragraph (b) insert —

‘(bb) in the case of appointment of a receiver or manager under section 33 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland;’.

(6) In Schedule 1, in paragraph 6(4) after ‘Charities Act 1993 (c. 10)’ insert “, section 44 or 45 of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008’.” — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Schedule 8, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 9 (Repeals)

Amendment No 64 made: In page 178, leave out lines 11 to 13. — [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Amendment No 65 made: In page 178, line 16, at end insert

“The Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (NI 1). In Schedule 3, in the entry relating to the Department, the words ‘the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964’.”

— [*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Schedule 9, as amended, agreed to.

Long title

Amendment No 66 made: Leave out

“to make provision about the funding of such institutions;”. —
[*The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).*]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Strategic Outline Case for Rapid Transit

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.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the content of the Rapid Transit for Belfast Strategic Outline Case.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I tabled this motion in order to provide the Assembly with an opportunity to discuss an exciting and hugely important transport initiative for the city of Belfast. A rapid transit system for the city — a modern, new and efficient public transport system — will move people quickly around the city, linking communities to jobs, schools, hospitals, shops and colleges. A rapid transit system will get people out of their cars and offer a high-quality alternative. It will reduce pollution, using the most modern technology in order to reduce our carbon footprint.

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

Proposals for a rapid transit system in Belfast have been talked about for many years, but the time for talking is coming to an end. Rapid transit is one of my key priorities, and it is a key priority of the Programme for Government. This devolved Administration will deliver a rapid transit system: so, what is rapid transit? It is new to us; it is a step change for public transport, providing faster, higher-quality services, with new routes serving new opportunities, segregated from other traffic so that congestion is avoided. A rapid transit system will incorporate high-quality halts with real-time information and a ticketing system that will enable quick and easy boarding of vehicles.

Earlier this year, I visited several schemes in the Netherlands in order to understand the concept of rapid transit better. I invited members of the Committee for Regional Development to join me and was pleased that most of them did so. We were all impressed at what we saw, and how rapid transit systems provide quick and efficient access into city centres and a real alternative to car travel.

Belfast needs a rapid transit system. The city is the key economic driver of the region, and all successful regions have strong cities at their core. Strong, vibrant cities need modern and efficient transport systems. Rapid transit will improve the city's image and will help to regenerate rundown neighbourhoods and open up new development opportunities.

My Department commissioned the consultants Atkins and KPMG to examine rapid transit systems with a brief to find the best system for Belfast. We did not have any preconceived ideas — it was an open brief. We wanted the consultants to examine the technology, routes, demand and cost, and they looked at light-rail and bus-based options.

Most Members will be familiar with light rail or tram systems. We have seen and experienced them in other cities, particularly the Luas system in Dublin, which has been very successful in bringing people into the city centre and getting people out of their cars. However, many of us are less familiar with bus-based rapid transit technology, which is relatively new and fast evolving. It has been described to me as a tram on tyres. No track is required, but it is segregated from other traffic as much as possible; it can also drive on the street in mixed traffic. It has priority at junctions, and the vehicles can be powered by diesel or electric hybrid engines.

There are bus-based rapid transit systems across Europe, in cities such as Amsterdam, Essen and Edinburgh; they are also being developed in cities such as Las Vegas, Cambridge, Swansea, Glasgow and Leeds. Other Irish cities, including Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, are investigating the potential of rapid transit systems, including bus technology. They have recently benefited from discussions with officials from my Department, sharing experience and knowledge.

Whatever vehicle technology we choose, the right infrastructure is crucial. Rapid transit vehicles require high-quality halts or platforms with level access, real-time information systems and off-vehicle ticketing systems to speed up the boarding process. The whole package is about providing a fast, efficient and sustainable system.

Finding the best rapid transit system for Belfast is all about looking at potential passenger demand, wider regeneration benefits and affordability. The consultants' study found that bus-based rapid transit will produce positive economic results, but that light rail will not. That is because the likely number of passengers does not warrant the extra cost of light rail. However, the consultants concluded that there should be an option of migrating to a light rail system in future, should demand increase.

4.45 pm

The potential cost of a light rail network across the three routes identified was estimated at £590 million, while a bus-based system would cost £147 million. The consultants concluded that a light rail system would attract about 600 more passengers at peak hours than a bus-based system. However, attracting those 600 passengers would come at a heavy cost. The consultants' analysis suggested that the additional cost

of £450 million would be difficult to justify. They suggested that light rail, if selected, would carry approximately seven million passengers a year.

To put that in context, the Luas in Dublin, which is of a similar size to the proposed Belfast network, carried nearly 29 million passengers last year. Belfast is a smaller, less densely populated city than Dublin. Solutions that are right for Dublin may not necessarily be right for Belfast.

The feasibility study investigated several potential rapid transit routes. First, the E-way in east Belfast was identified in previous studies as a pilot route because of the opportunity to use the old Belfast to Dundonald railway line along a significant part of the route and the growing congestion on the Newtownards Road. Secondly, the emerging Titanic Quarter with its new jobs, homes, college and tourism potential must be linked to the rest of the city. A rapid transit system seems an obvious way to make such links.

Finally, west Belfast houses one third of the city's population and contains the Royal Victoria Hospital, which serves many people in the city and beyond. The emerging Glenmona development site opens up opportunities for a rapid transit route that would serve west Belfast and link it to the city centre and beyond.

All three pilot routes connected together would provide a network of services that would allow cross-city journeys from Ballybeen to the Royal Victoria Hospital and from Turf Lodge to the Titanic Quarter.

Before making any decisions, I wanted to share the consultants' findings, and that is why I published them at the start of April. I tasked my officials to engage with as many stakeholders as possible. Developing such a transport system is an important decision for Belfast, and it is right that all views are heard, understood and considered.

I am pleased to report that, so far, there has been broad support for rapid transit. There was undoubtedly some disappointment that the consultants recommended that light rail was not the best solution for Belfast. Some of the comments that I have heard are, "Dublin has light rail, why should Belfast not have it?" and, "It is a second-best solution for Belfast."

None of the options — bus or rail — is second best. I want the best system for Belfast; one that works for us. That means examining carefully our current and future needs and matching them to the best technology — whatever it may be. That is what we asked the consultants to do.

I am not in the business of wasting taxpayers' money on schemes that are not fit for purpose or of building schemes that will be a long-term drain on our finances. I am in the business of delivering a world-

class rapid transit system for Belfast that is fit for purpose and of which we can all be proud.

Since the release of the consultants' study, I have received letters from people who are concerned about the possible loss of the Bloomfield walkway and cycling path. It might be useful if I tell Members about the history of that amenity.

In 2003, work was undertaken to build a new sewer along parts of the old railway line. That presented my Department with an opportunity to create a walking and cycling route along the corridor while plans for rapid transit were being progressed. That work was undertaken in the full knowledge that the line would be used for rapid transit in the future; those involved in the construction of the walkway understood that.

It was decided that walkers and cyclists should not have to wait for rapid transit to deliver a walk/cycle route but that an interim pathway could be built while the rapid transit plans were being developed. I am conscious of the needs of walkers and cyclists and I am keen to support both. I intend to retain a walking and cycling amenity on that route. However, I will further consider the issues that have been raised; my officials are carrying out that work.

Concerns have been raised about the exclusion of north and south Belfast from the project. The proposals are for a pilot network that can be rolled out to other areas of the city. In the meantime, the needs of those other areas will not be ignored. More bus lanes, new buses, and park-and-ride sites are just some of the initiatives that are being developed. If rapid transit is to be successful, the system must be segregated from other traffic as much as possible, and given priority over other vehicles at junctions. That will mean changes to our roads and less road space for cars. I am prepared to take the difficult decisions that are necessary.

If we are to introduce rapid transit to Belfast, I want to get it right. I do not want to do it in a half-hearted manner that is destined to fail. The introduction of rapid transit cannot be done in isolation — it must be integrated with the existing Metro services. Rather than competing with each other, rapid transit and Metro should work together to serve passengers' needs.

The introduction of rapid transit will also mean that we must do more to encourage people to leave their cars at home rather than bring them into the city centre. Rapid transit will serve the city centre; therefore, it is my intention that it will be integrated with the changes occurring in the city centre.

Rapid transit is one of my top priorities. It is highlighted as a key priority in the Programme for Government, with a commitment to start work by 2011. I have secured £111 million for rapid transit and my Department will continue to explore opportunities

to draw in additional private-sector finance. Some private-sector contributions have already been secured.

The consultants have made recommendations on how we can best procure a rapid transit system. If we opt for light rail, a PFI or PPP method of procurement route is proposed. If a bus-based system is selected, the consultants recommend that the Department should build the infrastructure and tender out the operation of the service. That will be further considered as the project progresses.

This debate provides an opportunity to hear Members' views on the rapid transit project. I want to benefit from those views before I take high-level decisions about the technology and broad routes that will be used. There is a lot of detail that still needs to be addressed. I want to move forward quickly to establish a dedicated team to deliver this project. That team will work through the detail quickly and efficiently and report back to me regularly.

Further decisions will be required on the final detail of the routes. However, today, I will listen carefully to Members' views on the consultant's report, and on how we can best deliver a rapid transit system for Belfast that we can all be proud of. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain): The Committee for Regional Development has been considering the strategic outline case for rapid transit in Belfast since 9 April 2008. Discussions took place at a number of Committee meetings and members had the opportunity to see the proposed routes for themselves.

In principle, the Committee supports the development of a rapid transit system for Belfast. It would provide economic, social and environmental benefits for the city. However, the devil is in the detail. Further work is needed on aspects such as guidance, technology, opportunities for off-road segregation, and the resolution of city-centre traffic management and on-street parking.

The Committee is particularly concerned about how the Minister will remove cars from the streets of Belfast. That is a prerequisite of any rapid transit system, and we are interested to see how that programme goes forward. The Committee urges the Minister to resolve such issues as soon as possible so that they can be reflected in the preliminary detail, design stage and outline business case.

The Committee also notes the consultant's evaluation that, on the basis of projected passenger numbers, Belfast is too small a city to generate enough passengers for a light rail system to be viable. It is the Committee's view that any rapid transit system should be built with the future in mind. Therefore, the necessary physical infrastructure should be put in place now to ensure that, should circumstances change, the system can be adapted to light rail.

In the course of its work on rapid transit, the Committee met executives from rapid transit manufacturers and operators in Northern Ireland and the Netherlands. We participated in a study of rapid transit systems that are in operation in Amsterdam, Eindhoven and Utrecht, which the Minister has already mentioned.

5.00 pm

In the Committee's view, the key lesson learnt from those engagements is that in order to maximise passenger numbers and positive passenger experience and to ensure that social, economic and environmental benefits accrue from proposed systems, the following element must be incorporated into any proposed bus-based rapid transit system: the dedicated rapid transit route must be separated as strictly as possible from other road users. Mr Wright of Wrightbus Ltd was particularly keen on that: a mixture of cars and rapid transit buses in the same lane does not work. Where complete separation cannot be achieved, priority must be accorded a rapid transit vehicle.

Any proposed rapid transit network must be fully integrated with other forms of public and private transport, with easy ticketing and transfers between rapid transit and existing bus, rail and park-and-ride facilities. It is essential that we have an integrated system that works; people will not choose public transport unless it is easy and efficient. The Committee's view is that it must be made so. Where such issues have been addressed, passenger numbers have risen dramatically: the number of passengers travelling by train, for example, has risen in response to such improvements.

The Committee also recommends that every possible effort be made to ensure that the buses chosen should employ green technologies. Jim Wells made that point. Hybrid diesel-electric, gas electric, or an emerging fuel-cell technology should all be considered. At Wrightbus, we discussed hydrogen-cell powered buses, which is an exciting prospect. The Committee urges the Minister to grasp the opportunity to bring positive environmental benefits to Belfast that will go some way towards meeting our carbon emission reduction targets. Present emissions are appallingly high.

The relationship between land-use strategies and the development of a rapid transit system is critical. There are opportunities now, with the review of strategic planning documents such as the 'Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012' and the fundamental review of the 'Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025' to propose a truly integrated infrastructure that will benefit Northern Ireland as a whole.

Since the publication of the 'Strategic Outline Case for Rapid Transit in Belfast', the Committee has had correspondence from residents who are concerned that the E-way from Belfast city centre to Dundonald will

damage the existing amenity value created by the natural walkway and cycle path along sections of the old Belfast to Dundonald railway. The Committee's view is that the Department should continue its engagements with stakeholders and user groups on the issue, as well as investigating alternative routes for the E-way corridor. In particular, a more detailed outline business case and design should be developed.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Wells): I apologise to Members that, on finishing my speech, I will have to move quickly — and, unfortunately, by private transport — to Down District Council for an important meeting.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. The Committee has been fully consulted on the issue. I had the benefit of going to Amsterdam twice to look at rapid transit systems. I must emphasise that it was to look at rapid transit. We have had numerous briefings from departmental officials — on one occasion when they were not expecting it. We have been given adequate information on the issue.

After much deliberation, we came to the view that, on this occasion, the right decision was made. Many ask why we do not propose an electric rail system: superficially, it sounds like a great idea until the economics are investigated. Given the size of the population of Northern Ireland and its geography, the figures do not stack up. An electric rail system would involve four times the capital cost of a rapid transit bus system. We went to Holland to compare the same decision-making process being undertaken by similar-sized cities and towns, and those communities have decided to opt for a rapid transit system. Properly designed, rapid transit is as good as electric rail.

It runs well where there are dedicated bus routes with which parked cars or cyclists, for instance, do not interfere. The Committee wishes the case for a rapid transit system a fair wind; we hope that it is successful.

As the Committee Chairman, Fred Cobain, said, the Committee's submission to the Department addresses one or two issues. The Committee received many submissions from individuals who use the Comber walkway regularly. Initial concerns among those who use the walkway were that we were to abolish the entire walkway. That is not true. The Department intends to have a walkway, which will still stretch the length of the old railway line, and a rapid transit system.

The quality of walkers' experience on that route will in no way be the same as it is now after the rapid transit system is introduced — that is a fact of life. However, it has been possible to achieve both with some success in cities such as Cambridge. It is hoped that that will reduce the level of people's concerns, because the emails that I have seen contain no reference to the fact that the Department has taken

great strides to try to preserve some amenity for the people of east Belfast.

The proposed rapid transit system should not have come as a surprise to the people who live in east Belfast, because the issue was flagged in BMAP and in all the planning procedures. The Department and the Planning Service have protected the route consistently and made clear that it was being protected for some form of rapid transit system. People, therefore, cannot say that they are shocked or surprised to hear the news, as they have in some of the letters that I have seen.

I remind Members that the route was the old railway line. Older Members — they would have to be quite old to remember this — will remember that a railway line ran along the proposed route. I do not accept that people are shocked at the proposal.

Mr Cobain: Robin Newton will remember the railway line.

Mr Wells: I do not think that Mr Newton remembers the trains on the Comber railway line — he is not that old.

To refer to the walkway as a disused railway track was perhaps wrong, and I am sure that the Department will accept that. It suggested that the enjoyment that many people get from the facility was not recognised.

The Chairman said that it is essential that there be total separation between the walkway and the rapid transit system. My slogan in that regard would be: “What do we want? Segregation now.” It is imperative that the system have a dedicated lane for the rapid transit system, one which it will not be possible for people to use as a quick route into Belfast or, worse, for parking. That will throw up some technical difficulties that will have to be overcome.

Mr Weir: Has the Member thought about installing some sort of Berlin-style wall along the route to prevent any other traffic from entering?

Mr Wells: Whatever form of segregation is chosen will have to blend into the environment and look the part. We saw it done effectively in Holland. If Members want to see exactly how to do it well, they should visit the Netherlands. *[Laughter.]*

The proposed rapid transit system offers the Minister the opportunity to show how green he is, in the proper sense, and to introduce vehicles that are environmentally friendly — electrically driven or using liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) — so that we can reduce the emissions and the impact of the rapid transit on those who use the walkway. As does the Committee, I support the proposal in principle.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus le Cathaoirleach agus le Leas-Chathaoirleach an Choiste. I thank the Minister

for tabling the motion for the take-note debate. It is an important issue, and I also thank the Committee Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson for reflecting the Committee’s views.

At its core, rapid transit is about a modern and efficient public-transport system. It has to move people around a city quickly and bring communities closer to their places of work, education, health and commerce, with all the obvious social, economic and environmental spin-offs.

Rapid transit must be seen as an alternative to the car. It must get people out of cars, and that can be achieved by offering a better mode of transport or by denying road space to cars by means of dedicated lanes. The rapid transit system will reduce pollution and our carbon footprint. To achieve that, we will have to use the best technology available. That technology will not only relate to hybrid engines but will be required to ensure the availability of real-time information, seamless ticketing systems and, where required, guidance systems.

Those objectives are achievable, and, as the Minister, Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson said, we saw successful schemes that covered a range of distances in cities of various population bases in Holland.

What was also very evident in Holland was that those in positions of responsibility had the ability and the desire to make the required decisions. Arguments will be made that Belfast’s streetscape is too restrictive, that people are too used to their cars, that congestion will never be tackled and that there is no additional space for dedicated lanes. All those arguments were made in Holland, but decision-makers had the vision, foresight and determination to bring about change. Therefore, I welcome the Minister’s intention to take the big decision on this matter.

Others who are already convinced of the need for a rapid transit system will use the example of the Luas in Dublin to argue that Belfast should have a light rail system. I believe that, given the capital investment required and the Atkins report about passenger numbers, the bus option is better. Given that the system will only attract 600 extra passengers, the figures provided by the Minister — £590 million for light rail and £147 million for a bus-based system — tell their own story. Although fiscal matters should never be the sole determinant in any process, in this instance the extra cost is not justifiable. That makes the case for a bus-based system all the more compelling.

The Committee was reassured that the Department for Regional Development wants to ensure that the construction of the system will be such that if a transfer to light rail is required in the future, it will not cause unnecessary construction costs and disruption.

The routes into east and west Belfast and the Titanic Quarter will be developed in the first phase of the development. The Minister said that there would be pilot schemes, but I have no doubt that this system will realise its social, economic and environmental objectives and that there will be a demand for new routes, taking the system into north and south Belfast.

Although I commend the Minister for this initiative and accept that Belfast is the key economic hub of the North, it is worth noting that Utrecht has a population base of 100,000 and has 105,000 jobs contained within its city limits. Utrecht has an efficient rapid-transport system, which was seen as one of the key drivers in securing and maintaining that level of economic performance. Therefore, the people of Derry will be watching the system unfold in Belfast and we will be at the Minister's door to campaign for a rapid transit system in Derry, so that we can repeat the success of Belfast and Utrecht. Sin a bhfuil.

Dr McDonnell: I feel more sadness than excitement about the enthusiasm that I hear about the introduction of bigger and bendier buses, because that is what this amounts to. Some years ago, I raised the issue of light rail in the House of Commons, as I believe that light rail is the best system. I believe that, by juggling the figures for the cost options, the comparisons that have been presented are not as honest or as accurate as they should be.

I am glad that when I raised the issue in the House of Commons, I, along with others, managed to persuade David Cairns to extend the scope of the feasibility study that was beginning at that time. To a large extent, this discussion is a result of that study. I thank the Minister for tabling this issue, but I honestly believe that we are deluding ourselves if we are fooled into thinking that somehow or other people will all queue up to get on bigger buses.

The need for a rapid transit system was recognised in the investment strategy, as was the role that that system would play in attracting investment. If we do not include the investment potential of a light rail system, we are not comparing like with like.

Effective regeneration and infrastructure development is a highly complex issue, and many of the most disadvantaged parts of the urban environment in the Belfast metropolitan area face a range of complex social, environmental, educational and economic challenges. Dealing with those requires joined-up thinking across the Departments for Social Development, Employment and Learning, and Regional Development. The importance of a comprehensive, integrated approach to regeneration and infrastructure development cannot be overstressed.

The development of a rapid transit system must not be addressed as a single-issue project. Instead, we must

ensure that it has a wide-ranging impact on the economic growth, regeneration and future prosperity of the city.

The need for a rapid transit system is well documented and was addressed in chapter 5 of the report. The report assessed four technology options and various routes. However, the conclusion that a light rail system would not be economical is wrong, and I will not be persuaded otherwise.

Belfast is reinventing itself, so there is no point in introducing a transport system in 10 years that was assessed on the city's position three, four or five years ago. The Victoria Square complex has increased the retail capacity of Belfast city centre by 30%. Belfast has become one of the top 10 retail centres in these islands.

5.15 pm

The regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter, the Titanic Quarter and other ambitious projects will contribute to bringing more people into our city. The downside of that renaissance is increased congestion on our roads and a lack of reasonable car parking. Much of the congestion is a direct result of our dependence on a failed bus-based public-transport system. Does anyone in the House believe that more buses or bigger buses will relieve our congested streets and persuade people to switch from their cars to a bus-based public-transport system?

Historically, Belfast was at the cutting edge of technology. The construction of the Titanic and other large ships 100 years ago, the construction of City Hall and the creation of the earliest electric street-lighting system provide ample evidence that Belfast did not always pursue the cheapest option.

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

Dr McDonnell: I urge the Minister to reassess the report and not accept it at face value. It is a very disappointing outcome, and I have to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That was not a signal for you to get your second wind, Dr McDonnell.

Dr McDonnell: I was not getting my second wind.

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

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for tabling this matter for a take-note debate. I have already written to the Minister on the subject, so I apologise if my remarks are repetitious. In my defence, many issues that are discussed in the House are repetitious.

I support the introduction of a modern and efficient rapid transit system for Belfast. It is good that we are moving away from facilitating the private car, which has been the emphasis to date and has been detrimental to the social and economic development of the city and the health and well-being of its citizens. Therefore, this is a good move forward. I will not spend my time

throwing bouquets when I agree with the report, but I will highlight the issues that I am concerned about. Rapid transit is important, it must be advanced, and I hope that it is successful.

I share the disappointment of other Members, which the Minister referred to, that light rail was not the chosen option. I understand that there must be a balance between expenditure and development, but the aim is not just to capture customers for public transport, but to capture the public imagination. I have concerns about whether a bus-based system would be able to capture the public imagination to the same degree as a light rail system. To achieve a modal shift, particularly in a country where car usage is culturally ingrained, we require an imaginative proposal. That is something that I want to explore, particularly in the context of the Minister's opening remarks that migration to a light rail system is a possibility in the future.

Given the balance in the Department's budget, which is 80% in favour of road and 20% in favour of public transport at the end of the three-year Budget cycle, a skew in funding towards public transport and away from road building would help to achieve a higher-quality solution to the problem that we are discussing.

If we are to take big measures for the city, perhaps we have to spend slightly more money rather than implementing a more cost-effective but less imaginative solution.

An overall package should be implemented so that if the pilot scheme works and is effective, it will be clear how it can be rolled out throughout the rest of the city and to the connections in between. Putting it in that context is likely to make it much more successful. It will be difficult to judge whether it has been a success until the entire network is in place. That is the danger with pilot schemes, although, I do understand why that option has been pursued.

I also want to address the issue from a constituency perspective, with particular reference to the E-way. I accept that the rapid transit system is not a surprise. At one point, there was a proposal for a four-lane motorway along the Comber Greenway. I was told that by someone who has lived in the area for approximately 43 years. I am glad that that is no longer being proposed. However, I am not entirely enthused about the current proposals.

The Minister is right that the E-way was well developed as an off-route cycling and walking route by the Department for Regional Development. No one anticipated how popular it would be, and it has outstripped what people expected. For that reason, people feel its loss more acutely than would have been the case a number of years ago.

What to do with the designated sites of local nature conversation importance and biodiversity along the

E-way must be considered. The area around the Bloomfield walkway section of the Greenway consists of terraced houses that have no gardens, so it is the only open recreation space available. For a long time, it has been used for that purpose.

I also want to draw to the Minister's attention the fact that most people who have written to him with concerns about the system are avid users of public transport. They include cyclists, but they are also people who use buses and trains and are supportive of the concept. Therefore, that group of people can be worked with.

I simply want to know whether more could be done to dispel concerns that the new system will attack the Metro system that runs through the heart of east Belfast communities and along the main arterial routes. Furthermore, will the new system act to relieve congestion temporarily by transporting commuters from outside the city limits? That could result in people inside the city limits — who have already made the shift to public transport — being attracted back to using their cars. There is only a short period in which to address such issues.

Perhaps restricting the width of the new system should also be considered. There are options for tidal bus lanes that would reasonably accommodate cyclists, those who wish to walk and some form of rapid transit system. However, it concerns me that that would not be of the same quality. Keeping the channels of discussions open with those who have expressed their concerns will be most helpful.

Mr Newton: As other Members have done, I welcome the opportunity to debate this issue, and I thank the Minister for tabling the motion. A rapid transit system will benefit the economic development of Belfast as a whole, and the initiative signifies a move to progress the transport system in a way that the traditional bus system is unable to do.

Many people, including Mrs Long and I, will be disappointed with the decision to opt for a bus system rather than a light rail system. The latter is perceived to be relevant to the longer-term potential of an efficient rapid transit system and to the continued physical and economic development of the city.

I recognise that the capital cost estimates between rapid-bus transport and light rail systems that were set out in the report is an important element of the consultant's recommendations of a bus-based system. However, the basis of the cost comparisons — at least in my humble opinion — are unclear about whether the comparison is like for like and whether the system, as suggested, can be upgraded at a later stage to incorporate trams or light rail.

The overall success of the scheme, as has been referred to, should not be determined only by the

ability to move passengers from point A to point B. Rather, the system should be a major priority in contributing to the development of Belfast's economy.

For that reason, as far as East Belfast is concerned, the rapid transit system should, ultimately, provide people with the potential to travel from places as far away as Comber, through Newtownards, Dundonald and Holywood Arches to the Titanic Quarter — that encompasses the travel-to-work area anticipated for the Titanic Quarter.

The Minister must also consider how the system will service the George Best Belfast City Airport. The airport is continuing to thrive; its passenger numbers are increasing, and it is further developing its services to Great Britain and Europe. That is a key point.

In his speech, Mr Cobain referred to the need for communication with communities. I have no doubt that the Minister will understand the concerns of bus users who faced a huge change when the Metro system was introduced. It resulted in radio phone-in programmes being deluged with complaints; letters to the press, and local community groups holding public meetings about the problems as that system was being introduced.

If the rapid transit system is to be successful, it must be characterised by a high level of specification, and I welcome the fact that the Minister mentioned the stops, interchanges, ticketing and real-time information that would be provided. To be successful, the system must be benchmarked favourably against any other system in any other part of the world.

Another feature that will make or break the system is how it will travel adjacent to other vehicles on the open road. In the absence of a dedicated route segregation and priority over other traffic, users need to be assured of the scheduled frequency and speed of the service.

As regards my constituency of East Belfast, the Minister will be aware of the environmental lobby that was mentioned. I am a regular user of the Comber Greenway, particularly around the Bloomfield area, and I enjoy that facility. Some people have strong feelings about protecting that area for the exclusive use of walkers and cyclists. I do not agree completely with those views, but, as Jim Wells mentioned, some sympathy for those points of view should be included in the proposals.

I will finish by saying that there are essential points that need to be considered. One of those is communication with the public, which I mentioned. The benefits to the economy need to be defined as that investment is rolled out. The system needs to be built to a high level of specification. The investment and involvement of the private sector should be considered. Potential routes within the city and traffic priority levels need to be defined —

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

Mr Newton: A value-for-money concept should run throughout the proposals.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement regarding the rapid transit system for Belfast. Like many of my party colleagues, I am very happy that the system will also service West Belfast. For many years, transport infrastructure — or indeed any other infrastructure that came from Departments — for West Belfast has not been good enough.

The proposals should be about connecting West Belfast with other parts of the city. When the roads through West Belfast were designed, it was as though a moat had been created around the city, which was very hard to get out of. There was no connection between the bottom of the Falls Road or Shankill Road and other parts of the city. Those roads were blocked off, and it was very awkward for people to travel from one part of the city to another. I welcome this initiative.

Alasdair McDonnell talked about his preference for a light rail system. All of us would prefer such a system. However, although the bus system would cost £147 million, a light rail system would cost £590 million. The issue has been talked about for far too long. I have been a member of Belfast City Council for a number of years, and this issue has been considered by its development committee. Departmental representatives have come to the council and discussed the issue on many occasions, but the council has not done a single thing about it.

The Minister deserves credit, because £111 million has already been raised to develop the proposals. Other investment has yet to be made.

It is a credit to the Department and to the Minister that proposals are being put on the table and that the consultation process is almost complete. It is important to note that decisions have been made, and, in just under a year, we will see plans for the rapid transit system come to fruition. The proposed start date is 2011. The rapid transit system is a good measure, not only for the people of the city, but for those who are drawn to it from around the world.

5.30 pm

We have heard about various quarters of the city during the debate. However, the Gaeltacht quarter, which is another emerging area that will, hopefully, attract many hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, has not yet been mentioned. We want to enable visitors to go from one part of the city to another — be that from the Titanic Quarter to other quarters — and that issue must be addressed in future plans.

The Royal Victoria Hospital attracts many people to Belfast, and that fact has been missed in the past. If the rapid transit system were to follow the right route, it could cater for people who attend the Royal Victoria Hospital — people could visit patients in the hospital as they please without having to fight the rush-hour traffic. If I am lucky enough to leave here just before 5.00 pm, it can take me over an hour — sometimes an hour and 15 minutes — to reach home on a route that passes the Royal Victoria Hospital. I know the pressure that hospital traffic adds.

We have many issues to consider. The Minister has already said that one third of the population of the city lives in west Belfast, and that is a key fact. West Belfast is also home to the emerging Glenmona site, which is the same size as the Titanic Quarter — and we do not know what will emerge on that site. It is hoped that the master plan will provide an idea of the number of people who will live and work in that area. However, we must also ensure that people from all parts of the city — including the west — will have the opportunity to work in the Titanic Quarter, which is vital for the future development of the city.

I commend the Minister on proposing the motion, and I hope that the rapid transit system will progress. As the Minister said in his opening remarks, we can always look at the opportunities for a light rail system in the future, and we should not lose sight of that. The Department has worked hard and has consulted several agencies, including various partnership boards and enterprise councils that also support the system. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCausland: I welcome the debate. There is an overwhelming case for a rapid-transport system for the Belfast area. We have seen a tremendous growth in car ownership and car usage over the years, along with an increase in traffic and housing developments — particularly in the north of the city — and people from those public and private housing estates go to work in the city centre. Many new developments are being built in Belfast, which is our regional capital city and a regional economic driver. Traffic in Belfast has increased greatly and, therefore, there is a need for a rapid transit system.

It has already been said that the system must be integrated and linked to other aspects of transport. The system must be easy to use and provide an efficient service, and must be environmentally friendly. I have noted from discussions the merits and demerits of a rapid bus system and an electric light-rail system.

There is merit in further exploration and explanation of the decision that has been made. This matter must be looked at with a view to the long term, and it must be acknowledged that the capital cost is much greater for a rail system. However, we must look carefully to

see whether that, in the longer term, is the most advantageous system.

I want to address the location of the pilot schemes, which has not yet been mentioned. Initially they were to be located in south and east Belfast; however, the Minister subsequently heeded the calls of his party colleagues in west Belfast, including Paul Maskey, who today outlined the great demand for the system that will come from the Gaeltacht quarter and other developments in west Belfast.

An overwhelming case exists for the provision of a pilot scheme along the north foreshore. The extent of the development in the north of the city and along the Shore Road provides many reasons for a pilot scheme on that route. The north foreshore development is due to start soon, and one has only to look at the number of students who live in Belfast but travel to study at the University of Ulster campus in Jordanstown or the Northern Regional College campus in Newtownabbey. All that development along the north foreshore — housing, the college campus, the university campus, schools, and so forth — creates a strong case for a pilot scheme along the north foreshore, York Road, Shore Road and beyond.

Given that there will be pilot schemes in south, east and west Belfast, will the Minister explain how the decision deliberately to exclude north Belfast was made? Will he reconsider the inclusion of a route along the Shore Road? There are many housing estates there and, by and large, people who live in them have family, business and work connections in Belfast.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for Regional Development for his statement, and I welcome the vision shown in the strategic outline case that he sketched for the Assembly. However, as with all such projects, the devil is in the detail; the design and the delivery of the project will be crucial to its success.

Belfast is the main population centre and economic hub of Northern Ireland. It is vital, therefore, that it is developed as a modern city with a transport network that can facilitate the economic and social development of Belfast and the region. A prosperous and growing Belfast will help to create a prosperous and growing Northern Ireland. London and Dublin are prime examples of how successful cities are key drivers in their national economies. Modern business is drawn to locations that can offer a high standard of living and provide excellent transport, social and cultural facilities.

A huge potential for regeneration exists in areas that will be serviced by a rapid transit system. There is also a great opportunity to link areas of the city that have, historically, been isolated from each other. The environmental benefits of such a system must not be underestimated.

The Ulster Unionist Party would have preferred the development of a light rail rapid transit system to reflect its ambitions for Northern Ireland and Belfast. However, we accept the argument, as outlined in the strategic business case, that such a scheme is not, at this stage economically viable. Where would the additional hundreds of millions of pounds come from? In today's fiscally constrained climate, not to choose the more economically viable option would have been irresponsible. It would have placed an additional burden on taxpayers and, perhaps, even defeated the purpose of a rapid transit system by imposing unacceptably high costs on its users.

The UUP welcomes that the strategic outline advised that the bus-based system be upgradeable to a light rail system in the future, when the figures justify it. The UUP strongly advocates that the scheme be designed and built with such an upgrade in mind.

There is no point in cutting corners when designing the proposed rapid transit system. The routes for the bus-based system must be segregated from mainstream traffic to facilitate speed and ease of use for the passengers, and that will be the difference between the existing system and the new rapid transit system. There must not be a halfway house, where buses and cars compete for space on the roads.

If the rapid transit system is to work, it must be made a priority. A major element of the scheme is to incentivise people to get out of their cars, with the result that traffic will be reduced, liveability in the city will be increased, and the environment will benefit. To do that, the system must be truly rapid. Equally, the Minister must give assurances that the system will be integrated fully with the existing — and any planned — Metro system, Ulsterbus network, and Northern Ireland Railways services. There must be adequate park-and-ride facilities at the tentacles of those networks so that the rural community can also benefit from transportation that goes right into the heart of the city centre.

We must ensure that such a system will be financially and functionally attractive to potential passengers. The Minister must also ensure that the rapid transit system will become integrated fully into larger development plans. He must consider — and aim to integrate the scheme with — committed and new developments in each of the areas that will be facilitated.

I hope that the Minister will work hard to ensure that the maximum developer contribution can be leveraged through planning permission. As the strategic outline case suggests, developer contributions towards the cost of the city centre Titanic Quarter route should be a condition of granting planning permission for the remaining phases of the development of that area.

The scheme presents great opportunities for the people of the region generally and for east and west

Belfast in particular. However, I hope that the Minister will work with the Minister for Social Development, and with local communities, to ensure that such regeneration does not marginalise any community or cause unwelcome side effects. The Minister must take on board community environmental concerns when he is developing his detailed proposals.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like most Members, I welcome the fact that there is now a Minister and Department prepared to make the significant decision to introduce a rapid transit system. There is no doubt that Belfast needs such a system, given the chronic traffic congestion in the city. The scheme is to be welcomed, albeit that it will be introduced as a pilot scheme at the outset. I share the concern, and perhaps a little of the disappointment, that the area that I represent in south Belfast will not be included in the pilot transit scheme. Nevertheless, I can only welcome the fact that a scheme will be introduced in the city. Even on a pilot basis, that scheme must inevitably go some way towards reducing traffic congestion in the city.

If the project is to work and to take people from their vehicles and on to public transport, I presume that from the outset, traffic would be eased to some extent. I hope that that is the case, and I have no doubt that the Minister and the Department will hope the same.

I was concerned when Alasdair McDonnell appeared to dismiss the concept out of hand, saying that he was sad and disappointed. He went on to say that he raised the matter in Westminster some time ago; clearly, what he said fell on deaf ears, as he did not get too far with it. I am pleased that we now have a Minister who is prepared to take this important step and who will at least make a start on the project.

It was unfortunate to hear Dr McDonnell describe as dishonest the figures that the Minister mentioned. I do not think that that can go unchallenged. I do not know, and cannot second guess, the figures that the consultants and the Minister produced. However, there is a fair gap between the figures of around £147 million and £600 million that have been quoted, and I do not think that such sums could be played around with.

Clearly, we cannot ignore the cost. All Members and all parties here are fully aware that we have a finite budget and that we cannot pay for all the things that we want and that many of us included in our manifestos. Nelson McCausland referred to Paul Maskey's mention of the Gaeltacht quarter in west Belfast. I suggest that the case for the north of the city may be helped if there were a Gaeltacht quarter in north Belfast, and I suggest that the Minister consider that in the time ahead.

It would be beneficial on a whole range of levels. The Minister referred to other parts of the city, such as north Belfast and south Belfast, in his statement. Raymond

McCartney mentioned places that are outside of Belfast. Obviously, all Members have a keen interest in the project's success.

5.45 pm

During the time ahead, when we discuss whether it will be a "big bendy bus", as Alasdair McDonnell described earlier, I hope that we will see what the delivery actually looks like. Some time ago, we were given images of the vehicles. It would be helpful if the public could see the type of infrastructure that is being discussed. That will help to inform everyone during the time ahead when we must make up our minds about the wisdom of the project.

I thank the Minister for the assurance in his speech that certain other areas will not be ignored in the meantime. In south Belfast, where there is some of the most serious traffic congestion in the city, the Minister has met residents' organisations during the recent consultation on residents-only parking schemes. The City Hospital and Queen's University draw in tens of thousands of people from all over the place. That contributes to serious traffic congestion in the area. Will the Minister elaborate on measures that will be introduced while pilot schemes are ongoing in other parts of the city, and give some indication of how long the schemes, during which those matters will be assessed, will operate, so that the wider public will have a sense of how long it may have to wait to see whether those pilot projects are successful and how long it will be until the extension of such projects throughout the city can be looked upon favourably? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Hamilton: I support the report's direction. At the risk of sounding like a bit of a trainspotter, I have had a long interest in the subject. As anyone who has read the report will be aware, one thing that we will not spot along the line is a train. My only slight disappointment, which other Members have, understandably, mentioned in the debate, is that the light-rail option is not the preferred option.

The people of Comber, in my constituency, will have to wait a while longer to become, once again, the Crewe of Northern Ireland. Back in the day, Comber was at the centre of a commuter rail network, before Northern Ireland even had commuters. People have mocked my good friend Robin Newton because he remembers the railway line. Of course, he is far too young to remember it.

Mr McCausland: He must have had a hard life.

Mr Hamilton: He had a hard paper round.

My colleague in Ards Borough Council Billy Montgomery recalls the last day of the Comber railway line, which, he tells me, was marked by a celebratory

fireworks display. In retrospect, the event should have been a wake, and not marked in such a salubrious fashion.

I understand entirely that the lack of a sufficient population density in Belfast militates against a light-rail option. Having watched the film 'Field of Dreams' on television the other evening, I am tempted to say that if we build it they will come. I hope that, some day down the line, the possibly will exist for at least one of the lines to be upgraded to light rail status. It is important that whatever is constructed is compatible with conversion to light rail at a later date so that the costs of that can be mitigated.

I want to touch on two broad, substantive areas. One is the important matter of integration with other forms of transport. The Minister will forgive me for being parochial in that respect. The Comber Greenway has already been mentioned. It is a popular walking and cycling route. In fact, it has surpassed everyone's expectations as to how popular it has become. Understandably, some people are concerned about the loss of that amenity. It is important that they are assured that it will not be lost and that, in fact, it will be retained in some way or another.

It is also important to remember that the E-way in east Belfast will run along a disused railway line that has, indeed, been set aside for many years for a rapid transit system such as that which has been proposed. I would argue for the extension of the E-way further into the Strangford constituency, into towns such as Comber and Newtownards, which are basically commuter towns from where we would hope to attract people out of their cars and onto the rapid transit scheme.

In a town such as Newtownards, there is the ludicrous possibility that one of the hardest parts of the daily commute is getting through the town itself. It is important that part of the service is extended to those towns to allow the optimum number of people to avail of the service.

In the interim period, a park-and-ride facility will be in place. The location of that park-and-ride facility in the east of the city is also important. If, as the report suggests, there is to be solely one park-and-ride facility, either in the Newtownards corridor or in the Comber corridor, some people may be tempted to drive out of their way to get to the facility to park their car. That may not have the desired effect.

In a previous reply to a question for oral answer (AQO 2710/08) from me, the Minister said that all procurement options were on the table, including PPP, PFI and private-sector input. That is welcome and important because such options can mitigate the substantial costs, which other Members have mentioned and which are included in the report, and any contribution that the private sector can make would be useful. In addition, the input of private-sector operators who

have expertise in that sort of operation elsewhere in the UK, in Ireland or elsewhere in Europe, would be invaluable. There is a risk that we are so bus-focused and bus-orientated in Northern Ireland that a project that is completely different from that may not be as successful as it would be if it were run by a company that had the requisite expertise. The private sector can make a contribution to infrastructure — *[Interruption.]*

I hear “Red” Fred Cobain barking from the back.

The private sector can make an important contribution to infrastructure such as stations. In Dublin, residential and retail developments that have been built by the private sector are adjacent to stations, and that allows substantial costs to be taken away.

The most important thing is that the rapid transport scheme is completed quickly. Some of us have been waiting for a long time, and it is important —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close before I have to strike him out.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate on the delivery of the rapid transit system, which will complement, improve and integrate public transport for the needs and the future needs of all the community in Belfast. It is hoped that such a system will be a pilot system, which, if successful, can be applied to north and south Belfast to deliver a long-term integrated and sustainable transport system that links all communities to employment, education facilities and hospitals.

As my colleague Paul Maskey said, it is no secret that areas such as west Belfast, including Shankill, have suffered a severe lack of investment in jobs and economic regeneration over the years. As was pointed out earlier, a third of the population of Belfast lives in west Belfast, yet it has some of the most deprived and disadvantaged wards in the North of Ireland. Many young people leave school with no academic qualifications and no prospect of employment. Therefore, the rapid transit system provides an opportunity to promote equality of opportunity through the linkages to employment and education.

Procurement was mentioned earlier. The investment strategy and the Programme for Government contain a number of key priorities, of which growing the economy and using increased prosperity and economic growth to tackle existing patterns of social disadvantage and ongoing poverty are central. The procurement of major infrastructure is committed to be taken forward in such a way to ensure that equality, sustainability and social outcomes are the core of the project. Therefore, the rapid transit system offers the opportunity to create economic regeneration in areas of disadvantage by creating employment opportunities in its development and opening up access to employment and educational

opportunities by providing a much-needed gateway. The rapid transit system will also help the environment and cut down on traffic congestion.

The proposed route is mentioned in the pilot scheme. Although I appreciate that it is currently out for consultation, there would be a major gap in the service if consideration were not given to the Colin area at the edge of west Belfast. The route must include the main Stewartstown Road. The Colin area is made up of Poleglass, Twinbrook, Lagmore and Kilwee, and it has a population of 30,000, the equivalent of a small town. Currently, it is within the Lisburn City Council area, but that may change under the RPA.

The Colin area has high unemployment levels, and two of its wards rate in the top 10 on the Noble multiple-deprivation indices. One third of Lisburn City Council’s population live in the Colin area, and the fact that there is just one play park, one comprehensive secondary school and no major shopping facility or leisure centre demonstrates that it is highly deprived.

Although the Colin area is close to Lisburn, it is in west Belfast. Nevertheless, the transport system between Colin and Lisburn is totally inadequate. Although I am conscious that we are discussing the rapid transit system for Belfast, I hope that the Minister will also investigate the corridor between Belfast and Lisburn, particularly the route from the Falls Road to the Stewartstown Road and on to Lisburn.

It is important that people in the Colin area feel, and are, connected to employment and education opportunities in both Belfast and Lisburn, and, if the rapid transit system goes as far as the Colin area, people will be connected with leisure facilities and shops. I hope that the Minister will take that on board. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Regional Development: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who took part in the debate. The contributions were interesting and, clearly, there is significant interest in the rapid transit proposals for Belfast from Members who live in and around the city and members of the Regional Development Committee. I also thank the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for their comments, and I appreciate the Committee’s broad support for the proposals.

As the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson said, the devil will be in the detail, and key factors must be developed further. My Department is happy to talk to the Committee about that, and I am pleased that the Committee recognises that, to date, there has been significant discourse between the Department and the Committee. I hope that that will continue.

Key issues of detail must be tackled, and they concern, as the Chairperson and others identified, the conflict for street space between cars and the rapid transit system — not to be too dramatic, the conflict in

the streets. Quite a few Members mentioned transport integration as a potential obstacle to the system's success, and we must address that key issue. Furthermore, in order to ensure an efficient, total transport system, integrated ticketing will be essential to connect the proposed system with Belfast's existing system.

The Deputy Chairperson and others pointed out the potential to introduce a greener form of transport, and we saw evidence of that in Holland. Locally, we have also seen people's ability to produce much more environmentally friendly vehicles, and, as we develop the project, those considerations will be high on our priority list.

Raymond McCartney, Robin Newton and other Members spoke of the necessity for top-class technology, and that is right. That connects to the points made by Naomi Long and Alex Maskey about capturing the public's imagination; this is all part of that package.

Many Members were disappointed about the decision not to adopt a light rail system. If we act on the recommendations in the consultants' report, we will have to embark on an exercise to capture the public's imagination. That will involve the complete package, and not just, as Alasdair McDonnell said, bendy buses. It must be about technology, the facilities for getting on and off the buses, speed, the segregation from other transport systems, and the reduced travel time — the entire package. The purpose of the project is not, as some people implied, to create an additional bus system, but to create a new transport system that will attract people from their cars. Therefore, it must capture the public's imagination.

In response to Alex Maskey's point, in order to capture some imagination, generate interest and show people what this might look like, we intend to launch the system by displaying the type of vehicle that we are considering. If the discussion is confined to this Chamber and we do not manage to engender interest among the general public — the travelling public — in the Belfast area about the opportunities and potential for the system, this will have been a fairly worthless exercise.

6.00 pm

Several Members mentioned the E-way and the Comber Greenway route, and the Department has been lobbied extensively on the issue. Although most Members who spoke today have recognised that the Comber Greenway was always earmarked as a route for a rapid transit system, nonetheless, it has proved to be a very popular cycle path and walkway. The Department appreciates that and is trying to develop proposals to allow the route to be used as a walkway and as a part of a rapid transit system. I am confident that proposals can be developed that will not push cyclists and walkers off the route.

Next week, departmental officials will meet residents along the route and show them some of the options being developed. I intend to examine the route soon to see how the plans could be accommodated, and I am very keen to find a satisfactory solution. The Department has put a great deal of resources and effort into promoting cycling and walking as alternative means of transport, and I do not want to develop a transport system that will impact negatively on such activities. Quite a few Members raised that issue, and I assure them that my officials are listening to what people are saying. I am confident that we can accommodate their needs.

Robin Newton and Simon Hamilton mentioned the possibility of extending the E-way route to Newtownards and Comber. It is fairly obvious that the further the system extends out of the city, the more the population decreases and the more the proposal becomes less economical. The trick is to have a rapid transit system in a densely populated area in which there is a large footfall. Thus, it would make less economic sense to extend the scheme out to Comber. I hope that the pilot scheme is successful, and that people are attracted to use the system.

Paul Maskey and Jennifer McCann mentioned how the system could benefit West Belfast. The Department does see opportunities to connect areas across the city, including west and east Belfast, which have been difficult to connect. There will be an opportunity for people in economically deprived areas to have access to a transport system that would allow them better access to jobs and educational institutions, and so on. I particularly noted Jennifer McCann's point about the Colin area of West Belfast, and she made a very good case for improving the transport there. Although the scheme being introduced is in pilot form, I hope that it will prove successful and can be rolled out to other areas across Belfast. Other Members also expressed disappointment that the scheme was not being introduced in their areas.

Alasdair McDonnell — who has now left the Chamber — and others mentioned their disappointment that the consultants had not opted for a light rail system. I am disappointed that he suggested that there had been some dishonesty in the figures used to justify the case for a bus-based system. I appreciate that people who have been impressed by the Luas in Dublin are disappointed that a similar scheme will not be implemented here. Nonetheless, the figures stacked up in a particular way, and though I accept that people are disappointed, I must point out that the proposed system allows for an upgrade to light rail in future if the numbers justify such a move.

Nelson McCausland mentioned North Belfast. Contrary to his suggestion, the BMTP has always included a proposal for a West Belfast route. When I became

Minister, I asked that the study take in the entire city because I thought that it was quite restrictive to have just two routes in one part of the city. He also mentioned the north foreshore, which is already served by a motorway and a railway. As I said to Members for South Belfast, this is a pilot scheme, and I anticipate that it will be extended into other areas if it is successful. Developments in areas such as Girdwood Barracks would certainly create the necessary footfall to attract such a transport scheme. That type of destination would attract consultants to consider the introduction of a transport scheme, just as they have been attracted to consider transport needs in other parts of Belfast, such as the Royal Victoria Hospital and Titanic Quarter, and so on.

Several Members mentioned developer contributions, and I want to clear up an issue that Simon Hamilton raised. The consultants recommended a PPP/PFI procurement process for the construction of a light rail system. However, they recommended that the Department develop the infrastructure for a bus-based system and then look to a third party to lease it to.

The Department considered developer contributions, which Roy Beggs mentioned. We have written to the Minister for Social Development in order to maximise regeneration opportunities along the suggested routes.

Alex Maskey was one of those who asked what is happening on other routes. As I said in my opening remarks, because this is a pilot scheme the Department is looking at particular areas of the city. However, other parts of the city should not feel neglected, as there will be work on quality bus corridors and the extension of park-and-ride facilities. It is not a case, therefore, of all our eggs being put in one transport basket. These are pilot schemes that will be developed and which are expected to be a success and extended to other areas in the city. In the meantime, we also intend to improve the transport network in other parts of the city to ensure that public transport is improved across Belfast.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the content of the Rapid Transit for Belfast Strategic Outline Case.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker.*]

ADJOURNMENT

Proposed Chicken Waste Plant at Glenavy

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 five minutes.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to debate this issue in the Assembly. There has been quite a bit of concern in Glenavy and Lagan Valley and in the adjoining constituency of South Antrim about this proposed chicken waste incinerator plant, which will be located close to an existing Glenfarm Holdings incinerator plant that deals with offal.

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

The plant is proposed by a consortium of Rose Energy, Moy Park and O’Kane’s Poultry and Glenfarm Holdings to try to deal with chicken waste litter, which, under the EC Nitrates Directive, cannot be spread on land.

I was looking at a question that was asked of the present Environment Minister’s uncle-in-law, Sam Foster, in 2000, by Ivan Davis, a former MLA for Lagan Valley, about Glenfarm Holdings when the existing incinerator plant received approval. The present Minister of the Environment wrote to me about, I believe, some 24 investigations of pollution of local rivers; there have also been numerous complaints about odours emanating from the plant. I spoke today to residents who were complaining about the plant and who had been visited by officials from the Environment and Heritage Service.

Despite measures that have been taken and approvals received under planning regulations, there has been widespread concern throughout Glenavy and as far away as Crumlin about how the plant has been operating.

There will be concerns that the new plant intends to bring some quarter of a million tons of chicken waste into the area to incinerate — I know that the modern-day term is “energy from waste”, but it is incineration nevertheless. I share those concerns about health and the environment and about the damage that this project, which will be on the banks of Lough Neagh, will do to local tourism.

It is an area of outstanding natural beauty and is one of the most scenic areas in Ireland. Therefore, it would blight the landscape if an incineration plant were to be

built there. I met representatives from Rose Energy, who told me that the plant would take two years to construct, which gives Members some idea of its potential size. Rose Energy never ruled out using water from Lough Neagh and discharging effluent into it, and no one mentioned that issue in today's debate. Therefore, there are concerns about the location of the plant. Some people will say that the plant will generate electricity and contribute to renewable energy in the area, but residual ash will have to be removed from the site.

There are also concerns about the impact that the plant will have on the road network. For some years, the volume of traffic on those roads has been a major issue. I sit on Lisburn City Council, and I know that numerous meetings have been held to discuss the traffic problem. The issue of the chicken waste plant has also been discussed numerous times at Lisburn City Council's environmental services committee. Council officials visited the existing plant before the Environment and Heritage Service assumed responsibility for such matters. Therefore, the impact that the new plant would have on the local road network would result in a 10-fold increase in traffic.

There are concerns among residents in the Crumlin area that the plant will be granted planning permission. Therefore, the Minister of the Environment is here this evening to give her view on residents' concerns about the erection of such a large plant in the area of Lough Neagh. Indeed, most MLAs in the area share those concerns. Some parties have different stances on the issue of incineration. We have to deal with the nitrates directive, but Glenavy is not the location for such a plant.

There are alternatives to the type of plant that Rose Energy is proposing. Representatives from Rose Energy held public meetings in Glenavy, and it seemed that they had come up with their proposal at the last minute because of concerns about the nitrates directive. They had not even considered alternative proposals to deal with chicken waste. We have debated some of those alternative proposals over the past year. For example, anaerobic digestion in particular could be an alternative to an incineration plant. The Assembly and the Minister must consider alternatives to deal with the problem of chicken waste.

I share the residents' concerns, and I know that people will say that there are 7,000 jobs in the poultry industry. Not all of those jobs are based in the North of Ireland, but Moy Park Foodservice and O'Kane Poultry, and the farmers who are associated with them, are concerned about the matter. Nevertheless, we must consider alternatives to Rose Energy's proposals for the site.

I hope that the Minister will take my concerns on board, and I am sure that other Members will voice similar concerns. However, the issue is really whether

we should site an incineration plant on the shores of Lough Neagh, blighting the landscape and causing pollution to the local area.

Mr T Clarke: After listening to the Member for Lagan Valley's speech, I am amazed that we are discussing an application that is not yet in the system. He placed great responsibility on the Minister of the Environment. However, his entire presentation overlooked the failure by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and her Department to suggest an alternative to get rid of that by-product in Northern Ireland. The Member's assertion that there is 250,000 tons of the by-product in Northern Ireland is correct. However, by December 2008, a system must be in place. It is not a new phenomenon; the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has known of the impending problem for some time, and her Department has failed to act.

Although there will always be concerns about the location of such proposals, we must recognise the need for the plant. The Member suggested alternatives; however, the Department has considered, and rejected, those measures. No Member could suggest an alternative that has not already been considered. Moy Park and O'Kane Poultry — through Rose Energy — have outlined a viable option that has worked on the mainland and in other parts of Europe, and the Member's outright dismissal of that proposal is poor form.

6.15 pm

There is a pressing need for the plant, and, as the Member said, thousands of jobs are at risk. The farming community lobbies us daily on the matter. Although I understand the concerns about the plant's proposed location — the Nimby factor — we must recognise that the industry in Northern Ireland needs some sort of chicken waste plant. Similar plants have worked, and continue to work, in Great Britain. The Minister can speak for herself, but she needs time to consider the application when it is submitted. We are projecting fear and negativity, and, therefore, I urge Members to be cautious when discussing the application and to remember that thousands of people are depending on a system to protect their jobs.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Armstrong: The debate highlights an important issue facing society in the twenty-first century. From what source do people want to obtain energy? What type of food do they want to eat? How do they want to dispose of waste products? We need to neutralise all waste to create power. Everyone wants access to energy and power. We want to boil kettles, watch televisions, switch on cookers, make food and heat our homes. People are less likely to venture an opinion on whether coal, oil or gas-fired power stations is their

preferred source of energy. Westminster and Whitehall appear to favour nuclear power — is that an option?

Most people claim to support renewable energy. However, suggestions to erect a wind farm — one of the cleanest and most renewable energy forms — are usually met with opposition. Hard choices must be made. As with food, people want power; they do not, however, want to be involved in its creation. People do not support lignite mining, nuclear power or even wind farms.

The Glenavy proposal relates to recycling animal waste — specifically chicken waste — to create power and reduce pollution on waterways and land. Our society creates vast amounts of waste that must be disposed of somewhere. Although people do not want to live near landfill sites, we have been, for too long, content to send all waste to landfill. We have now learnt that we cannot continue to bury all waste in a hole in the ground, and, therefore, we have an increased amount of waste to recycle.

As with all planning applications, the Minister and her officials must assess available evidence and decide whether certain types of waste-disposal facility, including landfill, recycling and waste-to-power units pose any health risks. I understand that the proposal is for a state-of-the-art facility of the kind that already exists throughout Western Europe, and, therefore, I consider it perfectly safe. If the Minister decides that the Glenavy location poses no risks, it should be included in Northern Ireland's efforts to recycle and create energy.

I am a farmer so I know how important it is to find ways to dispose of farm waste and by-products. The site at Glenavy has been in operation for about 55 years. No one would seek to implement a system that was dangerous or that posed a high health risk. People have been living near the proposed plant site for over half a century.

We are now living in the twenty-first century, and we must utilise modern methods of farming, waste management and energy creation. Rose Energy's proposal for the Glenavy site does all three. That is better than digging big holes in the ground and filling them with waste.

Mr Burns: This is a very important issue. The proposed chicken waste incinerator plant affects the constituencies of Lagan Valley, South Antrim and Upper Bann. There is tremendous concern in the local community about what is involved in the establishment of the plant and the extent of the buildings associated with it. Will the incinerator operate at a level that is efficient enough to produce electricity, or is its main purpose the disposal of chicken waste? That is the big question.

There is no doubt that the proposed incinerator plant is sited in a rural area. Neither is there any doubt that such a plant belongs in an industrial estate.

There are several reasons why the Glenavy site is the wrong location for the incinerator. The banks of Lough Neagh are an important wildlife sanctuary. We are trying to create a tourist industry, and to develop areas that tourists can visit, such as Lough Neagh, which is an important natural resource. Ram's Island, which is situated in Antrim borough, is a location that the council would like to promote as a tourist attraction.

Mr T Clarke: The Member has mentioned Ram's Island. I do not know whether he attended last week's meeting of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, at which the representatives of Rose Energy gave a presentation about the proposed plant. They showed a picture of Ram's Island, and gave a synopsis of how the plant would look from there. The plant can hardly be seen on the mainland from the view on Ram's Island. Will the Member clarify that he saw that presentation last week?

Mr Burns: The Member should know that the chimneys and the water-cooling tower will be as high as the Belfast City Hospital tower.

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Burns: No. There is no question that the plant will be seen clearly from Ram's Island.

Mr T Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member is trying to mislead this Chamber. The information that was given at the presentation was that the height of the proposed building was 43m. If the Member had attended the Committee meeting, he would have known that. He is trying to make out that the buildings will be 100m high, so he is trying to mislead Members in this Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I warn the Member about what he has said, and I ask him to refine his language. Mr Burns is entitled to say whatever he wants in his description.

Mr T Clarke: Even if he is misleading?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is your description, and I ask you to be careful about saying that anyone is misleading the House. I ask you to withdraw your statement.

Mr T Clarke: I refuse to withdraw it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member again to withdraw the remark, on reflection. Otherwise, I must ask him to leave the House.

Mr T Clarke: I will withdraw the remark, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I still believe the information to be inaccurate.

Mr Burns: I was at the Agriculture Committee meeting last week, and I heard that presentation. The Committee had to be suspended when it became inquorate, because Members left to attend Question Time. However, I was present.

We are trying to build a tourism industry in a rural location on the banks of Lough Neagh. One of the greatest benefits of Lough Neagh is that it provides us with drinking water. The two main pumping stations of Castor Bay and Dunore Point are within six miles of the proposed plant, and millions of gallons of water are pumped out of Lough Neagh there.

Both the Lisburn Area Plan and the draft BMAP designate the area around Glenavy as an area of high scenic value and special scientific interest. People who have applied to build houses in the area have been refused planning permission, as it is an area of scenic beauty.

For years, the people of Crumlin and Glenavy have heard the arguments about modern technology, and they have been reassured that there will be no smell from the plant. However, the people who live close to Ulster Farm By-Products know that there is a smell from that plant. No-one will be fooled by the argument that chicken litter can be moved without creating a smell — there will be a smell.

The Glenavy site, being in a rural location, is totally the wrong site for this plant.

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

Mr Burns: I urge the Minister to ensure that there is no piggybacking in respect of this plant. The proposal should be put to a public inquiry.

Mr Ford: I thank Paul Butler for securing time for this matter, which is of significant interest to many people, not only those who live in, and around, Glenavy, but further afield. As Thomas Burns said, the area extends into three constituencies.

First, we should sympathise with the farmers who are caught up in the problems caused by the nitrates directive. The major issue is that farmers must have some sort of plan in place by the end of this year, and many are still trying to deal with it at this late stage. It is clear that farmers in Northern Ireland have severe problems, as nitrates and phosphates can no longer be spread on the land. That will create difficulties, no matter what we say in the Chamber this evening.

We should have sympathy for those who are caught in that predicament and for those who work in poultry plants and other poultry businesses, which contribute hugely to our economy. Several thousand jobs depend on the poultry sector, so we should not take it lightly.

Having said that, we must examine the best option. Part of the problem with the application from Rose Energy is that two of its three partners are respected for their role in the Northern Ireland economy. O’Kane Poultry and Moy Park make significant contributions, provide significant employment and contribute to Northern Ireland plc.

6.30 pm

However, the third partner has a jaded reputation among local people. Having had the misfortune of cycling past its plant a couple of summers ago, I sympathise with the people who live closer to it than I do.

Is incineration the most suitable process? I recently had a visit from someone who is assessing the viability of anaerobic digestion wastes from farms and similar businesses. One of the key advantages of anaerobic digestion is that it works on a much smaller and dispersed scale than incineration. That would create an opportunity to develop several smaller plants; it would also benefit from transport savings.

Chicken litter is drier than other wastes. However, a co-operative process that dealt with more than merely chicken litter could mix in other agricultural wastes, such as those from creameries and other food producers. That possibility should be explored.

However, the final decision on the matter may be confirmed before the full facts about energy from waste have been uncovered. “Energy from waste” is a polite term for incineration — it may not be the best practical or environmental option.

If incineration is deemed to be the best option, what is the best location, or locations, for such a plant? Lough Neagh is not just protected at a domestic or UK level; it is a Ramsar site and should enjoy the highest level of environmental protection. Therefore, the shores of Lough Neagh are not the most suitable location for a chicken waste plant. Furthermore, the surrounding roads would not cope well with a large number of lorries coming into the area every day and week.

Paul Butler asked whether water from the lough will be used in the cooling process; that question has not been answered. It has been claimed that one of the advantages of the Glenavy site is that it is remote from poultry farms. Unfortunately, it is also remote from the industry and housing concentration that would make real use of the waste heap that will be produced. Under the current proposals, material of calorific value will be carted long distances to a plant that will yield approximately only 25% energy efficiency.

Mr T Clarke: The Member is not on the Committee for Agricultural and Rural Development. Therefore, he would not have heard Rose Energy’s presentation in which they gave valid reasons for locating the plant at Glenavy. The first of those reasons is the existence of Glenfarm.

The second reason was that the Glenavy site would have a three-mile exclusion zone in the event of an outbreak of avian flu, for example. If the plant was located in an area of industrial concentration, such an outbreak would close down other plants, too.

Mr Ford: I am not a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, but I heard a similar point being made at the Committee for the Environment. I thank the Member for his intervention anyway.

We must maximise energy value and achieve more than the proposed 25% energy efficiency. Indeed, given the amount of energy that will be expended on carting waste, energy efficiency will probably be less than 25%. We should assess the viability of an industrial site that could yield 70% or 80% energy efficiency.

Given that EHS is granted the lead role in the management of domestic waste, the Department of the Environment should consider giving it a role — in conjunction with DARD and DETI — in the better management of agricultural waste. That would be preferable to leaving it for private businesses to submit their best proposals. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some kind of a lead on that.

Mr Donaldson: I am not speaking in a ministerial capacity but as a Member for the constituency of Lagan Valley, in which the proposed biomass plant will be located.

I recognise the need for such a facility in Northern Ireland; I am not unsympathetic to the requirements of the poultry industry in that regard. I also echo the comments made by Mr Ford and Mr Trevor Clarke, which identified the requirements and targets placed upon us by the European Union.

We have a limited time to resolve this issue, and I question whether this is the right proposal and the right location. I am not convinced that Rose Energy's proposal is the only option that is available to enable Northern Ireland to meet our targets and to comply with the requirements laid down by the European Union. At the moment, I am in discussion with a Northern Ireland-based company that uses a more environmentally friendly process, will recycle the chicken waste, and will create a fertiliser by-product that the agriculture industry can use. That is therefore a much more efficient and effective process that will have the same advantages as Rose Energy claims for its process. The company that I refer to is in discussion with DARD, DETI and DOE about this matter. I seek to advance that option, because I believe that it is a better alternative.

I recognise the needs of the poultry industry and poultry farmers, as well as our targets and obligations, but I am not convinced that Rose Energy's process is the best technology for achieving those objectives.

I am far from convinced that this is the right location. For years, I have been aware of the concerns of local residents about the impact that the existing plant, which is on the Ballyvannon Road, has on the quality of their daily lives. The road network in that

area has been badly damaged by the heavy vehicles that travel daily to and from that plant. The lives of local residents have been made miserable, and I mean miserable. Residents have come to me in tears as a result of this matter, and others have had to sell up and move out of the area because of the impact that the existing plant has had on the quality of their lives. If we factor into that the additional, heavy traffic that will be generated by the transportation of chicken waste to the new plant, I cannot understand how the quality of life for residents will be improved. Indeed, it will have the opposite effect.

The environmental impact must also be considered. Mr Ford is correct: this is an environmentally sensitive area that is close to Lough Neagh. Not just the visual impact is in question; the impact on the environment as a whole must also be considered. The issue is location sensitive. If one were searching for somewhere in Northern Ireland to locate a plant of this sort, one certainly would not put it beside Lough Neagh, which is one of our greatest natural resources. That must be taken into account.

The impact on tourism is also a factor, but the environmental impact is the major factor that the Department should consider when a planning application is made. The impact on the roads will also have to be considered. These are narrow country roads — it is a rural area, and the roads were not built to take the heavy traffic that is to be anticipated. At the very least, Rose Energy needs to look for an alternative site if it is serious about the proposal. This environmentally sensitive area is the wrong site for the plant, which will have a detrimental impact on the lives of local residents.

I have spoken to poultry farmers who have lobbied me on this issue. When the impact that the plant will have on the local community is explained to them, they have shown themselves not insensitive to it. They are prepared to consider alternative locations, and they are also open to considering other processes.

If a planning application is made, the Planning Service will have to consider it in due course. However, in those circumstances, the Department will be within its rights to exercise its authority to hold a public local inquiry on the matter. The issues are of such a nature and of such importance that, at the very least, a public inquiry will become necessary if the plan goes ahead.

Mr B McCrea: Much has been said about the plant, but it boils down to five key issues: whether such a plant is needed; the appropriateness of the Glenavy/Crumlin location; if that location is chosen, the appropriateness of the technology; how trust may be built with the local community and its legitimate concerns addressed; and perhaps most appropriately, whether there is anything that the Minister can do to resolve this pressing issue.

Is the proposed chicken waste plant required? Members are aware that the chicken processing industry is under severe pressure. It must fulfil its obligations under the nitrates directive, and time is of the essence. Even if the plant were built today, it would not be completed and commissioned in time for the industry to avoid significant fines; that will happen regardless. Therefore, part of the reason for the tabling of the Adjournment debate is to try to see whether we can move with some alacrity.

Members have spoken about the scenic beauty around Glenavy and the fresh water in Lough Neagh; however, I can see only two compelling reasons for the choice of the Glenavy/Crumlin area as the location for the plant: either planning permission was granted previously, or a site is there already. We have heard the difficulties associated with that, and such a decision should not be made simply because it is the easy option. The Assembly should be able to take a more strategic view, and weigh up the options before deciding where in Northern Ireland is the best place for the chicken waste plant to be located.

Although some Members have argued in favour of the technology, areas in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom have rejected that technology, because they are unhappy with it. We should, at the very least, investigate those issues and discover the truth. Until we know that, how can we recommend that route to anyone? There are issues, not only associated with the transport of the waste into the area, but with the toxins that are pushed back.

Many Members will have joined the debate about smoking and the causes and difficulties associated with passive smoking. The emission of toxins from a plume is a similar issue, as are the low levels of asbestos. The quantities involved are minute, but people will have legitimate concerns if they are not assured that their concerns are being tackled. Not only the surrounding area of Glenavy will be affected, but, depending on the wind direction, the whole of Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, there is the matter of trust. I attended a meeting with the Minister of the Environment about another state-of-the-art facility at Mullaghglass. We were assured that it was state-of-the-art; that there would be no smells from it; that it would not attract rats; and that there would not be any fall-out. However, the local residents have had their difficulties. The Minister told me that if those issues were not sorted out, we could not expect to build plants anywhere else. There is an issue of public confidence and trust.

Several concerns must be addressed. The roads infrastructure is incapable of handling the loads that will be brought to the plant. There is also an issue with smell; with that come other hazards that do not smell but which are more deadly — carcinogenic products,

such as odourless gases and toxins. It has been suggested — and the Royal Commission agreed — that if plants such as the one proposed for Glenavy are considered safe, they should be built in industrial plants where the water and electricity that is produced can be used.

The companies concerned recognise the need to draw water from Lough Neagh and put it back for cooling, and that will have an environmental impact. My request to the Minister is similar to Mr Donaldson's: can she intervene on that issue before a planning application is made, or can she instigate an appropriate review? When we discussed the environmental protection agency, the Minister assured us that she would make decisions and could tackle related issues. I call upon her to do so. As Mr Ford said, it is not fair to ask industry to undertake the burden of this issue, or to tackle a problem that belongs to the whole of Northern Ireland. Not only is the Minister of the Environment responsible, she has the ability to influence. I call upon her to institute a review.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the residents of Glenavy and the Lough Neagh area in their call to the Minister of the Environment either to reject the proposal outright or to initiate a local public inquiry to consider the full environmental impact of building the proposed chicken-litter waste incinerator in an area that is designated as being of high scenic value.

6.45 pm

I accept that, as a society, we must devise a sustainable means of disposing the waste that we generate. We can, and should, do so without resorting to incineration or landfill, as neither of those options can be honestly described as sustainable. The impression being given by those in favour of the incinerator-based proposition is that there are no alternatives, but the simple fact is that there is more than one solution to meeting the terms of the nitrates directive. I hope that common sense will prevail and that other processes will be given full and open-minded consideration.

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr McLaughlin: I will not give way now, but I understand that the Member is particularly exercised by this issue, so I may give way later if I have time.

I share the residents' justifiable concerns about the long-term environmental impact and the health implications for the community, among other issues, particularly in light of the fact that viable alternative solutions to the waste issue — such as anaerobic digestion, linked to a combined heat and power installation — are available, and are tried and tested technologies.

If necessary, anaerobic digestion can be done on a smaller scale and in closer proximity to where the chicken litter is generated. That would eliminate the

need for transportation, in contrast to the present proposal, which would necessitate the wholesale importation of chicken waste into the Glenavy area to facilitate and support the incineration option. That would generate additional pollution through the increased heavy vehicular traffic. As other Members have said, the proposed development also involves the very real potential of causing serious water pollution in the Lough Neagh area — an area which, in addition to being hugely important from an environmental perspective, is a major source of drinking water. Therefore, in the long term, the proposal involves an unnecessary risk to public health.

This is not a case of people arguing “not in my back yard” — at least, not by the residents of Glenavy. However, considering that there is no significant poultry production in the proposed location, it would be a legitimate argument for them to make.

I fully acknowledge Trevor Clarke’s point about avian flu, but, if a calamitous outbreak were to occur, presumably the generation of chicken waste would also cease. Therefore, I do not believe that he has given a legitimate alternative to the point that Mr Ford was making at the time. We must question the motivation for building such a facility in a location to which it would be necessary to transport the waste. There is little or no production of poultry — or of poultry waste — in that area. That is, unless those who are engaged in this industry are themselves subscribers to the Nimby concept and would prefer to export their problem to Glenavy.

I call on the Minister to listen to the concerns of the local population and to use her powers to reject this proposal, and I call on the promoters of this ill-considered project to abandon it.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster):

Although it is always good to hear Members’ views — and I have listened with great interest to the support for, and opposition to, the proposed development at Glenavy — it is unfortunate that the debate is taking place in something of a vacuum. By that I mean that the Department has not yet received any planning application for the development. It is therefore very difficult for me to respond to some of the comments made by Mr Burns about the height of different installations. I do understand that there have been several engagements between the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee for the Environment on the matter.

Members are right to point to the origin of the issue, which is the nitrates directive that was introduced by Europe in 1991. Since then, our own nitrates action programme has come into effect, and the practice of spreading poultry litter and bedding on agricultural land has effectively ceased. In that context, Mr Burns’s

comment about the issue affecting three constituencies is incorrect — the problem affects the whole of Northern Ireland, and a solution must be found for the whole of Northern Ireland.

During the development of the Nitrate Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, it became evident that off-farm solutions for the pig and poultry sectors needed to be advanced. Therefore, in 2005, a working group called — and this is a very good title, Mr Deputy Speaker — the expert group on alternative uses for manure was established, with representatives from DARD, DOE, DETI, the pig and poultry sectors, and the environmental non-governmental organisations, under DARD’s chairmanship.

The technical approach that is being proposed by Rose Energy Ltd was endorsed by that expert group. I listened to the points that my friend, the Rt Hon Member for Lagan Valley Mr Donaldson, the Member for Lagan Valley Mr Basil McCrea and Mr Ford made about alternative ways to deal with the issue. However, the expert group, which was — correctly — established under the chairmanship of DARD, and includes officials from DOE and DETI, has identified that the waste plant is the correct technology to use. On many occasions, I have asked myself if there is an alternative. The answer has always been that the experts have examined the issue, and this is the only way forward.

If there are alternatives, my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development would be only too happy to examine them. As Members know, at present EHS is responsible for regulation and will be succeeded by the new Northern Ireland environment agency. Therefore, I will be the regulator, and the DARD Minister and the DETI Minister will be seeking an answer to the problem.

When this topic was proposed for the Adjournment debate, there was much discussion about which Minister would answer the debate because it is not only a problem for DARD and DETI because of jobs or for my Department because of the planning application and a permitting viewpoint, it also concerns OFMDFM with regard to sustainable development. Therefore, the Minister from any of those Departments could have responded.

The expert group on alternative uses of manures was assigned to investigate technical solutions for uses other than land spreading. As I said, it recommended that poultry litter be dealt with in a fire generator for the poultry sector. That recommendation helped to persuade the European Commission to allow a temporary measure in the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 for the storage and application of poultry litter in field heaps until 31 December 2008. As the derogation finishes at the end

of this year, there is a great deal of urgency to find a solution to the emerging nitrates problem. The difficulties that face the farming sector, particularly poultry processors, have been recognised by all the Members who spoke in the debate.

Moy Park Ltd and O’Kane Poultry Ltd came together as a consortium to pursue a solution to the emerging nitrates problem, and — as the House has heard — they were joined by Glenfarm Holdings Ltd. The consortium is called Rose Energy Ltd and proposes to construct a biomass plant on a site adjacent to an existing Glenfarm Holdings Ltd facility at Glenavy. I listened to the various concerns that Members raised about the Ulster Farm By-Products plant at Glenavy, and I have answered several questions about that plant from two of the Members opposite. There have been difficulties: the company was regulated by Lisburn City Council until November 2005, after which the Environment and Heritage Service permitted the installation under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Since November 2005, departmental officials have regularly inspected the operations at the site and have responded to and investigated complaints from many of the local residents. They also attempt to keep residents informed of the work ongoing to minimise further the environmental impact of the site, particularly the odour, which was referred to in the debate.

Over several years, Rose Energy Ltd has worked closely with Invest NI and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm the feasibility of its proposal and investigate potential ways of aligning the necessary funding to support the project — it was a feasibility plan that was part-funded by Invest NI that suggested the site at Glenavy. It is envisaged that the proposal would reduce not only the nitrate input, but also the phosphorous input, to which Mr Ford referred, from agriculture that contributes to eutrophication, which is the most widespread pollution problem facing Northern Ireland’s water environment.

In addition, the proposed burning of poultry litter, and meat-and-bone meal would produce 30 MW of electricity, which would help Northern Ireland achieve its obligation to generate 12% of its electricity from indigenous renewable resources by 2012. It is in that context that Members should take Billy Armstrong’s well-made comments about the need for renewable energy.

Mr Burns wondered whether the plant would be used for waste disposal or for electricity generation. Such uses are not mutually exclusive, and part of its benefit, if the plant were to be built, would be the provision of electricity generation.

Although departmental officials have held pre-application discussions with agents, the planning application and the necessary environmental statement

have not yet been submitted. I am sure that when they are submitted, they will be given intense consideration.

I realise that the proposal has already generated considerable opposition, and there has been much public debate about the impacts of the proposal, and, indeed, the manner in which I might deal with the planning application. I must also acknowledge that I have received substantial support from others in the community who feel that there is a need for such a plant. Therefore, there are two sides to the debate.

The planning application will be dealt with under the procedures for the handling of major applications, as laid out in article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Under those provisions, a final decision on such an application rests with me, as Minister. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for me to express any view that suggests that I have already adopted a position on the matter before it has been given full consideration through the formal planning process.

I look forward to the planning application being submitted, because the debate has been going on for some time, and there is a need for focus. When the planning application is received, with its environmental statement, I hope that Members who are concerned about the issue will take the time to read the entire application and statement. That may take the entire summer, but I know that they will take the time to do that.

The article 31 process that I referred to will allow me, if necessary, to ask the Planning Appeals Commission to hold a local public inquiry to consider any other procedural issues. That is one option that will be available to me at the end of my deliberations.

Much has been said about alternatives. When Mr Butler — who secured the debate — talked about alternatives, I thought that his colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development would be delighted to hear of them, because I know that she is exercised about the issue, as, indeed, am I. I have no current knowledge of any technology that can deal with poultry litter in the required manner. If alternatives exist, we will be glad to hear about them.

Members will be interested to know that, as well as planning permission, Rose Energy will also be subject to the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. Furthermore, the issuing of any permit is currently a matter for the Environment and Heritage Service.

The permit process requires the submission of an application that details how the plant will use the best available techniques to ensure that all measures are taken to prevent pollution. The application would have to demonstrate that the installation will be designed, constructed and operated in accordance with best available techniques. In particular, it would have to be in line with the requirements of the European directive

on waste incineration, which would entail the provision of rigorous and transparent information on the process and technology proposed for the installation.

I note the calls from colleagues about the importance of intervention and the requirement to resolve the issue. Mr Ford, in particular, addressed that issue.

I hope that, by now, I have made it clear that this is a cross-cutting issue. DARD takes the lead role because it is trying to find a solution to the issue of agricultural waste. I clearly have an interest in the issue, not simply from a planning-permission point of view, but as a regulator. Therefore, the Department of the Environment will continue to be engaged. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will also continue to be involved, because of the fact that so many jobs are involved. I hope that OFMDFM become involved in respect of sustainable development. Very many issues need to be resolved, and I look forward to receiving the planning application.

Adjourned at 6.59 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Thursday 5 June 2008

The Assembly met at 3.30 pm (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Resignation of the First Minister: Rev Dr Ian Paisley

Mr Speaker: I have received a letter from the First Minister, the Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley, notifying me of his resignation under section 16B(1)(a) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, with effect from 3.30 pm today, Thursday, 5 June 2008. Dr Paisley has sought leave to make a statement, and I will call him shortly. However, before doing so, I am sure that Members want me to convey the Assembly's best wishes to him and his family as he leaves the office of First Minister.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your liberality in giving me five minutes: I am very grateful to you for that. Sixty years ago, I first came to this House to watch a debate. Little did I think that I would sit one day in the seat of the Prime Minister. That is, his constituency returned me with a great vote in the Bannside, and I am ever grateful to them for that. Nor did I ever think that I would ever sit in the Prime Minister's chair in the Prime Minister's office. I am grateful for the privilege.

Words do not mean very much on an occasion like this. It is the emotion of the heart, the emotion of the mind and the emotion of the soul.

However, I would like to put on record my deepest possible thanks to the literally thousands of people from across the world who, by all sorts of methods, have passed on their best wishes to me. Many of them said that they never believed that they would sit down and pen such a letter. They said they had been forced to pen it because of how things had gone with us in these past 12 months. I am deeply indebted for all who have taken time to indicate their thankfulness.

I return thanks to Almighty God that I have been spared this time to see the progress of this House, to see the progress in Northern Ireland, and to see the future that we can have if we all dedicate ourselves to

working for the better good of everyone in this land. I believe that that is going to happen.

I trust that you, sir, will lead a long life, and that you will spend most of it in that Chair, conducting very reasonable persons as they do their business. I am sure that you will not have much trouble in throwing people out. This is one of the Houses that I have not been thrown out of, and I am grateful for that. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: Convention allows party leaders — or their representatives — to comment when a Minister is making a statement on his or her resignation. Therefore, I intend to provide an opportunity for a representative from each party to speak.

Lord Morrow: I have no doubt that whatever words I use today, they will fall far short of what should be said on an occasion such as this.

Dr Paisley has provided a lifetime of service, not only in politics, but in the Church. Despite that immense workload, he has also found time to write books, edit publications, and ensure that he always made time for his family, who, as those who are close to him know, are so important to him.

Back in the early days of his career, he ploughed a very lonely furrow. However, that did not deter Dr Paisley from his principles and political objectives. There are few individuals who have established, from nothing, a Church and a political party.

From humble beginnings less than 40 years ago, the DUP has become the largest party in Northern Ireland and the fourth largest in the United Kingdom. The party now has half the Province's MPs, Privy Counsellors and members of the House of Lords, in addition to our seats in this Assembly.

Dr Paisley has risen from an unknown and an outsider to become a respected figure in the House of Commons. He is its longest serving Member and someone who causes a hush in the Chamber whenever he rises to his feet. He has been an MP since 1970, and he was Northern Ireland's first MEP. He was not content to top that poll once — he topped it five times in total. Today, he is an international figure, sought after in the United States, Brussels and elsewhere around the world.

Prior to the arrival of Dr Paisley, unionism was led by "big house" unionists and landowners. Dr Paisley changed all that and provided a voice for the working class. Over his lifetime, he has had an impact on so many people. When he announced his retirement back in March, the term "colossus of unionism" was used to describe him. No politician has taken more insults than Ian Paisley, but he never allowed the bitterness that he encountered to deflect him from serving the interests of the unionist people.

Over the decades, he has provided principled leadership. He rightly opposed deals that were not good for Northern Ireland, but he recognised a good and fair deal when he saw it. As our First Minister, he has worked courageously for the benefit of all the people in Northern Ireland. Dr Paisley has shown unionists that with the constitutional position of Northern Ireland settled, their leaders can engage with confidence with those from all backgrounds, including the Government of the Irish Republic.

Those who are entrusted with the baton of leading this party know the size of the shoes that have to be filled. Dr Paisley is a unionist colossus, and he can be justly proud today. The DUP and Northern Ireland will be forever indebted to Dr Paisley for his immense contribution.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ian Paisley has been part of the political landscape here for as long as I can remember. He may be pleased to know: i bhfad i bhfad ó shin that it was his desire to visit the Falls Road — Divis Street — in 1964 that first whetted my interest in Irish politics. His journey from those days to where he sits now have been well chronicled, and my views on his role — for most of his career — are also well known. Therefore, I will not dwell on that today, a Cheann Comhairle, except, perhaps, to note that he is living proof of why a politician should never say never — or even “Never. Never. Never.” I resisted trying to imitate his dulcet tones.

Today, I want to commend Ian Paisley: today is the day to praise Caesar, not to bury him. I thank him for the manner in which he fulfilled his role as First Minister alongside Martin McGuinness. He certainly had a lot to put up with. I also want to commend Martin McGuinness, who also had a lot to put up with. Both leaders proved, together, that politics can work; and far from being the problem parties that were berated by begrudgers and naysayers, Sinn Féin and the DUP proved that progress can be planned and achieved and that difficulties can be overcome. A chairde, there is a high public expectation that that will continue to be the case in the time ahead. That is a huge challenge for all the parties represented here, especially for Ian Paisley’s successor and the rest of us.

Ian Paisley did not meet with me until recent times, and he did not talk to me directly until 26 March last year, when we agreed the arrangements that led to the re-establishment of the political institutions. Throughout all of our engagements, I have found him cordial and respectful, and I am convinced that the good humour, grace and enthusiasm that he displayed in public were good for public confidence and for all the people of this island.

I wish Dr Paisley well. I also want to extend my best wishes to his wife, Eileen, and to all their family, and may I commend her on the best speech of the past year, which she made, of course, at the Boyne site last month.

There is seanfhocal — a proverb — in the Irish language: Is fearfeasach é cinnte an duine a athraíonn treo ar leas an phobail, agus is fear ádhúil é an duine a mhaireann fada go leor le tairbhe a bhaint as. It is a wise man who can change direction for the common good; it is a lucky man who lives long enough to enjoy it.

Enjoy it; good luck. Go n-éirí an bóthar leat agus le do chlann.

Mr Kennedy: I express my personal sympathy, and that of my party, to Minister Nigel Dodds, and to the wider family circle, on the death of his father.

On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I acknowledge the contribution of the outgoing First Minister — over the past year, in particular. In my role as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, important work was carried forward on a range of issues in a positive and constructive manner. Both I and my Committee were treated with utmost respect.

It is worth saying that the relationship between Dr Paisley and the Ulster Unionist Party has been uneasy, to say the least. Nevertheless, on this day — and laying aside political differences — we acknowledge his contribution to politics in Northern Ireland and take this opportunity to wish him well, on a personal basis, as he reaches his retirement from political office in the Assembly. It is surely the case that we shall not see his like again.

I have no doubt that Dr Paisley will continue to contribute to the affairs of the House, but we extend to him, and to Baroness Paisley, a genuine wish of a long and happy retirement, with time to enjoy other aspects of life with his family away from the cut and thrust of politics.

3.45 pm

Mr O’Loan: Future historians will wrestle with the enigma with which they have been presented by the actions of Ian Paisley over the past 14 months of his political career when contrasted with those of the previous 40 years.

In these past 14 months, he has done the right things — indeed the only things that could create a society at peace. Those things involved the elements of partnership government and North/South co-operation for which this party has always stood.

We cannot ignore the fact that Ian Paisley stood resolutely against those things for all those long years. Today, however, I recognise him for what he did in the

end. My party and I wish him, his wife, Baroness Paisley, and their family well for the future.

Mr Ford: I also express the sympathy of my colleagues to Nigel Dodds and his family circle on their bereavement.

As I said a few weeks ago, history will judge whether Ian Paisley is remembered for 40 years of saying no or for one year of saying maybe. It is clear where my party stands on that question. However, as he steps down from the office of First Minister, it is right to recognise that Ian Paisley finally agreed to take part in the arrangements for an Executive.

I suspect that his act of taking office will be seen as more significant than anything that was actually achieved by the Executive over the past year. On behalf of my colleagues, I wish the former First Minister and his wife a happy retirement from politics with their family.

Ms Purvis: I also extend my sympathy and condolences to the Dodds family circle.

I may not have agreed with all of Ian Paisley's politics; in fact, I did not agree with his route in getting to this Assembly. There is no doubt that there is a lot of hurt out there in the community that needs to be healed. However, in the past year, Mr Paisley has certainly embraced his role as First Minister in the Assembly and, for that, I pay him credit.

He has also offered new hope and a role model in joining Sinn Féin in Government and in showing our community that there is a new way forward. I wish him and his family well for the future.

Mr Speaker: Order. I advise the House that there will be a further opportunity for representatives of parties to speak when the next item of business has been concluded.

Filling of Vacancies in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is the filling of vacancies in the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in accordance with section 16B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

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

As the Members nominated to fill the vacancies shall not take up office until each of them has affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office contained in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I will ask each of the persons nominated to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

The Pledge of Office is as follows:

"To pledge:

- (a) to discharge in good faith all the duties of office;
- (b) commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means;
- (c) to serve all the people of Northern Ireland equally, and to act in accordance with the general obligations on government to promote equality and prevent discrimination;
- (ca) to promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future;
- (cb) to participate fully in the Executive Committee, the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council;
- (cc) to observe the joint nature of the offices of First Minister and deputy First Minister;
- (cd) to uphold the rule of law based as it is on the fundamental principles of fairness, impartiality and democratic accountability, including support for policing and the courts as set out in paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement;
- (d) to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government;
- (e) to operate within the framework of that programme when agreed within the Executive Committee and endorsed by the Assembly;
- (f) to support, and act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly;
- (g) to comply with the Ministerial Code of Conduct."

Paragraph 6 of the St Andrews Agreement states:

"We believe that the essential elements of support for law and order include endorsing fully the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the criminal justice system, actively encouraging everyone in the community to co-operate fully with the PSNI in tackling crime in all areas and actively supporting all the policing and criminal justice institutions, including the Policing Board."

Members, the Pledge of Office has now been read into the record of proceedings. I will proceed with the

nomination process. I call the Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the First Minister.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: As nominating officer of the largest political party, it is a great pleasure and privilege for me to nominate our party leader, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP, to be First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly. As well as playing a pivotal role in the development of our party, Peter has been an excellent deputy leader for a considerable time. I have no doubt that he will continue to apply his leadership credentials as First Minister, and I wish him every success and God's blessing in his new role.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Gerry Adams to nominate a Member of the Assembly to be the deputy First Minister.

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat arís, a Cheann Comhairle. First, I also extend condolences to the family of Nigel Dodds — I was not aware of his bereavement.

Tá mé an-sásta an tUasal Máirtín Mac Aonghusa a ainmniú mar Leas-Chéad Aire.

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to nominate Martin McGuinness as deputy First Minister.

Mr Speaker: The Rt Hon Peter Robinson has been nominated to be the First Minister, and Mr Martin McGuinness has been nominated to be the deputy First Minister. I ask both Members to rise in their places. I first ask the Rt Hon Peter Robinson to affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office.

The First Minister (Designate) (Mr P Robinson): Mr Speaker, I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

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

The deputy First Minister (Designate) (Mr M McGuinness): A Cheann Comhairle, glacaim leis an Ghealltanas Oifige. I affirm the terms of the Pledge of Office as set out in schedule 4 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Speaker: I now confirm that the Rt Hon Peter Robinson and Mr Martin McGuinness, having affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office, have taken up office as First Minister and deputy First Minister in accordance with section 16B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I offer my congratulations to you both.

There will be an opportunity for speeches. I will begin by calling the First Minister and then the deputy First Minister to address the House. I call the First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Before I commence my remarks, I wish to place on the record of the House my deep condolences, and those of my colleagues on these Benches, to my friend and colleague, and the party's new deputy leader, Nigel Dodds, on the passing of his father Joe, earlier this morning. Joe was well known to all of us on these Benches; he was a great man, and he will be greatly missed. He was a devoted husband, father and grandfather, and a loyal and dedicated public representative. His passing will be genuinely mourned.

I spoke to Nigel this morning. He very much would have wanted to be at my side today. Nigel, his mother and the entire family circle are grieving their huge loss, but they are fortified in the knowledge that Joe is with his Lord and Saviour.

At the outset, Mr Speaker, I express my thanks, admiration, high regard and respect to the great Ulsterman whom I have the honour of succeeding. He has been a leader without equal. His contribution has been immeasurable, and no man laboured more faithfully than he to secure the political agreement that now shapes the future. I have worked with Ian for so many years, and I am especially honoured that he nominated me today. He has laid the foundation for this new era, and it is now up to the rest of us to build on it.

Ian, many of us are glad that you did say no and that you did say never.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The First Minister: There are questions to which no and never are the right answers.

When Enoch Powell said that all political careers end in failure, he had not reckoned on the career of Ian Paisley.

Ian, I wish you well for the future, and I wish Baroness Paisley and all your family some of the happiness and togetherness of which we deprived you over the years. However, you can expect a more-than-occasional call from me so that I can draw on your vast experience and gain advice.

Today calls on me to look forward to the future and the huge challenges that lie ahead. Although holding the post of First Minister is a great honour for me, politics is not about who fills an office; it is about what is done when in office. Ultimately, that is how history will judge us all.

We have made a good start. There are some in the Chamber who have often quoted an old Irish proverb or aphorism, which is interpreted as "a good start is half the job". However, we must remember that it is only half the job. There is still much work to be done. A year on, the settling-in period is over. The time for the Executive and the Assembly to deliver has arrived.

There is much important work to be done. We must secure the peace that has been achieved and remove, once and for all, the last vestiges of all paramilitary organisations and activity that has, for so long, marred our Province. We must grow the economy and build the prosperity that can help the lives of all the people who live here; we must address unresolved issues in a way that commands the confidence of the community; and we must work to transform the institutions to ensure that we move smoothly to democratic normality in the years ahead.

If devolution is to be meaningful to the people of Northern Ireland, the responsibility for delivering results rests with all of us. Of course, the deputy First Minister and I will have to roll up our sleeves, and neither of us will duck the challenges or recoil from the hard work that such tasks require. After a year operating in the Executive, no one knows better than we do that there is no elevator that will take us to a successful outcome. We will just have to take the staircase — step by step by step.

However, there is a four-party mandatory coalition. I want to work alongside all my Executive colleagues, because all of us have a vital role to play in delivering for the people who elected us. We will best succeed if we are striving towards a common goal.

4.00 pm

I will want to discuss and engage with other leaders in the House on how best we might work together to achieve the Programme for Government that the Assembly agreed, and how best we should address outstanding and unresolved issues. I know that how we deal with such matters is not the sole preserve of the two largest parties, but of all. I do not even limit that dialogue to the Executive parties; I languished too long on opposition Benches to want that.

For a moment, let me respond to some opponents outside the House. Over recent months, falling upon our ears like a fire bell in the night have been the claims that my party is somehow under pressure and is likely to lose support because we are in the Executive.

Parties have been built up and cast down from the earliest period of our history to the present day. No party has the right to expect unquestioning or automatic support from the people. Support has to be earned, and trust must be maintained.

It is true that people step cautiously when they are asked to tread new ground. The decision that we took just over a year ago, quite rightly, must be judged by our voters. I believe that the decision was right. I also believe that time is demonstrating that our judgement was sound.

There is no one out there who can offer a better, achievable, way forward. My colleagues and I will

justify to those who matter — the electorate of Northern Ireland — the judgement call that we made.

Let me assure you, Mr Speaker; our actions, as we move forward, will not be limited or governed by the snarl and screech of those jarring and rancorous voices that trade on creating fear. We will waste no time looking over our shoulders at those who have nothing to offer, and whose only hope is to profit from a healthy scepticism about whether the course that we offer is safe to travel.

Ian used to say to me, when we faced difficult decisions: do what is right, though the stars fall. We did what was right, and the stars did not fall; for, when you do what is right, the people follow.

Those in the House who have been in politics as long as I have been will have seen such parties appear many times before. They seek to tap into some genuine apprehension and concern, and, though they have no attainable solution and have done nothing to commend themselves to the people, they hope to ride to office on a tide of emotion or doubt. However, they have no alternative, other than offering the people of Northern Ireland a seat on the bleachers, helplessly to observe while others take our decisions for us.

There is no part of me that prefers being a bystander, unable to influence or shape the future; unable to change or improve the lot of our people; unable to govern ourselves; and assigned to the sidelines, while, under direct rule, London and Dublin decide our fate. We have the courage to shape our own destiny, and we have the confidence to do right and to trust in the good judgement of the people.

As we move forward in this new era, we must never forget the events of the past 40 years, and, in particular, we must never forget those whose lives were cut short, those who have suffered and those who still do.

As an Administration, we are pledged to help the victims of the Troubles, and we must boost our efforts to ensure, as best we can, that victims too can share the benefits of this new era. We must not go back to the bad old days. We must learn from the past; we must not live in it.

I want to see a Northern Ireland that is not known throughout the world for the Troubles, nor even for the peace process. I want to see a Northern Ireland that is known for innovation; for its industry; for the economic opportunity that it offers; for the friendliness, warmth and charm of its people; and for the beauty, vitality and magic of its landscape.

In this new era, we have much to celebrate. There has probably never been a period since the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921 with more widespread support for both the political and policing institutions than exists today.

We, in Northern Ireland, are in the unique position of benefiting from all the advantages of being an integral part of the United Kingdom, while having more positive relationships with the Republic of Ireland than ever before. We have also enjoyed the support and encouragement of the United States of America, and we very much look forward to the visit of President George Bush in a few weeks' time.

We are grateful for the support that we have been given from outside Northern Ireland. However, the real test of our maturity as a society will come when we all have the self-confidence to face and resolve our problems. In the past few weeks, there has been much talk of how the DUP has exercised the veto that it negotiated at St Andrews. Yes, we have exercised our veto, and we have not been alone in doing that. However, applying a veto is not an indication of strength or success; it is simply an indication that we were unable to agree.

Let me make it clear: my colleagues and I did not negotiate those changes as a weapon to be used against other parties, but as a safeguard — for as long as it is needed — of the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland. The truth is that unless we can create a shared society, we will not truly have turned the corner as a people.

Therefore — if I can rework the words of Abraham Lincoln, which were uttered almost 150 years ago — let us strive on to finish the work we are in and bind up the wounds of our divided community.

In all that I do as First Minister, I will — with God's help, and He granting me an ample portion of strength and wisdom — work to put the interests of the people of Northern Ireland first. I pledge to work unstintingly to help navigate the Province towards a better and finer day.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):
Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a thabhairt do Ian Paisley as an obair a rinne sé, agus guím gach rath ar an Chéad Aire nua. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

First, I also want to express my sympathy for, and give my condolences to, Nigel Dodds, his mother and his family. I thank my party leader and friend, Gerry Adams, for the nomination as deputy First Minister. I accept the post, being fully aware of its responsibility and potential as a coequal partner in leading the Executive.

I congratulate Peter Robinson on his appointment. I agree with Peter that neither of us is afraid of hard work. I look forward very much to working with him in the time ahead. I am conscious that leading the Executive along with Peter Robinson brings a high level of expectation. We must deliver a real and marked improvement in people's lives, and how we conduct our business and resolve our differences impacts directly on that task.

I am an Irish republican; I want to see a reunited Ireland created by peaceful and democratic means; I want to see the unity of green and orange. I am committed to working these institutions with the new First Minister, a committed unionist, to deliver for all of the community, our citizens and the most disadvantaged. Bringing about change does not impact on our respective political ideologies.

I am also committed to working with every party and Member in the Assembly in delivering a new and better future. The eyes of the world have been upon us in the course of recent years, as regions have looked to Ireland and to our peace process as an example of conflict resolution. I have no doubt that that will continue as we, as a society, seek to continue to move forward in partnership.

Despite what the cynics and begrudgers might have said over the past year, we have made huge progress. We have achieved what many said was impossible — we are in a stable power-sharing and all-Ireland institutional arrangement. We have agreed a Programme for Government, a Budget and an investment strategy.

There is much hurt in every section of our community. People have lost loved ones, and many others have been injured in the course of the conflict. They are an important constituency. A commission is now in place to address the needs of victims and survivors. As an Executive, we are proactively tackling the divisions in our society, and we will continue to do so.

Across a range of issues, we have confounded the critics, and, from differing positions, we came to an effective agreement. We have shown that we can work together. Peter Robinson and I were part of the Executive that achieved that, and I am committed to working with him positively and constructively as we meet the new challenges that we now face.

The all-Ireland political institutions are up and running and delivering for all the people who live on this island. They offer us an island-wide approach to dealing with problems, offering solutions and bringing benefit to all.

Over the past year, the institutions have bedded down under the leadership of Ian Paisley and me. It has been a remarkably historic year. From the beginning, we treated each other with respect. I pay tribute to Ian Paisley for the role that he played, and I wish him and his wife, Eileen, well in the future.

Throughout the past year, we enjoyed much support and goodwill from all the people of Ireland, but we now enter a new phase. As far as I am concerned, the honeymoon period is over. It is now about hard work; people expect results, and we have come here to deliver for the people. Our people want a future for themselves and for their children, and they want prosperity at a time when the cost of living is spiralling.

We must continue to grow our economy to generate wealth, deliver effective public services and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

The recent investment conference was a success, and I am confident that it will lead to tangible results. I echo Peter Robinson in thanking the US Administration and those who came to support a very successful economic investment conference.

Our people want an end to division, and they want to be valued equally. As an Irish republican, I want equality for everyone, not only for nationalists and republicans. We have a responsibility to promote tolerance and to celebrate our cultural and linguistic diversity. We must be open to the new communities that have enriched our society in recent years, and we must stand with them in the battle against racism.

The war is over. In Armagh, after the first meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council to take place since 2002, Ian Paisley generously remarked that we had to end the divisions and the old hatreds of the past on our island. That means proactively tackling the scourge of sectarianism. Difference, in our past, meant division. In the future, we must ensure that difference is not seen as a threat but as something to cherish and celebrate. We must start talking to one another and not at one another. We, as political leaders, must take the lead, particularly in the Chamber.

Our people want to feel safe in their homes and on the streets, and I want the Assembly to have policing and justice powers to ensure that that happens. We must continue to invest in health, education and elderly people. We face significant challenges in the global economy because of rising prices and a downturn in the housing market. We also face challenges as we journey out of conflict and attempt to reconcile our past with a new and better future.

Despite all the challenges that lie ahead, we will continue to make progress across this island. We are determined to bring an early conclusion to the talks that begin tomorrow to resolve all the outstanding issues from the St Andrews Agreement.

I believe that the public wants stability and progress. Acting together, the new First Minister and I intend to deliver both.

4.15 pm

In a speech in the United States in 2006, the new First Minister said:

"I hope... that the sons and daughters of the Planter and the Gael have found a way to share the land of their birth and live together in peace."

I very much share that hope. As joint First Ministers, the new First Minister and I, as leaders of the planter and the Gael, are charged with the responsibility to

lead the way on behalf of the Executive. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Speaker: As I indicated earlier, there will now be an opportunity for a representative from each of the other political parties to speak. I ask that Members limit their remarks to no more than five minutes.

Sir Reg Empey: I wish to take the opportunity to wish the First Minister well in his new post. I hope that he and the deputy First Minister will be able to inject a genuine sense of purpose, which is currently lacking, into the Executive's deliberations. I put on record the fact that on not a single occasion since devolution returned to Northern Ireland in 2007 have the leaders of the parties that comprise the Executive met to discuss the way forward. I believe that that is one of the reasons why the First Minister's term of office has started in an atmosphere of crisis.

Colleagues beside us told us that they had got it right in 2007; that issues had been resolved at St Andrews to ensure that there would be no more threats to devolution and that stability was guaranteed. That claim rings hollow today, as we meet here at the beginning of yet another round of talks involving both Governments. It is abundantly clear that matters are not resolved and that we are, in fact, embarking on St Andrews mark II. The truth is that the problems that we face do not lie in London or Dublin. The unresolved problems lie in this Chamber. They should be resolved here by all the parties present. That is why we are here. Once again, there has been no effort to bring the parties together to discuss those outstanding issues.

It is clear that Sinn Féin's behaviour during the past week will convince many that the Assembly is not yet ready to shoulder further responsibility, especially on such sensitive issues as policing and justice. When it is clear that we are unable to deal effectively with day-to-day problems, what reason is there to believe that adding more into the mix will produce better results? Sinn Féin could simply not resist the temptation to indulge in yet more brinkmanship to advance its narrow and outdated agenda.

In May 2008, I, like others, had the privilege of addressing potential US investors. Along with other Ministers, I encouraged them to believe that the problems of political instability were behind us. Yet, within a few weeks, we make fools of ourselves across the world. Real damage has been done to the credibility of this institution, both at home and abroad, and Sinn Féin is to blame. Families out there are reeling from increasing food costs, rising mortgages, increased energy and fuel bills. Instead of expecting to receive help from this place, people see a wrangle over an Irish language Act and other issues. People must ask what on earth we are playing at.

The process that is being embarked upon in London tomorrow may well end in the devolution of policing and justice; maybe not now, but next year or later. There will be an Irish language Act, although not the one that Sinn Féin wants for this place. The Act could apply to those areas for which London has responsibility and not this House. Remember, the St Andrews Agreement referred specifically to “an Irish Language Act”.

Therefore, there is nothing to prevent the powers that are reserved to London being used to create such an Act, including the powers that relate to broadcasting and other matters. The republican movement is beating the door down in London to secure that, and it is not being turned away. I suggest that that matter must be watched. That may not apply here, but it may apply to matters that are not devolved. That move will be sweetened by some economic bribe, perhaps involving the proceeds of the sale of Army bases — a policy that I support — and perhaps by some statement from the late Mr P O'Neill, who we thought had gone away. Perhaps he will be resuscitated once more to allegedly provide some confidence in what might emerge.

The problems are here; they are not in London or in Dublin. Running in and out of those places, when we thought that we had moved on from all of that, is not the way forward. The way forward is to deal with our own problems because that is what we are here for — that is what we are paid for and that is what we should be doing.

Mr Durkan: I congratulate the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on their appointment by their parties today. I regret the fact that, because of changes to the Good Friday Agreement, they have not been elected by the Assembly, as they rightly should be. The Ministers and indeed the staff of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister would show better respect to the Chamber and the full authority of the Assembly if they were elected by it. A number of issues that have emerged during the past year has reinforced that concern.

The joint First Ministers have the good wishes of the SDLP as they take up the responsibilities of their office. There are challenges of that office, and there are challenges in that office. As they come to terms with those challenges, we want to work with them in the Executive, the Chamber and the Committees to take society forward, to grow our economy and to develop and improve our public services.

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister referred to the Programme for Government, the Budget and the investment strategy. Some of us voiced differences about those, which we expressed legitimately and in a measured way — only to be dismissed. The problems are now biting as Departments come to terms with delivering efficiency savings in the form of

cutbacks to some services, which are hitting the community and voluntary sectors. There is uncertainty in schools and public services as reform and budgetary pressures bite. Families must cope with uncertainty about rising bills and the possible introduction of water charges. Firms must cope with the uncertainty of market pressures and cost rises.

In all those circumstances, we were treated to the phoney uncertainty this week of question marks around the future of the Assembly itself. That was a disgraceful contribution and was the result of political showboating, particularly on the part of Sinn Féin. The SDLP wants to see the institutions succeed and deliver; that is why we worked to create the institutions, which are based on the models of power sharing, North/South co-operation and strong east-west relationships. Those institutions were the centrepiece of the Good Friday Agreement, and we stood for them for a long time while other parties, which are now practising the arrangements so well, stood against them.

Is the best way to take the devolution project forward for our new First Minister and deputy First Minister to go off to Downing Street tomorrow, supposedly to talk about outstanding problems from the St Andrews Agreement, which are essentially outstanding problems between their parties? Essentially, there are outstanding problems because of a failure to resolve issues in the way in which people claimed that they had been resolved in the St Andrews Agreement — and those problems are now coming home to roost. Not only are the First Minister and deputy First Minister to talk about those problems, but, according to all the reports and briefings, they will talk about the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, education and the economy.

Those issues are the responsibility of this Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive. They are not matters that, on the first day of business, we should be bringing back to the former direct rulers in Downing Street.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Durkan: It is not encouraging or edifying, at this juncture of devolution, that that is the best that can be offered to us on the first full day in office of the new First Minister and deputy First Minister.

They should bring those issues to the House and listen to the rest of us, as we set out our concerns about the Budget and the Programme for Government. They will find in other parties people who are willing to share and help to deliver on their ambitions to ensure that this place becomes better, with a bigger sense of itself, its own community, one another, and its role in the world.

We will support the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in anything that they do for the good of the people of Northern Ireland. We will challenge them

on anything that they do that lets down the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Finally, on behalf of my party and of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which I chair, I extend sincere condolences to Minister Nigel Dodds on the death of his father.

Mr Ford: I also congratulate the new First Minister and the recycled deputy First Minister on their nomination by their party nominating officers to the posts that they hold. However, it is a pity that the House did not have an opportunity to vote as it would have done under the 1998 Act.

We heard two positive speeches from both Ministers about their aspirations for the future. The question that we in the Chamber are entitled to ask today is: was that rhetoric, or does it reflect reality? Three weeks ago, Members from the DUP and Sinn Féin were telling all of us, and potential US investors, that Northern Ireland was open for business and that we had stability. Then, three days ago, the president of Sinn Féin rushed off to Downing Street to create the image of a crisis.

Today, Mr Robinson and Mr McGuinness have taken the Pledge of Office, having been confirmed by their parties as First Minister and deputy First Minister, thereby creating the appearance of normality. However, tomorrow, they will rush back to Downing Street, depending on the Prime Minister to get them out of the hole into which their parties have dug themselves.

It really is time that those who have been charged with Government in this place took up their duties and stopped acting like squabbling children. A year on from the time when they told us that everything was resolved is long past the time for them to be continuing to act in that way. It is time that Ministers justified their appointments and started to take the difficult decisions. It is time that they recognised that the problems of Northern Ireland should be addressed in this Building and in Stormont Castle, and not in Downing Street, Government Buildings or the White House. It really is time that they grew up.

The time for chuckling is clearly over with the change in personnel. Will that be replaced by an ongoing sham fight, or will the Executive start to take some collective action on the difficult issues that confront us, and not just individual action on the easy issues?

We have been told by Ministers that they have put the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government. However, experience throughout the world shows that one cannot have a successful, dynamic economy if one is part of a divided society. Investment in promoting good relations is not some soft, liberal response — it is absolutely fundamental if we are to have a society in which talent flourishes and public investment is maximised. That is the challenge for the incoming Administration. That is the challenge

that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have apparently responded to, yet it is the challenge on which the outgoing Administration — of which they were both part — totally failed to take action.

I listened carefully when the First Minister talked about the responsibilities of all in the Chamber, and specifically the responsibilities that he said applied to all those who were outside the Executive. I will respond to him and assure him that, if he is serious in that challenge, we on these Benches are quite prepared to engage in constructive discussion to improve the way in which the institutions work and the service that we deliver to the people of Northern Ireland — and to start to make a difference. That issue reflects back to the First Minister, because the lead must be given by the Executive, and, in particular, by the two top Ministers.

4.30 pm

Reading the press, we see that the people of Northern Ireland demand leadership; they demand constructive action on a whole range of problems that face us. They want an end to the current shenanigans, the flip-flop from a photocall one day to angry exchange, begrudgery or sham fight the next. The question is: will the Executive now rise to the challenge to which the Ministers today said that they will rise?

Ms Purvis: Events of the past week have demonstrated the fragility of what we are all working to secure: peace and stability. I welcome the comments of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on the need to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. We all need to deliver, particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Disbanding the army council will not heat your house. You cannot eat an Irish language Act — *[Laughter.]* — Members can laugh all they want. Rising fuel and food costs mean that people will die this winter if that issue is not resolved.

I take the First Minister's comments on board and say that I have a responsibility — as do all of us in this Chamber, particularly this Executive — to address the outstanding issues. I wish the new Ministers well, and I look forward, as does our entire community, to delivery.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet 15 minutes after the House adjourns.

Adjourned at 4.33 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 9 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The legislative framework that brought about the establishment and restoration of the House — the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews legislation — requires that there should be equality for all peoples in the North of Ireland. Given the recent comments by Mrs Robinson, does the Speaker consider that the matter should be referred to the Standards —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take her seat. The Member is out of order, and she knows it — that is not a valid point of order.

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Given the public statements that were made during the past week with reference to the approach that the First Minister may take to the discharge of his duties on equality and good relations, particularly where the gay and lesbian community in Northern Ireland is concerned, has he sought an opportunity to address the House to clarify his position and that of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister?

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: That is not a valid point of order.

SPEAKER'S BUSINESS

Referral of a Ministerial Decision to the Executive Committee: Environmental Protection Agency

Mr Speaker: I inform Members that on Monday 2 June, I received a valid petition to refer a ministerial decision to the Executive Committee under section 28B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The petition related to the decision by the Minister of the Environment not to establish an independent environmental protection agency, as notified to the Assembly on Tuesday 27 May. Having consulted with the parties — in accordance with the Act and with Standing Order 27A — I have certified that the Minister's decision relates to a matter of public importance.

On Wednesday 4 June I referred the decision to the Executive Committee for consideration, by way of a letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister. When I am notified of the Executive Committee's decision, I will announce it to the Assembly at the earliest opportunity.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: I have been advised that the Minister of the Environment, Mrs Arlene Foster, will move the motion on behalf of the Executive.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) inclusive be suspended for 9 June 2008.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) inclusive be suspended for 9 June 2008.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

British-Irish Council: Social Inclusion Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure that he wishes to make a statement regarding the outcome of the British-Irish Council social inclusion meeting.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poets): The third ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC) social inclusion group was hosted by the Welsh Assembly Government in the Senedd, Cardiff on 20 May 2008. The meeting focused on the challenges presented by child poverty — particularly the issue of lone parents — in the eight member Administrations.

The British-Irish Council was established under the agreement that was reached in the multi-party negotiations in Belfast in 1998, and it provides a forum for its members to exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest, within the competence of relevant member Administrations.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Brian Gibbons AM, the Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. The British Government were represented by the Rt Hon Stephen Timms, the Minister of State for Employment and Welfare Reform; the Irish Government were represented by Mr Gerry Mangan, the director of the Office for Social Inclusion; and the Scottish Government were represented by Mr Stewart Maxwell MSP, Minister for Communities and Sport. Minister Murphy and I attended on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive; the Isle of Man was represented by Mr Dudley Butt MLC, the political member for the social services division of the DHSS; Jersey was represented by Senator Paul Routier, the Minister for Social Security; and Guernsey was represented by Mr Al Brouard, the deputy Minister of the Social Security Department.

We discussed the recent developments on social inclusion in the Administrations and focused, particularly, on issues relating to child poverty. The group had an interesting discussion on the projects that were contributing most to progress in that area, and it reviewed the successful work that is being carried out by the BIC's social inclusion group on child poverty — with a focus on lone parents, since that theme was chosen in 2006.

The Ministers noted the range of definitions that are used in that field and the comparison of statistics across the BIC region. We also acknowledged the findings of the literature; a review of the existing evidence based on tackling child poverty, particularly among lone-parent households; and the key challenges met by

member Administrations. Furthermore, we commended the examples of good practice in tackling such challenges.

We considered the merits of each of the four potential new areas of interest to be taken forward by the BIC social inclusion group: older people in long-term care; homelessness and affordable housing; the voluntary and community sector; and migrant workers. We agreed that the work over the coming year will focus on the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in promoting social inclusion.

The work carried out by the officials will continue to seek to strengthen and consolidate the ongoing co-operation and exchange of information experienced in best practice between member Administrations. The National Assembly for Wales presented a paper on child poverty. The Ministers welcomed and noted that the next ministerial meeting will take place in Scotland; and further details are to be confirmed.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas seo agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as.

My question emanates more from my involvement in the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister than it does my chairmanship of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. As part of the OFMDFM Committee's inquiry into child poverty, the Committee has been examining the relevant issues.

OFMDFM furnished us a copy of the report last week. Will the Minister say what action the Executive plan to take to ensure that the report leads to improvements in policies and actions to tackle child poverty, including, for example, joint initiatives with other Administrations? We welcome the report and statement, but where is the action plan for the Executive?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Executive remain committed to dealing with, and tackling, the issues. We will continue to work with other Administrations in the British Isles. The Department for Social Development (DSD) will take the lead in developing our plans for tackling poverty.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) also has a key role to play. It has a unit that is dedicated full-time to the issue of child poverty. Therefore, the Executive will make the case to the Assembly for adequate support, funding and recognition, and they will do so through the Department for Social Development and OFMDFM.

Lord Browne: At its launch in November 2006, 'Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland' set a target of halving child poverty by 2010-11, and its complete eradication by 2020. Will the Minister state

whether those targets are being met and remain achievable?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Those targets remain achievable across the UK. I am interested in a proposal that the UK Government are considering. That proposal is to guarantee that anyone who is coming off benefits and going into employment receive at least £50 a week more than they did while on benefits. That would assist a considerable number of people living on benefits.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his statement, and for its focus on the eradication of child poverty. The statement said that the voluntary and community sector would be looking to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion. Given budgetary constraints, and how other funding is being diverted towards meeting the challenge of the Olympics, how does the Minister intend to support the voluntary and community sector?

On the subject of social inclusion, will the Minister comment on what has been said by his DUP colleague, Mrs Robinson, on the lesbian and gay community? Her comments further isolate that community.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I deplore Mrs Kelly's attempt to introduce a matter that has no relevance to the issue under discussion. The Member's behaviour demonstrates how little interest she has in social inclusion, child poverty and the voluntary sector.

Other regions in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man look to Northern Ireland for its voluntary-sector expertise, which has been built up over many years, mainly through European funding. Reduced financial support from Europe means that the voluntary sector faces challenges. The Government will try to help where we can, but many projects must become self-sustainable or face being discontinued, because the funding just does not exist.

Mr Speaker: Members are reminded that this is an opportunity to ask questions on the Minister's statement.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement. Older people and their long-term care are among various issues on the work programme. Bearing in mind that the Executive have failed by totally excluding free personal care from the Programme for Government, will the Minister, through the BIC — and particularly the Scottish Executive — get free personal care for older people in Northern Ireland back on to the agenda?

12.15 pm

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Member will be glad to know that I raised the issue of elderly people, especially the difficulties that they currently face, given their static budgets and the rising

costs of living — in particular, the rising cost of home heating and food. It was agreed that, as part of the review that is being conducted on the voluntary and community sector, we will consider how that sector can contribute to the well-being of older people.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am delighted to note the four new areas that the Council will consider in the future. Given that my colleague Kieran McCarthy has just asked about the Council's role in its deliberations on older people, I want to raise the growing problem in Northern Ireland — and right across the United Kingdom and these islands — regarding migrant workers — that is, the role of migrant workers, the conditions under which they work and their housing problems. Will the Minister specify whether the issue of migrant workers, and the problems that assail those persons, will be considered by the Council in the future?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The issue of migrant workers is one of the topics that was considered for the next discussion group. Unfortunately, only one topic could be chosen, and, on this occasion, the voluntary and community sector was selected. We recognise that migrant workers in Northern Ireland and Great Britain comprise a significant population. That brings its own problems, which we need to deal with and be aware of to ensure that immigrants can expect a reasonable quality of life and standard of living.

Mr Shannon: I also thank the Minister for his statement, and I realise that he is speaking in his capacity as a member of the Executive and representing the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Will the Minister state what information has been exchanged among representatives of the United Kingdom Government, the Scottish Government and the National Assembly for Wales that we could beneficially use given that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is currently conducting an inquiry into child poverty? Next week, the Committee will present a report on that inquiry to the House, and any available information would be very handy.

During the Minister's statement, he mentioned the fact that the National Assembly for Wales presented a paper on child poverty in its Administration. Will the Minister indicate what targets that Assembly has set, whether they are rigid and, if so, whether they are achievable?

The Minister referred to the future work programme and help for those of a certain age, as well as the issues of homelessness and affordable housing. Will he state when those issues will be presented to the Assembly and to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, through the British-Irish Council?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There are common problems and challenges in all Administrations. We must explore such issues, and, in order to align policy and delivery, we share information and report on issues such as access to affordable childcare, in-work poverty, partnership and joint working with local government and other stakeholders. Study visits and good practice have been valuable to officials, and there are some successful, innovative interventions that OFMDFM, as well as other Departments, can examine more closely and possibly implement.

Other Administrations have also been learning from us. For example, initiatives such as the work being conducted on benefit uptake by the Department for Social Development are being shared with the Scottish Government. An anti-poverty strategy is currently being reviewed by Ministers before it is circulated to the Executive. In the development of that strategy, Northern Ireland Departments can examine successful projects from other jurisdictions and consider what may be appropriate for us to implement. When we are determining the way forward, we will, of course, take account of the recommendations in the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's report.

Mr Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The House can take its ease for a few minutes as we await the arrival of the Minister for Regional Development.

Regional Development Strategy

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Regional Development that he wishes to make a statement on the regional development strategy.

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I apologise for being slightly late.

My statement marks the start of our review of the regional development strategy (RDS). I want the review to be an inclusive one which will hear, and benefit from, a wide range of views and options.

Although we have differing views from time to time, we are united by our stewardship of the North, and we have a responsibility to our children to step back from the day-to-day management of Government and consider what we want for the North in the longer term. What sort of place do we want our children to inherit, and how many people will live here? How do we help to grow our economy? Where do we want our children to live, work and play? What do we mean by regional balance, and how can we work towards it? How should we respond to climate change? How can we obtain the most benefit from investment in our infrastructure? How do we position ourselves in a North/South, east-west, European and world context? Finally, how do we better respond to the speed of change around us?

Those questions take us beyond the time frame of our Programme for Government, so a long-term vision, within which all our actions can fit, is required. A vision without clear direction on how to achieve it is not worth the paper it is written on. Our vision must include clear and strategic direction on how it can be achieved by numerous small steps now and in future years. That is the role of the regional development strategy.

My Executive colleagues and I have discussed and agreed the need for a fundamental review of the regional development strategy. The new strategy will be different: it will be relevant to key stakeholders and flexible enough to deal with changing circumstances, yet robust enough for decision-making; it will set priorities and list a selected number of key infrastructure projects that are essential for economic growth; it will take account of, and be relevant to, structures and functions that emerge from the review of public administration; and it will take account of the many changes that are happening around us.

The speed of change is what strikes me: standing still is not an option. We must embrace change and be part of influencing and guiding our future. Ours is a growing population: population projections show growth greater than had previously been expected. By 2012, we will have a population of over 1·8 million in the North, and it is possible that it could exceed 2

million by 2030. However, where people choose to live is changing. Years ago, many people fled Belfast due to fear that was caused by intimidation and violence. Between 1995 and 2005, the population of Belfast fell by almost 25,000 to 268,000 — a drop of more than 7%. In that period, all other council areas experienced population increase.

For a time, Belfast was one of the greatest cities in these islands, and it should be our goal to make it great again. The success of the North depends on that. A strong Belfast is not a threat to other areas. For many years, we have argued over the allocation of funding to Belfast at the expense of other areas. There is an imbalance in the infrastructure between east and west, which I am addressing through investment in roads and rail. However, we must get away from the narrow sectional debates and look broadly at our region. We must examine how our cities, towns, villages and countryside areas support and interlink with each other, and how they are all important.

We need a discussion about what regional balance means and about how we unlock our potential to grow as a region.

Given the different political perspectives, that may be a difficult issue for us to tackle. However, it is an issue that we cannot, and should not, duck. I am determined to lead the debate, and, in doing so, will set the tone for a mature debate that is evidence driven and that will benefit the people of the North.

The original regional development strategy recognised the role of Derry — the regional capital of the north-west, a city with over 90,000 people, which sits on a magnificent setting on the banks of the Foyle, and which has a rich and long history — for the first time. I want to develop that even further.

The Executive have endorsed the cross-border work in the north-west and have recognised the linkages between Donegal, Derry, Limavady and Strabane. Joint investment by both Governments in the airport, in the road that links the north-west to Dublin, and in dualling the road from Derry to beyond Dungiven are but some of the projects that link the north-west better with the island as a whole. How can we maximise the potential of those projects? How can we attract more investment to the north-west? Those are just some of the issues that the review of the regional development strategy will consider.

In the south-east, the city of Newry has seen amazingly strong growth in recent years. Ideally sitting, as it does, between the two main cities on the island — Dublin and Belfast — it has benefited from that economic corridor. Like Derry, it is developing its cross-border linkages with Louth and Dundalk, recognising the potential of working together. Again, I

want to explore how we can support and develop the further growth of Newry and its surrounding area.

Stretching north from Newry, places such as Banbridge, Craigavon, Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt have experienced strong population and economic growth in recent years. Together, those council areas have experienced a population growth of more than 9%, which is well above the regional rate. The strong growth of that band, which runs through the middle of the region, brings with it new issues about the delivery of services and infrastructure.

Further west, Omagh has also performed strongly. The development of the A5 and A4 will open up new opportunities for Tyrone and Fermanagh. My role is to ensure that we maximise the potential of that investment.

In speaking about the different areas, there is always the risk of offending some people by leaving out their area. The people in the areas that I highlighted are no more important than people anywhere else. One aspect that makes this land so special is our settlement patterns: we have strong links to land and to place, and a more dispersed settlement pattern than other areas.

While that is what makes us so special, it brings with it challenges. It makes us heavily dependent on the car. Year by year, more and more cars are driven on our roads. Between 1992 and 2006, the number of cars increased by 80%. There are now 800,000 cars on our roads; more journeys are made within the region and beyond; people commute further and further to jobs and schools; and there are more routes to new destinations from our airports.

How do we manage such growth? For example, how do we improve access to our ports and airports, which are so important to an island economy? Part of the answer, undoubtedly, is better roads. Increasingly, though, we also need to focus on public transport. We need to think about reducing the need to use a car by better planning of where homes, schools and shops are built, and of where jobs are available. I am also initiating a review of the regional transportation strategy, which will consider such issues in detail.

The environment and our response to climate change will influence all our actions now and in the future. We are privileged to live in a place with a rich, natural environment, including the Causeway Coast, Rathlin Island, the Mourne and the lakes of Fermanagh, to name but a few. Our approach to the environment needs to find a balance between protecting it and unlocking the potential for tourism.

Increasing demand for new homes, sometimes in unsustainable locations, more cars on our roads and increasing demand for energy all impact on our environment. Transport is a key contributor to carbon dioxide emissions: there has been a 41% increase between

1990 and 2005. We are already doing much to improve and protect the environment, but, can we do more?

Before setting out a new approach to regional development, I will make some comments on the existing regional development strategy. It was the first regional spatial plan produced in England, Scotland, Wales and the South. In many ways, it set new approaches that were later applied in those other jurisdictions. At that time, it was recognised as a best-practice document, and it reflected the emerging European thinking on planning for regional development. It is something that we can rightly be proud of, but time moves on, and it is time for change.

I inherited from the direct rule Administration a five-year review of the strategy, which considered the need for detailed adjustments, but did not address the principles in the regional framework. The results of that review are adjustments to some aspects of policy on economic development, tourism and rural areas. That work will be published this month.

The five-year review was not a fundamental assessment of the strategy. For timing reasons, the opportunity did not exist to take account of significant issues that have emerged recently and that influence how we plan for the future. Such issues include higher than expected population levels; the need for more houses; climate change; and how to plan to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and facilities in our cities and towns.

12.30 pm

It is clear that although many of the policy directions in the existing RDS are still sound it has not had the influence that was anticipated. That was due to a combination of factors, including insufficient detail and clarity on matters such as housing need, rural development, and the growth of cities and towns.

There has also been criticism over the use of housing figures in the strategy. Many see them as unnecessary for, and restrictive to, forward planning. Others want some indication of housing need, but in a way that better reflects local need and the growth potential of particular areas.

We need to better understand the contribution that rural areas make to regional success and how we can support the cities, towns, villages and countryside beyond Belfast and the north-west to prosper and grow.

The RDS can only be delivered through the plans and programmes of individual Departments and agencies. I do not see the RDS as a Department for Regional Development (DRD) strategy, but as one for all of Government and beyond. Many of its policies are being taken forward through development plans prepared by the Department of the Environment (DOE). However, for a variety of unforeseen reasons,

the roll-out of the development plan programme has been slower than hoped, and the rate of impact of many RDS policies has suffered.

There is now an opportunity to learn from experience and to prepare a new regional development strategy that is fit for purpose and takes account of recent emerging trends that affect how we plan for the future.

With the unprecedented levels of expenditure we plan to make over the next five to 10 years, we have an opportunity to influence this land much more than previous generations did. More than £3.5 billion will be spent on transportation alone. That is our challenge and our responsibility to future generations.

I am conscious of the need for this major review to be concluded quickly. It is essential that new policy directions are developed to a point where they can inform the next investment strategy, which is planned for 2009. Although the review is planned to take up two years, I will assess ways to shorten the process where possible. I am, however, very aware of the need for involvement from all Departments and key stakeholders, which will take time.

The timetable is challenging. I have set up a number of groups to take the review forward. The Executive have agreed to a ministerial subgroup; and the first meeting with ministerial colleagues is due to be held shortly. I am also keen to benefit from the considerations of the Committee for Regional Development, which received an initial briefing on 28 May.

I have also reformed an interdepartmental steering group of officials at a more senior level and I welcome Departments' commitment to that approach. The first, and very constructive, meeting of that group was held on 28 May. I have also extended the membership of the external working group, which provided important input to our work on the five-year review.

There are other important initiatives, which I will take into account. The DOE is undertaking a reform of the planning process, and I will meet Minister Arlene Foster to discuss the important relationship between the RDS and development plans.

I am also fully aware of the need to take account of structures emerging as part of the review of public administration. Although regional planning and policy statements will remain a central Government function, it is clear that the relationships with local planning and development management must be structured in an efficient and effective way.

The strategy deals with a wide range of environmental, social and economic matters. It affects the working of all involved in regional development. I am therefore aware of the need to consult widely and effectively. I want to ensure that this is managed in a

way that allows the timely emergence of revised policy to inform budgetary and investment decisions.

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

I said at the start of my statement that we needed a long-term vision within which our actions can fit. That vision must include a clear strategic direction about how it can be achieved. My aim is to produce a revised regional development strategy that can accommodate the economic growth now expected in the medium-to-long term. That means a strategy that sets directions for the location of jobs, houses, businesses, public services, and facilities across the whole region.

The strategy must seek to make Belfast a great city once more, build on the significant opportunities for growth in the north-west and its hinterlands, and provide connections for North/South and east-west development.

It must better recognise the role of all cities, towns, villages and the countryside, and how they all support and work together with one another. That approach may include identifying key regional projects, which are considered essential for balanced economic development.

In dealing with all those issues, the RDS must set out a clear high-level vision for the North. It will have a strategic focus. It must be an aspirational document, setting out the actions needed to translate the vision into reality. It will focus on the development of regional significance, including population, environmental issues, telecommunications, housing, economic development, and infrastructure developments.

It must be an enabling document that sets out the interventions required of the Executive to make that happen. It is not a DRD document; rather it should become the Executive's spatial strategy and plan.

The RDS is a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. It must concern implementation, and the actions and priorities necessary to deliver the vision. It must set out how connections could be made to deliver a more sustainable future development.

It will play a key role in informing how places are shaped and developed at a local level. The review is, clearly, a very challenging and timely piece of work that gives us the opportunity to shape the future of the North over the next 20 years. I look forward to working with my ministerial colleagues and the Assembly as the work develops. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain): The Minister will be aware of the Committee's interest in the relationship between brownfield sites and greenfield sites. To that end, will he explain how he intends to ensure that the maximum

amount of development in our cities and towns takes place in brownfield sites rather than greenfield sites?

The Minister for Regional Development: I thank the Chairperson for his remarks. The existing regional target — for 60% of additional houses to be built in existing urban areas — has been successful. That figure has been exceeded since the RDS was adopted in 2001.

While the potential for building in urban areas may change over time, it is right to maintain the current approach, so that the potential for building houses in appropriate locations in existing urban areas is maximised. However, it must be recognised that building more houses in urban areas must respect the need to protect the character of residential areas. In that context, Members will be aware that — as part of the five-year review of the RDS — I have changed the definition of “brownfield development” to exclude gardens.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Wells): Members will have noted with interest the Minister's statement on this important issue. In particular, they will have noted the concentration on Londonderry and — surprise, surprise — Newry. There is a concern that the revised RDS will concentrate resources into areas west of the Bann.

Will the Minister assure Members that resources and infrastructure will be distributed evenly across this part of the United Kingdom, with no particular bias towards any city or town?

The Minister for Regional Development: If the Member listened carefully — as I am sure he did — he will have noticed that I mentioned every county in the North and most of its major towns.

The Executive recognised the imbalance in regional development and set the task of redressing that imbalance as part of the Programme for Government. The rewritten regional development strategy provides a very clear opportunity — to which all Members will be given an input — to do what the Executive recognised, which is to redress the regional imbalance.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement, and his commitment to areas west of the Bann in particular. Does the Minister think that the RDS will help to end regional imbalance?

The Minister for Regional Development: In itself, the RDS cannot deliver regional balance, but it sets out the framework and actions that are required to achieve balanced growth throughout the North. That must address the important role that Belfast has as the regional economic driver, and how all parts of the North can benefit from that.

Derry city has a significant role to play in creating a prosperous north-west. Equally, it is important that the economic potential of district towns — some of which act as gateways — is maximised. The RDS has a role in setting out how those component areas can best be developed, and the priorities required to deliver growth. I am also considering the possibility of identifying regional projects that are required to deliver regional prosperity in the areas of infrastructure, development, energy, telecommunications and tourism.

Mr Dallat: The Minister told us that the RDS is only a strategy, and not a means to an end — we accept that. However, does the Minister agree that there are serious outstanding deficits in the north-west? Derry is the only city that is not linked to the capital city by a decent rail service. In addition, it is the only city that is not linked to Belfast by a proper motorway. Above all, the town of Dungiven has the highest carbon dioxide levels of anywhere in these islands. Does the Minister agree that additional finances are urgently needed to address those imbalances? I am sure that Mr Wells would be happy to support those basic human rights.

The Minister for Regional Development: We have identified the finances that are needed to support those connections. As the Member is very much aware, I lifted the investment ban on the railway line between Coleraine and Derry. Money is being spent on the line between Belfast and Ballymena.

We have identified a substantial project to improve the service between Belfast and Derry — especially the morning service into Derry city — and we have brought forward the plans for the A5 and A6, including the bypass at Dungiven. The money and resources have been identified for all those projects. The importance of the north-west, and Derry's role in the north-west as an economic driver, is recognised. Derry's port and airport are also recognised as key features, and resources have been identified to support them.

Mrs Long: I welcome the Minister's comment on the definition of brownfield sites. The statistics in the RDS form a major part of the evidence base that supports long-term planning for public-sector capital investment in infrastructure. Those facts diverge from what is happening on the ground, due mainly to the area plans not having flowed in sequence. What action will the Minister and his counterpart in the Department of the Environment take to ensure that there will be a smooth transition between area plans in order to make sure that runaway speculative development does not shape the nature of development in our cities?

The Minister for Regional Development: I have scheduled an early meeting with the Minister of the Environment to discuss those matters. The regional development strategy is a high-level Government document that refers to the region as a whole and to

where the Government would like to see development. Area plans then follow on from the regional development strategy. The Minister of the Environment has initiated her own review of the planning process, so it is important to ensure that the strategies dovetail.

The previous regional development strategy was a huge document, but its impact on planning and development was not as expected. When drafting the new document, we have an opportunity not just to take into account new issues that have become more important, such as the environment, imbalance and other such matters, but an ability — with a functioning Executive — to ensure that there is a read-across through all Departments.

The review will take place on several levels. For example, there will be a ministerial subcommittee that will involve others besides the Minister of the Environment and me. A high-level group of civil servants from every Department has already met, and I was pleased with the seniority of the people in that group and with its commitment to the process. An external working group also exists, and that will bring in influences and ideas from outside Government. There is a real opportunity to ensure that a joined-up Government approach is taken to the strategy and that the Department for Regional Development does not simply produce a document to see whether other people recognise it.

As I said earlier, I hope to produce an Executive document that will guide regional planning. Other strategies will then flow from that document.

Mr Moutray: I welcome the fact that the Minister's statement has ensured that the review will take us beyond Sinn Féin's 2016 united Ireland fantasy and that the Minister accepts that Northern Ireland will be part of the United Kingdom for the long term.

The Minister referred to the need to better recognise the role of our cities, towns and villages, and he considered population growth in places such as Banbridge and Craigavon. Will the Minister turn his attention to seeking assistance for towns such as Lurgan, which have had the heart blown out of them by terrorist bombs and have suffered economically ever since? Will he also prioritise infrastructural improvements to reflect population growth in places such as Lurgan, Banbridge and Portadown?

The Minister for Regional Development: Whatever the constitutional future — and that is still up for question — we will still need to develop the region and we will still need good policies to govern that development. We will still need regional development strategies, whether the future is in an all-Ireland context or in the current restrictive political context within which we now operate.

Part of the current strategy recognises clearly the all-Ireland links that have developed substantially over the past few years. It is ludicrous to talk about the development of Derry in isolation from the development of the north-west as a whole, including Letterkenny and other parts of County Donegal. Similarly, it is ludicrous to talk about the development of Newry without involving Dundalk and County Louth.

The Member asked about Lurgan and other towns. It is clear that a central band of towns has experienced significant growth, and Craigavon Borough Council covers one of those areas. One of the weaknesses that was identified in the previous document was that it focused on Belfast.

It provided, for the first time, some degree of focus on the north-west and on Derry's role, but it was less focused on the rest of the North. The strategy offers the opportunity to refocus on all areas; not by trying to be all things to all people and giving everyone a nod, a wink and a mention, but by refocusing on development and identifying the areas in which the population is concentrated, and assisting them to achieve their potential for growth. Part of the strength of the new approach is that it will involve all Departments, which ensures that any plans will be co-ordinated.

12.45 pm

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his detailed statement, and I welcome his recognition of the growth in the mid-Ulster towns of Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt. Will he examine the fact that there is, unfortunately, no linkage road, as the A29 does not link the three towns? Does he accept that, in the past, the RDS was not flexible enough to respond to the number of new homes required for the local and migrant populations? How will he address the issues of equality? In particular, how will he deal with the decentralisation of Departments to rural areas, such as mid-Ulster?

The Minister for Regional Development: If I could achieve all that, I would be very popular. The weakness of the last strategy document was that it did not have the required flexibility when the predicted population growth was exceeded. The document included housing-growth indicators and, in some areas, became a bar to development, rather than allowing development in areas to which people were trying to relocate due to the availability of jobs. Therefore, the RDS must be a more flexible document.

The housing-growth indicators have been a thorny issue, and perhaps there is scope for new thinking on that. Rather than trying to curtail development in certain areas, we should identify areas of increasing population and determine what must happen to support that. Development must be sustainable and not damage the character of any area, but the housing-growth

indicators have a restrictive — rather than an enabling — influence. In many ways, the Department views the development of the document as enabling — rather than restricting — development. All development will be subject to new equality impact assessments that will consider how to balance development throughout the North and between east and west.

Mr Irwin: In Newry and Armagh, which is my constituency and that of the Minister, there is a wealth of small and medium-sized rural businesses, many of which not only supply the Northern Ireland market, but export to countries throughout Europe. The Minister will accept that such businesses play a vital role in the rural economy of Northern Ireland, but does he accept that the infrastructure of roads in many rural areas requires vast improvement to assist existing businesses and encourage continued growth in the rural economy?

The Minister for Regional Development: I accept that, if the resources were available, the roads in all rural areas could be improved. However, limited resources force the Department to prioritise the roads that are used most. I accept that, throughout rural areas, small and medium-sized enterprises sustain the population in many ways. The Member is aware of the downturn in farming in recent years, and more people are turning to small businesses to enable their families to continue living in rural areas.

The Executive's central focus is on economic growth, not only through large inward-investment projects, but by supporting local economic growth and small and medium-sized enterprises. Francie Molloy also made a good point about rural roads, and my Department tries to employ the limited resources in the best way possible. With an awful lot more money, we could do a great deal more, but we are restricted by our budget.

Mr McCallister: As the increasing dependence on cars and the growing demand for energy are having an impact on the environment, how will the regional development strategy bring about the required sea change, particularly the reduction in carbon emissions?

The Minister for Regional Development: That can be done, provided that a long-term view is taken. Although carbon-emission levels in other sectors are declining, they have risen by 40% in the transport sector — it is the one area in which a significant increase in carbon emissions has occurred, and that is damaging. It is a long-term trend about which we must do something.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the commuter belt around Belfast has widened. The population is increasing further south, west and north of Belfast, whereas there has been a reduction in the population of Belfast itself. That means that more people are travelling in and out of Belfast, because that is where a huge number of jobs in the North is located. Therefore, more commuting

takes place, and from greater distances. That contributes to an increase in carbon emissions.

Several factors must be taken into account. One factor concerns where jobs are located and where development is happening; another concerns public transport, in which it is clear that significant investment is required. The predictions are that, in the next 30 to 40 years, 40% of the population of Ireland will live on the east coast, in the corridor between Belfast and Dublin. That will raise some significant issues for commuting and transport. Therefore, the regional development strategy, which looks beyond current budgetary planning and investment-strategy planning, must identify, as far as is possible, emerging trends. It must also identify what needs to happen in future in order to try to reduce carbon emissions and make a real contribution to the environment.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas.

I thank the Minister for his statement, in particular his reference to Newry's growth. Last week, we discussed the importance of a southern relief road in the further development of Newry, and I am sure that that will be included in any future strategy. As a point of information, my support for a southern relief road does not imply opposition to the Narrow Water bridge project, as the Minister seemed to think was the case last week.

Does the Minister agree that the possibility of enhancing the growth and development of Armagh city — including better cross-border infrastructure — must be explored? Can he confirm whether a much stronger North/South element will be a central theme throughout the revised regional development strategy? Will the strategy lend support to such cross-border projects?

The Minister for Regional Development: To answer the Member's final question first — yes. The purpose of rewriting the regional development strategy is to take account of new developments, and one key development is the much stronger North/South linkages. I said that Derry and Newry's association with the border meant that they could not be considered for development in isolation.

The Member asked about Armagh city. We want to consider development potential right across the board, and if there was a weakness in the original strategy, it was that no specific focus was placed on areas outside Belfast and Derry. Places were labelled as hubs on maps — when I last visited Armagh City and District Council, councillors wanted to know whether Armagh was still a hub. I told them that it was, but that did not mean very much. Armagh may be described as such on a map, but what does that mean? What development flows from that description? Rather than to try to be all things to all people, and to give everybody a mention,

we want a regional development strategy that works. Central to that are North/South linkages, because that is where the development potential lies.

People have — foolishly — joined one camp or another over the issues of a southern relief road and the Narrow Water bridge project. I make the point that every time Mr Bradley's counterpart and namesake gets up to flog the merits of the bridge project, someone else gets up to promote the road. Mr McCallister asked me last week whether I was signed up to building a southern relief road, because that was in the development document. However, the Narrow Water bridge project can also be found in the development document. Like the Member's party colleagues, I was happy to sign up to the document, and that means support for both projects, as Mr Bradley rightly says.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and I thank him for it. He stated that the approach that is taken to the environment must seek a balance between protecting it and unlocking its potential for tourism. The main stumbling block to the development of tourism is poor roads infrastructure. Will the strategy ensure that tourism will be given the same priority as the rest of industry? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister for Regional Development: One element of the strategy is, obviously, to reflect the Executive's Programme for Government. There is no point in having a regional development strategy that is at odds with the Programme for Government, a central aim of which is to grow the economy. Tourism development is one of the key sectors in the North and, I am sure, throughout the island.

Several Members raised the point about roads. With its current budget, the Department will continue to struggle to provide the type of roads that people believe that the North deserves. That is why there must be prioritisation to try to develop key transport corridors — the roads on which there is most traffic. Had the Department received a much greater allocation from the Treasury, which it was able to spread as best it could across all other roads, there would be a much better roads network. The Department will continue to do all that it can with the resources that it has to try to improve the roads network.

If the regional development strategy, which dovetails with the Executive's Programme for Government, recognises that growth of the economy is at the programme's centre and that tourist destinations are vital for economic growth, the strategy will obviously reflect the need to resource and support that development.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has referred several times to the importance of cross-border development and to Londonderry and Newry. Most people would concede that those cities are important, particularly

because of their international linkages with the country that is immediately adjacent to Northern Ireland. People will want there to be progressive development in those areas. However, will the Minister not turn his mind to — and deal with — the fact that, right across Northern Ireland, as an entity, people want development to be focused towards the particular transportation needs of communities? They want the concentration of effort and the review of the RDS to focus on ensuring that resources are deployed accordingly.

The Minister for Regional Development: I accept the Member's comments. I assure him that that is the way that the Department intends to approach the matter — to spread its resources as best it can. I believe that there is general recognition in the Executive — people may choose to differ — that there has been an infrastructure deficit between the east and the west. In areas of the north-west and, I am sure, in the Member's constituency of East Derry and other rural constituencies, there is certainly a need for improved infrastructure.

Although the importance of the major city of Belfast — and of Derry for the north-west region — has been recognised as an economic driver, the role of rural areas, their contribution and the need for connectivity between them was not adequately reflected in the current RDS.

Interestingly, the Member picked up on the strategy's focus on North/South elements. It also focuses on east-west elements. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet the Minister who has responsibility for transport in Scotland to discuss the linkages between Larne and the roads around Loch Ryan. The Member will be aware that the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and I met the First Minister of Scotland at last week's launch of the new Stena Line terminal in Belfast. Again, we discussed the links between Belfast and Scotland, which are becoming hugely important, as is the connection through Scotland to mainland Europe.

Mr Simpson: In seeking to grow the economy in the way that the Minister has outlined, and in drawing attention to Northern Ireland's rich natural environment and the potential of its major tourist attractions, surely emphasis must be placed on ensuring that it is able to outcompete its nearest neighbour. Why has the Department not made a single mention of Lough Neagh's rich natural environment and massive tourist potential?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said in my statement, I am sure that, although the Department has mentioned a range of areas, it will have left some out. If Lough Neagh has been left out, it is not because its potential is not recognised — it certainly is recognised.

I do not see the issue in narrow terms as a competition with the South. If the development in Derry and Newry are anything to go by, the lessons are of co-operation,

development of mutual strengths and of attracting more business together.

The South attracts many more tourists and international visitors than the North does. Perhaps the Member's approach is to compete, rather than to work to ensure that the island as a whole enjoys the full benefit of international visitors who seek the tourist product.

1.00 pm

I am sure that the case for Lough Neagh will be well made. Today we launch what will be an exhaustive and extensive consultation and discussion with Executive colleagues, senior officials from all Departments, external advisers, the Committee for Regional Development and the Assembly as a whole. Members will have many opportunities to stress the importance of their particular interest. The fact that Lough Neagh was not mentioned in my statement does not mean that it is not considered to be a key resource. After all, it is located smack in the centre of our region.

Mr Burns: I thank the Minister for his statement, during which he urged the need for better transport links to and from ports and airports. Belfast International Airport, which is located in my constituency of South Antrim, requires better public-transport links. Is the Minister still of the opinion that to build a railway link to Belfast International Airport is not economically viable, despite the fact that only a couple of miles of track would be needed in order to link with the old Knockmore line? Has he considered building a guided bus lane to that airport? Such a regular service would get people who travel to the airport in their cars out of them.

The Minister for Regional Development: It is interesting that a high-level discussion about the development of the region ends up as a discussion about local roads, but that is fair enough during an open question-and-answer session.

Transport accessibility to airports and ports is a focus of the review of the regional development strategy. I have discussed road links with those who run Belfast International Airport, and they consider that issue to be of primary importance. We have also discussed the rail link, and it is viewed as being economically viable. If there were to be an opportunity to reassess the development of the region, those priorities might change.

As I said in my statement, and given that we are an island economy, access to and from the island, including the linkages to ports and airports, is a key area to be examined. Many of the major roads projects that are being undertaken, such as the Westlink upgrade, projects in the north-west and that for a southern relief road, are concerned with port and airport accessibility. The focus on that will increase as the level of traffic increases, and the form of travel

used to get to and from all the airports changes, most notably that to and from Belfast International Airport.

Dr Farry: The Minister rightly said that Belfast is a driver for the regional economy. In addition to considering the overall distribution in Northern Ireland, will the strategy also consider how Belfast can best have the critical mass to compete at European and international level when it comes to being a major city? Does the Minister recognise that it may be best to think of Belfast not only as a city but as a wider city region, which encompasses the suburbs? That would ensure adequate distribution of jobs.

The Minister for Regional Development: If the Member had seen some of the statistics that we have seen, he would know that, compared with other areas, much more than the lion's share of jobs — those jobs at the higher end of the scale — are located in Belfast and those council areas that form greater Belfast.

My statement recognised that Belfast is the central driver for the region. The population of Belfast city centre has reduced over the years, and we must consider whether that depopulation is good for Belfast. It leads to much more commuting and creates more congestion on the roads. Along with propositions such as that for a rapid transit system for Belfast, consideration must be given to how, through the development of genuine brownfield sites, the population of Belfast might be increased. Such big, key strategic matters must be considered.

In the past, many people thought that the Belfast-and-Derry-versus-the-rest argument was divisive. We must get beyond that by shaping a regional development strategy that best recognises Belfast's importance as well as the development potential of other towns and villages. Such development can support the region's and the island's economy.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Supply Resolution for 2008-09 Main Estimates and Supply Resolution for 2006-07 Excess Vote

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been advised that the Minister of the Environment, Mrs Arlene Foster, will move the next two motions and the First Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill on behalf of the Executive.

Since the next two motions relate to Supply resolutions, I propose to conduct only one debate. I shall ask the Clerk to read the first motion, and I shall then call the Minister who shall move that motion. Debate will then take place on both motions. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on the first motion. I shall then ask the Clerk to read the second motion into the record and the Minister to move it before putting the Question without further debate.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four hours and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 45 minutes to propose and 45 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes.

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,184,270,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 and that resources, not exceeding £8,474,916,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 as summarized for each Department or other public body in Columns 3(b) and 3(a) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2008-2009 that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,224,593.19 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – Health and Personal Social Services Superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2007 as summarized in Part II of the Statement of Excess document that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. — [*The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster).*]

It is with some trepidation that I move the motions tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel. These important Supply resolutions seek the Assembly's approval of the spending plans of Departments and

other public bodies for 2008-09 and its approval to provide excess cash to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) for 2006-07.

I request and recommend the levels of Supply that are set out in the resolutions under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which provides for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make recommendations to the Assembly, leading to cash appropriations from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund.

The first resolution, relating to the 2008-09 Supply, is based on the first year plans of the Budget 2008-2011, which was approved by the Assembly on 29 January 2008. However, as Members are well aware, Budgets set spending plans, but do not, in themselves, convey cash or resources to Departments or give them the legal authority to spend cash or use resources. That is done through Assembly approval of the Supply resolutions, the Estimates and the associated Budget Bill.

The first resolution seeks the Assembly's approval to issue a cash sum not exceeding £7.2 billion from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund and the use of resources not exceeding £8.5 billion for 2008-09.

The amounts of cash and resources that are covered by the first resolution are in addition to the cash and resources voted on account for 2008-09 in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, which was passed by the Assembly in February. Those amounts will complete the total provision of £12.5 billion and £15 billion of resources required for 2008-09 by Departments and other public bodies, as detailed in the Main Estimates volume, which was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. The public services to be funded by those allocations have been debated by the Assembly, both in the context of the debates on the Executive Budget for 2008-2011 and the Vote on Account in February.

The second resolution seeks the Assembly's approval on the issue of a cash sum of £7.2 million from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, as detailed in the Statement of Excess, which was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. That issue was considered by the Public Accounts Committee, which recommended in its report that an excess vote should be granted by the Assembly. The resolutions, once approved by the Assembly, will be the precursor to the Budget No 2 Bill, which I hope to introduce in the Assembly later today.

The Assembly took steps along the legislative path with a similar Budget Bill just one year ago. I hesitate to state that we, as Assembly Members — or I, personally — are now all experts on the minutiae of the Estimate volumes. Of course, some Members may be experts. I know that Members will by now be familiar with the need, for logistical reasons, for accelerated passage for Budget Bills.

For the financial year that commenced in April, Departments are spending cash and using resources on the basis of a Vote on Account in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, which was passed in February. As that provided only initial allocations, it is now essential that the further Budget Bill progresses through the Assembly before the summer recess and receives Royal Assent by 31 July 2008. The consequences of not doing so would be that Departments would run out of cash during the summer, which clearly would have devastating implications for public services.

At this stage, I acknowledge the assistance of the Committee for Finance and Personnel in this matter. I understand that the Committee has confirmed that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the Main Estimates and the draft Bill and that it is content for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage. The Executive and I very much appreciate the Committee's valuable contribution to the financial process and the scrutiny role that it plays at each stage.

As I stated earlier, the 2008-09 Main Estimates are based on the first-year plans of the Budget 2008-2011, which was agreed in January. However, since the final Budget in January, some technical adjustments and departmental budget additions, regarding centrally held funding, have been made in respect of issues that were not known or resolved at that stage. I hasten to reassure the Assembly that those technical adjustments are routine and do not change the spending plans that were approved by the Assembly in January.

I remind Members that Budgets are plans for wider public-sector spending, including for arm's-length bodies, on the full range of devolved services, while Estimates are restricted to departmental level, hence the table in the yellow section of each departmental Estimate to assist the reader to reconcile the Estimate to the Budget.

The first resolution before us today, which is supported by the 2008-09 Main Estimates, represents the cornerstone on which this legislative body not only sets limits on expenditure and the use of resources, but holds Departments accountable for managing and controlling that spending and use of resources within those limits authorised for that particular year. In that vein, if a Department exceeds any of those limits, the Comptroller and Auditor General, on examination of the accounts, will report the excess to the Public Accounts Committee, which, in turn, will examine the reasons for the excess and report the results of its examination to the Assembly.

The second resolution arises from such an excess by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety superannuation vote in 2006-07. A Statement of Excess was laid in the Assembly on 30 May 2008. The excess cash requirement of £7.2 million arose from a

failure to estimate accurately changes in working capital and cash within the health and personal social services superannuation scheme. As I mentioned already, the Public Accounts Committee has examined that issue and recommended in its eighth report that the necessary sum will be provided by an excess vote in the Assembly.

1.15 pm

It is critical that Departments manage their resources and cash within the limits that are approved by the Assembly, and a central plank of good financial management is that those limits are based on taut and realistic estimates.

I appreciate the tightrope that Departments have to walk between minimising underspend and ensuring that an excess does not occur. However, we must be ever mindful that we are dealing with taxpayers' money, and that we have a responsibility, as custodians of the public purse, to ensure that resources are managed efficiently and effectively. The public obviously expect better from a devolved Administration, and we must deliver on financial management.

My colleague Peter Robinson, now the First Minister, rightly placed great emphasis on improving the quality of financial management in Departments. I know that the new Finance Minister wants officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to continue to work actively with all other Departments to that end. On his behalf, I urge Departments to avail themselves of the training available for staff, especially non-finance staff, in policy areas in order to ensure that decisions are taken with due regard to financial consequences.

Last week, the House received details of the provisional out-turn for 2007-08. That statement highlighted many areas of concern for the Assembly, and for my colleagues and I in the Executive in particular, with regard to the continuing level of underspend on current expenditure. Eight of the 11 Departments showed a position in excess of 2-3% of planned spend. On the capital front, six of the 11 Departments had underspends in excess of 12%. In addition, two Departments overspent.

The trajectory of spend, in both resource and capital, highlighted a significant uplift at the end of the year, which is a cause for concern. I hope that my colleagues in the Executive take this message to heart and, with the assistance of the Statutory Committees, ensure that that situation is not repeated this year. The Finance Minister will be looking closely at out-turn figures and the need to consider options for incentives for Departments in order to improve their financial management.

The Estimates that we are debating derive from the Executive's first Budget. Agreeing and announcing

plans, such as these Main Estimates, is relatively easy. Delivering within those allocations will prove more challenging. The public rightly expects delivery on the targets and outcomes that were published in the Programme for Government, and the Executive will be held to account for that delivery.

In implementing the Programme for Government, we have the opportunity to strengthen the local economy, and to improve infrastructure and public service. Performance against the commitments that were made in the Programme for Government and public service agreements will be measured and monitored to ensure and drive delivery. A key strand to that will be the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU), which has been working with colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to develop the performance monitoring arrangements for the Programme for Government.

PEDU is available to assist the Executive, Ministers and Departments in ensuring that the commitments and targets that are set out in the Programme for Government are realised. The focus of PEDU will, therefore, be on the Executive's priorities and on where funding has not been translated into the desired outcomes. I urge my Executive colleagues to avail themselves of PEDU's support.

Improved public services must be delivered within the available resources and with a focus on increased efficiency. It is not an option simply to call continually, as some have done, for increased allocations, which could be funded only by an increase in the tax burden on households and businesses.

The Committees that scrutinise each Department will have a key role. The role of Assembly Members and Committees is to challenge and assist Ministers and Departments. It is also their role to hold Ministers and Departments to account. Assembly Members and Committees have a vital role in ensuring that Departments deliver on the Programme for Government targets for improved services, and in driving out inefficiencies. That task should commence immediately, and continue doggedly and persistently throughout the next three years. We do not want to wait until the end of the current Budget period to discover that Departments have not delivered on targets or that efficiencies have not materialised.

I fully appreciate the enormous challenge that lies ahead in developing a culture of delivery and efficiency across the public sector and of growing a dynamic, innovative economy in the current tight fiscal environment. It is a challenge that faces us all, and we must all play our part: Ministers, Departments, accounting officers, Committees and Members of the Assembly.

The amounts of cash and resources sought in the Supply resolutions are substantial on top of the Vote on Account. The Main Estimates for 2008-09 break the total requirements down to a finer level of functional detail for each Department. Although I am presenting the Estimates on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the underlying detail reflects decisions taken by Ministers within delegated financial authority given by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Therefore, although I will endeavour to respond in my winding-up speech to as many points as possible, I hope that Members will appreciate that I may be unable to respond in detail on individual departmental issues. In those cases, I may refer the matters to the appropriate Ministers for a response.

On behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, I recommend the Supply resolutions and ask for the support of Assembly Members for the motions.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement and for her brevity. I, too, will be brief in outlining the Committee's position. Senior departmental officials briefed the Committee for Finance and Personnel on 28 May 2008 and 4 June 2008 in relation to the Main Estimates for 2008-09 and the associated Budget (No 2) Bill, which gives legislative approval to the Estimates. The Bill will be introduced in the Assembly following this debate.

Advance copies of the Main Estimates were made available to Committee members at the meetings. DFP officials also provided a helpful paper to the Committee, which reconciled the figure work in the Budget to that which is included in the Main Estimates. Following those briefings, on 4 June 2008, the Committee for Finance and Personnel agreed to grant accelerated passage to the Budget (No 2) Bill. The Main Estimates and the associated Budget (No 2) Bill are the outworkings of the process to finalise the Executive's Budget for 2008-2011, which was agreed by the Assembly in January 2008.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel published a report in December 2007 when the Budget document was at draft stage. It included substantive submissions from all the Assembly's Statutory Committees. The Committee has since received a formal response to the report and is continuing to monitor implementation of its recommendations, especially in relation to measures to improve financial management in Departments. There was some reference to that issue in the Minister's statement today, and, last week, Members gave their opinions on the continuing problems.

The underlying spending plans for 2008-09 brought forward in the Main Estimates reflect the position established in the first year of the Executive's Budget

for 2008-2011. Although the Budget for 2008-2011 has been agreed, the Assembly and its Statutory Committees can have input into the reprioritisation of resources in 2008-09 via the in-year quarterly monitoring rounds.

The Committee recently wrote to DFP highlighting the need for Departments to brief Statutory Committees prior to making their monitoring round submissions, as it has not been happening consistently hitherto. Therefore, I hope that DFP takes the necessary steps to ensure that the issue is addressed, including making provision for Committee scrutiny in its timetables for monitoring rounds.

We need to return to an annual financial process as soon as possible, as it gives the Assembly and its Committees maximum opportunity to scrutinise and contribute to the Budget process. That will greatly enhance the consultation process.

Mr S Wilson: The Member and his Committee did a great job in highlighting the importance of Committees' scrutinising Departments when it comes to in-year monitoring. Does he know how many Departments have made figures available to Committees for scrutiny for the June monitoring round?

Does he believe that only the Department of Education (DE) failed in that duty by supplying the information to the Committee one day before sending it to the Department of Finance and Personnel?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: I do not have access to all Committees' reports. My own Committee made a complaint, and several other Departments failed to satisfy the commitments. We will ask DFP to address that matter in order to encourage mature working relationships between Departments and their Committees; that is a constructive and helpful process. For whatever reason — and I can speak only for the Department of Finance and Personnel — the relationship did not function on that occasion. However, the Committee received an explanation, an apology and an assurance that it will not happen during future processes, which I hope has occurred in all Departments.

I accept the Member's point; it is vital to establish sound working relationships. Sometimes, difficult decisions have to be made, and those decisions have greater authority if the relevant Committee has access to detailed information in advance — not to make the Minister's job more difficult but to understand the rationale behind recommendations.

DFP officials are considering Budget processes to ensure that, in future years, we have earliest possible sight of the indicative information on which the Executive will develop their spending projections. Moreover, the Committee for Finance and Personnel is considering whether an inquiry on that matter is

necessary and hopes to be able to outline recommendations to the Minister soon.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel forwarded all the information on the excess vote for DHSSPS for 2006-07 to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety for its consideration. The Comptroller and Auditor General reported on that matter, and it was the subject of an investigation by the Public Accounts Committee. That Committee recommended that the excess requirement of £7.2 million should be provided by the Assembly through an excess vote. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I support both motions. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Storey: The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel correctly highlighted several issues that should be given particular consideration by the House. As the Minister mentioned, bringing this matter to the House is difficult. The finance issue — whether personal or related to Northern Ireland — is huge, and it is important that we understand how to engage with the budgetary process.

The programme of work for Statutory Committees in the Assembly should include a clear identification of methods to scrutinise how Departments prioritise and spend finances. The Chairperson of the Committee for Education already mentioned the difficulties encountered by his Committee when that information was not supplied. Furthermore, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel referred to problems with the lack of information given to the Committee in order to allow it to offer meaningful input. Ministers will, undoubtedly, want to engage fully with the Committee that has a statutory responsibility to scrutinise them and their Departments.

However, if we are to believe that that is to be the case, the Ministers and the Departments have a duty and a responsibility to prove it, and to furnish the relevant Committee with information in a timely manner so that we can see how that money is being prioritised and how the bids for that monitoring round have been highlighted.

1.30 pm

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel spoke about a return to an annual financial process. We all have concerns about accelerated passage, not only with respect to the Budget, but for other Bills that have been presented to the House. As a legislature, we must not use accelerated passage as a quick fix or as a way to circumnavigate certain situations. There are times, when, unfortunately, it has to be used. However, the financial processes of the House will be improved if the financial timetable is such that the Committees and the House can scrutinise the Budget and the financial arrangements and management of Departments.

The Minister mentioned the training that would be provided by DFP for the Departments and their staff. I suggest that it might also be advantageous for that training to be extended to Members. There is a huge amount of learning and experience that we should seek to acquire when it comes to accurately and effectively dealing with budgetary issues. I support the motion.

Mr Beggs: As the Minister said, the Budget was agreed in January 2008, and today's vote is part of the technical process that gives legislative authority for that expenditure. I thank the departmental officials who recently briefed the Committee for Finance and Personnel on the technical adjustments that have occurred in the Budget report that has been presented to us in the Main Estimates booklet.

The officials pointed to some additional Peace II funding and some transfers of functions among Departments. Superannuation funding has been transferred from annually managed expenditure to the system of departmental expenditure limits, and all Members would agree that some additional background information on such issues would be useful. However, we trust that our civil servants, who have been trained and have the responsibility for those areas, and are taking the right decisions. There are concerns about the additional the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) funding, and an extra £266.9 million for Northern Ireland Water, which was indicated in the Budget but now appears in the departmental expenditure plans.

There are a number of questions to be asked about changes that have occurred in the detailed Estimates, some beyond the control of the Assembly and the Civil Service. For example, will the plans of the capital realisation task force be affected by the changes in the property market? In our plans, we have proposed to sell off certain assets in order to reinvest and create assets that are required. Will there be any long-term implications for that policy as a result of the changes in the property market? Can the capital investment plans be delivered, or will they have to be curtailed as a result of the likelihood of reduced funding from the sale of assets?

How will the recent disclosure of the dramatically reduced value of the DARD asset at Crossnacreevy be affected? I was shocked to learn at the weekend that an asset that had been valued at £200 million is now estimated to be worth about £6 million.

That change in value creates a significant black hole, and difficulties may arise from the £194 million shortfall. Will £90 million still be available to fund the farm nutrient management scheme, which is essential if we are to meet the European directive's requirements? How will that scheme be funded? How did such an overestimate of the value of a Government asset

occur? There has been a failure of huge proportions. How will other capital-expenditure plans be affected by the shortfall?

During the debate on the draft Budget, the under-funding of children's services was highlighted. Other Members and I welcomed the fact that additional moneys were made available in the final Budget for projects that had been funded previously by the Executive programme fund for children. I was disappointed to discover subsequently that many laudable projects in areas of need have been awarded reduced funding. Some projects, such as breakfast and after-school clubs, have not been awarded long-term funding at all; they have not been mainstreamed.

I appreciate that, at this stage, in-year monitoring is likely to be the mechanism used to try to address some of those issues. However —

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree that that is not only a question of the overall Budget that the Executive allocate, but also of departmental prioritisation? Breakfast clubs are, essentially, the responsibility of the Department of Education. If the Department were to reprioritise and target at breakfast clubs some of the money that it wastes in other areas, there would be sufficient funding for them.

Mr Beggs: I fully concur with the Member's point. When additional moneys were made available, I thought that they would go to the many laudable projects that have had positive results. Such projects address areas of need by giving young people a step onto the educational ladder and providing additional childcare, which, perhaps, enables parents to return to work and give their children a positive model of working to better their families through their own efforts. I was disappointed to find that such projects remain under threat.

As yet, there has been no ministerial announcement of plans to deal with the children's funding that had been channelled through PlayBoard to benefit some 57 projects and 2,800 children in areas of need. I should have thought that most people recognised the importance of early-years learning and the fact that giving our young people that additional step on the educational ladder is hugely significant. Perhaps the whole area of funding early-years education has somehow become lost in the more divisive education debate that has taken priority.

Mr O'Dowd: As recent publicity surrounding PlayBoard has targeted the Department of Education, the Member may not be aware that it has since come to light, via departmental officials, that funding for PlayBoard is the Department of Health's responsibility. It is hoped that that Department will make a more positive announcement about PlayBoard later this week.

Mr Beggs: The Member has just illustrated the strange ways in which our Departments and Ministers work. The junior Ministers assured the Assembly that, as a result of the allocation of additional funds, projects that had previously been funded under the children's fund would not be at risk and should not suffer. It is entirely wrong that Ministers should argue. Rather, the junior Ministers, who have responsibility for children's issues, should bring together the relevant people.

The Member said that PlayBoard is the responsibility of the Department of Health. It is clear that responsibility for childcare was transferred to the Department of Education in 2006. There is no great benefit in having arguments across the Chamber. The main issue is that, in removing children's funding from the central funding body, the legs have somehow come off the stool. The Department of Education has not accepted its responsibility for childcare or made it a priority, and funding from the children's fund has come to an end.

Long-term childcare funding must be resolved in a manner that assists our children. Verbal disputes across the Chamber or attempts at political point-scoring do not benefit those children. I want the matter to be resolved in a fashion that provides long-term benefits and better life opportunities for children and parents in areas of need. That would contribute to a reduction in child poverty, because education can benefit everyone.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member will be pleased to hear that at a recent meeting of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, it was made very clear that the Department of Education has responsibility for childcare.

Mr Beggs: The Member illustrates the need for the Executive to sort things out. If there is no clear way of identifying responsibility, let the junior Ministers resolve the matter. The Executive could create a new central funding mechanism to enable resolution to take place. If that spares the blushes of those Ministers who missed this element of funding, I will be content, as long as the funding continues; that is most important. I am thankful that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Estimate ensures that there will be three month's funding for those childcare projects, even though childcare does not fall under its departmental responsibility.

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

Mr Beggs: I support the Supply resolution for the 2006-07 excess vote. We should pay that sum and hope that such a failing does not occur in the future.

Mr O'Loan: We are debating the finances for this financial year. The Assembly will not have forgotten the concerns that I and my party expressed in the debates on the Programme for Government and the

Budget. I will repeat those concerns and, indeed, emphasise some of them because it is clear —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr O’Loan: It is very early in my speech, but I am always prepared to give way.

Mr Storey: Does the Member’s party support its Minister wholeheartedly, given that that Minister went through the lobbies with the rest of the Members of the House and voted for the Budget? She did not take the same cowardly stance as her party, which abdicated its responsibility and voted against the Budget.

Mr O’Loan: I thank the Member for his intervention and, indeed, it will do no harm to clarify the matter. My party has no concerns on this issue. This form of Government requires Ministers to behave in a particular way, which the Minister for Social Development did. My party was totally united in its stance. We had serious concerns about the Programme for Government and the Budget and we still have those concerns.

Good government is not just about money; we need a coherent system of government that is joined together and has a shared approach. Is that what we witnessed in last week’s events? Within OFMDFM, Sinn Féin has, for some time, been very unhappy with the outcomes of government and its domination by the DUP.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr O’Loan: Last week, we saw the OK corral behaviour of Sinn Féin Members. They rode their horses up to the corral, but then — having looked into the eyes of those opposite — quickly turned and high-tailed it out of town. *[Laughter.]*

Although we can see the comedy in what happened, we are entitled to ask whether that bodes well for future Government here or for the coherent government that we need.

1.45 pm

We have major concerns over the ability of those two parties to deliver a coherent strategy of Government based on a shared society. As I said, we expressed our concerns previously about aspects of the Budget. Other Members of my party will detail that, but I want to headline some of those concerns.

We are concerned about the extent to which the Budget is predicated upon efficiency savings. As those begin to work through, we see major concerns from around the community about cuts in front line services — only today, we see significant representation from trade unions that have come to this place to voice their concerns.

In our education system, we are seeing the biggest change to secondary education for decades — if the Minister ever gets there. There is no budgetary allocation in relation to that, and there is no greater

clarity on the policy resolution of that issue than there was when we debated the Budget. That is a major worry in the community among primary-school staff and among parents. It is not credible that such a dramatic change will be cost-neutral, and we are entitled to question the Budget on that issue.

The extended schools programme has been debated, and it is absolutely vital that the disadvantaged get a good start on the educational ladder. The Minister of Education has said that she has not had the budget for that and that she has gone repeatedly to the Minister of Finance and Personnel and that money has not been made available.

Mr Storey: Will the Member accept that that is not accurate? The Minister of Finance and Personnel has clarified that on those occasions when the Minister of Education asked for additional finance, additional money was given.

The issue has not been that the DFP Minister has refused to give money; the issue has been the inability of the Education Minister to prioritise in a way that is to the best advantage of the educational system. That was proven by the fact that in the monitoring round, the Minister gave £50 million back to DFP.

Mr O’Loan: The Member makes valid points as to the use of money within that Department, but the fact is that money was not available to continue that very necessary programme.

I was referring to asset sales and how vital they are to the Budget. In the current context of changes in property values, that is uncertain, and it is difficult to be confident in the Minister’s — or the former Minister’s — assurance that all is OK on that front.

I will mention one or two the Department for Social Development (DSD) issues — not to the detriment of other Departments — but clearly money for housing — social housing in particular — is hugely dependent on asset sales. That includes the problem that is now making itself transparent, which is the drying-up of Housing Executive house sales.

Fuel poverty is a greater problem than it was five or six months ago. We are facing a winter of even higher fuel prices, and it is not going too far to apply the word “crisis” to what is ahead of us; it is a real crisis in many homes, and it is imperative that the Executive address that.

We must say to central Government in Westminster that there needs to be an increase — and a substantial one — in the winter fuel payment. All parties need to do what they can there, but we should do what we can within our own sphere of control — to put it simply, more money must be put into the warm homes scheme.

There is a huge and unresolved problem in relation to water charges. There are clear concerns that the

Minister is going for a separate water bill and a very big one — up to £950 when those charges are fully realised. There will be no consistency in charges for identical water usage between two houses. The system is fundamentally unfair. There is a real worry among those who are on fixed, low incomes about the further burden that is evidently coming their way.

I have concerns about the quality of much of our governance. We face a major challenge, and that needs the highest quality of government.

I refer Members to an interview in yesterday's 'Sunday Independent' with Professor Brendan Drumm, the chief executive of the Health Service Executive. I recommend that article to any student of government. Professor Drumm discusses how best to create a well-working health system, but his comments range wider than that. Health is of huge importance, and accounts for 50% of our Budget. It is a vital and emotive issue. The title of the article is:

"It's not about more beds or more money, it is about accountability".

Brendan Drumm addresses how to get the best out of the money that is invested in our public services — and there are few greater questions for the Assembly.

Clear evidence is provided in the article that one unit in the Health Service can perform dramatically better than another, sometimes with less financial input. There is a need for a more efficient structure, based on clear chains of accountability. That opens the major issue of where accountability should rest — to what degree with professional managers, and to what extent with our political system. There is a lesson for all good public services: we must be able to create and support good, independent scrutiny and management.

In that vein, I wish to express very grave concerns about one recent ministerial decision: the refusal of the Environment Minister — or should I say "the then Environment Minister" — to create an independent environmental protection agency. The Minister saw the need for independence, and she provided for some elements of independence, but did not go the whole and absolutely necessary way of creating an independent agency. That was the wrong signal to send out about the quality of government.

Mr S Wilson: I have made a list of around seven areas that the Member has identified as needing more expenditure, yet he is now going one step further and saying that, in order to have what he calls "quality of government", we should have an independent environmental agency, which even its own supporters have said would be costly to Northern Ireland.

Dr Farry: I will address Sammy Wilson's point later on. I believe that he is the incoming Minister of the Environment.

The Alliance Party has already made clear its major concerns about public expenditure in general in Northern Ireland, and specifically the Executive's first Budget. We voted against the Budget when it was formally debated several months ago, and, as the formal process of turning that flawed Budget into reality continues, we will once again state our objections. If, however, my party does not force repeated Divisions, I must emphasise that that should not be mistaken for consent.

I wish to highlight some of the problems with public expenditure in Northern Ireland. We are signing off on an annual Budget of £16 billion — over half of that is due to be technically authorised today. Of that £16 billion, around £7 billion comes through subvention from the UK Treasury. We are dependent on external assistance for almost half of our expenditure. Our local tax base is very small. The table set out in Varney II shows how serious this issue is — not just in the context of the regions of the United Kingdom, but internationally.

Our public sector is large, but our biggest problem is our private sector, which is simply too small. It is right to give top priority to growing our private sector. Although it is important to put into perspective the size of our public sector, there are still major problems that we have to confront.

In a wide range of aspects of life in Northern Ireland — social, economic and environmental — our society does not keep up with new demands by the Northern Ireland public for investments that are delivered elsewhere. Clearly, there are major questions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure. They include, but go beyond, the costs of division; however, as you might expect, I will begin my speech on that theme.

The Alliance Party emphasises that major distortions of public expenditure and opportunity costs arise from attempting to manage a divided society, rather than from investing in high-quality shared facilities, goods and services for the entire community. The party held a positive meeting with the outgoing Finance Minister on that subject; and its members are working on a paper for DFP officials, which, I hope, will be with them before the summer recess. However, it is a matter of continued regret that addressing the costs of division is not a core theme of the Budget and is not a feature of its approach to efficiency savings. Investment in a shared future is required, and that will lead to significant savings for society overall.

On the topic of efficiency savings in general, I make one important point. The Alliance Party fully supports the concept of efficiency savings. We believe that the 3% targets are achievable and that more can be achieved. In that respect, we support the role of PEDU. Greater

targets are routinely sought and achieved each year in the private sector. However, for my party, efficiency savings must be about increasing productivity and finding new and creative ways of doing things to free up resources from outmoded purposes or activities for reinvestment in new policies and practices. However, in Northern Ireland, efficiency savings too readily become cuts. Rather than doing things differently, Departments and public bodies carry on as before, but try to do the same with less.

I want to explore the inefficiencies in the way that we spend our money and what we miss out on as a consequence. With regard to the environment, which Mr O'Loan and Mr Sammy Wilson discussed, we have recently been told that one reason we cannot have an independent environmental protection agency is the cost: the agency would cost some £2.6 million to set up and some £600,000 per annum to operate. Those are relatively small sums; however, the questions on which we must focus are the costs and consequences — financially, economically and environmentally — of not having an independent environmental protection agency. Obviously, there will still be problems, such as infraction proceedings, even if we have an environmental protection agency. However, the issue is one of scale; it is wrong to see it as a black-or-white choice. We need an environmental protection agency to have more efficient and cost-effective Government.

I give way to the incoming Minister.

Mr S Wilson: Does the Member accept that, in the case of the independent Scottish Environmental Protection Agency it was concluded that, the process of decision-making was costly and became more cumbersome, and the Environmental Protection Agency was totally out of touch with local communities? If the Member looks for a different way of doing things, surely he will not consider one that makes things worse?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his points. We all wish to learn lessons from how other societies have introduced and operated environmental protection agencies. However, that does not detract from my central point. We need an environmental protection agency to challenge more efficiently how we conduct environmental business. If we do not have one, we will pay the economic and environmental cost.

In respect of transport, we place a heavy emphasis on roads and private cars at the expense of public transport. In his statement this morning, the Minister for Regional Development did not depart from that script. We have a major congestion problem, particularly in greater Belfast. Other societies are able to maintain a much more sustainable balance between public and private transport; there is no reason why we cannot follow suit. Incredibly, the current 10-year investment strategy puts 80% of new investment into

roads — that is well out of line with the practices of most of our competitors. I fail to see how that will help us to rebalance our economy, never mind make us more environmentally sustainable.

We have natural strengths in the creative arts. However, it is staggering that we spend less per capita on culture than the UK average and well below our neighbours in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

Surely proper investment in the arts should be viewed as an essential element of growing and transforming our economy?

2.00 pm

There are also huge inefficiencies in the education system. Despite the large budget that is allocated to the Department of Education, there are major problems, for example, with the funding of the Youth Service and resource allocation to primary schools. To put it simply: there is a high level of education expenditure per capita but a low level of expenditure per pupil. There are major inefficiencies in the schools estate that are leading to distortions in expenditure. Too much money is spent on school buildings at the expense of investment in pupils and staff.

The Alliance Party is concerned at the continued absence of a sustainable schools policy. It believes that a system is needed that values a range of options for shared schools. More specifically, the party is concerned at how integrated schools are perceived. Integrated schools, whether newbuild or transformed, are the most sustainable form of education, socially, educationally and economically. However, at present, rather than being viewed as part of the solution, they are seen as being part of the problem and are regarded as a threat to the existing schools system. However, it is the schools system that is inefficient, so we are missing an easy solution.

The Alliance Party has made the point that, in the Budget, Northern Ireland is flatlining in comparison with the budgets allocated to health elsewhere in these islands. The health budget is already the highest per capita in the UK, which, sadly, reflects our relative need.

The highest level of increase will go to health, as well as the highest level of new resources. However, none of that hides the reality that we are simply not keeping up and that, by 2011, our health budget will be £200 million short of what we need to keep pace with our neighbours. The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has settled for far too little in his little political campaign.

Furthermore, attempts to plug the gap in our Health Service with monitoring rounds are flawed, for two reasons. First, monitoring round resources have no impact on baselines. Secondly, the automatic first referral to the Health Service distorts the monitoring

process and the necessary redistribution of resources across the entire system. Efficiency savings in the Health Service are important. However, such savings are viewed by the general population as cuts. Indeed, that reality is confronting elected representatives across Northern Ireland — including DUP MLAs — as expressed recently in local newspapers.

Given the rising costs of drugs, technology and our ageing population, we need to keep up with the pace of investment elsewhere in the world. Efficiency savings in health are necessary and will assist in keeping up with that pace. However, those efficiency savings must be complemented with new resources and investment in areas such as mental health and free personal care for elderly people.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr S Wilson): I wish to highlight some issues about the Department of Education's sizeable budget of over £2 billion. The Committee has concerns that, although over £2 billion is available for education in Northern Ireland, only 62% of that ever reaches schools. That figure is substantially lower than in other parts of the UK; in England, for example, 80% of the money available for education is delegated to schools. Many problems in our education system could be addressed if there were greater delegation.

Departmental officials have told the Committee that the operation of several education initiatives means that moneys are withheld from schools. Some £190 million is ring-fenced for those initiatives, which represents 19% of the money that is allocated to our schools.

All the school principals who appeared before the Committee said that they would prefer that the money currently being held centrally for initiatives were delegated to them. They could then spend the money as they see fit in their own schools. Those principals also said that it was time-consuming to research those initiatives, complete the highly bureaucratic application forms, and to monitor, check and evaluate.

Several school principals said that some initiatives require them to buy computers — which they do not need, but they do not want to pass up the opportunity — or to engage in activities that they do not consider to be of priority, but which qualify them for the initiative. The Department must address that situation. The Committee has asked the Department to highlight the initiatives and to establish how many of them could be withdrawn without any adverse effect on the quality of what goes on in the schools, thus releasing money to the school budgets.

The Member for North Down Dr Farry said that one of the ways of making the budget work better was to do things differently. In education, for instance, he said that we spend too much money on buildings — and therein lies a contradiction. We do spend too much money

on buildings; there are a lot of half-empty buildings that require money. However, Dr Farry's simple solution is to build more. That is the meat on the bones of the Alliance Party's verbiage. Dr Farry said that we should increase productivity, and that means looking at outmoded methods and doing things differently.

The only two examples that he provided of how things could be done differently were to build integrated schools — when there is overcapacity in the existing schools system — and to set up a costly independent environmental protection agency. It is all very well to utter fine words about increased productivity, doing things differently and testing the boundaries of how money is being spent —

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: I will in a minute or two.

However, when one examines how things could be done differently, one finds that the different way will lead to less efficiency, more waste and greater spending.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. The advocacy of integrated schools is based on the fact that enrolments are falling and the sad reality that many schools across Northern Ireland are unsustainable and will, in fact, have to be closed. Does the Member agree that in a typical village in Northern Ireland in which a controlled primary school and a Catholic maintained primary school, for instance, are under threat of closure due to falling enrolments, it makes sense to build a single shared school for the community, rather than to bus two sets of children to neighbouring towns?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: I am sure that everyone in the Chamber will agree that that is an admirable solution, but that is not integrated education à la the Alliance Party. In the House — and at local level — Alliance Party representatives have said that, not only should there be a Catholic school and a controlled school, but a third school should be built. That is what most of the Alliance Party advocacy of integrated education that I have heard consists of, and it leads to a greater waste of money. It is not the way forward, and it will not lead to greater productivity.

Mr Weir: I heard Dr Farry heckling from the side when Sammy Wilson was commenting on the building of more schools in the integrated sector. Closing schools is the Alliance Party's position. Does the Member look forward, as I do, to the Member for North Down's public statement containing the names of the schools in North Down that he would close?

Dr Farry: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Weir: Does he believe that the Member will not be able to put his money where his mouth is on this issue?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: He will not, probably. The comment that he made from his sedentary position is not true, because, according to officials from the Department of Education and the South Eastern Education and Library Board, Bangor alone has 1,500 more school places than are needed. That is the context that we are looking at. I could give many other examples of representations that have been made to the Committee. In one case, there was a surplus of 2,000 places, but an Alliance Party Member suggested that another school be built.

That is not the way forward and does not represent a better use of education money. However, alternatives must be examined.

The second issue that the Committee highlights is the current in-year monitoring. It is a great pity that the Department could not bring along its proposed bids to the Department of Finance for Committee scrutiny. In the event that other Committees are having the same experience, a warning should go out from this debate about the duty which rests with Departments. The recommendation was that, as part of in-year monitoring, Departments should come along with bids to see whether the Committee would support them. That is not happening, even though it might be helpful to Ministers to have Committee backing for some bids.

As far as the Department of Education is concerned, one of the things highlighted by the Committee is the need for the bid for extended schools to be met through in-year monitoring. I know that, as the Member for East Antrim Mr Beggs pointed out, that is not the best way of doing it, but if an extension of another year can be obtained through that mechanism, it will be better than the current situation, in which extended schools are being cut.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member accept that it is not only extended schools that are provided in primary schools? There are other after-school clubs, and breakfast clubs, which are also provided by the voluntary sector.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: I accept that. I am making the point that, while it is not the ideal way of ensuring that the extended schools programme is financed for another year, it is better than the present situation, in which many face being cut totally and some get only a percentage of their expenditure. It was another area of concern for the Committee.

The last area about which the Committee expressed concern was the huge discrepancy in spending between primary and secondary schools. I hope that many Members will take part in a debate on a motion that will be brought to this House on the importance of

getting money skewed towards primary schools in order that the disadvantage that is experienced by many youngsters in their first years in school is addressed. Later problems can be avoided through emphasis on remedial action in early years. That is something that I would like to see, and it can be done within the existing budget by looking for efficiencies — different ways of spending available money. That is how to address the huge spending gap, especially for primary schools.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Both these motions will enable Departments to draw down the necessary resources from the Consolidated Fund to deliver services. That is an important part of the Budget process, as the Main Estimates and Excess Vote resolutions are the next stages in ensuring that money goes to the various spending authorities. The process also sets limits on receipts that will be brought in, and provides authority to use those against various services.

Great concern has been expressed inside and outside this Chamber recently about the level of underspend in the budgets of Departments, which the Minister mentioned in her statement. Any form of accounting involves a margin of error, but the financial management of Departments is an area in which performance could be improved.

In essence, we are guardians of public money. Therefore, in their Committee and Assembly roles, all Members have a responsibility to hold Departments to account if local people are not receiving services to which they are entitled. Departments need to work closely with Committees to ensure that they meet those targets and to provide information on time rather than at the last minute, which has sometimes been the case.

Other Members have commented on the recent upsurge in the general cost of living, including the price of fuel and food, which has created public concern. Sometimes, the cost of living is talked about in a way which makes it seem very abstract.

For example, a meal for a family of five now costs almost £3 extra, meaning that such families are spending an extra £3 on every meal. Therefore, the issue is of real concern for people. The Executive and Departments need to be innovative in introducing measures to deal with that issue, such as working alongside energy companies to supply social tariffs and finding better ways to spend their budgets.

2.15 pm

We are facing a period where essential front line services that are delivered by community and voluntary organisations are being put at risk due to a lack of funding. Again, sometimes, our understanding of those services can be abstract, but they are delivered to people in local communities. When organisations that

are closing due to a lack of funding see that such a large amount of money has gone unspent in departmental budgets over the past year, they have every right to be concerned. That is because some of that money was allocated to those services but was not distributed to the organisations that would have delivered them.

The Executive — along with Departments — have a responsibility to ensure the delivery of their priorities as set out in the Programme for Government. The procurement guidelines that were launched recently offer an opportunity to deliver the social outcomes that are outlined in the investment strategy, thus ensuring delivery of equality of opportunity and tackling poverty and disadvantage. That is what we need to be doing.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member is quite right when she says that those priorities should be foremost in all our minds. However, does she not agree that decisions about them should be made in this House, rather than by people running to Downing Street?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for her intervention; however, I believe that we all have a responsibility to ensure that people are not going cold or hungry. I support both motions and believe that they can be seen as a first step towards achieving our objectives. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for the hard and diligent work that he has done in preparing the Budget and the motion, which I support. I am fully aware that some Members have constantly moaned and groaned about the Budget and the departmental allocations. It is my hope that, today, those Members will come back to reality and support the motion to ensure that the Programme for Government that has been agreed by the Executive and the Assembly can be implemented.

The Budget has provided the Executive with an opportunity to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland by allocating resources to high-priority areas, where the funds will yield the greatest benefit. Individual Ministers will determine how the resources from the Budget are distributed in the context of the competing needs and priorities in their Departments. I have no doubt that those are vastly distinct from the priorities and the local understanding that direct rule Ministers had.

With the required approvals granted, it would be an act of complete stupidity to reject the motion. Although there is no doubt that that would appeal to some, it would ensure that all Departments were unable to carry through the programmes that they have devised according to their budget allocations. Critics of the Budget would have a few questions to answer as to how such an approach would best serve the people of Northern Ireland.

I wish to see the targets on the treatment of cancer met, the supply of new social housing achieved, and

the development of our road and public transport continued. However, all that will be possible only if the Departments have the necessary funding. That is why it is essential that the motion is successful. Failure to agree the motion — especially after the recent important investment conference — would be a suicidal course of action for the Assembly, as it would damage prospective investors' confidence in Northern Ireland. The party opposite has done enough damage to that confidence in the past few days. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the motion is agreed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the first Member called to speak will be Mr Dominic Bradley.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Executive Committee: Cross-Community Votes

1. **Mr Spratt** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the number of times that a cross-community vote has been triggered at meetings of the Executive. (AQO 3872/08)

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): Three cross-community votes have been triggered at meetings of the Executive. All occurred at the meeting of the Executive on 15 May 2008, and related to the same subject.

Mr Spratt: I welcome Mr Robinson to his first Question Time as First Minister.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Spratt: I congratulate him on his election as First Minister of Northern Ireland.

Will the First Minister confirm whether the Executive's decision to proceed with a separate water charge from next April was taken unanimously?

The First Minister: First, I thank my colleague for his kind remarks and good wishes.

The Executive have dealt with around 228 issues since devolution in May 2007. There has been division on only four of those issues, of which only one has gone to a cross-community vote. None of the issues on which there was division included water charging.

That issue has come before the Executive on two occasions in two different ways. On the first occasion, it was as part of the premise on which Budget allocations were made. The Member will know that my Executive colleagues unanimously supported the Budget; there was no Division in the House either.

On the second — more recent — occasion, the Minister for Regional Development brought forward a paper on how those matters should be handled. Again, the Executive agreed to that without division.

Mr Kennedy: I also welcome the new First Minister to his position. Does the First Minister have any plans to convene an early meeting of the leaders of the political parties who are represented on the Executive?

The First Minister: I thank the Member for Newry and Armagh for his good wishes.

Today, I, as a party leader, wrote to the other party leaders — not only those who sit on the Executive, but those who sit in the House outside the Executive — indicating that I would welcome the opportunity to speak to them about matters relating to the Assembly and beyond. I hope to take account of what they have to say.

Neither the deputy First Minister nor I would avoid meeting other party leaders; we would certainly consider it. We welcome an exchange with all Members of the House. If all Members enter into discussions in a constructive manner, it may be very useful.

Mrs Long: I also welcome the new First Minister to the House. I wish him well for the future.

My question relates to the issue of collectivity in the Executive. Will the First Minister give us his assurances — amid the public controversy that is going on outside the House — that the Executive and OFMDFM are fully committed to their obligations to promote equality and good relations between the persons and groups listed under section 75 of Northern Ireland Act 1998, including the gay and lesbian community?

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The First Minister: The Executive have a good record on collectivity.

The figures that I outlined earlier would have done credit to any one-party Executive. The Executive have dealt with more than 228 issues; they had to vote on only four occasions in a straight vote, and once in a cross-community vote. Indeed, two of the issues in the straight voting were on the same matter, although voting took place on two separate occasions.

Very few issues have caused division in the Executive. They acted collectively on the key issues that have been brought to the Assembly; particularly those arising from the Programme for Government, which sets up the Assembly manifesto for the next three years. The Executive took the collective decision to move forward in that direction.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is legally obliged to ensure that no one is discriminated against in our society. Even if there were no legal obligation, I would be at the forefront in defending anyone who was being discriminated against. I know that my colleague the Member for Strangford would be alongside me in doing that. As far as the community is concerned, it is absolutely

essential that there is equality for people. Equality of opportunity should be at the forefront in all our minds regarding all of these issues. My colleague from East Belfast has given me the opportunity to say that I totally deplore any attacks that take place on individuals, whether it is because of their religion, their politics or their way of life.

Planning Appeals Commission

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the average time taken for a decision by the Planning Appeals Commission. (AQO 3865/08)

3. **Mr Bresland** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the budget of the Planning Appeals Commission for the last three years; and its budget for the next three years. (AQO 3848/08)

The First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 3 together.

In the past financial year, the average length of time taken to determine an appeal was 82 weeks. The delay in making decisions is due to the backlog of planning appeal cases that has amassed over recent years. That backlog is of considerable concern to the deputy First Minister and me. Consequently, significant additional financial resources have been committed to enable the chief commissioner to address the backlog of planning appeals.

The budget of the Planning Appeals Commission remained constant, at £1·858 million per annum, for the last three years, 2005 to 2008. During those years, the commission was only able to retain receipts of up to £56,000; £150,000; and £241,000 respectively. For the next three years, the budget figures are £2·368 million in the current financial year; £2·378 million for 2009-2010; and £2·396 million for 2010-11.

In addition, in each of those years, the commission will be able to retain receipts of £376,000 per annum. In short, the commission has been provided with the additional spending power of over £700,000 each year, which will allow it to recruit additional commissioners. Eight commissioners have been appointed in recent months, and a competition for a further 10 panel commissioners is underway. That will be followed by a further competition for commissioners in the autumn. The deputy First Minister and I will continue to keep the situation under close review.

Mr Weir: I add my congratulations to the First Minister on his first Question Time.

When the First Minister, in his previous capacity as Finance Minister, established the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU), he made the Planning Service one of its initial areas of focus. In light of the

delays in the Planning Appeals Commission that he outlined today, does he believe that that aspect of the planning system should have an equal level of focus?

The First Minister: At the outset, it should be made clear that the Planning Appeals Commission is an independent body. Moreover, it is an independent body that seems to have a very high degree of respect. It is worth pointing out that when issues such as the review of public administration (RPA) were considered, virtually all of the parties fought hard to ensure that the Planning Appeals Commission would be retained as a separate and independent body.

There are not many bodies that are still capable of gaining the support of public representatives and the wider community despite having a growing list of backlog cases. People are supportive of the role that the Planning Appeals Commission performs.

There is a relationship between the Planning Service, and the cases that it deals with, and the Planning Appeals Commission. Very often, I found that people become fed up with the delay in the Planning Service and take their cases out of the normal planning routine after the appropriate number of months pass. They then put them to the Planning Appeals Commission because they think that that might be a faster route and fear that their cases might end up with the Planning Appeals Commission anyway. That adds to the burden.

The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent body, so it would be unhelpful and unwelcome were PEDU to burst through its doors and attempt to deal with the commission's business. The Planning Appeals Commission is required to be fit for purpose. The deputy First Minister and I will do everything that we can to assist the commission to ensure that it reduces its backlog and is able to deal with matters more expeditiously.

Mr Bresland: What action have the Executive taken to deal with the problems that the Planning Appeals Commission faces?

The First Minister: I indicated that the former First Minister and the deputy First Minister recognised — presumably after discussions with the Planning Appeals Commission — that it needed further resources. The nice guy who used to be the Finance Minister readily acceded to that request, and, as a result, more funds have been allocated to the commission. However, I warn Members that a lead-in time is involved. Not only is recruitment needed — the Planning Appeals Commission has a rigorous appointment requirement, in order to ensure that its commissioners have the highest level of competence — but training then lasts for roughly one year. We will have to be patient. Even though the resources are there, and even though the Planning Appeals Commission has moved quickly to compose its recruitment panels, that requirement will

remain for a long time, until trained commissioners are in post. There will be some delay, but the deputy First Minister and I will continue to review the matter.

Mr K Robinson: I, too, welcome the First Minister to his first Question Time and wish him well for the future.

I listened intently to how he described the improvements to the Planning Appeals Commission and look forward to seeing those work in practice. When considering the Planning Appeals Commission, will the First Minister ensure that, when they appear before the commission, members of the public are afforded the same rights that developers appear to have? A developer can introduce a full team of planning experts, tree experts, bat experts — you name it — plus legal representation. A member of the public feels at a severe disadvantage when appearing before the commission.

The First Minister: I take the Member's point, although I emphasise that the Planning Appeals Commission is an independent body, so it must satisfy itself on the procedures that it adopts. Members of the public have the same opportunity as others to have legal representation or to bring in experts. However, the reality is somewhat different — members of the public will not have the same resources that are available to developers. Therefore, it is important that the Planning Appeals Commission attach appropriate weight to remarks made by members of the public who have concerns about planning applications. It must also take into consideration the fact that they do not have the same expertise behind them as developers have.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the First Minister to his first Question Time in that capacity.

What action can the First Minister take in order to prioritise appeals for accommodation for severely disabled people? I was involved in an appeal recently that took up to a year and a half. That places a great deal of stress on young families with a severely disabled person in the household.

The First Minister: I can take no action at all. The independence of the Planning Appeals Commission is such that it would be inappropriate for the deputy First Minister and me to intervene in its caseload. However, I will draw the Member's views to the commission's attention. It may feel that fast-tracking is required in certain cases.

2.45 pm

My clear message is that the Planning Appeals Commission is keen to deal expeditiously with all its cases. However, since 2003-04, the number of cases has roughly trebled. That level of increase is an indication that major planning applications will be submitted, particularly given the current circumstances in which we are coming out of a period of significant economic

growth. Planning law requires public inquiries on the area plans, and that has also added significantly to the commission's workload.

That combination of factors caused a considerable backlog of cases. In normal circumstances, the prioritisation of one type of application should not be an issue, but, until the backlog is cleared, there may be a case for the Planning Appeals Commission to consider whether any particularly sensitive cases should be prioritised and heard out of their normal order.

Capital Realisation Task Force Report

4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive have considered the capital realisation task force report.

(AQO 3885/08)

The First Minister: The Executive considered the report at their meeting on 21 January 2008. Work is under way to progress the report's key recommendations, which are vital to ensuring the delivery of the entire investment strategy for Northern Ireland and achieving value for money from the assets base.

Mr Hilditch: In the light of the Prime Minister's recent offer of asset sales and given the need for capital expenditure in Northern Ireland, will the First Minister agree that early progress on capital realisation is essential?

The First Minister: In the Budget and the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, as supported by the Assembly, assumptions were made about asset disposal and other block grant funding. Therefore, it is necessary to proceed with careful haste on any asset sales. I enter that slight caveat because the Executive's task is to maximise the return from any asset disposal, and they must take account of the standing of the property market at any given time.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also wish the First Minister well in his new role, and I wish the deputy Minister well in his continued role.

Will the First Minister identify the targets for the disposal of surplus assets in 2008-2011? Go raibh maith agat.

The First Minister: The capital realisation task force identified that the Executive could dispose of £300 million of additional assets. The Budget and investment strategy took into account £200 million of that, and care was taken not to allocate money beyond the total amount possible. In addition to that, the original figures had already taken into account £1.4 billion of asset disposal and capital receipts for the three-year period to 2010-11. That is a significant sum, and it requires all Departments to examine their timetables

carefully to ensure that the capital is realised during the period of the CSR.

Mr O'Loan: I also extend my good wishes to the First Minister.

According to information that was given to the DARD Committee, a downward adjustment has reduced the valuation of the DARD-owned property at Crossnacreevy from £200 million to a mere £3 million to £6 million. Is the Minister not extremely concerned by that? How can the Assembly be confident that the Budget, on which the Programme for Government depends, will be delivered?

The First Minister: As someone whose background is in estate agency, I can tell the Member that any land or property is worth what a willing purchaser will pay for it on the open market. At present, there are not too many willing purchasers, and that has an impact on the price of any asset. However, the other factor is whether planning permission exists for any type of development on the site at Crossnacreevy, because the land is worth much less without it.

One of the issues that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Finance and Personnel will have to consider is whether to apply for planning permission, and sell with that permission, or whether to simply sell the site with a hoped-for value attached to it. The lower price clearly refers to the amount without planning permission for development.

Economic Investment Conference: Outcomes

5. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to comment on the outcomes of the economic investment conference; and to detail its plans for other similar events. (AQO 3864/08)

The First Minister: The recent US/Northern Ireland investment conference was an enormous success. As well as the very significant dignitaries in attendance, 90 companies, represented by over 140 business leaders, were represented. At the conference, NYSE EuroNext and Cybersource announced new inward investments, which have the potential to create over 120 new high-quality jobs. Those announcements, along with major investments of some £77 million announced by Bombardier and Independent News and Media, aimed at safeguarding over 1,100 jobs, added to the success.

We are extremely encouraged by the positive reflections in the media on the immediate impact of the conference. Initial feedback from delegates is also very encouraging. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be working hard over the

coming months to capitalise on the success of the event. The full outcome of the conference will take some time to come to fruition. Invest Northern Ireland has put in place a comprehensive follow-up campaign. Since the conference has proven to be such a success, we consider it a model for potential future events in London and Dublin, to follow up with attendees and companies in those cities.

Mr Gardiner: I join with my colleagues in wishing the First Minister every good health in the post of heavy responsibility to which he has been appointed.

The so-called BRIC economies — Brazil, Russia, India and China — are all expanding economies. Would it be possible to organise an Asian investment conference, targeting China, Japan and India, along the lines of the US/Northern Ireland investment conference?

The First Minister: I appreciate the Member's comments. My colleague, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, has already visited India, and spoke to me of the massive potential that he saw there. Having visited the Middle East with the Westminster Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs some years ago, I see the potential of that area of the world.

Invest NI will examine where it is appropriate to establish offices. I have no doubt that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment will be quite happy to consider missions to those countries. I am quite sure that the deputy First Minister and I will be very happy to offer support in that area.

Mr Hamilton: I, too, warmly welcome the First Minister to his first Question Time in his new role.

The First Minister will be well aware of the importance of delivering the type of jobs that those who attended the conference can provide in helping the Executive to achieve its targets on increasing productivity and closing the gross value added gap. Will he comment on what steps he has taken to encourage employment in Northern Ireland from Bombardier's CSeries project?

The First Minister: The Member is right that the Programme for Government prioritised economic growth, which requires us to aim to secure high-value-added jobs. That is clearly one of the factors that will have an effect on improving our gross value added (GVA). Securing better exports improves our GVA, and Bombardier is one of the corporations that clearly has a massive export potential for Northern Ireland.

The deputy First Minister and I have spoken with the Prime Minister about the Bombardier CSeries. I have had a number of conversations with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State on that issue. I know that both DFP and DETI have been in touch with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in London, and Invest Northern

Ireland has been holding regular meetings. I understand that there is a very important meeting later this week on that issue.

Clearly, there are commercial issues to consider, which perhaps limit what I can say on the matter; but the CSeries would be very important for the development of Bombardier in Belfast, for potential jobs and, indeed, for the long tenure that those jobs would have.

Mr Neeson: Like other Members, I wish the First Minister well for the future in his new role.

As he realises, the organisation of the investment conference depended largely on interdepartmental co-operation. Economic growth is not the responsibility of just one Department. Will he assure me that he will ensure that that interdepartmental co-operation will continue to try to attract new investment into Northern Ireland?

The First Minister: The deputy First Minister and I are committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland's investment potential is maximised. I indicated that the investment conference, which invited people from North America to Northern Ireland, will be a good model for further conferences. The deputy First Minister and I are examining the possibility of conferences in London and Dublin to follow up some of the contacts that were made during the investment conference.

The Member is correct: all Departments played a part. DEL was deeply involved in the event. DCAL, DETI and my former Department were also involved, as was OFMDFM, which had a central role. I am sure that DARD was also involved, because I recall that issues arose with regard to food. Had I not mentioned that, the Minister would have pointed it out quickly when she got an opportunity. Therefore, all of the Departments threw their weight behind the project in a joined-up way. I am convinced that they will do the same in any future event.

Ms J McCann: Will the First Minister outline targets set by the Executive to ensure that any future investment as a result of the conference will tackle deprivation and social and economic disadvantage?

The First Minister: Having been in the job for only a matter of a few days, one conversation that I have had with the deputy First Minister identified deprivation and need as an area that we have both prioritised and in which we share a desire that focus and energy should be applied. Too often, the Programme for Government might be identified as having a trickle-down effect; that when the economy is boosted, ultimately, people will get jobs and that will assist them. The deputy First Minister and I both believe that deprivation must be tackled immediately at ground-floor level. That will certainly be part of our aim. Of course, the location of those jobs will have an impact. There is no better way out of deprivation than to get people into employment.

Northern Ireland currently has a higher level of employment than has ever been the case before. It has one of the lowest levels of unemployment of any part of the British Isles. Therefore, opportunities exist. If additional higher-value-added jobs can be brought into Northern Ireland, I believe that the tide will rise for everyone.

Visit of the President of the United States

6. Lord Browne asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is its assessment of the forthcoming visit of the President of the United States. (AQO 3850/08)

The First Minister: The decision by the President of the United States to visit Belfast during his forthcoming tour of European capital cities is a clear demonstration of his personal commitment to Northern Ireland. We look forward to welcoming him here on Monday 16 June. We were pleased to learn that the first lady will accompany him. We hope that the visit will attract a significant level of positive media coverage in the United States and around the world, and that it will help to promote Northern Ireland as a place in which to invest and as a tourist destination. The timing of the visit, soon after the investment conference, is particularly useful for Invest NI, which will be able to use the attendant publicity to maintain a positive image of Northern Ireland with corporate America.

Lord Browne: I also want to congratulate the First Minister on his appointment and wish him well in his office. I also welcome his statement on the visit of President Bush to Northern Ireland, particularly to Parliament Buildings at Stormont. It is an historic occasion. I am sure that the Assembly wants to express again its sympathy with the American people on the great loss of life that they suffered on 9/11 and its solidarity with President Bush in his continuing efforts to protect his people from future acts of terror.

Will the First Minister use the opportunity of the President's visit to reinforce the message that Northern Ireland is a good place in which to invest?

3.00 pm

The First Minister: The community recognises the great sacrifice that has been made by many Americans, and the day in history to which the Member referred will long be regarded as being one of its darkest moments. Perhaps this is an opportunity for me to pass on condolences from the people of Northern Ireland to the families of the three soldiers who were killed in Helmand province. We all extend our sympathy to those families.

It is important to note that the President personally wished to make the visit to demonstrate his support for

the devolved Administration. That identifies the fact that Northern Ireland is open for business.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Regeneration: Rural Villages and Towns

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's remit for helping to regenerate rural villages and towns. (AQO 3910/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): My Department's remit on rural settlements that have a population of fewer than 4,500 is met mainly through the village renewal measure of the new rural development programme for 2007-2013. Along with other measures in priority 3 of the programme, the village renewal measure will be implemented by local action groups working in partnership with council clusters.

The types of activities that are to be funded will depend on the priorities in the area strategy of the partnership and the types of applications that are received from the local community. I am confident that that measure will provide an excellent opportunity for the enhancement of rural settlements.

Members will be interested in the financial allocations to the seven council clusters of the first £50 million of funding for axis-3 measures, which have now been correctly calculated, based on population and deprivation. The allocations are: £6,211,991 for the north-east; £11,259,048 for the north-west; £12,721,715 for mid Ulster; £9,570,714 for the Craigavon cluster; £6,592,695 for Down; £1,793,712 for the Antrim cluster; and £1,850,124 for the Lisburn cluster.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that the amount of funding that is to be allocated to the north-west is an increased figure on an earlier announcement? I am particularly interested in whether the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) definition of "urban" and "rural" is the same as that understood by the Department for Social Development.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The initial figures were based on a miscalculation, and the Department has taken steps to address that.

For the purposes of the rural development programme, "rural" is defined as all areas that fall outside of the statutory development limit of towns with a population in excess of 4,500 inhabitants. However, the programme

will retain the flexibility to support projects that are located in more urban settings, where the projects will principally benefit rural towns and where a strong case can be made for them.

Some groups have found that they have fallen between two stools in relation to funding, and the Minister for Social Development and I have asked officials to schedule an early meeting so that we can discuss and address that important issue.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for her response. I am sure that the Minister is aware of the good work that has been carried out in many Protestant areas by rural groups. Can she provide an assurance that she intends to maintain, or indeed to enhance, funding to rural groups in Protestant areas?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As the Member knows, a pilot scheme has been running on that. As I said, the priorities that local action groups place in their clusters will decide how funding is allocated. That is a bottom-up approach, and local communities must take ownership to have flexibility in their decision-making process. The pilot schemes that I have mentioned are ongoing.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá a fhios againn gur diúltaíodh don mholadh a bhí ag Comhlucht Forbartha Foirceille don seansuíomh míleata sa cheantar. An dtig liom a fhiafraí den Aire cén straitéis atá aici leis an mholadh sin a choinneáil ar an bhord nuair atá seans níos fearr ann anois go mbronnfar an suíomh sin ar an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin saor in aisce?

Given the Department of Finance and Personnel's rejection of the Forkhill and District Development Association's plans for the vacated army site, and considering the fact that there is a greater likelihood that such sites will be gifted to the Executive, what strategy does the Minister have to ensure that that proposal is kept alive?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD's involvement in the development of that project fits with the overall theme of the 'Rural Strategy 2007-2013', which is to diversify the rural economy, protect the rural environment and sustain rural communities.

In addition, the project meets one of the key aims of the Department's 'Strategic Plan 2006-2011':

"to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas".

Furthermore, it meets with the aims of the Programme for Government, which was agreed by the Executive in January 2008, and in which DARD was charged to:

"Help rural communities improve the physical, economic and social infrastructure of their areas."

Therefore, given that the project is consistent with the Department's plans, I would like to see it come to fruition.

Botulism in Armagh

2. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her assessment is of the recent cases of botulism in cattle in the Armagh area; and what plans she has to increase awareness of the disease in terms of its causes and effects. (AQO 3878/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Botulism is not a notifiable disease; however, during April and May, farmers from County Armagh reported four suspected cases of botulism to private veterinary practitioners.

In 2006, there were 73 suspected cases, and, in 2007, 77 suspected cases were reported. That demonstrates a decline from the peak number of suspected cases — 138 — that were reported in 2003. To date this year, 27 cases have been reported, which suggests that, pro rata, there is no evidence of a rise in the number of suspected cases. Putting that in context, in 2003, the number of suspected cases in the North peaked at 138; in 2006, that number fell to 73; and that level was maintained in 2007.

Advisory leaflets on botulism are available from DARD for all farmers. In addition, posters are on display at local DARD veterinary offices, agricultural offices, auction marts and Ulster Farmers' Union offices, and they alert farmers to the dangers of botulism and advise them about appropriate control measures. Furthermore, advice is available from the DARD website. Consequently, awareness among farmers of the disease, the risk factors involved and the benefit of vaccination as a control tool should now be widespread.

An effective vaccine against botulism in cattle can be obtained through private veterinary practitioners, and that vaccine has been successful in helping to control botulism in cattle here.

Mr Irwin: The farmers in Armagh who lost valuable animals and identified the possible source of the problem to veterinary officials are unhappy — to say the least — that the Department took no action to deal with the problem. Does the Minister's Department have any powers to take action against the people who were responsible for handling chicken manure in a manner that was unsafe for livestock?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said, botulism is not a notifiable disease. However, private veterinary surgeons may submit carcasses to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) for investigation. DARD cannot comment on cases in which the evidence is anecdotal. However, if anyone has firm evidence of fraud, we

would be very interested to hear about it and to act accordingly.

Mr McCallister: Considering the risk to human health from some forms of botulism, will the Minister assure the House that no risk to human health currently exists?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Risk assessments that were conducted on behalf of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food did not identify a significant risk to the public from food that is associated to botulism in cattle. That is mainly because, in the vast majority of cases, the toxins that were isolated from cattle do not affect people. Nevertheless, the advice to affected farms is that milk and meat from animals that show signs of the disease should be withheld from sale for human consumption.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Minister support the use of incinerators to destroy chicken waste?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That question is not in any way connected to the main question, so I choose not to answer it.

Brucellosis: Testing Results

3. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to improve the time taken between the testing for brucellosis and issuing test results. (AQO 3824/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am aware from feedback from the recent farmers' meetings held as part of the brucellosis initiative and from talking to farmers that they have experienced delays in receiving brucellosis test results. The delays occurred because, as a result of improved surveillance, we have increased the volume of brucellosis testing by 15% from the figure for the same period last year. That increased volume has had an impact on turnaround times.

During the first quarter of 2008, the average time that it took to make a result available after having taken a sample rose to 10·7 days from 8·25 days for the same period in 2007. Moreover, there was additional pressure on staff resources and availability as, over that period, AFBI was also processing tests for bluetongue. AFBI has now redeployed staff, and I am pleased to say that there is no longer a backlog of tests for brucellosis.

Mr Burns: Does the Minister agree that the time currently taken by her Department to release results is unacceptable? Will she consider applying a 30-day retention period from the day that the test results are issued?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In the first quarter of 2007, the average time from sampling to delivery at the laboratory was 4.5 days. In the same period in 2008, that figure increased slightly to five days. Again, that was due to the increased volume of testing this year, combined with peak demand by farmers for veterinary service staff to carry out sampling during the housing period. That meant that those who took the samples had less time to return to their offices to process the test results. Resource constraints also adversely affect delivery times.

The Veterinary Service is continuing to monitor performance in those areas to minimise the impact on the programme and the delays experienced by farmers. I assure the Member that I take this issue very seriously and that I wish to give farmers the maximum amount of time following receipt of their test results before they move or sell cattle. I am very aware of that issue, which has been raised in the successful meetings that we held on the brucellosis initiative earlier this year.

Mr Bresland: Many farmers are concerned about the length of time that it takes DARD officials to remove animals that have tested positive for brucellosis. What assurance can the Minister give that her Department will speed up the removal of the infected cattle?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am very conscious of that matter. A leaflet was issued last week to outline what a farmer should do if there is a suspected case of brucellosis. We want those carcasses to be picked up as soon as possible. In the interim, farmers could double-bag them in ordinary bin bags — they should be secure until officials come to pick them up. I agree that there is a risk associated with carcasses or foetuses being on farms, and I want that situation to be improved.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What is the current incidence of brucellosis in the North?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The herd incidence where brucellosis is confirmed by bacteriological culture has remained level since October 2006 at 0.26%. More sensitive testing is identifying more potentially infected animals, hence the rise in the overall annual herd incidence from 0.6% in 2006 to the current level of 1.01%.

Biomass

4. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will use the development of energy generation from biomass energy to create jobs. (AQO 3875/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The development of biomass technology

has the potential to create jobs, but that technology is in its early stages. We are encouraging its growth and promoting the opportunities for renewable energy in the agrifood and forestry sectors and wider rural community through technology transfer and demonstration programmes at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and AFBI, and via measures in the rural development programme. In particular, employment creation is central to measure 3.2 of that programme: 'Business creation and development'.

During a recent visit to a major timber processor in the west, I saw at first hand a highly successful example of the innovative use of wood fibre for the generation of electricity and heat, and the production of wood fuel pellets for domestic and industrial use. I was particularly pleased that my Department, though the Forest Service, was involved with a commercial customer and other Government agencies in creating the circumstances that allowed investment in that renewable-energy technology.

That is underpinning the viability of the business and associated jobs, which are particularly significant in that rural area, as well as a higher-value market for timber from the Department's forests.

3.15 pm

My Department is also working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) through the bioenergy interdepartmental working group in order to assess the potential market opportunities for energy from biomass and to address cost-cutting issues such as job creation relevant to the agricultural sector.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her positive response. A recent report from Action Renewables for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to which I believe the Minister referred, highlighted the potential for job creation arising from the use of renewable energy sources. Does the Minister agree that greater co-operation is needed between her Department and DETI in order to maximise the economic and environmental benefits of energy from biomass?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Good levels of co-operation already exist, and I am not opposed to increasing that co-operation in order to benefit the rural community.

Mr T Clarke: Does the Minister accept, after the recent Assembly debate about the Rose Energy plant that is proposed for Glenavy, and the failure of her Department to come up with something suitable to help the farming industry, especially the poultry industry, that if that proposed application does not proceed, then thousands of jobs could be lost?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The question is about the development of energy generation from biomass energy in order to

create jobs. The Member's question is about incineration, which is not relevant to the question, and is, therefore, not appropriate.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister detail what assistance her Department is giving to landowners who want to use their land to grow willow trees, rape, maize and other sustainable biofuels?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department is involved in a number of issues, especially the creation of short-rotation coppice willow, which fits that category. I do not have the detail to hand, but I will write to the Member with details of what the Department is doing. The Department is working closely with CAFRE and AFBI in order to develop the technology and products that would fit into that source of renewable energy.

Recreational Use of Forests

5. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to increase the recreational use of forests; and to outline the rationale for the charging scheme for some activities.

(AQO 3915/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Our forests offer great potential for the development of recreation and public access opportunities for local people and visitors. 'Northern Ireland Forestry — A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth', which was published in March 2006, provides the policy framework for Forest Service to make forests more widely available and to work with partners in order to achieve that.

In line with the strategy, Forest Service is developing proposals to identify partnership opportunities with private- and public-sector organisations in order to improve the quality and range of recreation provision in forests. That is expected to result in improved caravanning and camping facilities, and the creation of recreation opportunities such as tree-top adventure activities, making forests more attractive as recreational venues for new and existing visitors, and contributing to the tourism agenda in the North.

I want to see the social use of forests continue and develop. In that context, the Department will be publishing a social use and recreation strategy later this year, which will set out a framework for social use and recreation in the Department's forests.

The rationale for charging for services falls into several distinct categories. For recreation provision similar to that which is available from the private sector, the Department's aim is to set fees that achieve full cost recovery. For forestry recreation provision of a non-commercial nature, such as walking trails,

charges are made at sites where it is cost-effective to do so. In cases where Forest Service facilitates specific events that are not directly associated with forestry provision, the aim will be to recover costs where the activities are not commercial. For those activities that generate a commercial return, the aim is to secure a share of that return that reflects the contribution made to the business by the forest asset.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that answer. She dwelt on the issue of social and recreational use. Will the Minister elaborate on whether she sees potential as regards the tourism agenda for the North?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I certainly do see such a potential, and I raised that issue at the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting that I attended with Minister Dodds last week. Our forests offer great potential to support the tourism agenda, and that is another area of opportunity that I want to explore. It is especially relevant to those forests that are included in the signature project areas, which have been identified by the Tourist Board. Forest Service officials have been involved in discussions about the possible contribution that forests can make to tourism; how that can best be delivered, and occasions in which forming partnerships with other interested providers can better realise the opportunities. I will ensure that such work continues.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her optimistic assessment of the possibilities. Was she talking merely about the possibilities in the forests that have full-time staff employed by her Department, and that we all identify as having tourism opportunities, or could more be done to add to the informal recreational opportunities in a range of forests across the whole of Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Some forests are outside my Department's control, so I will not speak about them. However, any forests that come under my Department's remit will be open for discussion. Some high-profile forests would be a natural home for recreational activities, but I want to examine the opportunities for other forests in other parts of the North so that we can also maximise the tourism potential for those areas.

Mr I McCrea: I am not sure whether the Minister is aware of the ever-increasing interest in mountain biking in Northern Ireland. Has the Minister had any discussions with the mountain-biking fraternity about whether our forests can be made suitable for that activity, because that would have potential tourism benefits? Has she had any discussions with her counterpart in Scotland?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have not had any such discussions with my counterpart in Scotland. However, I have had several discussions about the recreational opportunities

for forests with the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN), which has a remit for promoting mountain biking, and I would like to develop further the potential for that activity.

We may need to seek partners, and we have spoken to district councils and others to find ways of maximising the opportunities without necessarily incurring all the cost under the DARD budget. Therefore, I am happy to engage in those types of partnerships and to talk to relevant parties about the issue.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Farming Industry: Attracting Young People

7. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what strategies are in place to attract young people as agricultural workers and new entrants to the farming industry. (AQO 3844/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Young people are the future of the agriculture industry, and I fully appreciate the importance of attracting young people who have the necessary skills and competences to meet the needs of agricultural businesses. My Department is doing its utmost to encourage new entrants to the industry and to supply those young people with all the skills that they need to move forward. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise offers 21 full- and part-time courses in agriculture and related land-based services, ranging from NVQ level 2 to honours degree level, to equip young people with the vital knowledge and skills for a successful career in farming.

College staff work closely with post-primary schools to promote careers in the industry and the CAFRE programmes. Each year, schools receive a college prospectus, associated promotional material, school visits and briefings for careers teachers. College staff attend careers conventions and major industry events and host open days for prospective students, parents and careers advisers. Promotional articles and advertisements are published regularly in the farming press.

I also commend the work of CAFRE, Lantra — the industry's sector skills council — and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, in preparing a land-based occupational studies option for the 14- to 16-year-old age group in schools under the new entitlement framework and raising the profile of agriculture, food and rural environment among young people.

As well as further and higher education programmes, CAFRE will deliver agricultural training under the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) new Training for Success initiative. I wish to ensure that our highly innovative and successful multi-skilling programme, which helps young people to combine

off-farm employment with part-time farming, can continue under the new framework. College staff are working with DEL and the regional colleges to secure that outcome.

Furthermore, my Department offers financial assistance to new entrants to the farming industry. The new entrants' scheme is still open to young farmers under 40 who possess adequate competence and who are setting up as head of a holding for the first time. The scheme provides an interest-rate subsidy on loans for eligible projects that add value and make a positive impact on the farming industry and the wider rural economy.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for the brevity of her answer. Despite what the Minister said, does she not agree that the new entrants' scheme has not experienced the expected uptake? Will she ensure that greater flexibility will be built into future schemes?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We have consulted widely on the new entrants' scheme, and I am particularly interested to hear the Young Farmers' Clubs' opinion on the scheme and possible improvements. We have extended the deadline for the new entrants' scheme to encourage as many young people as possible to take up that money. Furthermore, there will be another publicity drive this week. We want to attract more new entrants, and I recognise that, last year, people were busy with the farm nutrient management scheme, which might have discouraged uptake in the interim period. However, by and large, the Department will do its utmost to attract new entrants into the industry and to ensure its long-term viability.

Dr W McCrea: Given the current financial realities in the farming industry, will the Minister acknowledge the need to adopt a wider twin-track approach to that issue? The scheme is necessary to permit senior members of farming families to retire and to attract vital new blood to the industry. Has such a detailed strategy been devised and presented to the industry?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have discussed that issue with officials; in fact, in my first day in the job, that issue arose during discussions with senior members of the Department. After in-depth examination, farming organisations have told us clearly that, if the budget is limited, they would prefer an investment in young people rather than helping farmers to retire. It was felt that the single farm payment would help to cushion retiring farmers. The Member is, perhaps, thinking of the scheme in the Twenty-six Counties, whereby much more money was available, which enabled funding for both groups. Unfortunately, we do not have access to that level of funding.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Has

she assessed the payment rates outlined in the minimum wage regulations for agricultural workers?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That is a timely question because, in October 2007, the Assembly debated the Agricultural Wages Board and the protection of the minimum wage structure for agricultural workers. We accept that farmers and farm workers must receive a level of pay that encourages them to join the industry, or it will be difficult to attract and retain workers in the sector. Therefore, it is a timely issue, and I will keep my eye on the ball in that regard.

Local Action Groups

8. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on having local action groups as part of the rural development programme 2007-2013. (AQO 3917/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Seven council clusters are in place, which have been conducting the animation of the rural areas and have either held — or are holding — a competitive call for the formation of a local action group. To date, four local action groups have been formed: Ards — covering Ards, Down, North Down and Banbridge council areas; Antrim — covering Antrim, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey council areas; Cookstown — covering Cookstown, Fermanagh, Magherafelt and Dungannon and South Tyrone council areas; Omagh — covering Omagh, Strabane, Limavady and Derry council areas.

Their documentation has been passed to my Department for ratification, ensuring that equality is addressed and that they represent all groups, as defined by section 75.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for her answer. What progress has been made under existing arrangements?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: To date, all seven clusters have agreed, through full council, to work together to deliver the programme. As I said, four of the clusters have completed the animation process and have, through a competitive process, formed local action groups. One cluster is in the final stages of selecting a local action group, and two clusters are completing their animation phase and opening a call for a local action group. Consultants have been appointed in all areas to start work on the rural development strategies, and my Department issued an invitation to all clusters to submit strategies by 31 July 2008.

Mr P J Bradley: Will the Minister explain why all councils were not notified of the miscalculations that were made in relation to the first £50 million of the

rural development fund? I know that the Minister notified all lead councils; however, would it not have been prudent to notify all councils of those serious mistakes?

3.30 pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said, the figures were based on an erroneous application by officials of the methodology for calculating deprivation and were, therefore, incorrect. That mistake was brought to my attention by members of my party. I have instructed my officials to recalculate the figures, and I have given information about that today. My Department is working with the lead council concerned and is giving it space to do so, because there is no point in duplicating that work. The figures were announced today, and I expect the lead council to talk to the other councils in its cluster.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Subregional Creative Clusters

1. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support is available to subregional creative clusters in the community and voluntary sector. (AQO 3892/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poole): In conjunction with other Departments and Invest Northern Ireland, my Department is developing a strategy to support and develop the creative-industries sector. I have secured £5 million over the next three years to deliver a creative-industries seed fund, which will provide support for creative businesses and sectoral initiatives. The detailed criteria for the fund are being determined, and I expect that the fund will be open to applications by autumn 2008.

Creative practitioners and businesses often develop in proximity to each other, and clustering fosters connections that are of mutual benefit. Examples of creative clusters involving the community and voluntary sectors can be found in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast and the Nerve Centre in Londonderry. There are several sources of support for those initiatives, including the Arts Council, Northern Ireland Screen and local councils. Several councils have made significant investments in their arts infrastructures, which provide hubs for creative activities across Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Loan: Does the Minister agree that there is robust international evidence that strong economic performance occurs in regions with a thriving arts sector and that the arts are a driver of strong economic performance, rather than merely a result of it? Given that our community-based arts organisations are currently delivering arts on a shoestring, will he do

everything that he can to increase support for the community-based arts sector?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not sure where the Member has been, but there was a significant debate on the arts during the Budget deliberations. Prior to that debate, people involved in the arts had been complaining strongly that their budgets were not good enough and that provision for the arts in the draft Budget was not good enough. My Department made substantial gains during the final Budget process. I have already told the House that £5 million will go into a creative industries seed fund over the next five years. I am glad that the Member is now aware of what happened some months ago.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Derry styles itself, like Galway, as a place where creative culture flourishes. I am sure that the Minister is aware of the work that is going on in the Magee campus of the university there and in the Nerve Centre. What support or interest is his Department demonstrating in supporting creative clusters, especially in the Foyle and wider north-west areas?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Again, I am fascinated that someone from the Foyle constituency would not know or understand what has been going on in the creative industries there. The Nerve Centre is supported by my Department. The north-west challenge fund has distributed £4 million in that constituency. Therefore, it is clear that a great deal has been going on in the arts in that city, and I am glad to be able to bring the Member up to speed on that this afternoon.

Mr McNarry: Time beat me, Mr Speaker, in welcoming the new First Minister personally. I do not know what the future holds for Minister Poots. However, I take this opportunity to thank him for his courtesy to me, which I hope continues.

Will the Minister tell the House what level of official departmental support he has had in developing the creative clusters, particularly in the context of business opportunities?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for his remarks. Mr Poots's future will be very good, because it is in the Lord's hands, and I am very happy to be in His hands.

My Department aspires to develop creative clusters. In Northern Ireland, 34,600 people are engaged in creative activities, which results in employment of around 4.7% of the population. Although it has often been viewed as a Cinderella sector providing few employment opportunities, it is one of the more significant employment sectors in Northern Ireland. My Department will work with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that people who have the skills to bring schemes forward can work with those who have the business acumen to develop

them further. That is already happening in such places as The Nerve Centre and Belfast's Cathedral Quarter.

Increasing Participation in Sports

2. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he intends to increase participation in sports by people in groups with current low rates of participation. (AQO 3837/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The draft 'The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation 2007-2017', which I published for consultation last October, proposes several targets and actions to increase participation in sports by people in groups with current low rates of participation. The Budget 2008-2011 provides a total of £145 million for sport, and it is my intention, in conjunction with Sport Northern Ireland, to deploy part of that resource to help increase participation in sport among people in groups with low participation rates, as identified in the draft strategy for sport and physical recreation.

Mr McFarland: The draft strategy, which was published last October, stated that women, people on low incomes and people with disabilities were seriously under-represented in sport. Will the Minister tell the House exactly what he has done in the last nine months to improve the levels of participation of people in those categories?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We are developing a strategy for sport, and we have set increased participation targets of 6% for women, people with physical and learning disabilities and people from deprived backgrounds to engage in sport and physical recreation. Achieving those targets will involve identifying greater numbers of coaches and developing more community-based places for sport delivery.

We lost significant lottery funding, but we managed to replace it. Thirteen programmes that applied for the lottery funding were told that they could not proceed. Not only will those programmes now go ahead, but we will be able to progress many others. Much work has been done, and I thank the Member for his interest in the issue.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Has the Minister had any discussions with his counterpart in the Scottish Executive, which made the decision to invest money from its health budget in sport, because of its health benefits?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Yes. I travelled to Scotland and had discussions with the Scottish Minister. He subsequently visited Northern Ireland and he was very impressed by our multi-use games areas, where schools and councils have joined together to provide opportunities for sport. There can

be absolutely no doubt that sport is one key area through which we can challenge poor health resulting from obesity and weight problems and can help to prevent conditions such as diabetes and colon cancer. We hope to encourage people to get people involved in physical recreation.

Special Olympics Ireland

3. **Mrs O'Neill** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department will assist Special Olympics Ireland to continue the growth of the Special Olympics programme. (AQO 3886/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department and the whole Northern Ireland Government have been supportive of Special Olympics Ireland. In 2003, Special Olympics Ireland received £1,184,000 towards the cost of hosting the world games. In 2006, my Department contributed £500,000 towards the cost of hosting the games here in Belfast and surrounding areas.

Special Olympics Ireland has prepared an operational plan for 2008-2011 for Special Olympics Ulster, which it will present to several Ministers soon. After that presentation, it would be appropriate for the Ministers involved to discuss and agree the way forward.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister place the item on the agenda of his next North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting with the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, Mr Martin Cullen TD? Has the NSMC ever received a presentation from Special Olympics Ireland about the importance of its work?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: No.

Lord Browne: The Minister will be aware of an increase of 3,000 in the number of athletes participating in Special Olympics activities since 2003. Indeed, athlete numbers have doubled since 2000. How many of those 3,000 new athletes are from Northern Ireland? What is the percentage increase in participation in Northern Ireland since 2000?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: A considerable number of people from Northern Ireland — and, particularly, from Special Olympics Ulster — are participating in those activities. I was delighted to host an evening, earlier this year, for young people who participated in the Special Olympics in Shanghai, many of whom returned home with large numbers of medals. Those Special Olympics athletes are showing the way forward. I will provide Lord Browne with the figures for Northern Ireland participants in writing.

Mr Cree: How has the Special Olympics movement developed in Northern Ireland since Belfast hosted the games two years ago?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Special Olympics groups have developed well. Our young athletes' considerable success in last year's games is a demonstration of that. An operational plan was due to be presented to the junior Ministers and Ministers McGimpsey, Ruane, Ritchie and myself on 5 June. Unfortunately, that meeting was postponed because of scheduling difficulties, but it will take place in the near future.

Community Festival Funding

4. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what take-up there has been by local councils of funding for community festivals. (AQO 3895/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To date, 22 councils have responded to accept the offer of community festivals funding. Three councils — Craigavon, Derry City and Ballymoney — have indicated that they intend to accept the offer. Belfast City Council has yet to formally respond to the offer.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I welcome the fact that some councils have either already taken up the provision or are about to do so. Groups in the unionist community, particularly the Loyal Orders, have routinely lost out in the allocation of funding. Will the Minister's initiative reverse the scandalous inequality in funding allocation?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I hope that it will. Last year, organisations that could be identified as having a unionist background received less than 10% of a fund of over £400,000. Councils should do a considerably better job in ensuring the more equitable delivery of funding.

I am disappointed that Belfast City Council has not yet formally responded to the offer of funding. Indeed, it is shocking that some of those people holding up the process are Ulster Unionist councillors. On the one hand, organisers of Orangefest in Belfast are writing to me, asking me to move things forward. On the other hand, people such as Councillor Bob Stoker are holding the entire process back.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that funding for festivals in Belfast has been greatly reduced? Will he detail what funding has been given to Féile an Phobail this year?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Councils are supposed to match fund what is offered by the Department. If Belfast City Council match fund what the Department has offered, it would have the same amount of money to distribute to the festival organisers as it did last year. The lady from Sandy Row who complained bitterly about not receiving funding

was right. The funding necessary for that festival could be in place if Belfast City Council moves forward.

Councils such as Ballymena, Newtownabbey, Ards and Strabane, which previously received nothing, will receive funding under the scheme.

Councils across the Province are reporting back to me that that the funding offer has proven successful, and that they have had 20 or 25 applications for festival funding, which they can approve. Councils are saying that that is a good-news story for their constituencies and for Northern Ireland — I encourage Belfast City Council to join in that good-news story.

3.45 pm

Mr P J Bradley: The Ulster Fleadh Cheoil will be held in Castlewellan this year between 21 July and 27 July. Does the Minister agree that ministerial attendance at that major cultural event is very important?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I did not hear the name of the event about which Mr Bradley asked.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member clarify his supplementary question?

Mr P J Bradley: I asked about the Ulster Fleadh Cheoil.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My ratio of attendance at events to requests that I have received is very high. Whenever that request comes in, it will be considered.

Active Places NI Website

5. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department is promoting the Active Places NI (www.activeplacesni.net) website.
(AQO 3833/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Active Places Northern Ireland website was developed by Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) with the co-operation of Northern Ireland's district councils, sports' governing bodies, the education sector and other stakeholders. The website is being promoted through the SNI website, which is due to be relaunched in July. Active Places NI is also promoted on all SNI-designed publications, such as SportsZone and Sportsline, and the web address is prevalent on SNI business cards.

Mr Armstrong: Active Places promotes 5,500 sporting opportunities across Northern Ireland. Will the Minister indicate whether any geographical areas are significantly under-represented in that spread of opportunities?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: One would assume that if 5,500 places are promoted across Northern Ireland, most of Northern Ireland is covered.

Mr Shannon: I have a very quick question: are there any plans to review or indeed improve the Active Places NI website in any way?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The website is not particularly old. Given the nature of the rate of IT development, however, such matters are under regular review.

Mr Brolly: Is financial assistance provided to individuals who, in order to train and prepare in their pursuit of excellence, must travel from rural areas to greater Belfast or Lisburn to access sporting facilities?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: That is a very interesting question, which bears absolutely no relevance to websites.

Upgrading Football Stadia

6. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he intends to take to upgrade football stadia before the 2012 Olympics.

(AQO 3842/08)

8. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what the total cost is to the public purse of applications or proposals from Irish League football clubs to renovate or refurbish their stadia.

(AQO 3820/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: With your permission Mr Speaker, I shall take questions 6 and 8 together. Responsibility for upgrading football stadia before the 2012 Olympics rests with those venues' owners. However, Sport Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport — including the distribution of funding — has been running a number of Exchequer and lottery programmes to which the owners of football stadia are eligible to apply. Those include the lottery's Building Sport programme and two Exchequer programmes — the stadia-safety programme and the soccer strategy.

The total anticipated cost to the public purse for applications or proposals that have been received to date from Irish League football clubs to renovate or refurbish their stadia under SNI's stadia-safety programme is £5.9 million. The Irish Football Association (IFA) is planning to launch a capital programme to assist Irish League clubs to meet new UEFA licensing requirements, and new IFA Premier League and Premier Intermediate League facility requirements. The SNI has agreed to provide up to £3.56 million to assist the IFA in implementing that programme.

Furthermore, I have been reviewing sports facilities' spend patterns more generally in light of the sports-places targets proposed in the Northern Ireland strategy for sport and physical recreation, which I published for consultation last October.

As a result of that, I plan to initiate a sports-places modernisation programme, using the available capital budget for sport that was announced in the recent Budget. That programme will be open to all sports, including football, and will allow capital moneys to be used more flexibly in facilitating the delivery of the places target that is emerging from the Northern Ireland sport strategy.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the Minister's response.

Can the Minister outline what discussions, if any, he has had with the Irish Football Association or any other body regarding the provision of a new or upgraded Northern Ireland national soccer stadium at a location other than the Maze?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have had a number of discussions with the IFA, which has put its cards on the table: it wishes to proceed with the project at the Maze. It has not indicated that it wishes to proceed with any other project.

I have had separate discussions with Linfield Football Club about the potential to upgrade Windsor Park. That could only happen if rugby was involved in some way to generate the additional income that would be required for the investment. Both football and rugby need more income, and the way in which they can generate that is to have more people attend their matches. The longer that this debate goes on, and the longer the procrastination goes on, the longer those two particular sports will suffer. We politicians must bear some of the responsibility for that.

Mr Campbell: Can the Minister say whether the announcement that he is making about the additional moneys that sports, including football, can access might allow Coleraine Football Club, at the Showgrounds, for example, or Institute Football Club, at the Riverside in Londonderry, to avail themselves of funds to develop their respective grounds?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The modernisation fund that has been referred to will allow a variety of sports to apply for funding for stadiums. Stadiums in Northern Ireland are in a fairly decrepit state, and I have had a number of meetings with, for example, Coleraine Borough Council in relation to the Coleraine Showgrounds. The council is looking at potential opportunities, including the possibility of relocation. It is very important that there be a quality facility there, given that it is the home of the Milk Cup — many teams participate in that particular competition, and it is a high-profile event for Northern Ireland. The answer is that yes, sports organisations in general can apply to this fund, and Coleraine and Drumahoe are not excluded from applying.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the delay in reaching a decision about the multi-sports stadium at the Long Kesh site effectively

mean that we have missed the boat on hosting important football matches in association with the 2012 Olympics? Does the Minister plead guilty to the charge of failing to be decisive when decisiveness and leadership were called for within his Department? Furthermore, does he fancy Tyrone's chances against Down next Saturday?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It was not a decision to be made exclusively by my Department. It is a cross-cutting issue, and I do not want to be like other Ministers who thought that they would be decisive, but only ended up being divisive and not being able to deliver. We could still get the 2012 Olympics, should we move ahead in the not-too-distant future.

Mr A Maginness: In fairness to the Minister, I think that he was decisive in his own mind — other people prevented him from implementing the strategy in relation to the Maze stadium.

In the light of the serious delay in decision-making, is there a real chance of facilities being ready so that we can benefit in some way from the London Olympic Games?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There would be a one-year planning process and a two-year building process, so it is really down to the decision-making process. It takes three years, and the closer you get to that, the less of a chance there is of it happening. It is as simple as that.

Co-operation Between Sport NI and the Irish Sports Council

7. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the extent and character of co-operation between Sport NI and the Irish Sports Council. (AQO 3882/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport NI and the Irish Sports Council co-operate on an ongoing basis to develop all-island sport and on issues of common concern.

That co-operation takes various forms, including regular meetings of an all-Ireland planning committee, made up of representatives of both organisations; joint meetings with the 37 all-Ireland sports governing bodies to optimise development in those sports; a jointly organised biannual all-Ireland sports conference; and the formulation of joint policy such as a code of ethics and good practice for children's sport.

Mr W Clarke: I thank the Minister for his succinct response. Has he held meetings with his counterpart in the South in relation to making a bid to host a major UEFA European football championship? Furthermore, does the Minister agree that such a bid could be made by a Celtic alliance that could include the North of Ireland, the South of Ireland, Wales and Scotland?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Previously, a bid was made for the 2011 UEFA Under-21 European Championship. That bid has now been withdrawn. The IFA worked with the FAI on that bid, but the lack of a suitable stadium in Northern Ireland prevented that from proceeding.

Mr Craig: Will the Minister tell us why Northern Ireland schools are participating in every event of the UK School Games with the sole exception of swimming? Is it true that the participation of swimming clubs in Northern Ireland has been blocked because they are affiliated to an all-Ireland institution?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for his question. The UK School Games is hugely beneficial, and many young people from Northern Ireland participate in them. I confirm that many young people participate in Northern Ireland-only teams, but that swimmers are prevented from participating. My understanding is that the Irish Schools' Swimming Association, which organised the swimming teams, has pulled out of the games, and Northern Ireland schools are not allowed to enter children in the games. That is hugely unfortunate and it is a matter that must be resolved. The UK School Games should not discriminate against one region of the United Kingdom by preventing children from this part of the UK from participating in that great event.

Foras na Gaeilge

9. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if Foras na Gaeilge will fund capital development projects in the future. (AQO 3884/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is no provision for Foras na Gaeilge to operate a capital-funding programme in Northern Ireland. No provision has been made in the comprehensive spending review for it to fund capital-development projects for the next three years.

Mr A Maskey: A Cheann Comhairle, I thank the Minister for his response. In some of his earlier responses, the Minister has been rather abrupt and his responses have been totally inappropriate. I am not sure whether to thank the Minister or to wish him slán go fóill, because I know that he is having a difficult day.

My supplementary question is to ask the Minister whether there is any prospect of capital-grant support for organisations such as An Droichead on the Ormeau Road in south Belfast. An Droichead is currently the only project of that nature in that part of the city. That project is seeking to expand and develop in order to introduce training and conference facilities, which may be used by the wider community and bring additional tourism into an area of disadvantage.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Neither Foras na Gaeilge nor the Ulster-Scots Agency, both agencies of the North/South Language Body, fund capital-development projects. No provision is made for that in the comprehensive spending review, nor is there a mechanism to deliver it.

Mr Storey: What assessment has the Minister made of those proposals, and how likely are they to be implemented? What criteria will be used to determine the viability of such projects?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Prior to devolution, a bid was made through the integrated development fund for a Gaeltacht quarter in west Belfast. My Department is currently considering that matter. We have asked for an economic appraisal of the proposal. To be implemented, it will have to meet the recognised standards of economic appraisal. There is no question that such a project would be implemented if it does not meet green-book standards. We have applied that stop check.

4.00 pm

Events Strategy

10. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline progress in the formulation of the events strategy. (AQO 3859/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Following the discovery of serious financial and corporate governance weaknesses at the Northern Ireland Events Company, responsibility for its functions has passed directly to my Department and has been administered by the DCAL events unit since April 2008. Therefore, we are still open for business, but under new management.

Officials from DCAL, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and DETI are working on a strategy to transfer the events function to NITB which will develop and deliver a 10-year events strategy. That strategy is subject to the successful completion of a due diligence exercise on the events function and to agreement between the Ministers from DETI and DCAL.

In the interim, calls for applications to the events growth fund and the major events fund were advertised on 28 March 2008, with a closing date of 2 May 2008. A total of 26 applications were received to both funds and these are being processed.

Mr McElduff: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, a Cheann Comhairle. Further to Alex Maskey's comments about the Minister's being very abrupt in the last session, his answers to supplementary questions posed by Members on this side of the House failed to meet even the basic standard of courtesy and detail. I ask the Speaker to examine the Hansard report

and rule appropriately on whether the Minister exhibited bad manners during the past half hour.

Mr Speaker: As I have said to all sides of the House, on many occasions, it is not up to the Speaker to decide how a Minister answers a question or a supplementary question. The Minister gave long answers to some Members.

Mr McElduff: Thanks, Edwin. Keep in touch.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Supply Resolution for 2008-09 Main Estimates and Supply Resolution for 2006-07 Excess Vote

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,184,270,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 and that resources, not exceeding £8,474,916,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 as summarized for each Department or other public body in Columns 3(b) and 3(a) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2008-2009 that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. — [*The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster).*]

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,224,593.19 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – Health and Personal Social Services Superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2007 as summarized in Part II of the Statement of Excess document that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. — [*The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster).*]

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Leas — gabh mo leithscéal — a Cheann Comhairle.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on some issues relating to education and to the children and young people's fund.

The extended schools programme, mentioned by other Members today, was directed to the areas of greatest need. It was, to all intents and purposes, a form of early intervention, aimed at counteracting the effects of social disadvantage. Similar aims lie behind the community- and voluntary-run school-age childcare schemes, many of which are running out of funds. In fact, some may have done so by the end of this month. They have provided an excellent service and have worked in areas of great social disadvantage.

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

The philosophy of early intervention that lay behind extended schools was correct. However, it can be effective only if it is applied and resourced consistently. On-off, or reduced, resourcing amounts to nothing more than short-termism, which can have only limited, short-term benefits.

Although the aims were laudable, they were not supported by strong, underpinning policy. In some cases, schools received funding and, after initiating their own schemes, received the guidelines three to six months later. Furthermore, links between the schools and the local community were, in many cases, not explored, resulting in the displacement of local services provided by the voluntary and community sectors.

The reduction in the extended schools budget reduces drastically the services that schools can offer. That, coupled with the effect of displacement of community and voluntary school-age childcare services, leaves a huge gap in provision that will be difficult to fill without an increase in resources.

Guaranteed, core funding is needed in the longer term. That will allow the advantages of intervention to continue into the future and will ensure that the maximum benefit is received.

If the policy arguments of this issue are strong, 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 — a cross-cutting fund to deliver on programmes, such as childcare, with obvious connections to education, employment, the economy and social care.

Executive colleagues told us that children's programmes would not suffer; they told us that we were playing politics. However, the extended schools programme and the school-age childcare programmes are in danger of going to the wall. The two main parties — the DUP and Sinn Féin — are playing the politics of mutual self-interest at the expense of the economy, children and working parents.

It is worth recalling their commitments when the re-establishment of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people was being debated. Junior Minister Paisley claimed:

"We are confident that the available funding should mean that no child or youth programme will be reduced or cut." — [*Official Report*, Vol 27, p 173, col 1].

Minister Kelly agreed with his colleague and said that:

"the Budget was good for children". [*Official Report*, Vol 27, p175, col 1].

That is not the current situation.

At least the Minister of Education is consistent. She failed to seek funding for the reform of education in the Budget, and she also failed to seek funding for school-age childcare. Now we are to hold our breaths to see what in-year monitoring can do to save her blushes. I support her bid for £5 million in resource funding for extended schools, but I do not hold out much hope for success — a feeling shared by her departmental officials. Last Friday, they informed the

Committee for Education that they are far from confident that the bid will succeed.

Although I welcome the uplift of £12 million towards providing more administrative time for teaching principals, that underlines, in many ways, the huge anomalies that exist in education funding in Northern Ireland. Primary school principals — who will meet here on Wednesday — express their exasperation daily at a system that makes it difficult to attain the smaller class sizes that are required to achieve the outcomes that we want to see from primary education.

Principals and primary-school teachers are, rightly, seeking parity with their secondary colleagues in preparation, planning and assessment times; more and better learning resources; more support staff; and more management support. Those are serious issues to which Members must give serious consideration and take action to tackle.

As I said earlier, the reforms envisaged by the Minister of Education have not been costed. The Minister believes that reform can be achieved through tweaking, in some way, the present system. However, if reforms have not been costed, how does the Minister know what resources will or will not be required? We may well find ourselves embarking on a programme of reform without the necessary resources to implement it. Where will we be if that is the case?

The SDLP supports extended schools, but not all schools are taking up the option — even if they are properly funded. It is not a panacea. School-age childcare schemes also provide a vital service. They are targeted at areas of social deprivation, and they aim to help to get parents off benefits and into work. The Executive said that the economy was their priority, and they have a golden opportunity now, at a modest cost, to get people back into the workforce. Even if Ministers ignore the social argument, they should appreciate the financial case — the cost of a childcare place is much lower than the cost of benefits for parents.

There are important questions to be asked. Why has the Minister of Education not made a bid for the social-economy school-age childcare schemes, which will run out of funding at the end of this month? There seems to be an ongoing argument among several Departments — a game of pass the parcel — which is not good enough on this serious issue.

Why do Ministers not appreciate that the cost of a childcare place is lower than that of benefits? Can they not do the sums? Does the Minister accept that a cross-cutting fund for cross-cutting issues of such central importance is one of the best ways to provide services on a stable and coherent basis?

Mr Durkan: We were told by other parties that cross-cutting funds of themselves did not work. We were also assured that the funding for children and young

people was being ring-fenced into three Departments — Culture, Arts and Leisure, Health, and Education — only to find that Education could not sustain the very programmes that were funded.

Does the Member agree that cross-cutting funding is the only way to stop what he called the “pass the parcel” exercise, in which people are referred from one Department to another, each of which sympathises and encourages, but then refuses funding?

Mr D Bradley: I totally agree with the Member and thank him for the points that he made.

The Executive are seen to lack strategy and leadership. They talk economy but do not deliver, even when opportunities are there for the taking. In their self-interested collaboration and the phoney war that was played out last week, they let vital issues go to the wall. That is totally unacceptable.

We all promised that devolution would improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland. However, what I have outlined are vital areas that have not been improved. Not only are they not being improved, but they are being “dis-improved”.

We also see certain Ministers reflect their own prejudices in the way in which funding is allocated within some Departments. We have seen an example of that in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, with the underfunding of the Irish language. An examination of the percentage increase given to Ulster Scots —

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

Mr D Bradley: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I allowed an intervention; I am allowed an extra minute.

Mr Deputy Speaker: On a ten-minute speech, no extra time is allowed for an intervention.

Mr D Bradley: I apologise. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Hamilton: More money for the health budget there — I think that there is a bit of a crisis somewhere in the Chamber. *[Laughter.]*

Maybe you should check the acoustics, Mr Deputy Speaker. There seems to be a problem with the sound.

The debate is a necessary part of the seemingly interminable and ever-ongoing budgetary process in this House. Budgets, Finance Bills, even Supply resolution debates are characterised by calls for more money for this or that. Members have not disappointed. From all sides of the House, they have called for additional sums of money for various projects that are dear to their hearts.

Another common occurrence — and today’s debate has been no different — is to blame the poor Finance Minister, or the Department of Finance generally, for a lack of funding here or a lack of funding there. Minister

Foster must be glad that she is only temporarily filling the Finance Minister’s shoes, and will not be subjected to such criticism in the longer term.

An example of such behaviour comes from a perhaps not unexpected, but, nevertheless, unfortunate, quarter — a Minister. During a debate in this House on 20 May on funding for extended schools, Minister Ruane said some things unbecoming of a Minister or any Member of this House. I have a range of quotes, but I will start with this one:

“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.” — *[Official Report, Vol 30, p378, col 2].*

That is the sort of excuse or response that might be expected from others, but certainly not from a Minister who signed off on the Budget, both in the Executive and in the Assembly.

It is patent nonsense and, in many respects, does not stand up to scrutiny. The Minister has acknowledged that the funding gap for the extended schools programme is around £4 million — 0.2% of the funds available to her out of a budget of almost £1.8 billion.

4.15 pm

During the budgetary process, of which today’s debate is an element, the Department of Education received the fourth-highest budget uplift of all Departments over the period 2008-2011, with an additional spending power of over £400 million, which will be available by the end of the Budget period. If, considering the Minister’s comments, those facts were not damning enough, Members should remember that her Department was unable to spend almost £100 million in funds that were available to it last year, making it one of the worst-performing Departments in the Northern Ireland Executive.

All Departments have difficult choices to make, which sometimes involve scaling back some services in order to fund improvements elsewhere. Sadly, instead of Minister Ruane defending her decision, she has opted for the easy choice of blaming the Department of Finance and Personnel. Continuing on the same theme, during the aforementioned debate, the Minister of Education stated:

“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.” — *[Official Report, Vol 30, p378, col 2].*

In that debate, she also said:

“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.” — [*Official Report, Vol 30, , p380, col 1*].

The accusation that the Minister of Finance and Personnel ignored the issue of education is not supported by even the most elementary scrutiny of the facts.

In the time between the draft Budget being announced on 5 October 2007 and the Final Stage of the Budget Bill on 26 February 2008, the allocation to the Department of Education was increased by some £24 million in addition to, I understand, other increases that were made throughout the budgetary process. Of the additional £24 million, £13 million was specifically set aside for children and young people’s projects of the type that we are debating.

As all Members will recall, the Minister of Finance and Personnel also responded positively to arguments that were made during the public consultation on the draft Budget about the allocation for everything from health — specifically, mental health — to the arts and to social housing. Clearly, the Minister of Finance and Personnel responded to calls on the finite resources at his disposal, including the Department of Education. He responded positively to the public. It is not so clear whether the Minister of Education did that for the extended schools programme.

It is disappointing — if not, sometimes, unexpected — when a private Member takes the easy path of attacking the Department of Finance and Personnel for its Budget allocation without considering fundamental questions such as where the extra money will come from — for example, from higher rates or cutbacks in services — but it is all the more so when it comes from a Minister who was a major player in the budgetary process.

Mr Durkan: I note the seriousness with which the Member is considering these points. However, surely questions can be asked not only of the Minister of Education but of the junior Ministers in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister? During the debates on the Budget and the Programme for Government, the junior Ministers gave specific assurances that all the money that was in the children and young people’s funding package was being ring-fenced in three Departments’ budgets — including that of the Department of Education — and assured the House that there would be no cut in the funding for the programmes that were previously supported.

Why have the junior Ministers not ensured that the money that supposedly went to the Department of Education was used to support the extended schools programme? The questions that Mr Hamilton raises do not refer only to what was said by the Minister of Education but to what other Ministers were telling us at the time of the debates on the Programme for Government and the Budget.

Mr Hamilton: I know that the Member has serious concerns about this issue, and he has expressed them previously in the Chamber.

The point that I am making — which has, today, been raised not only by me but by the Member’s colleague, as well as other Members — is that the Minister of Education has pleaded that the Minister of Finance and Personnel gave her no assistance whatsoever or any additional money, but, when the facts are examined, it is clear that she did receive additional money.

Given the Member’s experience, he will know better than most that the Minister of Education must prioritise the extended schools programme and make funds available to it if she considers it to be a good programme, which is exactly what she said in the debate on 20 May 2008.

Additional funds were made available to the Minister, and it was up to her to prioritise that. It is disappointing when a Minister, after signing off on — and voting for — the Budget in the Executive and the House, blames the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a lack of funding. The Minister had ample opportunity to secure more money for those programmes and would not have had to rely on end-year funding.

Although one expects a humble Back-Bencher like myself to call for more money for various projects —

Mr Durkan: Not for much longer.

Mr Hamilton: We would love to see the light before the end of the day.

Although one might expect such behaviour from a Back-Bencher, it is not becoming of a Minister. The Minister is fond of speaking every language under the sun in the House, but it would be good if she spoke some sense.

Mr O’Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have listened to the debate with interest — it has degenerated into a finger-pointing exercise between Members about how Ministers from other parties run their Departments and how much better run those Departments would be if they were controlled by the party of those Members. I am not sure that that assists us in our long-term project to manage our finances in this part of the world.

We deal with a block grant from the British Exchequer, which means that there is a set Budget that we must divide as best as possible. Until the Assembly grasps the nettle and deals with its own economic destiny, the squabble over who should have got more of the pie will continue.

We are not dealing with the economic questions that we face in the short and long term — some parties shy away from taking responsibility for tax-varying and other powers. They believe that continuing in a subservient

fashion will solve the problems that many in our society face — it will not. Until we establish an all-Ireland economy and until we establish our own economic independence, we will not be able to solve the problems that we face in our society daily.

From one humble Back-Bencher to another, I want to respond to several of the points made by Members, particularly those about the Department of Education. If we are going to have a debate about the block grant, we must use the facts that are before us. Since the debate on extended schools funding, I am surprised at how often the DUP has denied the claims that were made by the Minister of Education. I did not study Shakespeare, but I think that it was — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Shannon: He was English.

Mr O'Dowd: There is a rumour that he was, but we will not claim that yet.

There is a Shakespeare play with the famous line: he denieth too much. DUP Members denieth too much. At every opportunity, they tell the House that the Minister of Education did not ask for more money, that the lack of funding was not the fault of the Department of Finance and Personnel and that there was plenty of money in the kitty, and so on.

Mr Weir: The Member is a new member of the Education Committee, and I am keen to improve education where possible. The correct quote is: he doth protest too much. I am always keen to help the opposite side.

Mr O'Dowd: I am always keen to take on more knowledge. However, that does not change the point that I made.

Like every other Department, the Department of Education must make hard decisions and deal with the finances that are before it. The Minister ring-fenced as much money as she could to ensure that the extended schools programme operates in as many schools as possible, but there was not enough money in the Budget to go around.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that Ministers must take difficult decisions, and that, when a decision is taken to spend money in one particular area, it means that there is no money for another area? Furthermore, does the Member accept that agreeing to establish an additional Irish-language school, when there are over 100 vacant places in a school less than a mile away, is a decision that will use scarce additional resources, and, therefore, one that limits choices in other areas of expenditure? Finally, does the Member accept that that was a bad decision, particularly as it went against the advice of officials?

Mr O'Dowd: The Minister of Education has clarified exactly what advice was given to her by officials and by other bodies in the Department of Education. The

issue is not about denying one person's rights in favour of another's; it is about ensuring that we deliver services to the entire community, including to those parents who want their children to be educated in the Irish-medium sector.

The Members opposite are right: Members should not come into the Chamber and cry for more money. Ministers have to run the Departments and the services at their disposal as efficiently as possible.

Members across the Chamber, who are currently blocking a Bill that would provide for the establishment of an education and skills authority, and who are protecting the five education and library boards, will be interested to know that of the £100 million that Mr Hamilton said the Department of Education handed back, £27 million was handed back by the five education and library boards.

Mr D Bradley: Is the Member aware that £3.8 million of the children and young people's fund to assist voluntary- and community-sector projects working with children in disadvantaged areas was handed back by the Department of Education to the centre? I quote a letter from the OFMDFM liaison officer to the Education Committee:

"The Department of Education managed the funding package and the £3.8 million relates to money which that Department identified as not being required. It was therefore declared as a reduced requirement from the Centre.

As already stated, this funding package was managed by DE and the £3.8 million identified was not brought to this Department's attention. Junior Ministers are writing to the Department of Education to ascertain if this reduced requirement was reported to the Education Committee".

Mr O'Dowd: One other lesson that I have learned in political life is to never ask a question unless you know the answer. If Mr Bradley had stayed at the Education Committee meeting on Friday, he would know the answer to that question.

Mr D Bradley: I was present for the whole meeting.

Mr O'Dowd: In that case, you must not have been listening.

The Department of Education managed the fund. However, the Departments responsible for handing back that money — and it may come as a shock and an inconvenience to Mr Bradley — were the Department of Health and the Department for Social Development. Mr Bradley wants to criticise a Minister for handing back that money — I am sure that Ms Ritchie will be in her seat at some point. *[Interruption.]*

The Member should check the minutes of the Committee for Education. As I said, the Department for Social Development and the Department of Health were responsible for handing back that money.

I mentioned that £27 million was handed back from the education and library boards. Had the boards not contributed £20 million to the classroom assistants' dispute, they would have handed back £47 million this financial year, which the parties across the Chamber are defending. That is a layer of bureaucracy and administration that is soaking up funds that could go to the extended schools and other facilities.

During Question Time, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure talked about how Departments have to take different decisions on various issues. Mr Hamilton was right: £50 million was handed back from the capital build fund, including £21 million from one project. That was because land that the Department of Education was getting from the Department for Social Development was found to be contaminated, which resulted in a delay in the land being handed over. That was no one's fault.

When Members banter figures back and forth across the Chamber, they should be aware of the facts behind those figures. Until we grasp the nettle of taking decisions about the economy and have debates about how we run the economy — instead of today's debate, which has been a finger-pointing exercise about who is to blame for what, and so on — we will continue with the same rigmarole year in, year out. Let us take bold decisions in the future, and let us, as locally elected politicians with collective responsibility, start taking control of our destiny.

4.30 pm

Mr Weir: Earlier in the debate, Declan O'Loan, when leading off for the SDLP, made a true comment. He said that, because this was one of a number of debates on the budgetary process, there was a danger that we would hear a good deal of repetition in Members' remarks. Unfortunately, that is what has happened.

I pledge that I will try to avoid saying anything novel in my remarks that will add to the sum total of human understanding. The only reasonably novel remarks have been made by Back-Benchers, who are in competition to express their humility. The Member who is due to speak after me is Mr Basil McCrea — that, at least, will be an occasion on which the humility will end.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will, humbly, give way.

Mr B McCrea: The Member has not yet said that he is humble. If he wants to say that, I will concur.

Mr Weir: I am more than happy to declare my level of humility in this process. As I indicated, the humility of my contribution will become abundantly clear over the next few minutes.

When one examines the budgetary process, two issues are uppermost in people's minds. One was the reason why a number of us were at the gates of Stormont with various representatives from the trade unions today. The first of those two issues is a fear or concern to ensure that front line services are fully protected in any budgetary process.

Secondly, there is a challenge on the Assembly as a whole and, in particular, the Executive, to ensure that we do things differently. Stephen Farry made reference to that. On that second point, if we do exactly the same as a direct rule Minister, but with a Northern Ireland accent, people will say that the Assembly is some form of expensive white elephant. We must achieve things in a different fashion.

We have a Budget that is capable of ensuring that front line services are protected. Continual reference has been made to the 3% efficiency savings; let us remember that the purpose of that is to redirect money to ensure that there is a shift from bureaucracy to front line services.

There is no desire to make people wear a hair shirt, but there is a desire to recycle money to ensure on-the-ground delivery. There is genuine concern that when Departments are asked to make that level of efficiency savings, they do not look at slaughtering some of their sacred cows, and do not look at ways in which they can change bureaucracy and programmes, but that they instead look for easy targets. It is important that the Finance Committee and the Public Accounts Committee ensure that Departments be scrutinised at that level to ensure that they deliver up front.

It is disappointing that the Health Department has handed back more than £50 million — to which reference has been made, and with good reason — at a time when we are being told about great shortages in that Department and others.

I take on board what Peter Robinson, the then Finance Minister, said last week. He stated that it is better to have no spend than bad spend. It is not simply a question of ensuring that the books balance at the end of the year. There is a challenge for Departments in respect of their spending — be it on large capital programmes or recurrent expenditure — to ensure that we do not reach a situation whereby money is not delivered to front line services.

Similarly, Departments have to apply a degree of prioritisation and structuring. Declan O'Loan mentioned the Health Service, and said that some units perform better than others, which is undoubtedly the case. There is a need for structural change; there is a need to ensure that best practice exists. In reality, it is about ensuring that Departments are fit for purpose — that they can fully deliver on their promises, and genuinely fund front line services.

Mr Beggs: The Member has been critical of the fact that the Department of Health returned £50 million. Is the Member pleased that a major part of that was as a result of more efficient purchasing in the pharmaceutical section by buying products at a more efficient level? Is it not good that £20 million was saved, and that that money has come back to the Northern Ireland Budget, which can be spent in subsequent years?

Mr Weir: Any efficiency savings are good. However, it was identified that £20 million was saved at the end of the year. Why was it not identified earlier in the cycle?

Mr B McCrea: For goodness' sake.

Mr Weir: Well, that meant that money that could have been brought into the delivery of front line services had to be held back. That occurred in the Health Department when pressure is on to provide a better Health Service.

I am not blaming the present Health Minister for that situation — that has been happening in the Health Service for quite a time. The Health Service has received much more resources than in the past, but nobody could argue that people who use the Health Service are more satisfied.

What applies to the Health Department can also apply to other Departments. It is about ensuring that Departments use their resources properly and deliver better front line services. From that point of view, it is important to consider doing things differently. The Budget allowed things to be done differently — the regional rate was frozen; action was taken on the business rate; and changes were made regarding free public transport, which will take effect in the autumn.

Those are areas in which value has been added for people in Northern Ireland. Our economy needs to be restructured — unless it is about creating wealth, it will simply come down to how we slice up the cake.

Members can make valid points for services that need funding, because often government is not a choice between a good area of spend and a bad area of spend but between competing priorities that everyone agrees are fundamentally good.

If we are to increase the size of the cake, we must ensure that the economy grows. The Executive proposals will help us to move slowly towards a better-structured economy; one that creates conditions that could lead to the growth of the private sector rather than the decimation of the public sector.

Our actions need to be more imaginative. With respect to some Members, actions that have proved unsuccessful in the past cannot be used again. For example, in the first Assembly, we had ring-fenced Executive funds. They were meant to create much more cross-cutting thinking — in practice, it meant that Departments that had bids rejected simply made

recycled bids that were jazzed up to look as if they could be connected with another Department, but it did not lead to different thinking.

Different thinking is needed. Sammy Wilson pointed out that expenditure for schools here is among the lowest in the United Kingdom. If schools had greater freedom to spend their own budgets rather than money being held by either the Department or the education and library boards, school principals could focus and deliver on the important issues.

That is a much better way in which to operate than the contradictory position of the Alliance Party, which seems to argue that more integrated schools should be built because there is too much capacity in the system. I see that Mr Ford is shaking his head — he could perhaps counter by saying that some schools should close to accommodate those new integrated schools. If there is oversupply in the system, building additional schools in a new sector is the last thing that should be done. I am more than happy to give way if the Member has a list of schools that he wishes to see closed to make way for his new schools. However, I suspect that the silence from those Benches will be deafening.

Mr Ford: I will not take time away from the Member's speech — I intend to address that issue when I get my turn.

Mr Weir: I thought that the Member said when he gets his "term." I thought that the Alliance Party envisaged such success that it will choose the Department of Education in the next mandate.

We have good Supply Estimates that could help to address the fundamental issues that face Northern Ireland.

Mr B McCrea: I address the Assembly with complete humility, humble as I am, and following the learned words of others who have spoken before me. There is another word to go along with "humble", and that word is "humanity". What we must address is the purpose of the Assembly and the Budget, and I hope to address both with a certain amount of honesty.

It appears to me that there is an issue about our education system. The system cannot be changed in the timescale envisaged or without spending considerably more resources than we have heretofore given to it. It seems strange that the extended schools programme, which has the support of all Members, should be cut drastically. One would have thought that someone, somewhere, would have found the £5 million that is needed to keep that programme going.

I listened to Mr O'Dowd having words with Mr Dominic Bradley about who was responsible and who was at fault. Surely, what really matters is that those schools will lose their funding and that someone must take responsibility. Members may start pointing their

fingers, but the responsibility falls within the remit of the Minister of Education.

I am about to say something important on this matter, and I am happy for Mr Maskey to intervene. Here and now, Members can take it that the two Ulster Unionist Ministers will be placing the extended schools programme funding at the top of their priorities. That is unequivocal. It is absolutely necessary to get the funding issue addressed.

Members know that funding in the monitoring rounds will be tight.

Mr A Maskey: Does that mean that the two Ministers in question will go to the Minister of Finance and Personnel or the Minister of Education and offer some of the projects that they have already prioritised and that are in the spending queue to replace some of the deficiencies that may appear in the budget of the Department of Education? That is the only way in which the funding can be achieved. If that is not the case, it is only rhetoric, although it may be well-intended rhetoric. Unless someone offers money from another project, the Member's words mean nothing.

Mr B McCrea: *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, which means, "shame be to him who thinks evil of it". When one stands up and makes a genuine commitment to address an issue and make a difference — *[Interruption.]* — one gets such a response.

Mr A Maskey: I asked you a question. Can you not answer it?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please address remarks through the Chair.

Mr B McCrea: I am prepared to make a commitment, but Members opposite are so keen to get up and chitter that they do not listen. That is what is wrong with this place: there is too much talking at people and not enough talking to people. If Members want the issue dealt with, the Executive should get together and work out their priorities. The Executive should admit that it is shameful to talk about taking funding away from extended schools in some of the most socially deprived areas. They should have some form of conscience and be able to sit down and decide how to provide the funding. Every Minister should look to see how the money can be found. The Ulster Unionist Ministers will give a commitment to work with colleagues to address the issue. Is that clear enough for you? We will all have a look at the issue.

Mr A Maskey: It is ridiculous for Basil McCrea to say that. I said that he may mean well — and I am not second-guessing or questioning his integrity in the matter. However, he should not dare to lecture any other Member about having a conscience about the Budget. His Ministers are on the Executive: they have sat down with the other Ministers on the Executive;

they have deliberated on the Budget; and they have agreed the Budget. The Member should not try to lecture the rest of us.

4.45 pm

I am simply saying that, rather than a Member stating that he speaks on behalf of his party's two Ministers, those Ministers should make a firm commitment at the next meeting of the Executive. The Member cannot, whether he likes it or not, make a commitment on their behalf. I imagine that the two Ministers concerned have many projects in their respective queues of priorities and that they are committed to delivering those on behalf of the people whom they represent.

It is, therefore, ridiculous that the Assembly must listen to Basil McCrea speaking from his high horse. All Members have a conscience and know what they are in the Assembly to deliver; that may be based on the individual party manifestos or the collective responsibility that the Executive established in the Programme for Government. I do not like listening to someone with that high-horse mentality, and I am not prepared to do so.

Mr B McCrea: Sometimes, even I regret allowing Members to intervene — and look at how much time has been taken up. The Member had a chance to make a speech. He should vow to persuade his party's Minister of Education to honour her commitments to the people of Northern Ireland. The funding of the extended schools programme is the issue, and the Ulster Unionist Party will match any amount that the Member can produce. When the Ulster Unionists came forward with money, the Sinn Féin Minister could not provide match funding. The Member has repeatedly tried to turn the debate into an argument, but I am standing here to say that the Ulster Unionist Party realised that there is a problem and is now trying to provide assistance.

Furthermore, I will not be told on what subjects I may or may not address the House, and the Member will not lecture me on this issue as he has on others previously. This is a discussion; this is the time for Members to introduce ideas. Early learning and primary schools are foremost amongst the areas that the Assembly must address.

It is absolutely ridiculous that, in Northern Ireland, primary schools receive only 62% of the funding received by secondary schools and 10% or 20% less than primary schools in England and Wales. The Assembly must find a way to match that level of funding. If it does not, primary school leaders, who are at the forefront of the trial of the extended schools programme, will have to take time off work due to illness, and, ultimately, they will be unable to do their jobs. If the Assembly were a private company, it would be legally responsible for that eventuality, because Members know that there

is stress in the system, and they are not doing anything about it. The Assembly is forcing school leaders to struggle on without addressing the issues that affect them.

The debate on the Budget must extend beyond academic selection or academic criteria to how to move this place forward. If the Assembly is to address the legacy of the past and prepare young people for the future, it must invest more in schools. There was a discussion on whether the economy is at the centre of the Assembly's agenda. The economy is only part of the agenda. Education, education, education — that is the only way out of the poverty trap, and a good education is the only sustainable advantage that people can gain.

This body politic must find a way to deal properly with education, because it requires significant investment. I talk about making various changes, and I can suggest where the money should be spent: for example, the Assembly must develop an effective strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds, increase nursery provision and find a way to ensure that the extended schools programme is available not only to those schools that have been identified but to all schools.

I have a direct question to ask in the Chamber today: will the Minister of Education allow primary schools to carry forward their reserves to keep the programme going for another year, or will the Department of Education insist on drawing them back into the centre?

When it comes to how to make progress, I do not agree with the idea that the declining demographic should necessarily mean a decrease in funding. The Assembly should take the opportunity that it provides to invest in schools and children and try to achieve better pupil:teacher ratios, because that is the one measure that continues to make a difference.

If the Assembly does not invest in early-years provision, it will have to begin to invest more in prisons, social welfare, health services, and so forth. Education requires a long-term commitment that cannot be met through incrementalism. There must be a fundamental review on education and education policy. If such a review were introduced honestly to the Executive, the Ulster Unionist Party's Ministers will respond in kind.

Mr A Maginness: On 29 January 2008, the SDLP voted against the Budget, and neither my party nor I regrets having done so, because there are fundamental problems with it.

The concerns that our party raised — rightly — at that time have been brought into stark relief today, even though a few months have passed. It is important that we focus on those concerns again.

I will make one general point before I discuss those concerns in detail. The economy in the UK and throughout western Europe has experienced a fundamental crisis

in credit, financial stability, the property market, land values, and so forth. A great deal of the Budget was predicated on the fact that assets could be sold off in order to derive capital with which to finance the Budget and its programmes. During the debate that I mentioned, our party said that that was a precarious foundation on which to base any Budget. We have been proven correct.

Mr Beggs, in his earlier address, referred to the decrease in the value of lands at Crossnacreevy. He told the House that there had been a massive devaluation of that land. If that were the case, he asked, how would we finance the nutrient scheme that the farmers need? That is a fundamental question that needs to be answered, not just in relation to Crossnacreevy, but to other schemes.

It is important to remember that, prior to the Budget's being settled, when we were discussing the vexed issue of social housing, our party was told that we were crying wolf about the financing of social housing and that there was sufficient money in the Budget. However, we remained firm, and together with the Minister for Social Development, we demanded additional funding for housing. We got £205 million extra. That was important, because we now see the value of having that money as opposed to looking for funds from the realisation of assets.

Therein lies a lesson: we should not predicate a Budget on the basis of future capital realisation. That situation has thrown the Department of Finance and Personnel into a great deal of confusion as to where the money will come from. I think that if one plots the next financial year, there will be some very nasty surprises as it develops. Unfortunately, I do not believe that the British Exchequer will bail us out, particularly given that we are sending £170 million of unspent money back to it. That sends the very sorry message to the British Exchequer that either we do not need the money or we are incapable of spending it when we get it on a plate. Sending so much money back illustrates that there is a fundamental flaw somewhere.

There is a very fine primary school in my constituency that has 300 pupils, 75 of whom are on the special needs register. At present, their educational needs are met by two full-time special educational needs teachers — one of whom provides a specific reading programme entitled Reading Recovery — and an outreach-support teacher.

The school chooses which children need support using standardised scores in reading and maths. A score of 100 is considered average. Children whose scores are below 85 are chosen for support. Children who score between 85 and 95 are supported through the Rainbow Reading programme, which is funded through extended schools. Parents of all children are

offered support through the parents' support programme, which is also funded through extended schools.

Unfortunately, because of the reduction in the extended schools programme, the school cannot afford to provide full-time special educational needs support, the Reading Recovery programme, the Rainbow Reading programme, the breakfast club or the parents' support programme during the school year 2008-09.

The school's budget has been further reduced through targeting social need. Up to 75% of children used to be entitled to free school meals. With the introduction of family tax credit, that has been reduced to 55%, because parents who avail themselves of the scheme cannot apply for free school meals. Often, those parents have low-paid jobs. When their family tax credits are balanced with the loss of benefits such as free school meals, they are no better off financially. That means that the school must continue to deal with the same social and academic problems, but with a much reduced budget.

I ask the Department of Finance and the Department of Education what hope there is for those 75 children who will be deprived of special educational needs support during the next academic year. Is that the way that a primary-education system should operate in an area of severe deprivation? I appeal to those Departments to remedy that situation because it is replicated across Belfast and across the country.

There are serious problems with the Budget. The Assembly has only scratched the surface of those problems; the next year could be disastrous. Those problems require a united effort from the two parties that dominate the Executive, and they must work together to resolve them. The Assembly can only tell them what is wrong; it cannot force their hands. It can, however, bring public opinion to bear in order to pressurise those parties to get their act together. There is no point in their acting in the usual disparate fashion. A united effort is needed at the centre, particularly in the Department of Finance, to tackle all those problems that other Members and I have outlined in the debate. It is vital for society's future that that be done.

Today, the trades union movement demonstrated outside the House in order to emphasise its grave concerns about the Budget; not least about efficiency savings, but about threatened job losses among its members, particularly in public services. It is important that the Executive take that on board.

5.00 pm

Mr Shannon: I support the motions. One Member mentioned the Irish language Act; given that that would cost £290 million, there is no economic sense for it. That figure is equivalent to the budget for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for almost

three years. The DUP will not sign up to an Irish language Utopia — not now, not ever.

I shall focus on how tourism relates to the motion, and I shall make a few comments that, I hope, will be helpful and specific. The Lonely Planet tour guide described Northern Ireland as:

"abuzz with life: the cities are pulsating, the economy is thriving and the people, the lifeblood that courses through the country, are in good spirits".

Furthermore, in another part of the guide, Belfast is mentioned as one of the top ten cities on the rise. That should kick-start a genuine tourism push which, not unlike the Discover Scotland adverts that were so attractive on TV and in cinemas here, should feed directly to TVs in GB, in the Republic and further afield.

We have the impetus behind us of being in a new dawn with no threat of violence or fear for safety, and that must be exploited. Alongside that, the views of our natural beauty and history, coupled with the vivacity that is linked with anything that originates in Northern Ireland, cannot help but draw others to our shores. For that reason, funding must be set aside to enhance tourism potential, including finance to enable better facilities.

In reply to a question that I asked last week, the Minister Nigel Dodds said that the numbers of cruise liners that will come to Northern Ireland this year will increase from 27 to 36, and that the number of visitors will increase from 41,000 to 54,000 from the cruise liners alone. A great many of those people will visit the abbey in Greyabbey in the Ards Peninsula; I understand that some 10,000 visitors are expected this year.

There is no doubt that the returns from dedicated funding for a concerted international TV advertisement, similar to the adverts for Florida that currently grace our screens, would well outmatch the outlay. Northern Ireland as a whole would be the winner.

Northern Ireland has it all, including rest and recuperation in superior salons and five-star hotels; nature holidays; touring the country and staying in quaint bed and breakfast accommodation; touring in caravans, using our many caravan parks; and shopping in the city, followed by dinner and a show. Therefore, a sincere and earnest push must be made to show that to the rest of the world.

Mr F McCann: It is interesting to listen to the Member run through all the positive aspects of the North; however, the serious social deprivation that exists in many areas must also be taken into consideration. In many ways, that is often forgotten. One of the main strategies for dealing with social deprivation is neighbourhood renewal, yet that seems set to be transferred out of the control of DSD and into the control of local government at a time when central Government should be funding it to such an extent that social deprivation can be seriously dealt with.

Will the Member agree that 100,000 people who are on incapacity benefit are classed as being economically inactive, and are therefore not included in the unemployment figures? If those people were included in the figures, unemployment would be far higher than is reflected in the current figures.

Mr Shannon: I concur with those comments, and, based on my experience from my advice centre, I echo the Member's points on incapacity benefit, disability living allowance (DLA) and deprivation.

Wha' cud richtly bae cried the hidden Jewel i Ulster's Croon – Strangford bes an unbeknownst gem i global terms an' yet hit bes undoutedly true at the breath taakin view fae Scrabo Tower i Newtonards wi. Hit's view tae the Mourne oan yin side Scotlan' an' the watter aa anither an Bilfawst city ahin iz, bes a view at cannae bae equalled ir metched. I the toon o' Newtonards hitsel', we hae a furst cless hotel an nicht lif', we hae a meercet ivry waek, we hae picture hooses, a great shappin centre an beauty salons aplenty. Gif ye mother doon the peninsula ye'll cum oan clatters o' beauty an' wil' lif' wi' monie coffee an' tay shaps, an' antiques shap an furst cless aitin hooses. History an heirskep ir rich about the Ards wi' the weel kent Scrabo Tower an' Mountstewart Hoose an gairdens. Forebye thon we hae an example o' the onie waarkin faschin village o' Portavogie an' the beauty o' the lan'scape alang wi' caravan pairks an B&B. We hae the Exploris i Portaferry at gets mair nor 200,000 visitors ivry yeir an' hes the capacity fer monie mair.

Strangford could fairly be called the hidden jewel in the Province's crown, but, globally, it is an unknown gem. The breathtaking view in every direction from Scrabo Tower in Newtownards — towards the Mourne, over the sea to Scotland and towards Belfast city — cannot be equalled. Newtownards has a superior hotel, nightlife, a weekly market, cinemas, a great shopping complex and beauty salons aplenty. Driving down the peninsula, one finds beauty and wildlife aplenty, with many coffee and tea shops, antique shops and superior places in which to eat.

History and culture is rich throughout the Ards Peninsula, including the well-known Scrabo Tower and Mount Stewart house and gardens. Portavogie is our only example of a working fishing village, and that is combined with the beauty of the landscape, caravan parks and B&B accommodation.

Exploris in Portaferry already attracts more than 200,000 visitors a year, and has the capacity to attract many more. If one takes the ferry from Portaferry to Strangford village, the journey time of eight minutes cuts out more than an hour and a half of driving and covers the route taken by Princess Alexandra in 2003 as part of a theme day to recognise excellence in tourism throughout the UK.

For more modern cultural tourists, the Ards Peninsula provides the Battletown gallery, which is gaining an international reputation, and, if one wants not only the opportunity to purchase but to make superior pottery, one can visit the Eden Pottery Centre.

On the other side of the Ards Peninsula, near Comber, one comes upon Castle Espie Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, as well as restaurants and archaeological and historical links to the monastic life of Saint Patrick. County Down's history covers 7,000 years, and no history buff could help but be enthralled by such evident preservation in the area of days gone by.

Even with all those attractions in a single place, it is clear that people in the rest of Northern Ireland — never mind those in the wider world — are generally unaware of them. The only people who are fully aware of what Strangford has to offer are those who are blessed enough to have been born there or who have passed through the area.

The two-day Northern Ireland Game Fair at Ballywalter Park attracted a record number of country-sports enthusiasts to Strangford — more than 25,000. That is another field in which the area has the potential to excel. A group of American country-sports enthusiasts — along with their lovely wives — took a five-day trip, spending £50,000. Country sports already employ 3,000 people and generate £45 million for the Province's economy, and, if Strangford's successes could be repeated in the rest of the Province, there is great potential for more business.

The bottom line is that, given the opportunity, Strangford — and Northern Ireland — has the potential to boost tourism and for it to become a major factor in our economy. Funding must be allocated for widespread promotion and, as a place of outstanding beauty, culture, diversity and modern facilities, Strangford must be given the recognition that it is due. Such an all-encompassing mix of qualities should be promoted.

Although no other constituency offers quite the same potential as Strangford, all constituencies — and the Province as a whole — should be able to display themselves and create a showcase for the world. In order to do that, funding must be set aside, and I urge the Minister to ensure that that is done and that people from County Tyrone to County Antrim — from Eskra to Ballywalter — benefit from the financial boost that will come when the world realises what a gem we have in Strangford and, indeed, in Northern Ireland. I support the motions.

Mr Ford: I will attempt to look slightly wider than my constituency. I had hoped to congratulate the humble Back-Bencher from Strangford, Mr Simon Hamilton, on his promotion to the Front Bench, but, unfortunately, he managed to escape before I was able to speak. I was wondering whether, by the time this

debate was over, Mrs Foster, Mr Donaldson or Mr Hamilton would be responding on behalf of the Executive.

I will take up where my colleague Dr Farry left off, specifically concerning some aspects of health and social services expenditure. Clearly, there is a major funding gap in relation to mental-health services. In Northern Ireland, approximately 8% of the health and social care budget is spent on mental health, whereas, in other regions of the United Kingdom, spending averages 12%. That is a huge shortfall.

Every party in the Chamber refers to the Bamford Report and to the need to ensure that services are adequately funded for people with mental illnesses. Nevertheless, we have a huge gap in services, and we are simply failing to meet the needs of those citizens.

At different times, that can be a substantial part of our population. Indeed, I was told recently by a psychiatrist that of those who are currently economically inactive — *[Laughter.]* He gave his opinion entirely professionally, although I did not see him in a patient capacity. *[Interruption.]*

That may be considered a good joke, but the fact that 40% of our economically inactive fellow citizens suffer from a mental illness is an indication of what we are losing economically, as well as socially, by failing to invest in mental-health services.

That loss has a knock-on effect on our overall economy. Consider the number of people who suffer from different stages of mental illness: those people have a wide range of talents and could do all kinds of jobs. They could contribute to society, but we are all losing out on that because we do not provide the mental-health services that enable them to take up employment. That is a clear example of how investment in mental health would pay economic dividends. It is also a clear example of a failure to practise joined-up government. Individual departmental budgets are being considered without account being taken either of the knock-on effect on other areas or of the significant opportunity costs that arise as a result of our failure to address the needs of those who are mentally ill. Let us ask the Executive to take such matters into account when they consider future budgeting. In future, will we hear a DETI or a DEL Minister pointing out the need for money to be invested in mental health if we are to prosper as a society generally?

An issue that is often related to people's mental health is learning disability — although it is, of course, a different matter. It was mentioned alongside mental-health issues in the Bamford Review, and it is similarly underfunded. It might be that many of those who suffer from a learning disability would not make a significant contribution to the economy, but there are undoubtedly those who could. More particularly, if social-care services were better organised to cater for those who

suffer from a learning disability, many carers could make a contribution to the economy. In some cases, many patients have been removed from some of the bigger institutions, such as Muckamore Abbey Hospital in my constituency, yet we have failed to ensure that the costs of community care — which, in many cases, are greater than the costs of caring for people in large institutions — are met properly. As a result, some people do not receive all that they ought to in the community, and they — and their families and carers — continue to suffer because of that failure to invest properly. Again, that lack of investment has a knock-on effect on society.

No doubt the Minister who is currently acting on behalf of the Department of Finance and Personnel would be upset if I did not mention environmental matters. What has happened in the past couple of months, since the Budget was finalised, has shown the total inadequacy of the transportation funding in DRD's budget.

Belfast continues to be the only city of its size in Europe that seems to imagine that it can deal with a commuting problem by building more roads. Yet, as Stephen Farry pointed out, 80% of the Department for Regional Development's budget is tilted towards roads and only 20% towards public transport. Certainly, more investment in trains and buses was announced in that budget. The simple reality is that, as far as heavy rail is concerned, half the trains in the current investment package are required to replace redundant stock, principally on the Larne line. Only half the trains will be available to improve the quality of existing services in any way. Moreover, there are continuing problems with the Enterprise service, with the rolling stock now at the point where it is failing to meet the needs of those who wish to travel between the two major cities on this island. A great deal more investment is needed in that service.

DRD tends to make small, piecemeal efforts to provide what it terms "park-and-ride" facilities. It is open to question whether providing a few dozen parking spaces on the Ballyhenry Road, which is a couple of hundred metres from the Sandyknowes roundabout, will encourage anybody to drive through Sandyknowes to make use of them. The Transport Holding Company has invested in land for potential park-and-ride facilities, but further investment has not been forthcoming to enable that land to be used for that purpose. That is a fairly crass example of a lack of joined-up government — short-term budgetary considerations mean that the land has been purchased but is not being put to the use for which it has been designed.

5.15 pm

We need to ensure that all those aspects of transport policy show that government is not just joined up but

is sustainable. When we see the way that oil prices are rising, continuing to depend on the current level of private car transport is simply unsustainable. Yet we have seen no sign that that aspect of the Budget is being reversed.

The cost of fuel has knock-on effects in areas such as the warm homes scheme, and a wider knock-on effect on social housing. Although there has been some additional investment in those areas, there is a vast amount that still needs to be done if we are to provide decent living conditions for many of our people.

I put again to the Minister the question that Stephen Farry posed as I briefly touch on the environment agency that she is proposing: what is the opportunity cost of not having an independent environmental protection agency compared to the relatively miniscule cost of establishing and running one?

Despite the fact that neither Sammy Wilson nor Peter Weir is in the Chamber, I want to refer to the schools estate, which was discussed earlier, and about which my party received criticism. The Alliance Party fully supports the concept of integrated education being available for those who wish it for their children. There are some cases when that might involve building a new school. The post-primary situation in north Down, for example, where there is a shortage of places, is a clear indication that expansion is needed in that area.

The reality for most cases, however, is that the option to move towards integrated education is an option for transformation, which is becoming increasingly popular and which is the option that my party has said makes sense with regard to public expenditure. To suggest that we have talked only about new-build grant-maintained integrated schools is simply not factual. In that respect, I declare an interest as a governor of Round Tower Integrated Primary School in Antrim, which is an excellent example of a good school that has transformed, which is making full use of the capital that has been invested in its building, and which has an increasing demand for places. That is a good example of how good relations work done by an existing school has resulted in a logical transformation.

Declining school rolls in almost every area of the Province will result in more of what Stephen Farry talked about earlier: the idea of two primary schools in a village finding a way to work together — which might be an amalgamation but might also be something short of that — as the way to ensure the best use of available money. There ought to be a greater incentive from the Department of Education to encourage similar ways for schools to come together. The Alliance Party has made it clear that the public purse needs to see that different type of creativity in what is planned for education.

I was asked earlier by Mr Weir which schools the Alliance Party would propose for closure. The reality is that in his own constituency, when Groomsport Primary School, a couple of years after transformation to integrated status, still had a remarkably low roll and was proposed for closure by the South Eastern Education and Library Board, it was Alliance Party members who said that that was the only realistic way of saving on the public purse. It was DUP members who demanded that a school with approximately 30 pupils was kept open. Therefore, I am not sure that the lectures that were delivered across the Chamber earlier are necessarily entirely right.

The issue has to be: what is the best rational use of the school estate, and not knee jerks. As Stephen Farry made clear earlier, the Alliance Party does not support this Supply resolution. However, having divided the House on the Budget earlier this year, we shall not be dividing the House this afternoon.

Mrs D Kelly: That children should be placed at the centre of society as fully respected and supported members is increasingly upheld nationally and internationally from the perspective of rights and best practice. Flowing from that, the desire to ensure that all children experience better outcomes in their lives is a compelling and influential force.

It demands that organisations examine how they can work together to answer a fundamental question, namely: what do we want for our children? They then need to chart a process in order to achieve those outcomes. Therefore, it is dismaying to find that there is no protected funding for children and young people in the Programme for Government or the Budget. The play and leisure policy that is in draft form is now considering the age range of 0 to 18 years rather than pre-school years as was first envisaged.

It is also sad to note that no funding has been set aside for any projects this year, and, over the next two years, a little over £2 million has been set aside for play and leisure. Yet everyone knows the value and importance of play in developing the abilities of children and young people, particularly in their formative years, and its role in contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals.

This morning, I listened to an interview with some young people who were facing their exams. They said that the exam stress in their latter years of primary school through to university is intolerable. One young man felt that stress was leading to harmful behaviour and to the culture of young people taking their own lives. Therefore it is not acceptable that no money has been allocated in the Programme for Government for flagship projects or for children and young people.

Some groups that were previously funded by the Executive programme children's fund or by the

extended schools programme have folded. There is a great deal of uncertainty about what we are doing for our children. Although play has an important role in children's development, affordable childcare also has a role to play in developing a strong, vibrant economy, which is the Government's main objective, yet many Ministers seem to fail to recognise its value and necessity. For a strong economy to emerge, we must invest at the softer end, that is, in the provision of children's and young people's activities. We must support social-economy businesses, among others, to provide affordable childcare.

Childcare funding should be ring-fenced. There are arguments for and against mainstreaming and ring-fencing funding, but such funding for children and young people would have sent a clear signal that we have inclusive plans for children and young people that will lead to better outcomes, not only for individuals but for society as a whole.

Children and young people are among the most marginalised in society: so too are the homeless and those on housing waiting lists. However, at least they can be thankful that the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, negotiated a substantial £205 million increase above what was offered in the draft Budget. Last year, she secured an extra £50 million, which allowed an extra 1,000 houses to be started over and above the original projected out-turn for that year. However, there are major pressures on DSD's budget. Some £80 million of the budget is predicated on house and land sale receipts, but, as many Members said, there are concerns about the decrease in land values and about Housing Executive house sales drying up. That figure now looks unrealistic. Fortunately, however, Margaret Ritchie secured agreement from the Finance Minister that help would be available if events beyond her control were to threaten the attainment of her new social and affordable house building targets. The Minister of Finance and Personnel must live up to that commitment.

The Minister for Social Development has limited resources available for a scheme designed to help people who are struggling to stay on the housing ladder. A mortgage rescue scheme is an essential part of Minister Ritchie's new housing agenda, and it deserves more support from the Finance Minister if it is to help people through a very difficult time.

The Minister for Social Development has continued her Department's record high spending on the warm homes scheme, which is the Executive's main response to fuel poverty. However, she has said that although the record £35 million spend on warm homes will help to improve energy efficiency and keep many families out of fuel poverty, it is not sufficient to respond to the crisis facing many people this coming winter.

Recent fuel price hikes, and other steep increases in the price of food and other essentials, have resulted in a fuel-poverty crisis. Although DETI has some responsibility for energy policy and price regulation, and Westminster is responsible for the winter fuel payment, Margaret Ritchie has demonstrated leadership and established a task force, comprising relevant Departments and agencies, to co-ordinate efforts to combat fuel poverty. She has already written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to request a substantial increase in the winter fuel payment and a complete refocusing of that benefit to ensure that it reaches not only pensioners but other low-income households who will struggle this winter. Her efforts must now command the full support of Executive colleagues, and more resources must flow from the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The DUP is reported to have a shopping list in its latest tactical negotiations with Gordon Brown at Westminster — an increase in the winter fuel payment must be placed at the top of that list. The voluntary and community sector will undergo radical change in the period ahead as certain funding streams from Europe and elsewhere start to run out. The Executive must be satisfied that sufficient funding is in place to support the sector during that period of transition. The Minister for Social Development has, courageously, started to refocus the funding available for neighbourhood renewal to ensure that limited funds have maximum impact on the ground in tackling deprivation.

For too long, much of that community funding has been regarded as paid posts for community activists, rather than as targeted spending on tackling deprivation. The Minister for Social Development is prepared to make difficult decisions, and she deserves greater support from other Ministers. Neighbourhood renewal is an Executive initiative, and all relevant Ministers must be prepared to fund it. The Department of Finance and Personnel must encourage other Departments to fund their fair share of the programme, and, as has been highlighted in the Chamber today, tackling poverty — and child poverty in particular — is an Executive priority. No poor children live in well-to-do families. However, it is sad that no funds have been set aside for children and young people in the Programme for Government and the Budget. That is clearly wrong, and I urge the Executive to rethink.

Mr Gallagher: I welcome the section of the motion on the superannuation scheme for health workers and the amount of money set aside for that scheme. However, I want clarification on how we reached that position, because, in the past, there were miscalculations in relation to that superannuation scheme, and the public need reassurances that similar errors will not resurface. Furthermore, I want an assurance that the

money allocated to the scheme will not impact on the delivery of front line services in that sector.

As has been highlighted in the Assembly on previous occasions, many schemes involving children, such as early-years provision and after-school clubs, are now at risk. Some of those schemes will cease at the end of June 2008; I want an assurance that funding for the coming year will be available to help those organisations retain key staff and reassure the communities that they serve.

The issue of water charges was raised earlier. From 1 April 2008, the business sector has been obliged to pay water charges. Those businesses are already under pressure and now have the additional burden of water bills arriving at their premises.

Some of those businesses had no prior warning about their bills until they arrived in the post; certainly, none of them had had any prior discussions with anyone in the Department for Regional Development or Northern Ireland Water.

5.30 pm

Even more worrying is the fact that, since 1 April 2008, water bills have been delivered to clergymen in parish churches. Some of those bills have been shockingly high. Contact that has been made with my constituency office indicates that those bills average £500. It is disgraceful that parish churches should have to pay such water charges. As everyone understands, in no way is water used to that extent in any of our parish churches anywhere in Northern Ireland. Indeed, rather than billing them for water, we should follow example of the Scottish Parliament, which exempted Churches and charitable organisations from water charges.

Will the Minister provide the House with some clarification on water bills that average £500? Do those bills represent 50% of the charges that will be billed in April 2009? The Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy, has not given any clarification. If those bills represent 50% of the total charge, which will rise to 100% in April 2009, can Church authorities expect to receive water bills totalling about £1,000?

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster):

This has been a useful and wide-ranging debate. Many points have been raised, and although some of them have not always been pertinent to the Supply resolutions and the Budget (No. 2) Bill, which I will introduce shortly, they touch on the wider Budget considerations that Members feel are important to reflect on and discuss. With your latitude, Mr Deputy Speaker, and given the spirit in which Members raised those points, I will do my best to respond as fully as possible in the 45 minutes that have been allocated to me.

Mitchel McLaughlin, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, spoke about the Committee's role in the budgetary process. I thank the Chairperson for the Committee's support for the motions,

and I welcome his views on the important role that Statutory Committees played during the monitoring rounds. The outgoing Minister of Finance and Personnel wholeheartedly agreed with those views. He said so repeatedly, and encouraged his Executive colleagues to engage proactively with the Statutory Committees.

The Chairperson also highlighted the helpful contribution that the Committee made to the previous Budget process. I acknowledge that contribution. Looking forward, DFP officials have initiated a review of the Budget process to seek to improve future Budgets. It is hoped that that work will be completed by the autumn. I am aware that the outgoing Minister of Finance and Personnel specifically asked his officials to continue to work with the Committee on that issue.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel spoke about accelerated passage, and I acknowledge his concern about the use of that process. Officials will certainly review procedures to determine whether there is any possibility of processing Budget Bills without the need for accelerated passage. However, at present, it is necessary to ensure that public services do not run out of money. As I said in proposing the motion, if we did not deal with that issue, Departments would run out of money in the middle of the summer, when none of us is about the place. I know that Members do not want that to happen.

Mr Storey also mentioned that financial training is available for staff in the different Departments and asked whether it would be available for Members. In the last Supply debate, in February, the outgoing Minister of Finance and Personnel offered to make his officials available to provide training to Members at any time. Unfortunately, that kind offer has not yet been taken up. I reiterate that DFP officials are willing to help in any way that they can and to provide briefings. I encourage all Members who wish to have a wider understanding of the issues — not just those who sit on the Finance and Personnel Committee — to take up that kind offer.

Mr Roy Beggs said that he wanted more information on issues in the Estimates. I take his point. It reinforces the need for better engagement between the Departments, which are best placed to give those explanations, and their Committees. Hopefully that will happen, given that a review is ongoing.

Mr Beggs and Mr O'Loan mentioned the downturn in the property market. In that context, it is essential that all Departments take every possible action to secure the planned level of capital receipts that was set out in the agreed Budget, so that capital investment projects can be taken forward as planned. Although there are pressures, particularly in the residential market, I am confident that Departments — working with the support of the capital realisation task force, which Members mentioned — will be able to maximise the level of capital receipts.

Many comments have been made about Ministers not working in silos, but working together as a whole Executive. There is a need to consider the level of capital receipts in the broader financial context this year. That issue will be addressed in the June monitoring round.

The value of land at Crossnacreevy was mentioned by several Members. The valuation that was included in the Budget was based on the best possible advice at that time. I am aware that the Minister of Agriculture raised the issue with the outgoing Finance Minister, and the Executive will wish to consider the best way forward. It will be a material issue in the strategic stocktaking that is planned for later this year.

Funding for children and young people was mentioned by most Members who spoke — in particular, Roy Beggs, Declan O’Loan, Dominic Bradley, Simon Hamilton, Basil McCrea, Alban Maginness and the final Member to speak, Mr Gallagher. As part of the recent Budget process, central funds — including the children and young people’s funding package — were mainstreamed, as Members know. That was to allow Departments the necessary flexibility to manage such issues in the context of their overall positions. In response to Departments’ concerns, significant additional allocations were made at the time of both the draft and revised Budgets to ensure that all worthwhile projects could continue.

I concur absolutely with Roy Beggs on the issue. Frankly, as I know from my constituency, after-school clubs do not care whether the money comes from OFMDFM, the Department of Health or the Department of Education. They only wish to know whether they will be able to continue their work. I declare an interest in the matter, because my children attend an after-school club in Brookeborough, County Fermanagh. It is an excellent facility, and the children enjoy it very much. Therefore, I, and the whole Executive, wish such clubs to continue.

However, as Mr Storey said, the main problem is that individual Ministers have decided not to continue funding certain projects and have, instead, sought to lay the blame at the door of the Department of Finance and Personnel. I dispute absolutely the suggestion that my party is to blame in any way for the reduction in extended schools or after-school provision. The Executive will continue to consider the amount of resources available to individual public services, but the primary responsibility lies with individual Departments to prioritise their resources.

Basil McCrea made the excellent point, in the debate on extended schools, that the funding gap identified by the Minister of Education was £4 million, compared to a budget of over £1.7 billion — 0.2% of the available funds. That is a very telling statistic.

In addition to the debate on extended schools, Dominic Bradley spoke about the bid for additional funding in this

in-year monitoring round. It would be wrong to pre-empt the Executive’s consideration of June monitoring, but all Departments face significant pressures. One such pressure is equal pay, which the outgoing Minister of Finance and Personnel was keen to sort out. I concur with his determination to deal with that under a devolved Administration. The Education Minister’s spending performance in 2007-08 suggests that she has plenty of capacity to deal with extended schools provision. Mr Hamilton and several other Members made that point, and I endorse their valid comments.

I, and the entire Executive, want to deal with that issue. Every party expressed significant concern about extended schools and after-school clubs. We need to get that sorted out very soon.

I concur with Dolores Kelly about the pressure on children in schools. Those of us who sat the 11-plus, or indeed any exam, throughout our school lives forgot about it once it was finished. That is no longer the case; children are under incredible pressure in school. We must assess how much pressure we put on our children and, indeed, what society demands of them.

Mark Durkan and Dolores Kelly talked about the ring-fencing of money in the children’s fund. All the funding that was previously allocated to ring-fenced areas has now been allocated to Departments. However — as Mrs Kelly pointed out — that reallocation has not been ring-fenced. Each Minister must prioritise funding in the context of all the issues that they face. In an intervention during Mr Hamilton’s speech, Mr Durkan suggested that the junior Ministers should take up the issue. However, it is a departmental issue because the Departments have been given the money.

Mr Beggs mentioned efficiency savings versus cuts. Dr Farry also commented that the public view efficiency savings merely as cuts. Departments should achieve progress on savings delivery by improving efficiency rather than simply by cutting services. Departments should not cut front line services in an attempt to meet the 3% efficiency targets. Reductions in services are often perceived as cuts when it is simply a scaling back of provision to its appropriate level.

Sammy Wilson spoke at length about over-provision in the schools estate. In particular, he talked about the development of the integrated and Irish-medium sectors and the additional pressures of surplus places. I thank Mr Ford for his intervention, which provided the House with some clarity on integrated schools. A debate on the integrated education matters that he discussed would provide the best way forward.

Mr O’Loan and Dr Farry spoke about the Budget’s over-reliance on efficiency savings. It is right that public services are delivered as efficiently as possible; therefore, the Executive have asked each Minister to deliver annual efficiency savings of 3%. In its efficiency delivery plan, each Department has published details of how those savings are to be delivered. The Executive

are clear that the focus is on efficiency rather than on cuts or service reductions.

Mr O'Loan and Mr Gallagher spoke about water and sewerage services. Mr Gallagher mentioned, in particular, clarification on bills. As I said in my introduction, I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development will follow up this debate by providing clarification on such matters. As Mr Gallagher and Mr O'Loan know, the independent water review panel concluded that the contribution from the regional rate is not sufficient to deliver water and sewerage services in the long term.

The Executive, during a meeting on 8 October 2007, agreed unanimously to introduce additional revenue streams to pay for water and sewerage services; that householders should provide a greater contribution; and that charging would commence in April 2009.

5.45 pm

The Executive also agreed that no one should have to pay twice for water, giving full recognition to householder contributions towards water and sewerage services from the domestic regional rate. The Department for Regional Development has submitted a paper to the Executive outlining the proposed charging methodology, and the Minister is seeking the Executive's agreement to those proposals: that is where the matter sits currently.

Mr O'Loan and Dr Farry spoke about an independent environmental protection agency, and undoubtedly Mr O'Loan would have given us more had time allowed. I want to say to Mr O'Loan that environmental regulation is very important to me — too important to be dealt with by an unelected body. The financial cost of establishing that body is an issue, but it is not the only issue. I listened very carefully to what he had to say about the article in the 'Sunday Independent'; it is not a periodical that I read, but I take his word for what is in the article.

Mr O'Loan stated that it is accountability and not the size of the budget that is an important part of management structures. I find it strange, therefore, that he would then go on to argue that we need an independent environmental protection agency to deal with regulatory issues for the 1.7 million people in Northern Ireland. The new Northern Ireland environment agency will use effective and proportionate regulation to assist legitimate businesses to comply with the law, and enforce sanctions against environmental crime.

I think it was Mr Ford who asked about opportunity costs relating to environmental protection; he and Dr Farry have acknowledged that just because one has an independent environmental protection agency, that does not automatically mean that European infractions will stop. That being the case, why, in Northern Ireland, can we not have an effective way of dealing with those issues that is within Government and within an accountability mechanism? I have yet to hear an

argument as to why an independent environmental protection agency is the panacea for all of the environmental wrongs in society.

As I said in my speech when launching the Northern Ireland environment agency — I cannot remember what date it was; it was some time ago — if I am proved wrong, there will be a review in three years time that will examine all the options again, including the option for an independent environmental protection agency. I am confident that the new Northern Ireland environment agency will be able to deal with those issues and that the agency will be made all the more stronger by the fact that it can, and will, be scrutinised by the Committee for the Environment and indeed by the House.

Dr Farry mentioned the cost of division, and he is correct; there are additional costs arising from divisions within society in Northern Ireland. I know that he will accept that the levels of savings that can be realised in the short to medium term are rather modest. I know that he is — as ever — looking to the future. Executive Ministers will need to consider the steps that they can take to reduce unnecessary costs, which inevitably reduce the standard of public service provided to the people of Northern Ireland.

The incoming Minister of Finance and Personnel will examine the paper that Dr Farry is preparing — and we are all looking forward to that paper because it has been some time in the making. I understand that the paper was promised in January, but I am sure that it will be very good when it lands with the new Minister.

Dr Farry mentioned funding for the arts and creative industries, which do make an important contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland as well as to social well-being. However, it is important to recognise that spending on culture and arts in Northern Ireland is broadly comparable with that in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is important, because the figures are sometimes misquoted. It was recognised in the Budget, when additional funding was allocated to DCAL to address concerns expressed about arts, sports and library funding that were raised during the public consultation on the draft Budget. People sometimes say that the consultations that take place in relation to draft Government documents do not really mean anything and are not taken into account. However, that was a clear example of Government reacting to the public consultation.

In addition, DCAL has secured £5 million over the next three years to establish a creative industries seed-fund to support business enterprise in the creative industries sector. That is a competitive fund that will provide creative entrepreneurs with assistance on business planning, marketing, advice on access to venture capital, and intellectual property issues, as well as start-up finance.

Dr Farry also made mention of Varney II, and the size of the public sector. In his second report, David Varney endorsed the Executive's focus on economic development. The Executive and the Assembly need to seriously consider Varney's recommendations in the light of our commitments to improve productivity. That will help to address the issue of the relative size of our public sector, but it must be clear that that matter concerns the relevant size of both the public and private sectors. The key aim must be to grow the private sector, rather than to shrink the public sector.

Dr Farry also stated that the health budget was not big enough. As he is aware, the 2008-09 health budget includes a resource budget of £4.139 billion, and a gross capital budget of £262 million. That totals £4.345 billion, which is approximately 48% of the Northern Ireland Budget level — the highest level on record. As the Finance Minister has stated, it is not just the size of a Budget that is important, but how it is used and managed to deliver effective high-quality services.

The article that Mr O'Loan quoted concerned accountability mechanisms and how the Budget should be used in the most effective way. The allocation to the Department of Health, along with the package of measures to provide greater financial flexibility will enable that Department to cover its very substantial cost pressures, to pay for drug costs, as well as delivering significant service improvements in 2008-2009. The latest figures show that Northern Ireland continues to spend more per head on health and social care than England.

Sammy Wilson then referred to the differential between primary and post-primary funding — an issue that he has raised on many occasions. The key driver of funding, the age-weighted pupil unit weightings, are higher for post-primary pupils because the nature of the post-primary curriculum, its mode of delivery and the extensive support arrangements — such as staffing, equipment and resource materials — are quite different from that of the primary sector. It is more expensive in the main. I know that the Minister of Education is making provision for an increase in primary pupil weighting, with a view to progressively increasing the relative funding. I know that the Chairperson of that Committee will be glad to see that happening.

It is important that we ensure that there are no inefficiencies that could distort funding levels. Jennifer McCann mentioned the level of underspends in the various Departments, and I agree with her that Departments must and can do better in relation to their departmental underspends — including my own. High levels of underspend are not simply a financial nicety, but have real impacts on the level and standard of services provided to the public.

My colleague, the outgoing Finance Minister, has raised that matter on a number of occasions. In the House last week, he stated that the time had come to

consider the introduction of targets and sanctions at the organisational and personal level. Ms McCann also raised the issue of social problems, and the broader concern of the need to them, in particular the increasing costs facing all our households.

Although the Executive's key priority to grow the economy will address many of those issues, it is important that Ministers seek to improve all aspects of people's lives in Northern Ireland. Mr Durkan made mention of cross-departmental funds, and reflected on the old Executive programme funds. Although that appeared to work, there was a level of underspend in those Executive programme funds. It was considered that making those funds available to the Departments would cut out the bureaucracy that is associated with them.

Mrs Kelly made the point that there were pros and cons in respect of those funds, and that is why it was felt that those should be mainstreamed for the sake of efficiency. That is why they were mainstreamed.

Mr O'Dowd spoke about tax-varying powers. He felt that there was a need to do away with the economic over-dependence on our national Parliament.

Mr O'Dowd was, of course, engaged in distraction politics. Before he rose to speak, there was much debate about the education issue, so he decided to move us on to the issue of tax-varying powers. Tax is a double-edged sword. Raising taxes would damage the local economy's competitiveness, and cutting them would have to be financed by the Executive under the Azores ruling. The Varney Review II confirmed that the local economy's future is in the hands of the Executive, and we must maximise the opportunities afforded to us as part of the United Kingdom economy.

Mr O'Dowd also made comments on inefficiencies in the education and library boards and the amount of money that they return. However, the education and library boards are not just about money; accountability also matters, and I have used that term throughout the debate. We look forward to keeping our education authorities democratic; that done, we can consider proposals in that sector.

I apologise to Mr Maginness for not being in the Chamber when he was speaking. He raised the issue of asset disposal and said that predicating the Budget on asset disposals was a risky strategy. Asset disposals represent the release of funds that are tied up, unused or underutilised. When they are sold, the associated holding cost is released. The fact that market values have changed is relevant, but it does not suggest that the strategy is flawed. Fundamentally, the Executive are in the business of public-service provision, not property speculation — perhaps that is just as well. That does not mean, however, that the way in which we deal with those issues is flawed.

Mr Maginness also spoke of the £170 million underspend as lost to the Executive. The Member is

right to highlight the need for Departments to reduce the level of underspend, however, I remind him that the money is not lost to the Executive, and is available for public services in the future.

Mr Maginness also suggested that DFP must get its act together and sort out those issues. Talking about the Executive as though they were not a four-party mandatory coalition is a trait of the SDLP. Dominic Bradley said that the Executive were lacking in leadership and vision, despite the fact that the Executive have an SDLP member. Declan O'Loan told us that the SDLP shows no ambiguity in relation to the Budget and that his party is united in its stance on it. However, the SDLP Minister voted for the Budget. That semi-detached attitude to the Executive does no one any good.

The SDLP must recognise that the Executive are a four-party mandatory coalition, and it must play its part in supporting the decisions, often difficult, taken by the Executive. I remind that party that the Budget was agreed unanimously by all members of the Executive. The key task for all Ministers is to get on with delivery, improve public services and avoid repetition of the underspend that we saw this year, not to fight continually over the Budget figures.

David Ford spoke about mental health. I understand that the Health Minister intends to allocate an additional £19 million in 2008-09 to mental health and learning disability services. He and the rest of the Executive hope that that will go a long way towards implementing the recommendations of the Bamford Review.

David Ford and Stephen Farry talked about overinvestment in the roads infrastructure. However, there are several arguments for putting more money into that infrastructure: it relieves congestion and improves journey times; it improves the quality of life and provides development opportunities; it balances the development of Northern Ireland by improving access to the north-west and south-west; and — importantly, from the point of view of my Department — it improves road safety, which I know is dear to Mr Ford's heart.

The allocation of some £56.5 million to transport will allow for continued capital investment in both bus and rail services. That will enable Translink to continue funding its bus-replacement programme, and NI Railways to continue its programme of significant capital works. It will also enable the commencement of preparatory work on the proposed rapid-transit line in greater Belfast.

There is no need to spend substantial amounts of money on sustainable transport, and I know that the Member will agree with that. There are more innovative ways to bring sustainable transport into this country, such as the creation of cycle lanes, which do not cost much money.

6.00 pm

Mr Gallagher raised the final point on the excess vote for the Department of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety. Indeed, Mr Gallagher is probably the only Member who raised that issue today. In 2006-07, the Department incurred an excess vote on its superannuation scheme accounts, because it failed to take account of a reduction in its creditors. That was not highlighted in 2006-07 as additional cash, and it was taken from the departmental vote instead of the Consolidated Fund. I understand from the Department that it has undertaken a commitment to prevent a recurrence, including separate banking arrangements being set up this month for the superannuation vote.

I have tried to cover all Members' comments. However, if I have failed to do so, departmental officials will respond to each Member concerned when they have read the Hansard report. I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. In a democracy, it is important to hear the views of elected public representatives and to debate issues fully. Therefore, I ask all Members to support the motions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,184,270,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund, for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 and that resources, not exceeding £8,474,916,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation for the year ending 31 March 2009 as summarized for each Department or other public body in Columns 3(b) and 3(a) of Table 1.3 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Estimates 2008-2009 that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,224,593.19 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – Health and Personal Social Services Superannuation, for the year ending 31 March 2007 as summarized in Part II of the Statement of Excess document that was laid before the Assembly on 30 May 2008. — [*The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster).*]

Budget (No. 2) Bill

First Stage

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I beg to introduce the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 18/07], which is a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the year ending 31 March 2009; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources (including accruing resources) for the year ending 31 March 2009; to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of an excess cash sum for the service of the year ending 31 March 2007; and to repeal certain spent provisions.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received written notification from the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, confirming that the Committee is satisfied that, in accordance with Standing Order 40(2), there has been appropriate consultation with the Committee on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill. Therefore, the Committee is content that the Bill can proceed via accelerated passage. The Second Stage of the Bill will be brought before the House tomorrow, Tuesday 10 June 2008.

Mesothelioma, etc., 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. As no amendments have been tabled, there will be no opportunity today to discuss the Mesothelioma etc., Bill. Members will, however, be able to have a full debate during the Bill's Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Adjourned at 6.06 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 10 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order that at no time in the past three months has a report been given to this Assembly by the Assembly Commission in respect of the fact that leave has been granted for a judicial review against the Commission by former members of Assembly staff? Why has the Commission not deemed it fit and proper to come to the House and give an explanation about how those circumstances arose?

I make this point of order in the week that is in it, when the judicial review against you, Mr Speaker, and against the Assembly Commission, is listed for hearing in the High Court in Belfast on Thursday of this week and Monday of next week. Can you explain how, given the authority of this Chamber, the Assembly Commission has not deemed it fit and proper to give any explanation about why it is facing legal proceedings?

Mr Poots: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that Mr Attwood has trained as a lawyer, but I am very surprised that he has brought this matter up today. Matters that are before the courts should be left in that jurisdiction and should not be talked about in a public forum such as this, prior to a case being heard. It would be wholly inappropriate for the Assembly to do what Mr Attwood is suggesting.

Mr Speaker: First, I will deal with Mr Attwood's point of order. The Member is aware that any Member of this House can put down questions to the Commission, for oral or written answer, on any matter relating to the Commission. He also knows that the Commission is a corporate body, and his party has a Member who sits on that body. That is all that I will say on the matter. The Commission knows how to conduct its business.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. On the point raised by Mr Poots: it is often the practice in various organisations that, to the extent that it can be done without prejudicing legal proceedings, a body is informed about developments.

Only last week, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure came to this Chamber and, consistent with due process and without prejudicing future proceedings, provided an insight into matters concerning the Northern Ireland Events Company. Based on that precedent, and regardless of whether Members might ask questions, it would be appropriate for the Commission to come to this House and provide relevant, non-prejudicial information.

I am concerned that on a matter of such significance, when it comes to a report to this House, the Commission is silent.

Mr Speaker: I hope that the Member respects the fact that I have given him some latitude. I repeat that the Commission operates as a corporate body. The issue is before the courts. I will leave it there and move on with today's business.

Ministerial Resignations and Appointments

Mr Speaker: I notify Members that I was informed yesterday that the resignations had been tendered to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in accordance with section 18(9) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, of the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, as Minister of Finance and Personnel; Mr Nigel Dodds, as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Mrs Arlene Foster, as Minister of the Environment; and Mr Edwin Poots, as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The resignations took effect on 9 June 2008.

I inform Members that the vacant ministerial offices have been filled in accordance with the requirements of section 18(10) of the 1998 Act. The nominating officer of the Democratic Unionist Party made the following nominations: Mr Nigel Dodds to hold the office of Minister of Finance and Personnel; Mrs Arlene Foster to hold the office of Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Mr Gregory Campbell to hold the office of Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure; and Mr Sammy Wilson to hold the office of Minister of the Environment.

Mr Dodds, Mrs Foster, Mr Campbell and Mr Wilson have affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office, as set out in schedule 4 to the 1998 Act. The Clerk Assistant to the Assembly and I witnessed the affirmations.

I, therefore, confirm that Mr Dodds has taken up office as Minister of Finance and Personnel; Mrs Foster has taken up office as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Mr Campbell has taken up office as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure; and Mr Wilson has taken up office as Minister of the Environment.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Child Maintenance Bill

Accelerated Passage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):
I beg to move

That the Child Maintenance Bill proceed under the accelerated passage procedure, in accordance with Standing Order 40(4).

In proposing the motion, I comply with Standing Order 40(4), which requires me to explain the reason or reasons for using the accelerated passage procedure, the consequences of its not being granted, and any steps that I have taken to minimise its future use.

This important piece of legislation will allow Northern Ireland to correspond with provision in Westminster's Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008, which received Royal Assent on 5 June.

There is a long-standing principle of parity between Britain and Northern Ireland in the areas of social security, pensions and child support. That is recognised in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, according to which I have a statutory duty to consult with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with a view to maintaining single systems of social security, pensions and child support for Britain and Northern Ireland. In order to maintain those single systems, if changes are made to child-support legislation in Britain, corresponding changes must be made to the Northern Ireland legislation, with minimal delay. I emphasise that: with minimal delay.

The Child Maintenance Bill aims to reform the child-support maintenance system and makes tackling child poverty the main priority by ensuring that more of the maintenance that is paid goes directly to children. Currently, child-support legislation compels a parent with care who is on benefits to claim child maintenance, unless she — I say “she” because the parent with care is usually a woman — can demonstrate that she has good cause not to do so. If the parent with care cannot show good cause, her benefit is reduced by £24·20 a week. The Bill will remove the compulsion to claim child maintenance and will also remove the provision that imposes a reduced-benefit decision when the parent with care cannot show good cause for opting out of applying for child maintenance.

Removing the requirement for parents with care who are on benefits to use the statutory scheme will enable parents to make their own arrangements to manage child maintenance in a way that is best for them and their children. It will also enable parents who are on benefits to make their own arrangements, in the same way as parents who are not on benefits can. It is more

likely that child-maintenance arrangements will be complied with if the parents themselves have made them.

As part of the package to give parents more choice to make their own arrangements, an information and support service will be provided. The service will support parents to make and maintain voluntary arrangements. It will be available to both parents and will provide them with impartial, high-quality information to ensure that they can make informed choices about their child maintenance.

I recognise that there may be a risk that one parent will put pressure on the other to accept no or low maintenance arrangements. Therefore, in cases in which it is clear that the non-resident parent is unwilling to pay an appropriate amount of maintenance, or where a voluntary arrangement is unsuitable, the information and support service will help the parents to move to the statutory scheme. It is important to point out that, in order to protect vulnerable parents, both parents' agreement is required before they can opt out of the statutory scheme.

In order to provide a stronger incentive for parents with care to seek maintenance, and for non-resident parents to pay, the amount of maintenance that parents with care who are on benefits can keep before it affects the level of benefit that they receive will be increased to £20 a week by the end of this year, and to £40 a week in 2010. That increase in the benefit disregard underlines our commitment to ensuring that child maintenance does more to reduce child poverty.

The Bill is on the side of children — I want to be on the side of children and to ensure that more money flows to the children who need it.

10.45 am

In accordance with Standing Order 40(4), I am seeking accelerated passage for the Bill because the Department for Work and Pensions plans to implement the proposal to break the link between child maintenance and the benefits system from July, which is just one month away. To ensure that the proposals in the Bill are implemented here at the same time as those in Britain, the Bill must pass all its Stages before the summer recess, which is just three weeks away. If it does not, parents with care will continue to have £24·20 a week deducted from their benefit and will be worse off than those in Britain until such time as the law is changed.

For the purposes of clarity, I will repeat that. To ensure that the proposals in the Bill are implemented at the same time as those in Britain, the Bill must pass all its Stages before the summer recess. Should it not do so, parents with care requirements or responsibilities in Northern Ireland will be worse off than those in Britain by £24·20. Do Members want that to happen? I leave them to think about that.

Members will agree that it is essential that parents with care in Northern Ireland benefit from the provisions in the Bill at the same time as parents with care in Britain. That is the responsibility that has been placed on me and Members of this House, and I hope that we are able to live up to it. If we are to maintain parity of timing with Great Britain, reduce child poverty and ensure that no child in Northern Ireland is deprived, the use of accelerated passage is unavoidable in this case.

I have discussed the provisions of the Bill with the Social Development Committee and, in accordance with Standing Order 40(3), explained the reasons for my request for accelerated passage. As I said during the debate on my request for accelerated passage for the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill, I have discussed the future handling of parity bills with the Committee for Social Development and the impact that the need to maintain parity of timing with Britain has on the legislative process. I have undertaken to ensure that the Committee receives, and is fully briefed on, Green Papers and White Papers that contain proposals for legislation. There is now a new or putative Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, and I will discuss some of those issues with him and the Deputy Chairperson in the coming days.

I will consider any future Bill on its own merit, and I intend to use the full procedure where possible. However, given the policy of parity on social security, child support and pensions, I expect that I will have to return to the Assembly to seek agreement on the use of the accelerated passage procedure for Bills that deal with those matters. The granting of the use of accelerated passage means that there will not be a formal Committee Stage. However, there will be an opportunity for Members to make their views known and to discuss fully the issues during the Bill's passage through the Assembly.

This is a good-news Bill for Northern Ireland and the Assembly. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that more money flows to children and that that money is received sooner — we are trying to improve the system, because we recognise that there were issues with the old one. We are introducing a disregard, which is a child-poverty measure. We are addressing non-resident parents in a more expeditious fashion. We are on the side of children. The Executive supported the accelerated passage of the Bill, because they recognised the issues with regard to parity and the need to ensure that no child would be financially deprived.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hilditch): On 29 May 2008, Minister Ritchie attended a meeting of the Committee for Social Development to explain her reasons for requesting that the Child Maintenance Bill be granted accelerated passage. She also outlined the consequences should accelerated passage not be granted. I thank her for giving further explanation this morning.

Accelerated passage is not the Committee's preferred method of progressing legislation; members would prefer to conduct detailed scrutiny, which we believe is a crucial element in the development of better policy. However, as outlined by the Minister, given that the Bill must pass through all its legislative stages before the summer recess in order to avoid a financial loss to parents with care in Northern Ireland who do not claim child maintenance, the Committee agreed to support the Minister's request that the Bill be granted accelerated passage.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is no secret that Sinn Féin had problems with the Bill's being granted accelerated passage. However, we will support the motion, because we are also on the side of children and of people who try their best to reduce, if not eradicate, child poverty. No one could support lone parents losing £24·20 a week.

My understanding is that the Executive noted the Minister's decision to use the accelerated passage procedure but that they were not asked for their support.

I understand the Minister's position — much legislation is enacted in order to maintain parity. The difficulty that most Members have with legislation that comes to the House is the inability to scrutinise, which is difficult at the best of times but is particularly the case when accelerated passage is granted. When that happens, our ability to question, scrutinise and even recommend measures for consideration is limited.

Committee members' other concern was over the inability to conduct an equality impact assessment, which would have enabled more consultation. However, I understand that, because of the timing of the legislation, any such consultation would have had to be conducted in December, which, like the summer months, is not a good time for people to contribute to consultations.

I accept the Minister's commitment that the process will continue, because I am sure that she and her officials realise the importance of ensuring that people are given the opportunity to add to and improve legislation.

I am concerned that, because of the issue of parity, and because of the link with the Department for Work and Pensions in England and Wales, any consultation on legislation conducted there is applied to legislation here. That sidesteps, if not ignores at times, the unique aspect of section 75 and our ability to provide additional support mechanisms that ensure that people avail themselves of consultation opportunities to the full. I want clarification about that issue.

The publishing of Green Papers and White Papers is a good idea, because it allows for some scrutiny. However, the Committee should have the ability to conduct evidence sessions and request papers before it makes a decision on such legislation. The issue is about scrutiny.

The main thrust of the legislation is to ensure that children are protected, and to remove the onus from parents with care to chase non-resident parents for child maintenance. No one should have any difficulty in supporting parents on such issues. In saying that, it is important to note that there is a difference between people who will not pay and those who cannot pay.

My main query is about the Child Support Agency's coming under the remit of the Department for Social Development. Will the agency now be able to collect outstanding arrears? It is all right to have the legislation, but does the ability to implement that legislation exist?

It is not just about making sure that those payments are made; it is about all the additional difficulties that we, through our constituency offices, face in respect of the Child Support Agency's ability to recoup moneys owed by absent parents.

Sinn Féin will support accelerated passage, because the Bill will improve the lives of lone parents and children. However, we put a marker on the need to scrutinise legislation and on the need for equality impact assessment consultation. Consultation in England and Wales is not the same as that required here. We fought for, and won, additional mechanisms through section 75 and the equality impact assessment process. I uphold those rights to provide better consultation and scrutiny.

Mr A Maginness: I support the Minister's application to have the Bill dealt with by way of accelerated passage. I welcome the change of heart of my Sinn Féin colleagues on the Committee for Social Development and in the Assembly in their decision to support accelerated passage.

The matter was aired extensively in Committee, which Mr Hilditch, the Deputy Chairperson, pointed out. At that stage, it was possible for Sinn Féin members to express their concerns without putting the matter to a division. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the issue was, in fact, put to a division, and that a question remained over whether the Bill would be granted accelerated passage by the Assembly this morning. This is an important piece of legislation, and if it is not passed before the summer recess, there will be important consequences for those whom it affects.

It is, of course, unsatisfactory and undesirable to not have a full Committee stage; everybody accepts that. However, there are exceptional circumstances. Yesterday, in the Assembly we discussed the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill, which was previously granted accelerated passage. There are certain circumstances under which accelerated passage is necessary. The procedure exists; however, it does not mean that legislation is not properly examined. Legislation is looked at in more depth in Committee, but it can be also looked at in depth in the Chamber. It is my firm understanding that

the Executive approved accelerated passage; that is important to remember.

Ms Lo: All MLAs have reservations about granting accelerated passage to any Bill. However, as the Minister outlined at the beginning of the debate, we must do so in this instance to maintain parity of timing with Great Britain. Any delay would have serious consequences. It would disadvantage families and children in Northern Ireland, because they would lose out on receiving the same levels of child maintenance. It is important that we support the motion. The Alliance Party supports the motion.

Miss McIlveen: I support accelerated passage in this instance. It is important that this particular legislation, given its subject matter, is given effect at the earliest possible opportunity. Obviously, we do not like to see this method being used. In an ideal world, legislation would begin in the Assembly and proceed through all the legislative stages.

In this instance, however, it would be wrong to hold up this Bill, given that it will benefit the lives of children.

11.00 am

The Members across the Chamber who voted against this process in Committee are very much aware that the Chairperson of the Committee voiced concerns to the Minister and her officials about the number of times that accelerated passage has been requested. Moreover, on each of those occasions, they were aware of the need to maintain parity, be that in welfare reform, pensions or mesothelioma. This is no different, and it is interesting that, since they took their eyes off the ball during discussions in Committee about welfare reform, they have tried to take the moral high ground on any accelerated passage request.

I welcome the fact that Sinn Féin has changed its mind in respect of this piece of legislation. The consequences of not supporting accelerated passage were very clearly explained by the Minister, and I support the request for accelerated passage of the Child Maintenance Bill.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Deputy Chairperson of the Social Development Committee and other Members who contributed to the debate on accelerated passage for the Child Maintenance Bill.

There is a need to be more honest about the whole process of passing social security legislation through this House. I am very conscious that Members said that they were unable to scrutinise this piece of legislation line by line. That notwithstanding, my party leader, Mark Durkan, described the Counter-terrorism Bill, currently going through Westminster, as a digitally remastered version of the old Special Powers

Act. Similarly, we must be candid with this House and remind ourselves that many of the social security Bills that come before us could be described as karaoke legislation. That is not because they are trivial, but because such Bills are localised presentations of legislation that has originated elsewhere, and there is virtually no scope to alter the original in any meaningful way.

Although it may grate with some Members of this House — including myself — Northern Ireland has signed up to a single system of social security for the UK, and has accepted the principle of parity under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Under parity, Northern Ireland benefits enormously from UK Exchequer net transfers. We could not afford to set up our own alternative system. Even if we did, we could not afford anything like the benefits that we currently receive under the system of parity. Those are the facts.

All of the Members who contributed to the debate highlighted the problem of scrutiny. Cárál Ní Chuilín referred to it. Bill proposals can be discussed in Committee in advance of the Bill being put before the Assembly. Mr Maginness referred to that when he said that my officials attended a Committee meeting some weeks ago. I, too, attended some of those meetings, and the proposed Bill was further discussed at a Committee meeting last week.

In relation to the equality impact assessment, only two weeks of the consultation period from December 2007 to February 2008 occurred during the Christmas period. I will ensure that equality impact assessments are done for all future primary legislation. In respect of that piece of legislation, only two responses were received during the consultation period, namely, from Advice NI and Disability Action.

In respect of future consultation on parity legislation, I have already agreed — and I will meet the new Chairperson shortly — to involve the Committee fully during the consultation period on GB Green and White papers. That will ensure that the Committee is facilitated in making its informed comment on the potential legislation. I say “potential” legislation, because that legislation could change, or it might not be introduced at all. Everything that is done in respect of social security legislation is predicated on what happens at Westminster and Whitehall.

From past experience, social security, child support and pension Bills are likely to be a regular feature of future legislative programmes, and I will continue to consider any future Bill on its merits. I assure Members that, in this instance, I do not lightly seek accelerated passage.

I thank those Members who participated. The detail of the Bill will be discussed during its Second Stage,

subject to the approval by the Assembly of accelerated passage. I look forward to the discussion.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07] proceed under the accelerated passage procedure, in accordance with Standing Order 40(4).

Child Maintenance Bill

Second Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07] be agreed.

The Bill will make provision for Northern Ireland to correspond with child maintenance provisions made for Britain by the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008, which received Royal Assent on 5 June this year. It is, therefore, a parity measure.

As I said during the debate on accelerated passage of the Bill, parity covers not only the content of the legislation, but the timing of its implementation. New provisions have always been introduced here at the same time as they have been introduced in Britain, and that arrangement should continue.

The Child Maintenance Bill will make tackling child poverty the number-one priority for the child-maintenance system. The Bill breaks the link between child maintenance and the benefits system, and gives parents power to manage child maintenance in the way that best suits them and their children. It will ensure that non-resident parents live up to their responsibilities to support their children.

Part 1 of the Bill sets out the additional functions that, once it becomes law, will fall to the Department for Social Development. The Department will set out to raise awareness among parents of the importance of taking responsibility for child maintenance, and to make appropriate arrangements for securing that maintenance. Where parents cannot agree on how to support their children, the information and support service will be available to explain the options open to them, and the statutory maintenance scheme will be available as a fallback.

Part 2 of the Bill contains the bulk of the reforms to be implemented. The Bill promotes parental responsibility by removing the requirement for parents with care, on benefits, to claim child maintenance. That also includes the removal of the provision to impose a reduced-benefit decision where the parent with care cannot show good cause for opting out of applying for child maintenance.

The Bill will make significant changes to the way child maintenance is calculated; it will change from an assessment based on net weekly income to one based on gross weekly income. That will simplify the assessment process and allow the Department to obtain accurate details of a non-resident parent's gross income from Revenue and Customs. The move from net to gross income means that no deductions will have been made for income tax or National Insurance, and

new percentages are designed to reflect that change. The aim is to ensure that more fathers pay, rather than fathers pay more — there is a distinction.

When a child maintenance assessment has been made, it will last for one year. A one-year fixed-term award will lead to more certainty for both parents, and only substantial changes in income during the year will result in a re-assessment of the amount of maintenance due.

Annual reviews will keep maintenance liabilities up to date, and if a parent with care suspects that her former partner is manipulating his income to reduce his childcare liabilities, it will be easier for her to apply for a variation of maintenance.

The Bill will enable the Department to use deduction from earnings orders as the primary method of collection. At present, a deduction from earning order is used when a non-resident parent fails to pay maintenance, and it is an effective way of ensuring that maintenance is paid to families. If a non-resident parent is self-employed or avoids a deduction from earnings order by regularly changing his employer, the Department will have the power to collect maintenance regularly from his bank account, usually monthly, and money can be taken only from an account that is in credit.

The Bill will give the Department another similar enforcement tool in the form of a lump sum deduction order that will allow the Department to collect maintenance debt directly from a non-resident parent's savings. When there is a risk that a non-resident parent who has failed to pay child maintenance may dispose of an asset with the intention of avoiding paying child maintenance, the Bill will allow the Department to apply to the court for a freezing order. If the asset has already been disposed of, the Department will be able to apply to the court for an order to set aside its disposal.

I have said already that the Bill aims to simplify the method of calculating the amount of child maintenance that is due. It also contains provisions that aim to speed up the process of getting hold of the maintenance that supports children. An administrative liability order is one method of accelerating the process. The Department will have the power to make liability orders administratively, and those will operate in the same way as the current court order. The liability order will be the first step towards an enforcement measure, and its use avoids the lengthy timescale that is involved in applying for a court order.

I recognise that the Bill's enforcement powers may, on the face of it, seem extensive. However, they will be used only as a last resort when all other means of collecting money that is owed to children have failed. The Bill introduces two new enforcement measures to encourage non-resident parents to comply: the Department will be able to apply to a court, first, to have a non-resident parent disqualified from holding a

passport or secondly, to impose a curfew order. Those measures can be considered only after the enforcement of a liability order has been attempted through the Enforcement of Judgments Office, and they are intended to function as a last resort when more direct forms of enforcement have been attempted but maintenance remains outstanding.

The Bill's provisions include safeguards to prevent undue hardship as a consequence of imposing the enforcement measures. Such considerations include the need of non-residents to travel to earn a living or the adverse effect on the welfare of children of disqualifying a non-resident parent from holding a passport. At present, the Department has the power to apply to the court to have a non-resident parent disqualified from driving for up to two years, or committed to prison for up to six weeks, for failure to pay child support maintenance. The Bill makes some amendments to align those powers with those that apply to the two new enforcement measures. For example, the court will have to assess both the impact of its decision on the non-resident parent's ability to earn a living and whether the non-resident parent has refused — as opposed to being unable — to pay maintenance.

I stress that the court-based enforcement measures are intended to function as a last resort; I want the House to be clear about that. If a non-resident parent makes a reasonable offer to pay less than the total amount that is owed and agrees final settlement of the entire amount of child maintenance that is owed to the parent with care, the Department will be able to negotiate and accept settlements between the two.

11.15 am

When the debt is due to the parent with care, that parent must give consent before the Department can accept the offer of the non-resident parent. A similar provision will allow the Department to write off debt in limited circumstances.

It will become a criminal offence for any parent to fail to notify the Department of a change of address. At present, there is no obligation to do so, but that measure will ensure that the Department will be able to take swifter enforcement action when compliance breaks down. Powers will be granted to the Department to seek recovery of child maintenance from the estate of a deceased non-resident parent where it is appropriate to do so. The Bill will remove the penalty of contempt of court when people disclose information that they have obtained in certain family proceedings to the Department without the permission of the court, and will remove the requirement to seek that permission from the court. In turn, that will remove the possibility of being found in contempt when such information has been disclosed to the Department with the intention of

ensuring that a child maintenance calculation is fair and accurate.

It is proposed that the Department be able to provide credit reference agencies with information about all those persons who have a maintenance liability, including those who meet their obligations in full and on time. When a non-resident parent is the subject of a liability order, the information will be shared without his agreement. However, in the case of a non-resident parent who is fully compliant with his obligations to pay statutory child maintenance, his consent must be obtained before information relating to him can be supplied to credit reference agencies.

Part 3 of the Bill is a general section that deals with some technical matters, such as consequential amendments, repeals and transitional arrangements.

The Child Maintenance Bill makes tackling child poverty the main priority by ensuring that more of the maintenance paid goes directly to the children. That is the most important point in the legislation. The primary purpose of the Bill is to make the child maintenance system work for children. I recognise that that has not been the case in the past, and I know that Members will agree. It is widely acknowledged that one of the main reasons for that is that, despite the best efforts of the staff who administer the system, the current system is too complicated and attempts to take too many factors into account.

To ensure that the proposed system works, the statutory maintenance arrangement process will be streamlined in order to make it simpler, smoother and quicker. In that sense, it is a move that will benefit everyone. The move from net to gross income will make the statutory maintenance calculations more transparent for parents and will help the Department to determine the correct amount of payment due. That will mean that money will flow more quickly to more children.

The increase in the maintenance disregard will also result in more money flowing to the parent with care for the benefit of the children. That is the crucial issue, and it is the crux, the purpose and the objective of the Bill. The proposal to introduce new liability orders, which can be made administratively by the Department, will speed up the enforcement process and reduce the time taken to enforce the collection of arrears.

I assure the House that no responsible parent need be concerned about the strengthened enforcement measures. Those measures are aimed at those who refuse to pay as opposed to those who cannot pay child maintenance. I know that all Members want to ensure that all non-resident parents face up to their parenting responsibilities. It is not right for any child to live in poverty because a parent fails to provide adequate support.

Those are all proportionate measures. Currently, one in three non-resident parents fails to pay any of the

money that is owed to his or her children. That affects around 12,600 children in Northern Ireland. It is both right and fair that the Department should use effective measures against those people who deny their children the support that is due to them.

In summary, therefore, the Department wants to ensure that money flows more quickly to children. The Bill is a child-poverty measure; it introduces a disregard and it deals with non-resident parents in a more expeditious fashion. The most important feature of the Bill is that it is on the side of children and parents with care. It is a good news Bill and a good news story for Northern Ireland. It will ensure that money will flow more quickly to children.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hilditch): I thank the Minister for her explanation of the Bill's background and policy provisions. I do not intend to cover the same ground, but to make a couple of important points about voluntary arrangements and enforcement provisions. The Committee fully supports the drive to get parents to make their own child-maintenance arrangements. However, I want to draw Members' attention to a research report on the redesign of child maintenance that was produced in 2007 for the Department for Work and Pensions. That report showed quite clearly that there is a big difference in the views of parents with care and non-resident parents in respect of voluntary arrangements. Only 24% of parents with care had any confidence that voluntary arrangements would work for them, whereas 57% of non-resident parents thought that they would work. I am sure that I do not need to explain to the House the reasons behind the difference in opinions.

Non-payment in cases where voluntary arrangements have been made needs to be carefully monitored. The Department must ensure that parents with care know exactly what their rights are within the statutory maintenance system. It remains to be seen whether non-resident parents who do not pay under the statutory system will pay under a voluntary system. If the Assembly wants to focus on meeting children's needs and is to tackle child poverty effectively, it must ensure that more parents take responsibility for paying for their children and that more children benefit from that.

There was much discussion in the Committee about enforcement provisions and related human rights issues. Some members expressed serious reservations about those provisions. Of course, concern was heightened by the possibility of the Bill not being subject to Committee scrutiny. The Department informed the Committee that it is content — based on the legal advice that it has received — that the Bill's provisions are compatible with the rights that are defined in section 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Committee noted that several safeguards are in place to ensure that enforcement provisions are used only as a last resort. However, it seeks assurance from the Minister that only those people who will not pay, as opposed to those who cannot pay, will be subject to such provisions in the Bill.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Child Maintenance Bill certainly has some good features. The Minister has outlined its advantages for parents with care. Sinn Féin's point of view is that there is absolutely no intention in the Bill to deprive anyone of maintenance or, indeed, of benefit. However, historically, the Child Support Agency has had several inherent difficulties. Recently, the Public Accounts Committee published a report on that agency, which outlined clearly its failure to deliver, and the inadequacies of its computer system.

The Minister has called the Child Maintenance Bill a "good news Bill". However, the good news depends on how effectively it can deliver and on whether the Social Security Agency has the resources to deliver. In my constituency, many absent parents simply go across the border where they are outside the jurisdiction and cannot be forced to contribute maintenance to the parent with care. Unfortunately, that has been an ongoing problem since child support was introduced.

Effectiveness of delivery will be a big issue as regards the Child Maintenance Bill, and we can only hope that delivery will be effective. The Minister said that the computer system would be mainstreamed, but it remains to be seen whether that will improve its effectiveness.

The Bill includes some draconian measures, such as for instance the confiscation of passports. In my constituency, people often have two passports. Therefore, if one passport were taken from them they could still travel on the other passport. There are several difficulties, which the Bill will hopefully address in time. The Bill has some good points, and it is not the intention of Sinn Féin to deprive anyone of maintenance or benefit. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr A Maginness: Members will be able to go into more detail when the Bill is given its Consideration Stage next week. I generally welcome the Bill, which provides for important reform of the child maintenance system in this jurisdiction, and indeed elsewhere. It bases its proposals on the findings of the Henshaw Report, which was important in its examination of the whole regime of child maintenance.

Clearly, this is a complex piece of legislation. The current system of child support is complex and in need of serious reform. One welcomes the Bill because it sets out to carry out that reform. It does not provide perfect answers to the difficulties that children encounter due to the fact that a parent, usually their father, does

not support them. There are many reasons why non-resident parents, particularly fathers, do not support their children; but they have a moral duty to do so. That is emphasised in the Bill and by the Minister for Social Development's introductory comments on it. If the Bill achieves its purpose of bringing into the net 12,000 non-resident parents — mainly fathers — who do not maintain their children, it will be a job well done.

The Bill contains inducements to establish a fairer, better and more balanced system of obtaining maintenance from non-resident parents. It also introduces a number of sanctions, which, equally, are important. It creates a new structure in which it is more likely that parents who are not maintaining their children will be brought into the system.

Importantly, the Bill contains a mixture of inducements and sanctions, some of which have been mentioned. For example, Mr Brady mentioned the withdrawal of passports. In certain circumstances, the withdrawal of a passport is a necessary sanction that should be used, provided that that does not disrupt a person's employment. The Bill contains provision to prevent that from happening. If a person deliberately avoids or evades paying maintenance for their child, it is right and proper that the state exercises some form of sanction against that person. We know already that the courts can imprison a person who defaults deliberately and on a prolonged basis, because it effectively amounts to contempt of court.

Such a sanction is right and proper, and it is important that we do away with the notion that we cannot impose sanctions on people who deliberately avoid their responsibilities. It is also right and proper for the courts and, in certain circumstances, the Department to have such powers.

11.30 am

There are new curfew powers, and, again, they are —

Mr F McCann: I understand perfectly what the Member is saying, and he should remember that similar matters arose in the Committee. Indeed, the European Commission or one of the human rights organisations expressed reservations about elements of the Bill.

The difficulty is that, although those measures might be permissible on paper, experience tells us that powers can be abused. We must ensure that those powers are not abused. We can argue about those matters, and that may prolong the Bill's Committee Stage, which will be OK so long as we are assured that legislation will not be abused. Nevertheless, that does not affect our right to be concerned that such legislation might be used in other ways.

Mr A Maginness: I accept Mr McCann's point, which is reasonable and with which I have great sympathy. Everyone in the House who adopts a

sensible view would not wish for people to be oppressed where, because of circumstances that are beyond their control, they simply cannot fulfil their obligations.

In this instance, I am referring to situations in which people deliberately evade their responsibilities. In such circumstances, a range of sanctions are necessary, including curfews; driving licence restrictions, which, in certain circumstances, we already have; and, when there is wilful evasion, court-imposed custodial orders. So long as the sanctions are proportionate and observe human rights, it is right and proper that they be introduced. Nevertheless, Mr McCann was absolutely correct to mention oppression and the possible misuse of such a range of sanctions.

Unless there is good reason not to do so in particular cases, a deduction of earnings order will be the initial collection method. That is the simplest and most effective method with which to bring about a proper maintenance system for children, and it will introduce a measure of certainty for children who have been deprived of maintenance.

Furthermore, the Bill will introduce flexibility into the child-maintenance system. The previous system was hidebound by unnecessary restrictions and regulations, a lack of flexibility and the failure to recognise that a voluntary scheme is as good as a statutory or administrative scheme. The Bill will loosen up child-maintenance procedures, and, therefore, it is to be welcomed.

I could discuss other provisions of the Bill; however, it is appropriate to wait until its Consideration Stage to deal with them in more detail.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party welcomes the fact that the Bill focuses on reducing child poverty. I hope that the reforms that it will introduce will also have a positive impact on the health and well-being of all our children and young people.

The Bill is also about fairness. People must meet their parental responsibilities to support and bring up their children. It is not simply about mums finding money through child benefits; it is also about showing children that their parents care, and want to provide, for them.

One in three non-resident parents fails to pay maintenance, and that is totally unacceptable. The fact that they have been allowed to get away with it for so long, and that the Child Support Agency seems to be powerless to pursue those parents, has caused much grief and frustration for families as well as agency staff. For so long, the agency has been seen as a lame duck that is unable to do anything for children and those parents who shoulder the big responsibility of caring for children. Many of those parents must manage on a shoestring, knowing that, although they

are entitled to money from the non-resident parent, they will not get it.

I welcome the Bill's new measures to obtain details of the income of the non-resident parent directly from HM Revenue and Customs rather than from the non-resident parent, as is the case at the moment. That arrangement has caused many wrangles, disputes and delays in getting the money to children. The new approach will provide more accurate information on parents' incomes rather than depending on the parents' co-operation in supplying details.

I agree with the Minister that the Bill must be child-focused; we must put our children first. We talk a great deal about child poverty, and Northern Ireland is one of the regions with the highest rate of child poverty. It is important that we address the issue across Departments by whatever means and through whatever legislation we can.

I also welcome the new powers to enforce arrears and collect money from bank accounts. That will make it much easier and quicker to get money from parents who have failed to meet their responsibilities.

The additional measures — the court measures and the range of sanctions — will give the agency much more power and clout. I understand that some of those measures may be considered quite draconian, but they will be used as a last resort. Sometimes a case may not even need to reach the courts: the measures can act as a deterrent by making parents aware that they will face serious consequences if they do not meet their responsibilities. It is important to give the agency those additional powers so that our children can benefit. In the end, we must think about the children and the mothers who are trying to make ends meet day in and day out, and who are not receiving the money that they need to meet their children's needs and to bring them up fairly.

Miss McIlveen: It is a commonly acknowledged fact that the Child Support Agency (CSA) has failed many families. Since its inception, the agency has attracted widespread criticism, and it has been beset by backlogs and delays. An estimated £1 billion of debt has been written off, and it has been admitted that perhaps £1.3 billion is uncollectable in the United Kingdom. Such figures are unacceptable, and it is to be hoped that this legislation will succeed where previous legislation failed.

Last year, the Chairman of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee said:

"The reform of the Child Support Agency has been one of the greatest public administration disasters of recent times."

Change was, and is, needed. Although the CSA was able to help a lot of families, in a proportion of cases it has increased hardship for other families. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, more than four

in 10 poor children live in lone-parent households, but less than a quarter of those parents receive maintenance payments.

This Bill introduces a number of changes. An important change, which will remove a huge proportion of administrative work from the newly-established commission, is the removal of the requirement that parents with care who claim benefits are treated as having applied for child maintenance. Parents who are in receipt of benefit now have the choice of making their own arrangements. Furthermore, the Department will be able to accept a settlement made between the parties for part-payment of arrears as a full and final settlement. Previously, only full payment was acceptable.

In the past, there have been cases of non-resident parents ending up in jail for non-payment of arrears despite the protestations of the resident parent. This will encourage families to go through mediation rather than the court process. A recent National Audit Office report found that mediated settlements take around a quarter of the time and cost the taxpayer half as much as those that end up in the courts.

As the Minister has said, the Department will be responsible for investigating and gathering evidence when an application is made for variation. Previously, when the application was made by a parent with care, the applying parent had to supply the evidence, although they rarely possessed such information. It is often impossible for such parents to gather that information, and it is logical that the Department, given its greater powers, should carry out that investigative function.

As some Members have said, the Bill has the potential for speeding up the issuing of administrative liability orders by removing them from the court process and granting the Department the power to issue them directly. Those liability orders can then lead to the exercising of other new Departmental powers such as seizure of passports, curfew, and disqualification from driving.

The Bill also introduces important powers to the Department to collect arrears from non-resident parents, by way of regular payments or lump sums, from their bank or building society accounts. That is an important new power given that the attachment of earnings orders, which are the primary source of payment, are not appropriate for those who are self-employed or who regularly change employer. The Department, as we have discovered, will also be able to freeze bank and building society accounts where it is believed that a non-resident parent is attempting to dispose of or remove his or her assets, and apply to have a sale or gift of assets set aside if it can be shown that it was done to avoid paying child maintenance.

These powers ensure that those who can afford to pay arrears, but have ignored the demands to do so,

meet their responsibilities. That, coupled with the existing power to make an attachment of earnings order, should result in a speedier resolution of cases, which is something with which we should all be content.

The Department will be given the power to recover arrears from the estate of a deceased non-resident parent. Previously, it was left to the resident parent to make a claim against the estate. In addition, maintenance arrears will be treated like any other debt in that the Department can make the information available to credit reference agencies. That should mean that those non-resident parents considering not meeting their maintenance responsibilities will think twice when they weigh the effect that that could have on their lives when applying for a telephone, a mortgage or car finance.

Such provisions for recovery of arrears and publicising debt seem draconian, considering the previous regime. However, that debt is money to be spent on vital items for that parent's child or children. If those payments are not made, families are placed in hardship.

Many issues have been debated in this Chamber, such as fuel poverty, child poverty and rising prices, and the impact that those have on children. In many instances, those children have only one resident parent, and the non-resident parent is often not meeting his or her financial responsibilities. It is imperative that legislatures such as this put in place appropriate and robust measures so that children are not disadvantaged.

The legislation is a step in the right direction. I said at the outset that change was needed, and it is pleasing to note that problems have been identified and measures have been taken to address those problems. I support the motion.

11.45 am

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Much of what I intended to say has been covered. However, I wish to put on record that, although members of the Committee for Social Development had objections and observations about how the Bill was being handled, we fully supported its broad thrust and concept, and we recognised the impact that it would have on parents who rely on absent parents to pay maintenance for their children.

Human rights organisations raised concerns about various elements of the Bill. This is the fifth Bill to have been subject to the accelerated passage procedure, and the Committee raised similar concerns about those Bills, with the exception of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill, because the Committee understood the urgency and importance of granting accelerated passage to that Bill and the impact that it would have on people. However, it remained the Committee's right and duty to raise questions about possible problems that people may face when the Bill is implemented. Committee members continue to retain that right, because, when

they vote against a Bill at Committee Stage, they do so because they have reservations about it. Furthermore, the Committee will continue to raise the whole question of the accelerated passage procedure.

The Minister for Social Development: I have listened carefully to all Members' points during the debate, and I trust that I will be able to address their concerns and the fundamental purpose and objective of the Bill. I cannot stress enough that its purpose is to simplify the process and deal with the flow of money to children in a more expeditious manner, address child poverty and ensure that no child in Northern Ireland is deprived of money.

Members generally accepted the thrust and purpose of the Bill. The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, David Hilditch, referred to the issue of voluntary arrangements. Information and support services, which are an integral part of the Bill, will be available to help parents to decide what arrangements are best for them. Both parents have to opt out of the use of the statutory child maintenance system, and, if they are unhappy at any time, they can opt in again.

I assure Mr Hilditch that enforcement measures will be used against people who will not pay maintenance rather than those who do not have the capacity to pay. Anna Lo said that parents must meet their parental responsibilities to the children for whom they have caring responsibilities. That is a very simple concept to me.

Mickey Brady raised the issue of the Child Support Agency's performance. I do not know how many times I have to tell the Committee and the House that I recognise the past deficiencies of the Child Support Agency. As a result of the Henshaw Review, I decided to move the Child Support Agency into the core of the Department for Social Development on 1 April 2008. The arrangements are designed to ensure that the system is smoother and simpler. I have instructed my officials to ensure that payments flow more quickly to children who are in need.

Enforcement is a measure that will be used as a last resort only, and the passports issue is only one possible measure. The courts must decide on the most appropriate measure in each case.

The Bill introduces reforms to ensure that more children benefit from maintenance. It will help parents make maintenance arrangements that suit their personal circumstances and pressurise those individuals who do not comply with their responsibilities.

I question, reluctantly, whether Sinn Féin has acted in good faith during the process. Although it did not comment at the appropriate time between December 2007 and February 2008, it condemned the Department's equality impact assessment. It attacked the minutiae of the equality impact assessment hours before the

Executive were to consider the legislation, but it subsequently relented at the Executive Committee and allowed the Bill to proceed. Furthermore, Sinn Féin voted against the Bill in the Committee for Social Development yet supported the motion for accelerated passage today.

I conclude that Sinn Féin's points about the equality impact assessment and human rights do not indicate that it genuinely cares but are a smokescreen for old-fashioned mischief making. If Sinn Féin cared about the detail of social security legislation, it would join the rest of us, abandon its old-fashioned abstentionism and take its seats at Westminster, where it could exercise real influence over such matters during every stage of the Bill.

Finally, child maintenance makes an important contribution to tackling child poverty, and, when it is paid, makes a significant difference to families' lives. Members must remember that the Bill's central aim is to enhance children's lives. Through the Bill, we want to ensure that measures are simpler, processes made more expeditious and money flows more quickly to children who need it — nobody in the House should want to deprive anybody of money.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Child Maintenance Bill [NIA 17/07] be agreed.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Second Stage of the Child Maintenance Bill.

Budget (No. 2) Bill

Second Stage

Mr Speaker: I have been advised that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, will move the Second Stage of the Budget Bill on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Nigel Dodds.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 18/07] be agreed.

The debate follows yesterday's First Stage, and the Supply resolutions for the 2008-09 Main Estimates and the 2006-07 excess vote, which the House considered and approved yesterday. Accelerated passage is necessary for logistical reasons and in order to secure Royal Assent in July 2008, which will ensure that Departments and other public bodies have legal authority to spend the cash and use the resources, without delay, for the remainder of 2008-09.

I am pleased to report that the Bill can be granted accelerated passage, because the Committee for Finance and Personnel has confirmed — in line with Standing Order 40 — that it is satisfied that it has been appropriately consulted on the public expenditure proposals outlined in the Bill. I understand that confirmation was given in a letter, dated 4 June 2008, from the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel to the Speaker.

Once again, on behalf of the Executive and the Department, I welcome and appreciate the Committee's assistance in this matter.

The Budget (No.2) Bill gives legislative effect to the 2008-09 Main Estimates and to the 2006-07 excess vote approved through the Supply resolutions that were passed yesterday. Copies of the Main Estimates volume, the Statement of Excess document, the Budget (No.2) Bill and the explanatory and financial memorandum have been made available to Members.

I do not intend to take up valuable debating time with unnecessary repetition of the details that I provided to Members yesterday. However, in accordance with the nature of a Second Stage debate envisaged under Standing Order 30, and for the benefit of Members, I wish to summarise briefly the main features of the Bill.

The purpose of the Budget (No.2) Bill is to authorise the issue of £7.2 billion from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund and the use of resources totalling £8.5 billion by Departments and certain other bodies as detailed in the Main Estimates for 2008-09. Those amounts are in addition to the Vote on Account passed by the Assembly in February 2008. The sums to

be issued from the Consolidated Fund are to be appropriated by each Department or public body for services as set out in schedule 1 to the Bill, while the resources are to be used for the purposes specified in schedule 2 to the Bill. In addition, the Bill sets for 2008-09 the limit on the use of operating and non-operating accruing resources. Schedule 2 to the Bill specifies the purposes for which those resources may be used.

Clause 2 of the Bill authorises the temporary borrowing by the Department of Finance and Personnel of £3.6 billion; that is, approximately half the sum authorised by clause 1(1), for issue out of the Consolidated Fund. That is a normal safeguard against the possibility of a temporary deficiency arising in the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. Clause 5 of the Bill authorises the issue of £7.2 million from the Consolidated Fund to be appropriated for excess expenditure on the Health Service superannuation scheme in 2006-07. Finally, clause 6 removes from the statute book two Budget Orders, which are no longer operative.

The Budget (No.2) Bill reflects the detailed spending plans of Departments as set out in the 2008-09 Main Estimates. We have now embarked on the first-year plans of the Executive's first Budget. The Main Estimates and the Budget (No.2) Bill are the beginning of the road, but they are certainly not the end of it. It is the responsibility of every Assembly Member to play a part in holding Ministers and Departments to account throughout 2008 and 2009 in order to achieve our goals on delivery and efficiency.

There is little more that I can usefully add on the substance of the Budget (No.2) Bill. However, I will be happy to try to deal with any points of principle that may arise.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I wish to take this early opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on her appointment. We look forward to working with her in future on this very challenging brief, and wish her every success.

At its meetings on 28 May 2008 and 4 June 2008, the Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence from senior Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on the Budget (No.2) Bill, the general principles of which are being debated today. The Bill authorises departmental spending in 2008 and 2009 on resources and associated cash requirements based on the first-year spending plans of the Executive's Budget for 2008-2011, which was approved by the Assembly on 29 January 2008.

The Bill also includes provision for an excess cash requirement by the Department of Health, Social

Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) for the health and personal social services superannuation scheme for 2006-07. Assembly approval of the Budget (No.2) Bill provides the legal authority for the balance of resources and associated cash requirements as detailed in the Main Estimates, which were discussed substantially in the Assembly yesterday.

The Committee was briefed on the Executive's draft Budget by the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and, on several occasions, by senior departmental officials. The Committee also sought submissions from other Statutory Committees prior to finalising a report on the draft Budget 2008-2011, which was published in December 2007. The Committee has received a formal response to that report from DFP, and was briefed by DFP officials on the Budget on 23 January 2008.

12.00 noon

The excess vote for DHSSPS was the subject of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Public Accounts Committee, which recommended that the necessary sum should be provided by an excess vote in the Assembly. My Committee took steps to inform the Health Committee of the situation.

During briefings on the Budget Bill, officials informed my Committee of the reasons for differing figures in the Budget and the Estimates. Given that the same source data is used for both the Budget and the Estimates, my Committee questioned the officials, who provided the Committee with a helpful paper to demonstrate that the figures are reconcilable. The Committee was entirely satisfied with that explanation.

The Committee is well aware of the consequences for departmental spending and the potential effect on front line services should this Bill not progress through the Assembly before the summer recess. In that context, the Committee is satisfied that there was appropriate consultation on the public-expenditure proposals contained in the Bill, in accordance with Standing Order 40. The Committee is content that the Bill may proceed by accelerated passage, as the Minister has acknowledged. As the Minister pointed out, I corresponded on the Committee's behalf with the Speaker on 4 June to confirm that. Therefore, the Committee supports the Bill.

Mr Storey: I support the process by which the Bill is passing through the House, and I concur with the comments of the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

Yesterday, we saw considerable grandstanding by Members who took the opportunity to use the debate to raise particular issues. I refer particularly to the comments of my colleague from North Antrim Mr O'Loan, who cited a list of issues. He will recall that I intervened to seek clarification — which, unfortunately, I did not get — on the SDLP's approach to the entire

budgetary process. The SDLP likes to have the luxury of being able to distance itself, when it suits, from the four-party mandatory coalition to which it signed up, and it tries to evade its responsibilities. The SDLP put its Minister in an invidious position when it forced her to vote in support of the Budget, while it took the more convenient route of voting against it.

I trust that, as we have progressed through the budgetary process in recent months, Members will have seen the way in which the House formulates the financial position and takes responsibility for what it, as an elected Assembly, must do. Therefore, it would be remiss of Members not to take those responsibilities seriously, but, equally, the House must not dismiss Members' concerns about the major issues that it must deal with. It seems as though many believe that those issues can be resolved only by pounds, shillings and pence. Some seem to think that the world is set aright solely by the way in which we allocate money and that, unless we have the money, we cannot deliver a particular service.

I realise that funding is a very important element in the delivery of services. However, the Budget places on Ministers the responsibility to prioritise the way in which their Departments spend money. Yesterday, various Members rehearsed their arguments about the way in which particular Ministers have decided to allocate their moneys. We have only to look at the bid process to see the way in which Departments prioritise their issues. For example, the Minister of Education made 32 bids whereby she decided that certain issues had higher priority than others. Irish-medium education and the Irish language were given higher priorities than extended schools.

Then, in the in-year monitoring round, the Minister of Education decided to hand about £50 million back to DFP. That should focus attention on the importance of Ministers' priorities in how they spend the money that they are given.

We must approve the Budget (No. 2) Bill to ensure that money is released from the Consolidated Fund. We should take lessons from what has been said about this entire process over the past days and months. That would put the focus on prioritising the issues that are of primary importance to the people who voted us into this House, ensure that we receive value for money, and deliver services on the ground in the way that people expect. I support the motion.

Mr Beggs: I, too, congratulate the Minister on her appointment, and I wish her well in her new post. I also congratulate her on stepping up to the mark and enabling the Budget (No. 2) Bill to proceed. One of the principles behind the Bill is the distribution of funding through the departmental silos. It would mean an end to cross-cutting funding, as previously occurred in the

Executive programme fund for children and the children's fund; the Bill does not make reference to such streams of funding.

However, there are dangers in putting funding through departmental silos. Cross-cutting funding programmes assist several Departments in fulfilling their responsibilities and achieving their objectives. If a Department bids for funds for a cross-cutting issue, it compares that against bids for which it has sole responsibility, and worthwhile projects that would benefit multiple Departments may be endangered.

The budgetary process has weaknesses and failings. There are issues that have to be addressed in order to ensure that budgeting arrangements are improved and worthwhile projects are not left behind. It is not sufficient simply to end the children's fund and pass sole responsibility to Departments. There needs to be a further refinement mechanism in place to ensure that projects with benefits to several Departments are recognised.

If the principle of departmental silo funding is to be used, I suggest that OFMDFM and the junior Ministers — who have specific responsibility for children's issues — should have a budgetary role to examine cross-cutting issues. A ministerial subcommittee on children could play an important role in determining departmental funding and addressing cross-cutting issues in the Budget.

It is unseemly for the Minister of Education to argue that, although she has responsibility for childcare issues, she has no responsibility for after-school clubs; I hope that such a situation does not develop again. If the Minister of Education does not have responsibility for after-school clubs, who does? If identifying who holds that responsibility is problematic, the OFMDFM Ministers should step in, plug the gap, and clarify the matter.

The use of departmental silos is dangerous and represents a weakness of the budgetary process. That weakness must be addressed to ensure that important cross-cutting funding projects are not lost in the future.

Mr O'Loan: I add my congratulations to the Minister on her appointment. I also congratulate her on the way in which she handled yesterday's debate on a portfolio that was not her own.

Like the Minister, I am not going to repeat all that was said yesterday, but certain points do need to be placed on the record. I want to state clearly that this party has serious concerns around the Budget. I was surprised yesterday, therefore, to hear the previous Minister of Finance — now the First Minister — say that there had been no dissent on the Budget at Executive level or in this House. The SDLP very clearly expressed dissent and divided the House on that issue.

As I said yesterday, good government is not just about money — that money has to be spent well. We have serious concerns about the government that we are getting under the leadership of OFMDFM and the clear divisions that there are between the two parties in that Department.

I referred yesterday to the quality of good governance and the concerns that I have around that. Government is not just the political system — the Government play an important role in leading a wider system. The administrative side of that system and the political side must work in harmony, each having its own part to play and each determining what its role is within that system. I have real concerns around the manner in which certain parts of our political system are interacting with other parts of our administrative system.

There is a need for deep thinking within this Assembly about how we are going to get government that really does rise to the occasion and take us to a higher level of governance. That needs to be done, but I am not convinced that that is happening in a lot of our current activity. I refer specifically to the need for an independent environmental protection agency — an important issue in its own right — but I do not want it to escape from attention that I am making a broader and more general point.

I want to briefly state again the major concerns that I have around the Budget: efficiency savings, their delivery, and their effect on front line services; education, and the absence from the Budget of provision for one of the biggest changes to our schooling system that we have seen in decades; the extended-schools system and after-school issues.

Only yesterday I was approached on behalf of one such scheme in the Millennium Centre in Loughgiel — a superb after-schools programme catering for 70 to 80 young people and taking them through activities including music, City of London University certificates and so on — that is potentially in jeopardy because the funding is not in place for it.

We must determine what is needed and evaluate existing schemes, but there is no point — as was said yesterday by a colleague of mine — in throwing money at something for a year or two and then walking away. If something is of value — and I think that the wisdom of the day is that after-schools programmes are of value — then we need to continue that funding. The Minister of Education is seeking extra funding in the June monitoring round, so clearly that money was not put into the Budget.

I referred to the problem around asset sales, the degree to which the Budget is predicated on those, and the major uncertainty around that. The provision of social housing is one of the targets that the Executive

have adopted, and all parties have agreed that. It is vital that money is put in place for that.

The issue of fuel poverty is a greater one now than it was at the time of the Budget.

We can rightly use the word “crisis”. The Assembly must find a way to put more money into the warm homes scheme.

12.15 pm

I referred to water charges, around which there is great uncertainty, as well as indications of a movement toward separate water bills, which will be a very contentious issue. We are entitled to ask the Minister whether, by supporting this Bill, Members will be endorsing water charges, separate water charges, and water charges for churches and charities. I would like to hear the Minister’s comments in relation to those points. I repeat those serious concerns around the Budget. I will be interested in hearing the comments of other Members as the debate continues, and I am particularly interested in hearing the response of the Minister in due course.

Dr Farry: I congratulate the Minister on her new appointment and pay tribute to her dexterity. She found herself in an almost unique situation in parliamentary terms in that she started one long debate yesterday as the Minister for the Environment, and concluded it as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, while covering the DFP brief. No doubt she will go down in history for that. We wish her well for the future.

The Alliance Party has made it clear that it is opposed to the Budget. We have made our opposition clear in numerous debates and in the formal vote on the adoption of the Budget several months ago. I hope that the House appreciates that we did not force a Division on the Supply resolutions and detain Members needlessly for another repetitive vote yesterday.

The motions and legislation being discussed today are the mechanisms for putting into place the Budget that has been adopted by three parties on the Floor of the Assembly and four parties in the Executive. That said; I detect a lukewarm reaction to the Budget across the House. Only the DUP seems truly enthusiastic about it, and that reflects the fact that its fingerprints are on it. The other parties seem to be more apprehensive and are not rigorous in their defence of it — notably Sinn Féin, which is, in effect, co-equal at the top of the Government. It is, however, for that party to justify its position in the debate. Back-Benchers from all parties — including the DUP — have been critical of different aspects of the Budget at different times, and there have been particular complaints about cuts in public services across Northern Ireland.

I will endeavour to avoid repeating the comments that my colleagues and I made yesterday in the Supply

resolutions debate as best as I can. In keeping with the general principles of the Bill, I will focus on three broad failings of the Budget. First, it fails to address the reality — the very sad reality — of the divided society in Northern Ireland, which carries social and human costs. The most relevant costs in relation to the Budget are the economic and financial ones. The Budget has been presented as a recipe for the economic transformation of society. I stress that we cannot have that economic transformation unless we address the divisions within our society at the same time. We must acknowledge the negative sense that divisions create barriers to labour market mobility and deter investment.

Members should take note of the comments of the Mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, when he visited Belfast at the time of the US/NI investment conference several weeks ago. We should be talking about how a mixed, open and respectful society can be successful in attracting investors and creative, skilled people from overseas.

I will not repeat the comments that I made yesterday about the Deloitte report except to say that it is very much a work in progress. I have been trying to ascertain from Departments and Ministers how that report impacts on the work of their Departments and, in particular, on the budget allocations.

Most Ministers provided very narrow responses, with limited focus on their Department’s direct service delivery. On the whole, they missed the wider policy aspects of their work, the areas in which they spend money, and how economic and financial costs are created as a consequence. Their responses showed a lack of appreciation of the potential for minimising those costs through more creative use of public policy.

To give some examples: the Minister for Employment and Learning did not acknowledge the point about labour-market mobility; the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — and perhaps the new incumbent will reflect upon this — did not refer to the barriers to investment presented by the so-called peace walls that scar the Northern Ireland landscape; the Minister of the Environment showed no awareness of how planning issues interact with those of shared space, the more efficient use of land and the delivery of public services. Only the Minister for Social Development rose above the narrow focus and recognised the potential of shared housing with regard to budgetary allocations. I give her credit for that. My wider point is that addressing the costs of division and pursuing a shared future, in addition to creating wider efficiency savings, are critical to a more balanced approach to public expenditure.

The second aspect that I am concerned about is the claim that the Budget will prioritise economic growth and economic change in society. There are grounds for questioning whether it will do what has been claimed.

The best measure of our development as a society is our level of gross value added (GVA) convergence, and the Executive have set a target for GVA convergence with the UK average minus that in the greater south-east of England. I appreciate the argument that the south-east of England distorts the picture, but its exclusion amounts to moving the goalposts with regard to the measurement. Rather than challenging the overall balance of the UK economy, we will now be measuring how well Northern Ireland is competing with other dependent regions of the UK for the scraps that fall from the table. We have no target for GVA convergence with the Republic of Ireland, which would reflect the all-island dimension in which we operate, nor with the European Union average.

The economic aspects of the Budget are built around the same economic drivers that have been in use for about the past 10 years: they were reflected in the draft regional economic strategy, which was panned, rightly, for its conservatism — and I mean conservatism with a small “c” — across the board by businessmen and politicians alike. To be fair to the Executive, they have sought to develop those drivers to a new level in both the Programme for Government and the Budget. Even so, questions arise over the allocation of resources to address skills shortages at both ends of the spectrum — basic literacy and numeracy, and PhDs. It may also be questioned whether we are doing the right thing with regard to investment in infrastructure. An interesting debate will gather pace over the next few months as to how we balance development and meet the demand for moving resources out of the greater Belfast area and across Northern Ireland.

We must also recognise the importance of developing infrastructure in the greater Belfast area; recognising Belfast’s importance as a regional driver; and ensuring that, as a city region, Belfast is capable of competing as a major player in wider European and global scenes. That must be the cornerstone of our economic approach.

The Varney II report operated within a limited framework, but it encouraged the Executive to go further. However, the sobering reality behind both Varney reports is that the UK Treasury does not expect there to be any meaningful GVA convergence. Therefore, whereas the Budgets being agreed by the Assembly may refer to GVA convergence, the UK Treasury does not foresee such convergence taking place. When Sir David Varney appeared before the DFP Committee last week, he effectively conceded that point under questioning.

The UK Treasury has condemned us to operate within the same macroeconomic framework as previously. That framework views and protects the south-east of England as the main driver of the overall UK economy and the source of wealth from which the remaining regions of the UK benefit. Under that

framework, Northern Ireland benefits through the fiscal transfers to the Barnett formula. That is not an appealing vision for Northern Ireland, and it is not one that our devolved Assembly should accept.

The policies and practices coming from the Treasury do not offer scope for any potential step changes in our circumstances. It is with regret that I detect that the Executive have given up the fight on a differential rate of corporation tax.

Mr O’Loan: Dr Farry referred to Varney II as being the product of the Treasury. However, our DFP officials were heavily involved in the production of Varney II, but they were not involved in the first Varney Review. That is an important statement, because one must ask whether the results of Varney II best illustrate the Department of Finance and Personnel’s thinking on the economy. If it does, it is a prognostication of despair. It suggests that, under existing measures, we will not achieve the GVA convergence that Mr Farry talked about or improve our relative position with the UK average, never mind those of the Republic of Ireland or the rest of Europe.

Returning to my point, we must look at the quality of our Government and ask fundamental questions about how we can do things better. The quality of the DFP officials’ involvement in Varney II raises a lot of questions about what the Assembly is doing.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr O’Loan for his intervention, and I concur with his well-made remarks. I look forward to joining him at the Committee for Finance and Personnel tomorrow morning in challenging the DFP officials about the outcome of Varney II and in looking ahead to the regional economic strategy.

Mr A Maginness: Varney II contained details on the privatisation of the Port of Belfast. Does Dr Farry agree that it would be disastrous to privatise an asset that has not cost one penny of public money and that produces a substantial profit, all of which is reinvested into the port, which is a major gateway for the economy of Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is right to acknowledge that there is substantial concern across the board about several of the recommendations contained in Varney II. That is one that caused particular concern. It is imperative that the Assembly and the relevant Committees study that recommendation in great detail.

The issue of sustainability can be looked at in two parts. First, I talked at length yesterday about the sustainability of public services and the different areas — including the health and education sectors — in which public expenditure in Northern Ireland is not being used wisely. I will not repeat myself, but I refer interested Members to yesterday’s Official Report, where they can read my remarks in more detail.

Secondly, we must consider whether this is a green Budget. There are grounds for concern in that regard. Growing our economy and protecting our environment are not contrary objectives; if anything, they are complementary. Further to that, it is essential that they run parallel with one another. It is regrettable that we have not progressed with an environmental protection agency. The agency would not be a panacea to all of society's problems, but it would be a sound investment that would help to ensure that we avoid many of the economic and environmental costs that we will derive from current policies and practices.

I am not sure whether our investments will address Northern Ireland's carbon footprint, which is already high in the overall context of the United Kingdom. I am concerned about the ongoing obsession with focusing on roads and private transport at the expense of investment in public transport.

I suspect that through the investment strategy, we are repeating how we have done things in the past, but this time on a much greater scale. We should instead rethink matters and try to be imaginative in how we proceed in the future.

12.30 pm

The Alliance Party has major concerns with the Budget, but it recognises that we are a long way into the process. It is clear to all that the party has voiced its concerns constructively. It has made its point, and it has divided the House in the past.

The Alliance Party will listen to the remainder of today's debate with great interest. Ultimately, the party recognises the importance of Departments' having the resources to deliver essential services and of proceeding on that basis. Hopefully, parliamentary scrutiny has flagged up critical issues that will be addressed in future budgetary processes.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Mr McQuillan: I support the Bill. The Budget is an essential part of ensuring that the Programme for Government is implemented. The Bill must be passed to enable all Departments to receive the funding to meet their financial requirements.

The Minister of Health recently announced the development of new cancer facilities at Altnagelvin Hospital. How could those proceed without the necessary resources? My constituents are deeply interested in investment in the roads network. Funding is needed to upgrade the A26, which is well into the planning stage; for new trains that have been ordered for NIR; and for new buses for Ulsterbus.

Passing the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill is the only way in which to guarantee that funding. As I said yesterday, the Bill gives the Executive an opportunity to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland by allocating resources to high priority areas, where the funds will yield greatest benefit. I have no doubt that those priorities are well informed, because locally elected people are making the decisions.

Untold damage will be done to the Assembly's credibility and to our international image if the Bill does not pass. We have entered a second honeymoon period with investors after the recent investment conference. We must not damage that goodwill by rejecting the Bill.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the Bill and welcome the opportunity to participate in a debate that is being held in the shadow of many families facing an economic crisis. That issue should be at the Budget's core.

Recent rises in the cost of fuel and food, coupled with downward trends in borrowing and credit facilities, represent a real squeeze on personal budgets. Families are finding it difficult to meet the cost of basic needs, such as food, transport and heating. They are also in a real danger of losing their homes. Many people in my constituency are finding it difficult to meet mortgage repayments. Some, who have had their homes repossessed, are living with relatives in cramped conditions while they wait for social housing.

Prices are rising, but wages and benefits are static. Fuel poverty is a reality for one in three local households. The cost of living here is higher, and we pay more for energy, despite the fact that the average wage is lower.

A key priority for the Executive must be to tackle poverty and disadvantage. It is important that the Executive respond to the crisis by looking at new and innovative ways in which to tackle poverty. Departments also have a responsibility to be innovative with their

budget allocations. The Executive should try to work with energy companies on initiatives, such as social-tariff schemes, that ensure that vulnerable households will not have to decide whether to buy food or to heat their homes.

A huge budget is available for procurement, and that presents the Executive with an opportunity to deliver a strong, vibrant economy alongside social outcomes. Recent guidelines for public procurement procedures identify equality of opportunity as an objective. The Executive could deliver quality change on the ground through social-economy enterprises and by ensuring that small and medium-sized businesses are considered for public-service tenders.

The Budget gives us a chance to deliver on the important issues of fairness, inclusion and equality of opportunity, by actively and effectively challenging the existing patterns of social and economic disadvantage and by using any future increased prosperity to tackle ongoing poverty.

Mr McQuillan referred to the investment conference. If any investment comes from that conference, the Executive can ensure that it is channelled into areas of disadvantage and need. We must take every opportunity to ensure that organisations with the responsibility to create and retain employment directly target people whom social and economic disadvantage directly affects.

I support the Second Stage of the Bill and urge all Departments to use their budget allocations to offset the real financial difficulties that people face. The Executive must also be creative in order to ensure that those who need help receive it in order to get through the current financial crisis. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Nigel Hamilton.

Mr Hamilton: I think that you have elevated me to the head of the Civil Service. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs D Kelly: It is Sir Nigel Hamilton, please.

Mr Hamilton: Yes, the full title next time, please — I have worked hard for my knighthood. *[Laughter.]*

Thank you, Mr Speaker — sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was almost elevating you to a higher office as well. When I first came into the Chamber after lunch I was fearful of the dreaded Q-word, as I am sure you were, but I am sure that it is the expectation of my imminent contribution to the debate on the Budget (No. 2) Bill that has rustled up a crowd.

I have enjoyed the debate up to this point — whether other Members will be able to say that after I have spoken, I will leave up to them. I want to respond to some of the issues that have been raised before making some other comments.

Declan O’Loan, one of my colleagues on the Committee for Finance and Personnel, has spoken both

during yesterday’s Supply resolution debate and in today’s debate about how government in Northern Ireland works. That is an issue that we will have to get to grips with in the coming years, if not sooner. The various Varney reports — including the most recent one — have also been mentioned. Although that review does not say everything that we would want it to, it raises issues about governance and how our structures of government work in Northern Ireland, which are certainly worth reading if not, perhaps, worth replicating.

If Mr O’Loan is talking about making government more efficient and more effective, streamlining operations, and, as he said, finding better ways to deliver the same services, he will find no stronger friends than me and my party colleagues, as we also want to achieve that. One of the hallmark achievements of the now former Minister of Finance and Personnel — the new First Minister — was the creation of the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU). Although PEDU has yet to undertake and conclude any piece of work, it will mark a step change in how we view Government in Northern Ireland, especially in relation to delivery.

Yesterday, Mr O’Loan cited the interview that appeared in last weekend’s ‘Sunday Independent’ with the chief executive of the Health Service Executive in the Republic of Ireland. I do not want to reopen old debates about the Budget that we had last year and in the early part of this year, but the Health Service in Northern Ireland is a good example of how changes in structure and delivery mechanisms can deliver real improvements. In recent times, record inputs have been made to the Health Service in Northern Ireland; however, we are not always getting the outputs that might be expected from that.

That comes at a time when Health Service staff — some of whom we met yesterday at the steps of Parliament Buildings — are putting their heart and soul into their vocation. When people are working flat out but the expected outputs are not being produced, clearly there is a wider, systemic problem, rather than there being anything wrong with the effort and the dedication of Health Service staff. We must get a grasp of those issues, and bodies such as PEDU, as well as a cultural change in Government in Northern Ireland, are essential for that.

The capital realisation programme has been mentioned a couple of times during today’s debate and during yesterday’s Supply resolution debate. Some doubts have been expressed about it, and, given the current economic climate, I understand Members’ concerns about whether we will realise exactly what we had hoped for with some of the sales of underutilised or unneeded assets. However, I maintain that it is an excellent exercise.

In fact, it is a useful exercise to identify the unnecessary, unneeded and unwanted scraps of land — with which we all, as constituency representatives, have, at times, had untold problems — and to find out who owns them and what their purpose is. It is still a worthwhile exercise to identify that land, and, over time, to realise the assets so that they can be employed elsewhere in the public sector for much better purposes.

There is no point in a triangle of land lying vacant in a constituency, because that serves no purpose. The land could be sold and the money redeployed to, for example, the Health Service.

The previous Member mentioned the economic crisis that we keep being told that we are in. I am not going to talk down the Northern Ireland economy — we live in optimistic times as regards our general economic development. However, it would be churlish not to accept that there are difficulties with credit, mortgages and energy prices. Rising energy prices affect everyone, even Members; and they are the reason why many more people face falling into the trap of fuel poverty this winter.

Mechanisms are available to the government and the Executive to address the problem, and I welcome the establishment of a task force by the Minister for Social Development. However, fuel poverty levels are increasing due to rising energy prices; so we must bear in mind that it is not the Executive that are putting people into fuel poverty, and that the responsibility for bringing people out of fuel poverty does not rest solely with the Executive. Members will struggle to find a bigger friend of business in the Chamber than I, but there is an onus on the companies that make exceptionally high profits, particularly from oil, as well as those that deal in various other utilities, to step up to the mark and contribute to the fight against fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

If President Bush can go to Saudi Arabia — one of his allies — ask them to address the issue and be told that there is nothing they can do, there may be little that any of us can do. Therefore, there is little that the Northern Ireland Executive can do. However, where Members can make a difference and effect change, it is incumbent on them to do so. There are others who also have responsibilities in that regard.

Dr Farry mentioned the costs of division. From time to time I and others mock Dr Farry when he raises that issue, not because it is not serious, but because he raises it regularly in debates such as this. The new First Minister acknowledged that the cost of division is a serious issue. Obviously, costs are incurred because of our divided society, which could be avoidable in the long term, but only by taking difficult steps and hard measures. Members should support any short-term measures that exist to realise savings, and I welcome

the engagement that has taken place between Dr Farry's party and the former Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Dr Farry said that there is general dissatisfaction with the Budget. I am very positive about the Budget, of which the Bill being discussed is part. I am positive, because it is another step forward in the maturity of the political system here — a Budget Bill is a core document of an institution such as this, so it is good to have one being approved by the Assembly. No Budget in a legislature has been welcomed universally and has included all the spending requested — such is politics. There will always be people who disagree with the contents of a Budget, which is only natural.

Although the Budget does not satisfy everyone's requirements or even all of my expectations, it is positive, which is in no small part due to its focus on the economy. That subject is dear to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's heart and will become increasingly so in the coming days, weeks and months.

2.15 pm

When we, as individual Members or as constituency representatives, talk about the economic uncertainty that we are faced with and about our constituents' concerns, it is right and proper that the Executive are fully focused on economic development in Northern Ireland. That focus has been sorely lacking in recent years.

Some Members have expressed doubt as to whether the Executive's policies will result in a step change in the Northern Ireland economy. However, we can be absolutely sure that the policies of the direct rule Administration were not going to deliver such a step change.

I am glad that the policy intervention in the Budget is focused on the key drivers of productivity — skills, enterprise, innovation and infrastructure. That focus is much needed, and was sorely lacking, if not non-existent, in the past.

Although Northern Ireland has high educational achievement at GCSE and A level, and the lowest proportion of people leaving school with no GCSEs, that success has not always translated into the economy.

Historically, there have been low levels of investment in infrastructure — a key driver for the economy — and innovation. Almost half of R&D expenditure is through universities. Although I am not knocking that in any way — universities are a key deliverer of research and development and innovation — it is an indication that we have a problem. In the past, businesses have not invested enough in that important aspect of economic development.

I am pleased and positive about a Budget that has set economic growth in Northern Ireland as its number-one priority. It is only by growing the economy that we can shield ourselves from the economic uncertainty that we are faced with. Furthermore, it is only by growing

the economy that we can get on to the sort of footing for the future that we all want. As I said, that has been sorely lacking in the past.

Some Members may say that, during a period of economic uncertainty, we should concentrate on other issues. However, that should only embolden us to continue to focus on the economy as a real answer to our problems. That will deliver us from our current difficulties, and from those that we might face in the future if the Budget did not have that focus.

I welcome, not just the debate and the sub-topics that have been discussed, but the focus of the Budget. It is a positive Budget for Northern Ireland. As I said, I am sure that it is not to everyone's satisfaction, but that is what we have come to expect in this place. I wholeheartedly support it, and encourage other Members to do likewise.

Mr B McCrea: At this stage of the proceedings, the question should be about the fundamental principles of the Bill. It is hard to disagree with many of the elements of the Budget. However, it is also hard to agree with some of the other elements. In truth, it is a rather bland document, devoid of any real enthusiasm or excitement. That is an issue that I raised during the debates on the Programme for Government. I fail to see any form of shared future or any real dynamic that will take us to a better place.

Mr Hamilton said there would be few in the Assembly who could point to a stronger position on the economy than his. I am willing to take on that challenge. I believe that the economy is vital for the development of Northern Ireland. However, it is not the only issue. Producing an economy without giving people the skills to take advantage of it is a recipe for immigration.

If we do the opposite and give people skills but fail to develop an economy that takes advantage of them, then people will emigrate.

Northern Ireland faces a two-fold challenge — the economy and education. Education, education, education; it is the only way forward to address the legacy of the past, to prepare young people for the future, and to give us the wherewithal to thrive in a competitive global economy.

I want to talk about the fundamental principles outlined in the Bill. According to schedule 1, the Department of Education will be granted £1,117,241,000 for general expenditure, which by anyone's standards is a considerable amount of money. Why, then, has one in six primary-school principals in my constituency been off ill in the past year, due to stress and the inordinate amount of pressure that is put on them? Why are 130 teachers and leaders coming to the Assembly tomorrow to highlight the problem?

When I look at that one all-encompassing general expenditure figure, I find it difficult to understand how we can transfer funds between particular budgets. The Department of Education told the Education Committee that:

"It is, however, recognised that the funding differential between primary and post-primary schools should be smaller than it is currently. However, as all recurrent school funding comes from the one budget, unless the overall budget is significantly increased, it is not possible to increase funding to the primary sector without a corresponding reduction in the funding for post-primary schools."

I fundamentally disagree with that approach. We cannot move forward without increasing funding to the primary-school sector, but it should not be done at the expense of the post-primary sector.

Schedule 1 also states that £74,445,000 will be provided for teachers' superannuation and "premature retirement compensation". In trying to balance the workload of the education workforce, it is impossible to predict with any certainty how we can get new teachers into employment and help more mature teachers who want to retire or move on. I cannot deal with those issues. There is a structural problem.

During his recent investiture, the First Minister talked about the need to do things differently; to have cross-cutting programmes; to talk to the leaders of all the parties; and to try to agree some form of genuine consensus on the way forward. Unfortunately, we do not see that with this particular set of contingencies. We see a silo-based mentality, whereby individual Departments have what they hold, and they will not share until it is too late.

The big issue is the package for children, and the fact that £3.8 million was unallocated. Not only was it unallocated, but it was used as the reason why that particular cross-cutting measure should be done away with. The Department of Education said that it was the Department of Finance and Personnel's fault. The issue about the Bill that I wish to bring to the Assembly's attention is that we should create more cross-cutting budgets.

The Departments of Health, Social Development, Employment and Learning and Education must find a way of delivering more joined-up government. We cannot do that without the Budget. The issue of extended schools demonstrates that. We have talked about that at some length, but it is worth reiterating. It is unacceptable to take money away from schools that operate in the most socially challenging areas.

Worse than not giving people money is building up expectations by giving people money and taking it away again. Here and now, I challenge the Assembly and the Executive to step in, overrule the Minister of Education on that matter and provide the £5 million, because we cannot afford to wait and see whether

more money can be found. I hope that that issue will be dealt with at the Executive meeting this Thursday.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has not been found wanting in that respect. Not only was he able to find funding for a further 60 projects, but he found it for a further 32 children's fund projects, which are multi-disciplinary and cross-cutting in nature. Even then, 54 school projects were unfunded from the end of June 2007. Although the Minister of Health clearly recognised that those projects were not his responsibility, he stepped in and provided the funding to keep those projects going. I commend him for that, and I urge the Minister of Education to do likewise.

It is absolutely imperative that a way is found to resolve those particular issues. I am quite sure —

[Interruption.]

I missed the comments from the sedentary position; perhaps we could have another go.

This is an issue for all consciences, on which people should step in and make amends. It is simply unacceptable — everyone has talked about the fact that more funding is not provided, not only for extended schools, but for the primary school sector as a whole.

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I bring the Member's attention to the fact that, when the Budget was introduced, the Committee ensured that the Health Department's budget would be subject to an equality impact assessment. As a member of the Education Committee, did the Member do the same?

Mr B McCrea: I do not know — I might have the answer in front of me.

Ms S Ramsey: No — you did not.

Mr B McCrea: What is the purpose of equality impact assessments? It is not some sort of rule that one raps people over the knuckles with; it is to try and determine whether we do the right thing by vulnerable sections of the community. I fail to see any people more vulnerable than children, particularly children in socially deprived areas.

For the life of me, I cannot understand why a party such as Sinn Féin — with its supposed Marxist-Leninist principles — is prepared, not only not to increase funding, but to cut it. I have never seen the like of it. The party prevaricates, filibusters and tries to place the blame somewhere else.

The party cannot accept that it sold those people out because it did not find the funding to look after extended schools. Shame on them; I will continue to say that until that party resolves that issue. No amount of red herrings, or placing the blame elsewhere, will take me off that track. Sinn Féin should put its money where its

mouth is and find the funding for the extended schools; find the funding for the primary school sector; and increase the funding in the pre-nursery sector. Those issues must be sorted out.

Since we talk about the Minister of Education, there is a fundamental problem with this Budget and the Programme for Government, and that lies in her strategy. It is simply not possible to deliver the changes that she has in mind, in the timeframe that she has set out, without massive financial intervention. Neither of those problems is reflected in the Programme for Government or the Budget.

We, on this side of the House, would like to widen the debate on education. We want to take it away from the narrow and somewhat sterile confines of issues like the 11-plus, the transfer procedure, or whatever it is called. For many people, it is a red herring. Inequality does not start at the age of 11, contrary to what other people say. It starts at birth, and we should be investing in those areas. We should consider how to increase parenting skills; how to provide support for parents; how to tie in social development agencies; and how to ensure that the Police Service is involved. Those are all of the issues.

I am pleased that there is agreement from the party across the way. I have said many times that, if it were to lead the strategy in that direction, it would have the support of all Members. However, it has not done so; it has chosen to go down a cul-de-sac that is taking us nowhere.

2.30 pm

Sometimes people try to do the right thing, and they achieve incremental progress, but that is not enough. Mr Hamilton talked about the Alliance Party's position and the cost of division, and about trying to bring things together. That is putting the cart before the horse. We must invest in schools and improve pupil:teacher ratios, and we should not close schools that serve their communities. I want us to learn lessons, understand what we are talking about and find ways to attain genuine co-operation and a consensual approach. When we do that, the Assembly will start to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mrs D Kelly: I congratulate our new Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I look forward to an early visit from her in Upper Bann in her ministerial role.

It is unfortunate that Mr Storey is not in the Chamber this afternoon. However, my colleague Mr O'Loan and I want to put to bed the nonsense of the SDLP's Minister being in an invidious position. Margaret Ritchie was not in an invidious position. She was placed in a legal position because of the ministerial code, as negotiated between Sinn Féin and the DUP at St Andrews to ensure that no party could behave as the DUP had done

in the past by being part of an Executive but with its Assembly team often voting differently.

The SDLP will not take lectures from the DUP about consistency in politics, given that the SDLP, from its formation, promoted the policies of non-violence, power sharing, agreement and self-determination. It is wonderful that the other parties in the House now agree with the SDLP's vision for the North of Ireland and for the future of the people on this island.

Yesterday, Members referred to the funding available for health issues. The former Minister of Finance and Personnel said that he had made a promise to sort out the mess of unequal pay in the Civil Service. My colleague Mr Gallagher referred to Agenda for Change yesterday. On a local radio station today, I listened to callers discussing the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, where many of the lower-paid workers at the coalface still have to receive the money to which they are entitled under Agenda for Change. Some workers still have to receive £500 in back pay. For many of us, that is a large sum of money, and it should be paid.

It is appalling that so many directors and chief executives of health boards and trusts were able to leave in the smoke with their golden handshakes and pay-offs without putting matters right for the workers who deliver services to the people, day and daily. I trust that the Budget will address those inequalities and that injustice.

Mr O'Loan put on record the SDLP's fundamental opposition to the Budget. Many of my colleagues have highlighted deficiencies in the Budget. In the past few minutes, some Members have spoken about the importance of the economy and it being the focus of the Budget and the Programme for Government. Nevertheless, there is continued logjam and stalemate at the heart of the Executive. For example, no decision has been taken on the school newbuild programme because we do not have a sustainable schools policy.

Members are aware that we have a struggling construction industry. Many young men, some of whom are fathers, are being forced seek work across the water, often in Scotland, because the Executive are not making decisions on new buildings, schools, elite facilities for the Olympic bids or, of course, the regeneration of Ebrington Barracks and the Maze/Long Kesh site. Such indecision affects both social and economic regeneration and is compounded by the planning logjam.

In her former role as Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment instituted a reform of the Planning Appeals Commission and announced new investment for that commission and for planning policy. However, the Assembly still awaits the introduction of the reforms that will enable businesses to make Northern Ireland an attractive place

in which to invest. As the Minister knows, a developer who is considering an investment in Banbridge, for example, would receive a much quicker decision on a planning application that was submitted only a few miles up the road in County Louth, where a decision would be made within three months. Developers want quick decisions; they do not want to wait for some 18 months, as is often the case in the North.

Some Members referred to the role of Committees in scrutinising the work of Ministers and Departments. They said that Ministers should bring their plans to the Committees for scrutiny. How wonderful it would be if that happened. In my experience on the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the timetable shifts every week because OFMDFM gives us no strategies or delivery plans.

Among Members who talked about the creation of a shared future, Dr Farry spoke eloquently on the subject, but the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy has been delayed further. A huge number of decisions are not being made, and work is not being done. That is not good governance, and it does not provide good government for the people in Northern Ireland.

As many Members said, efficiency savings mean cuts, and that is a concern for public-sector workers. Many Members have been written to recently, as have I, particularly by people working in the Civil Service who feel demoralised and undervalued. That presents the Assembly with the challenge of how to reach out to them. The Minister is aware of the great fallacy about public-sector pay. Many civil servants are paid at a lower rate than my daughter who works part time for Tesco. Indeed, many of those public-sector workers earn little more than the minimum wage. Despite that, and in an unfair generalisation, they are lumped in with those who are paid a great deal more but who will not make decisions and whose work is not being done.

The Assembly talks about fairness, equality and pay, but it must get real and make decisions that will grow the economy, make a difference to everyone's lives, and ensure that Northern Ireland is an attractive place in which to live and invest.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I thank Members for their kind words on my recent appointment. I want to deal with as many issues as I can this afternoon. I will run through some of the points that were raised, although Members' comments today largely reflect what was said in yesterday's debate, during which I tried to deal with them.

Mitchel McLaughlin, the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, reconfirmed the Committee's approval of the Bill's receiving accelerated passage, and he acknowledged the reconciliation of the Main Estimates with the Budget. On behalf of the new Minister of Finance and Personnel, I thank the Finance

Committee, and all Committees, for their continued work on scrutinising the financial planning and management of Departments.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel spoke about the responsibility of Ministers to deliver, and he said that funding is not the whole story when it comes to the delivery of services. I agree strongly with that sentiment. Ministers have a serious responsibility to prioritise in order to deliver the services that the public expect in the incoming and future years.

We cannot do everything, and choices must be made. As Mervyn Storey pointed out, the devolved Administration exists to deliver as much as it can for the local electorate, and, therefore, there must be prioritisation of departmental budgets.

Mr Beggs and Mr Basil McCrea referred to the issue of cross-cutting funds, and Mr Beggs added mention of departmental silos. I recognise the argument about the potential for cross-cutting funds, such as Executive programme funds and the Secretary of State's funding package. However, those funds have been examined, and, although they may, at first glance, seem attractive, the reality in the past has been somewhat different. In practice, the funds have been marked by high levels of underspend.

The question is not which Department provides the funding, but which Department takes the lead with those cross-cutting funds and takes responsibility for moving matters forward. There were, historically, high levels of underspend, so there was no delivery of what was expected. Departments did not feel that they had complete ownership or responsibility for the matters in question, and, therefore, the issue was not driven forward. That is regrettable.

For that reason, the Executive decided to mainstream funding, so that Departments could afford projects the appropriate priority. The Assembly Committees and the other key stakeholders have a role in ensuring that the Departments do not scale back good projects on the basis that I have outlined. This House and, indeed, the Committees, have a role to play in highlighting any occasion on which Ministers deviate from priorities to which they have committed in the past. This House will continue to play that role.

Declan O'Loan expressed some surprise that DFP officials were involved in the production of the second Varney Review. Frankly, I would have been surprised if they had not been involved in providing that local context to the work.

Mr O'Loan: For clarity, I expressed no surprise at all that DFP officials were involved in that process. I drew a conclusion about the fact that they were involved because the output — the economic diagnoses provided in Varney II — was so disappointing, and failed to offer any remedies. I was concerned that that was the

best that the departmental officials could offer at that stage. That did not bode well for what that Department was offering to the economy.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

I do not accept that that is the case at all. Varney II was indicating that, if direct rule policies are continued, if there is no step change in respect of the economy, and if the issues are not dealt with, we are not going to see convergence. That step change must happen, and I believe that it will happen in the future. The point that I am making to the Member is that Varney II was an independent review — not a DFP-inspired document. Those officials were there to provide the backup, and to impart context to what was provided to the Executive.

Mr O'Loan also made comments about governance, continuing his comments from yesterday. He spoke about the need for good governance and stated that government was not just a political system, but also had an administrative side, and that he was concerned that there was an overlap between the two. That overlap would be a bad thing if it involved political interference, but, if there is political accountability, that overlap can be a good thing. That is the point that I made in respect of the argument for an environmental protection agency, which the Member very briefly mentioned today, and I certainly hope that that political accountability will continue to push the environmental agenda ahead. Although I am no longer the Minister of the Environment, I am keen to see that that moves ahead.

Mr O'Loan also highlighted the fact that there are a number of cost pressures facing the Executive over the coming year, including those that are a result of the downturn in the property market. Although he suggested that that will reduce the level of capital receipts, he will appreciate that there should also be a significant reduction in the cost of delivering the Executive's capital investment programme.

The need to address such pressures is one reason why there is in an in-year monitoring process, and indeed, why the Finance Minister must report at the end of each monitoring round, as he will on the outcome of the June monitoring process.

2.45 pm

The issue of water bills and charging was raised by Mr O'Loan and, I believe, by Dr Farry, who queried whether approval of the Bill implied approval of water charges. The financial package that was negotiated with the Treasury provided sufficient funding for the deferral of water charges in 2008-09. I can confirm that approval of this Bill does not confer approval of water charges because the Bill relates to the current year only.

The introduction of water charges was incorporated into departmental allocations for 2008-09 to 2010-11, as outlined in the Executive's Budget, which was approved by the Assembly in January 2008. If the

Executive decide not to introduce water charges — a decision that still has to be taken — that will have significant implications, of which the House is aware, for the level of resources that are available to Departments; not for the incoming year, but for the 2009-2010 and 2010-11 Budget allocations.

Mr O'Loan also raised the specific issue of water charges for churches. There are around 3,600 religious establishments in Northern Ireland, of which 1,200 are already metered for water and have been making payments for some time. The Executive agreed that, from April 2008, all non-domestic properties should pay for water and sewerage services on a phased basis of 50% of the full liability. Therefore, some religious establishments have received bills for the first time. I accept that. That has implemented the Independent Water Review Panel's recommendation that everyone should contribute to the cost of water and sewerage services. The Executive, however, retain the scope to review the system of exemptions from water charges, although it must be recognised that additional exemptions will, again, have implications for the level of charges for other customers and, indeed, the level of public subsidy.

I accept Dr Farry's point that the House's engagement in constructive analysis and, indeed, scrutiny, should be welcomed. However, the Member put forward a pessimistic analysis of Northern Ireland's economic development potential. The draft regional economic strategy highlighted that there was limited scope for convergence with the performance of the broader UK economy. However, that was in the context of direct rule. The regional economic strategy's objective is to set a new direction for the local economy in order to ensure that it can take opportunities from a more stable political environment.

Mr Maginness referred to the Varney report's recommendation that the Port of Belfast should be sold. I want to stress to him and, indeed, to all Members that the Varney report and its recommendations were simply that — recommendations. The decision on whether to go ahead with such recommendations lies firmly with the Executive.

Varney II is a comprehensive and robust analysis of the Northern Ireland economy, which highlights the many positive strengths and opportunities that exist to increase economic growth and prosperity. Therefore, the situation is not all doom and gloom. The report highlights policy areas that also require the Executive's focus. It is a good analysis of where the economy was at that particular point in time.

Dr Farry also raised the issue of cost of division, which was also mentioned by my colleague Simon Hamilton. The Executive have recognised that there are costs associated with a divided society in Northern Ireland. However, it is delusional to believe that all those divisions can be dealt with in the short to medium term, or that that will result in significant additional

savings that can be redeployed to improve public services. Although he praised DSD for its recognition of the cost of division, I am sure that Dr Farry would acknowledge that social housing is, indeed, one area where the cost of division is particularly apparent.

Dr Farry also commented on the green economy. I cannot resist returning to that issue. It will, obviously, take me some time to get away from it.

I agree that growing the economy and having a greener environment are not mutually exclusive. That is one of the reasons why protecting and enhancing our environment and natural resources is one of the themes in the Programme for Government. It is a key strategic and interdependent priority for our Government, so we will keep an eye on that.

The Member also mentioned the carbon footprint, and I would add CO₂ emissions and transport difficulties to that point. Huge challenges lie ahead, and the Minister of the Environment is awaiting analysis on issues that are specific to Northern Ireland so that targets can be set. When he has that analysis, he will be able to examine what must be done and what adaptations are needed to meet our targets on climate change.

Jennifer McCann and Simon Hamilton mentioned fuel poverty. Ms McCann gave an indication of the context in which we are discussing the Budget Bill today. In developing the Executive's Budget, the Minister for Finance and Personnel recognises the additional cost pressures that face local householders, including the increase in fuel costs. That is why the domestic regional rates were frozen in cash terms over the Budget period. That will reduce the bills that would otherwise have been faced by every household in Northern Ireland if direct rule had continued.

Furthermore, the Minister for Social Development has established a fuel poverty task force, which is due to make recommendations by August 2008. It is hoped that that will help to alleviate the situation for people who are under sustained pressure. The Executive will need to consider whether further support for households is needed in light of the available resources and competing priorities. The work of the task force will form part of that deliberation and discussion.

Ms McCann also raised the broader concern regarding the need to address social issues, particularly in light of the increasing costs facing households, such as food, transport and mortgage payments. Although the Executive's key priority is growing the economy, I hope that that task force will address many of the issues that she raised. It is important that Ministers do not consider issues in the abstract, but that they take into account issues that Members have raised and which affect the everyday lives of the electorate and our citizens.

Although procurement policy has a potential role to play in developing social issues such as disadvantage,

it must be ensured that value for money is part of service delivery. That must be kept high on the agenda.

Simon Hamilton mentioned PEDU, and I agree with my party colleague that any lack of improvements in efficiencies is not necessarily due to a lack of motivation on the part of public-sector employees. Taking up the point that was made by Mrs D Kelly, I pay tribute to the work of public-sector employees. They get very little thanks for the job that they carry out, and the House should send a message that we appreciate the work that is carried out by civil servants and the entire public sector in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hamilton raised the point about asset realisation, and I welcome his support for the work to release the surplus and underused assets. We do not welcome the current state of the market, but we must work with it. The Member also mentioned that economic development was the key priority, and that a step change and a cultural change were needed. I have already addressed that issue in response to Mr O'Loan's point. That step change is needed to deal with the issues that have been identified by Varney II.

It is vital that a step change takes place in financial planning and economic development to bring about convergence in gross value added between us and the UK average. Dr Farry said that we had given up on convergence, but I do not accept that. We must have a step change and move on. If we keep to direct rule policies, we will not deal with convergence, but we will be able to move that issue forward if it remains focused in our mind.

Some chest beating took place about who was more concerned about the economy between Mr Basil McCrea and Mr Hamilton. Mr McCrea referred me to the Bill, which was quite exciting for me as a former lawyer. He referred to the amounts of money that are mentioned in schedule 1. He was just about the only Member who referred to the Bill.

Basil McCrea then spoke about skills in the economy. A balanced approach to economic development is very much needed in order to ensure that we deal across the scale. He also mentioned PlayBoard's funding, about which there has been much talk. I welcome — as should the House — the Minister of Health's responsible decision to reprioritise funding in order to ensure that PlayBoard projects can continue. Obviously, that matter must be sorted out in the long term. Nevertheless, it provides a good example to other Ministers that more funding is not always required to address a departmental problem.

The Member also mentioned unallocated central funds, and, having developed associated projects, it is Departments' individual responsibility to draw funds from central funds. Therefore, it is not DFP's fault that Departments did not avail themselves of available funding.

Mrs Kelly raised the issue about the SDLP and its Minister, but I will not rehearse the arguments that go back and forth across the Chamber. Suffice it to say,

the Executive are a four-party mandatory coalition, not a 12-person mandatory coalition. Perhaps the party on the other side of the Chamber should reflect on that.

She also spoke about equal pay, and, although I do not have any answers on the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's Agenda for Change, I am sure that the new Minister of Finance and Personnel will be happy to write to her about that.

She referred to the planning logjam, particularly in her constituency, and, therefore, she will welcome the Department of the Environment's moves to deal with planning. Hopefully, the planning reform paper will be with Members in the not too distant future. Apart from that, the planners are making progress, and, in a pilot scheme in the divisional office in Londonderry, they are dealing effectively with simple and reserved-matter applications — some within 20 days. We should recognise that that office is doing much good work, which, I hope, can be replicated throughout Northern Ireland.

Mrs Kelly also spoke about the fact that, in her experience, unfortunately, certain Departments and Ministers have not engaged with Committees in the way in which they should have. As I said yesterday, in coming years, I hope that such engagement will improve. The Executive have now had a year, so Ministers must engage with their Committees in order to show what they are doing with their budgets.

She said that efficiency savings mean cuts. I do not agree. Efficiency savings can mean cuts but not necessarily so.

In the next few weeks, as we approach the 2008-09 monitoring round, I urge Departments to manage closely their resources and declare any reduced requirements early in the financial year in order to facilitate the redistribution of funds to other priorities at the earliest possible stage.

In light of last week's statement on the provisional out-turn for 2007-08, I cannot overemphasise the importance of good financial management in 2008-09 and beyond. It is critical that significant resources are not left unspent at the end of 2008-09. In the coming year, on behalf of taxpayers, the Assembly and the Executive will carry a heavy burden of responsibility to manage public expenditure in Northern Ireland prudently.

I am aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you wish to bring the debate to a close, and I will assist in that by thanking Members for their interest in the legislative stage of this public-expenditure cycle. I also thank again the Committee for Finance and Personnel for assisting in securing accelerated passage for the Budget (No. 2) Bill and for ensuring that the legislative timetable is adhered to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before proceeding to the Question, I remind Members that the Budget (No. 2) Bill requires cross-community support.

Question put,

The Assembly divided: Ayes 50; Noes 15.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

*Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Butler,
Mr W Clarke, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey,
Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney,
Mrs McGill, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy,
Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey.*

UNIONIST:

*Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan,
Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter,
Mr Cree, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey,
Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Kennedy,
Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea,
Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan,
Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson,
Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt,
Mr Storey, Mr Weir.*

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hamilton and Mr Spratt.

NOES

NATIONALIST:

*Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley,
Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mrs D Kelly, Mr A Maginness,
Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan.*

OTHER:

*Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr McCarthy, Mr Neeson,
Mr B Wilson.*

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Burns and Mr O'Loan.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Total votes</i> | <i>65</i> | <i>Total Ayes</i> | <i>50 [76.9%]</i> |
| <i>Nationalist Votes</i> | <i>28</i> | <i>Nationalist Ayes</i> | <i>19 [67.9%]</i> |
| <i>Unionist Votes</i> | <i>31</i> | <i>Unionist Ayes</i> | <i>31 [100.0%]</i> |
| <i>Other Votes</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>Other Ayes</i> | <i>0 [0.0%]</i> |

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill [NIA 18/07] be agreed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Second Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill.

Mesothelioma, etc., Bill

Final Stage

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):
I beg to move

That the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill [NIA 16/07] do now pass.

Diffuse mesothelioma is a terrible illness. It has a long latency and is rapidly progressive, and, invariably, fatal, with death normally occurring within nine months of diagnosis. The Bill provides for a compassionate upfront lump-sum payment to people who have been diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma, or, if the sufferers have passed on, to their dependants. It will ensure faster compensation for people with mesothelioma, without the need to establish an occupational or causal link.

The Bill will, crucially, help people who face difficulty in securing civil compensation, such as family members who were exposed to asbestos fibres from their partners' or fathers' work clothes and people who cannot determine an obvious source of exposure. The Bill will provide significant financial assistance to such people in the final months of their lives.

3.15 pm

Under the new scheme, the intention is that payments will be available from October 2008, and persons with diffuse mesothelioma should receive a substantial payment within weeks of making a claim. Over time, the Department's aim is to increase the compensation available, and any money recouped from subsequent civil compensation will be ploughed back into the scheme to provide even greater help to future sufferers. During Consideration Stage, Members sought clarification on several issues, on which I provided reassurances, and I will ensure that officials expedite payments as quickly as possible. The only test is the simple diagnosis conducted by a claimant's general practitioner.

I thank the outgoing Chairperson, the deputy Chairperson and the Committee for Social Development. Furthermore, I thank Members for their support during the progress of this important and compassionate Bill, which I hope will provide some comfort to people during their final days.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin supports the Bill, and, moreover, we supported accelerated passage. In the Minister's eagerness to attack Sinn Féin during an earlier debate, she gave the impression that Sinn Féin voted against the Child Maintenance Bill. However, we voted against accelerated passage for reasons that we considered acceptable. Unlike the Minister — who seems to want to rubber-stamp everything in her sphere of influence — Sinn Féin will continue to consider each piece of legislation on its merit. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Does the Minister want to make any further comments?

The Minister for Social Development: Although Mr Brady's barbed comments are totally unreasonable, I nonetheless thank him for his contribution. The Mesothelioma, etc., Bill is a compassionate piece of legislation that will affect a small group of people who suffer from a terrible illness through no fault of their own.

Mr Neeson: I want to place on record my deep gratitude to the Minister and the Department for introducing the legislation — it is long overdue. As I said during Consideration Stage, the Justice for Asbestos Victims considers today a special day.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Neeson for his helpful comments; that is the interpretation that I have received from the wider community. People are keen for the Assembly to enact the Bill as quickly as possible in order to bring comfort to sufferers during their final days.

I recognise that no amount of money can adequately compensate for a person's life. However, lump-sum payments will be available within weeks of making a claim, and I hope that that measure will comfort sufferers and their dependants. I am grateful to the Committee for Social Development and to Members for their positive contributions during the Bill's progress. The Bill has enjoyed considerable consensus across the Assembly — despite some barbed comments.

If Sinn Féin took its seats at Westminster and abandoned its mischief-making and policy of abstentionism, it could discuss parity legislation at Westminster line-by-line either on the Floor of the House or during Committee Stage — that is how parties can have real influence on parity legislation.

In conclusion, this is a progressive —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

The Minister for Social Development: No. I have only a few minutes left, and I want to deal with this compassionate piece of legislation, which, I note, the Member's party supported.

This is a progressive and compassionate Bill —

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister is giving the impression, having listened to what Mickey Brady said, that Sinn Féin did nothing other than support the Bill when it was discussed by the Committee for Social Development. She must clarify her position.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

The Minister for Social Development: That was not a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was simply a self-justification for the position that Sinn Féin took

on the Child Maintenance Bill. That party said that it had points to make about an equality impact assessment; however, it did not make them when it should have.

The Mesothelioma, etc., Bill is a progressive and compassionate piece of legislation that will help people when they are most in need of it. I am pleased to commend the Bill to the Assembly. All Members look forward to helping people who are in great distress and who are suffering from this terrible illness.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Mesothelioma, etc., Bill (NIA 16/07) be agreed.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

First Report on Training for Success

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the first report of the Committee for Employment and Learning on Training for Success (34/07/08R); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to incorporate the report's recommendations into his Department's ongoing review of Training for Success.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to begin by thanking all those involved in producing the report, including the Committee Clerk and Committee staff. The Committee heard extensive oral evidence, so I thank all the witnesses from the many private, public, community and trades union sectors who appeared before the Committee. I particularly thank the representatives of the sector skills councils, who provided such a valuable insight to the Committee, not only on Training for Success but on a wider sectoral level.

Those sessions proved to be an excellent opportunity to inform Members about broader training issues in various industries, and the Committee will continue that work. I thank Hansard and Assembly Research, which provided a valuable service to the Committee, as well as the departmental officials who participated fully in the Committee's review, and who, I hope, found the work valuable to them and their programme managers.

Although Training for Success will need time to bed down and become established — given the Public Accounts Committee's criticisms of the Department's Jobskills programme — the Committee decided to prioritise early scrutiny of Training for Success in its work programme to ensure that lessons learned would be taken into account in the design and operation of the new programme.

By way of a brief introduction, I should explain that Training for Success is divided into two main strands. The first is the job-ready strand, which has four separate components aimed at delivering services for young trainees. The second is the apprenticeship strand, which delivers level-2 and level-3 apprenticeships. The Committee was pleased to learn early on that the Department was conducting its own work aimed at continually adjusting and improving the programme. The motion calls on the Minister for Employment and

Learning to incorporate its recommendations into the Department's work.

The Committee considers the Department's monitoring, in conjunction with the collaborative approach with the Committee, to be the best method of ensuring that only the highest standard of training is delivered to apprentices and trainees in technical training. I know that the Minister will tell the House about the steps that the Department has taken to address some of those issues.

The Committee makes recommendations in nearly 25 areas of concern. I do not have the time to go into all of them, but I am sure that other Committee members will do so. I wish to focus on a few key areas only. I will begin on a positive note by commending the Department for its hard work in restructuring professional training within a tight timescale.

In aiming to provide a training framework for an extremely wide range of needs and abilities, the programme is, by necessity, highly complex. However, it is clear that the speed of implementation of that highly complex programme will lead to problems and to issues developing. That is why the review is so important.

I stress that when the Committee set out to conduct the review, it did not wish to become overly focused on procurement and contracting issues. Rather, it wanted to concentrate on the policy and operational aspects of Training for Success. However, that proved to be very difficult.

As soon as the Committee began to take evidence, many stakeholders raised important concerns about procurement and contracting. Those concerns were voiced throughout the review. The Committee was conscious that it did not wish to step on other Departments' territories, particularly those of the Department of Finance and Personnel, bearing in mind the important role that its Central Procurement Directorate plays. However, given the level of concern, it would have been remiss of the Committee not to have drawn attention to several issues that relate to procurement and contract management.

I will mention briefly several areas in which the Committee considered that improvements could be made. In the roll-out of the programme, there was early evidence that suppliers were facing capacity problems. Therefore, the Committee questioned whether the initial procurement selection process was sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the bidding suppliers had the necessary capacity and capabilities to deliver, particularly in cases where bidders were claiming an important relationship with a third party or sub-contractor.

The ultimate contract failure of Carter and Carter Group Plc exercised the Committee greatly with respect to that issue. Carter and Carter Group had won the contract to deliver automotive training. However, had there been a more rigorous assessment at the procurement

stage, the Committee considers that the weakness in the company's capacity to deliver could have been identified.

As that company's contract progressed, it became clear to the Committee that significant problems had emerged. The Committee was surprised that the Department had not intervened earlier to assess whether there had been a breach of contract. The Committee was disappointed with the time that was taken to intervene, given that members were impressed with the new quality mechanisms that the Department had put in place in all its programmes.

The Committee considers that the Department, working in conjunction with the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Learning and Skills Development Agency, offers a sound basis for general quality monitoring and improvement. However, the Committee was concerned that the framework for the inspection of new contract providers at the early risk-management stage was not entirely clear.

The Committee's report, therefore, calls for assurances that an appropriate programme of inspection will take place where there is concern about delivery. In particular, the roles of the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Department's inspection and monitoring mechanism must be identified clearly. Linked to that, the Committee calls on the Department to challenge suppliers at an early stage — if it believes there to be a problem — in order to assess whether there has been a breach of contract.

Moving on to the programme's take-up, or occupancy, the Committee considered Training for Success in the context of the ambitious plan for economic growth that is presented in the Programme for Government. It is fair to say that the Committee has concerns that the current level of occupancy in Training for Success is slightly fewer than 5,900 young people, and the outlook for the programme meeting its target of 10,000 apprenticeships by 2010 does not look promising.

The Department has stated that it is content with the situation and that that is only to be expected of a new programme. The Committee is concerned that there are worrying messages in the top-line figure. In particular, only 7% of those in apprenticeships are at level 3, with 93% at level 2.

3.30 pm

The Committee concurs with the key sectoral evidence that, although level 2 apprenticeships work well and are appropriate for sectors such as food, drink and hospitality, they are not appropriate for sectors that are expected to add higher gross value to the economy, such as manufacturing and technology.

Given the drive for direct foreign investment in engineering and manufacturing, the Committee was alarmed to learn that only 16 apprenticeships have

been registered in that sector. Although a wide range of factors will influence take-up of Training for Success in the early stages, the Committee is concerned that some sectors, such as retail and leisure, reported a lack of basic information at the programme's outset. The Committee considers that the time frame for implementation of Training for Success worked against marketing and promotional activity in advance of its initiation.

The Committee also remains unconvinced that sufficient dialogue has taken place with key local employers. The Committee appreciates that the programme is resource-intensive, but considers it essential that the Department address the apparent low level of occupancy through a comprehensive programme of employer engagement.

In a number of debates in the Assembly, concern has been registered about the general dearth of apprenticeships in certain trades and geographic areas. The Committee believes that the general perception of apprenticeships is not conducive to achieving economic growth targets and that there is a need for value to be returned to apprenticeships. However, the Committee also recognises that this is not, and cannot, be an issue for DEL to deal with on its own.

The Committee's report calls for early and consistent messages — aimed at enhancing the perception of apprenticeship training as equal in quality to a more academic route — to be delivered to young persons throughout their schooling. The new joint DEL and Department of Education career strategy is a suitable vehicle for the promotion of training apprenticeships as a quality career path.

The Department reports a 12% decrease in the number of trainees in Job-Ready, compared to similar strands in Jobskills. I am aware that I am approaching my time limit, so I will move on.

The Committee views the potential for the exploitation of young people — through low wages and allowances paid to trainees and apprenticeships — as one of the most damning criticisms of the Jobskills programme. Training for Success goes a long way towards eradicating that potential problem, but the Committee is concerned by the evidence that some apprenticeships are still poorly paid. Our report calls on the Department to examine the model of apprenticeship payment in England, in which suppliers are contracted to pay apprentices at least £80 per week. I understand that the Minister will take up that point.

I would like to raise other issues, but I have a 10-minute limit and other Committee members will want to contribute to the debate. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr B McCrea: I should be happy to take interventions from the Chairperson of the Committee if she wants to finish her speech.

Modern economies cannot, and should not, be managed by Government. Rather, Government must seek to facilitate a match between the needs of individuals and the needs of business. Individuals must develop the skills necessary to develop business. Businesses and locations must be attractive places in which to work and live. We need a dynamic, innovative training and apprenticeship programme that brings individuals and businesses together for mutual benefit.

Unfortunately, that did not happen effectively enough under the Department's Jobskills programme. The Minister and his direct rule predecessors were right to replace Jobskills with Training for Success. Indeed, as my colleagues have already said, the Department should be commended for its hard work and the speed with which it achieved the restructuring. However, the Minister is correct to keep Training for Success under review. I hope that the Committee's report will aid that review.

It is most important to make Training for Success attractive to trainees. Certain operational aspects of Training for Success can be improved. As the Chairperson of the Committee mentioned, one of the major criticisms of Jobskills was the potential for trainees and apprentices to be financially exploited by employers. Training for Success goes a long way to improving that situation. However, I am not convinced that it completely removes the potential for exploitation.

We therefore recommend that the Department examine the possibility of introducing and enforcing a minimum rate of pay for apprentices, similar to the system that is currently operational in England. To attract people into that scheme, we must make it a financially attractive option. There is a disparity between allowances for young people in education and those for people in unwaged training. I hope the Minister will specifically address that anomaly.

Young people in education are means-tested and are currently paid educational maintenance allowances of £10, £20 or £30 per week plus three £100 bonuses, dependent on household income and a minimum attendance of 15 hours per week. Young people in the Job-Ready strand of Training for Success, for a minimum of 35 hours per week, receive a non-means-tested training allowance of £40 per week.

The significant problem is that that training allowance is taken into consideration when assessing entitlement to means-tested benefits. Potentially, that has the undesired effect of putting off people from the most deprived areas — arguably those people who would benefit most from taking up apprenticeships. I have been told of a case in my own constituency where that anomaly has produced not only hardship, but frustration.

I understand that the Department and the Minister have been making considerable progress toward the introduction of non-means-tested educational maintenance

allowances that would not impact on young persons' means-tested benefits. The Committee and I would welcome that, and we consider that moving to educational maintenance allowances would bring about a fairer, more inclusive and, ultimately, more successful system.

Many young people who enter into those schemes have not had the best experience of school and, at the moment, the Job-Ready strand tends to mean a front-loaded system that is based on a considerable amount of time in the classroom. We need to try to achieve a more balanced approach between the classroom and the vocational elements. That would make the schemes more attractive to people.

The business community must see the potential of Training for Success, but not everyone is aware of what is possible. I urge the Minister to introduce an effective marketing and promotional campaign.

I believe that we have a Minister who is fully aware of the contemporary needs of modern business — both indigenous and international — and who has a desire to achieve the best for young trainees. I am confident that he will give due consideration to the report and that he is already working on ways to improve Training for Success. I look forward to his reply. I support the motion.

Mr Newton: I welcome the report and I thank the Committee Chairperson, Ms Ramsey, for her diligence in proposing the motion. I thank the Deputy Chairperson, my colleague the Member for South Belfast Jimmy Spratt, and I thank the Committee Clerk and his team for the excellent work that they have done on the report.

In the short time that is available, I would like to stress three points. First, the background to the Training for Success; secondly, the role — as I perceive it — of the Department and of industry in taking the report forward; and, thirdly, how to build on the report.

We all know that the Training for Success initiative became necessary following the report of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) at Westminster on its predecessor programme, Jobskills. The Public Accounts Committee made a number of damning indictments in that report. That report states:

“one of the most damning aspects of the Department's handling of the programme was the extent to which a number of fundamental weaknesses — such as poor quality training and high levels of early leaving from the scheme — persisted over many years.”

The PAC report states that, since there was a:

“substantial ‘skills mismatch’ between Jobskills and the needs of the Northern Ireland economy, we can only conclude that, in far too many respects, Jobskills has provided poor value for money.”

I wish to pay tribute to the senior management team of DEL who listened to what was said by the Committee and by industry. Although Training for Success has not yet achieved all its potential, we are certainly a long way away from we were with Jobskills.

The Minister has agreed that his strategy for the Department's role in delivery is to meet the needs of the economy and society — it is a demand-led strategy.

The Committee, in compiling the report, visited the further-education provision in Omagh. It is an excellent site, and the Department should be proud of that facility. There were two aspects of the visit that I and other members of the Committee found revealing. First, the college produces students well qualified in hairdressing and beauty therapy. They are highly motivated young people who, at the end of their term, could not find a job to utilise the skills and qualifications that they had achieved. Secondly, automotive students who had gone through the vocational education strand of the programme were unable to complete their apprenticeships, as the college was unable to find the necessary workshop experience for them. That is very disheartening for a young person.

The approach to determine the demand-led strategy is complex and multilayered. It involves: the skills expert group; workforce development forums, based in the six regional FE colleges; the sector skills councils — 25 skills councils each with a sector skills agreement agreed by DEL, Invest NI and industry; sector training councils with specific initiatives; and training and education providers delivering the strategy.

That strategic approach is complex, and it leads me to believe that the situation in Omagh may well be repeated in other areas. We have got to get to grips with that. The problems facing the automotive and construction sector seem to me to be created — not in totality, but in part — as a result of this multilayered approach to the delivery of the strategy.

In building on the report — which is a very positive one — I am conscious that Northern Ireland once had a vocational training system that was the envy of Europe. That included Government training centres and a training grant/levy system.

If implemented by DEL, the report will take the vocational training of our apprenticeships forward. We must reach for the sky as regards training and ensure that excellence in training is our benchmark. That requires us to think about centres of vocational training excellence that will provide a steady flow of young, qualified people — motivated and skilled — who will be able to apply for a career-type job in industry. We need prestigious centres, and one section of the report deals with how Scotland has approached that.

Only the best should be good enough for our young people, and only the best will meet the needs of the economy. I support the report.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge the work of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and the Committee members, as on this issue — and that of the ongoing issue of Stranmillis, St Mary's and Queen's University

— the Committee is punching at its weight. That is very important in a young democracy like this one. However, more than anything else, I want to acknowledge the staff involved in producing this report. Staff in any Parliament who produce a report such as this demonstrate that they can manage evidence, write reports and gather witnesses in a way that empowers the Assembly to do its business.

I make that point because, elsewhere in this Building, senior management and the Assembly Commission have taken decisions that damage capacity and prejudice the interests of this Assembly to do the business that this Committee has done over recent months, in this report. By decisions taken elsewhere in the Building we have hurt staff and the interests of this Assembly for Committee after Committee to do this sort of work in the future. I want to put that on record.

I acknowledge that the Minister has already announced a review and stated in the Chamber some months ago that if there were issues around Training for Success that did not work, he would not wait but would have them fixed. That is a very important statement for the Minister to make, and this Assembly and the Committee should ensure that he lives up to it.

3.45 pm

Representatives from many sector skills councils and other organisations gave evidence to the Committee that Training for Success is more fit for purpose than previous training programmes. Although I want to address broader themes, my remarks should be understood in that context.

Procurement is the first of several areas that I want to discuss. I want to ask the Minister two questions. First, does the Department not now acknowledge that when Carter and Carter Group plc submitted the tender and was awarded a Training for Success contract, it gave commitments that it had on board subcontractors, but that that was not the case, that it was a breach of the procurement process, and that the contract should have been cancelled at that time? Secondly, if in January 2008 the inspectorate discovered that there were serious flaws in Carter and Carter's management of the contract, why did the Department fail to pick up on the same issues in the previous month? If we do not deal with the issues involving procurement policy and the inspection of those who have contracts, I worry that the same mistakes will be made in the future.

Given what Mr Basil McCrea and the Chairperson of the Committee said, it is clear that an announcement will be made on the payment of wages to those who are in training. If there were such an announcement, I would welcome it. However, I do not welcome what paragraph 1482 of the oral evidence reports officials as having said to the Committee:

“We do not monitor what employers pay”.

We are then told in paragraph 1484 of the report that:

“In order to monitor wages, we would have to increase bureaucracy at a time when resources are stretched.”

That is not satisfactory. It is not good enough that our young people, aged from 18 to 25 and in training, are told that what they are paid is not monitored. In view of all the civil servants that we have, it is not good enough to be told that bureaucracy would have to be increased in order to carry out such monitoring.

The Chairperson of the Committee referred to another issue. On 10 April 2008, there were fewer than 6,000 people in training. How can we meet the target of having 10,000 trainees in less than two years from now? That would be an increase of 40% in a very short time. I ask the Minister to confirm whether he thinks that that target is feasible. Given that we are trying to make Northern Ireland more attractive for business and have many good reasons to do so, is it good enough that only 7% of apprentices receive level 3 training? If that training is for higher skills — and we are not training enough people in those skills — how will we remain fit and open for business?

Ms Lo: As other Members have done, I thank the Committee staff and all those who gave evidence to the review. I will address mainly level 2 and level 3 apprentice training.

In view of the numbers that are currently in training, I share the concern of Committee members and others that the Department’s target of training 10,000 apprentices by 2010 is unlikely to be met. Moreover, I am concerned that insufficient numbers of well-qualified young people opt for the programme as a viable alternative to school or full-time further education. Of the 3,000 apprenticeships, 93% are at level 2, and, as Mr Attwood said, only 7% are at level 3.

Level 2 apprenticeship courses are pitched below GCSE level — normally taken by school-age pupils — but at specific occupational areas. Level 3 is equivalent to the point that it is hoped that young people will reach when they leave school with five GCSEs at grades A* to C. Representatives of several key sectors have informed the Committee for Employment and Learning that level 3 is the basic requirement for sectors such as engineering and utilities. We must ensure that trainees receive training that is aligned to the current and projected needs of local businesses and that only the required number of level 2 apprentices are trained.

I also support the Committee’s recommendation that the Department remove apprenticeships from Training for Success. The report also recommends that apprenticeships be developed and promoted as distinct, high-value and high-quality programmes. At an evidence session on 23 April — the last session before the Committee report was finalised — departmental officials confirmed that the apprenticeship programme will be separated from

Training for Success to become a flagship programme that will be on a par with A levels and other full-time professional and technical programmes that colleges provide. I welcome that.

The proposed new apprenticeship programme will link up with the provision that the Department is developing for people in work. If we move that service away from Training for Success and into a separate programme, what facility will be available for the young people who have completed the Job Ready strand of Training for Success? Where will they go?

The Department should also consider the report’s recommendation that adult and part-time apprenticeships be included in the changes. More flexibility is required in respect of the current programme minimum of 35 hours. Perhaps the opportunity to start an apprenticeship could be opened up to older people, or part-time apprenticeships might become available for women in the catering industry, for instance, or any other sector that is attractive to them.

We must also examine the report’s recommendations on the involvement of public-sector and community-sector organisations, particularly in rural areas.

Mr Ross: I welcome the opportunity to speak about the Committee for Employment and Learning’s first report on Training for Success. In common with other Members, I commend the Committee staff for the work that they put into compiling the report.

In many ways, it is too early to give a full assessment of the scheme’s success to date, although continued monitoring and early feedback is essential to ensuring that the mistakes made in Jobskills are not repeated with Training for Success. That is why it was so important that the Committee for Employment and Learning was able to scrutinise the programme early on and identify potential difficulties.

The Department has been conducting its own work on adjusting and improving the programme, and that is welcome. The Committee will play its role in helping the Department do that. As mentioned in the report and by Members who have already spoken, Jobskills was the subject of significant criticism by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and the Public Accounts Committee. Concerns over the quality of the training, the low progression and retention rates, the exploitation of young workers and the low net employment impact were highlighted. Training for Success is a valuable programme and, throughout the course of the evidence sessions, we heard about some of the difficulties in the scheme.

The Department should be commended for the approach that it has taken and the structural changes that it has so far made.

The single greatest failing is in the procurement procedure. That was not an area that we were initially considering, but, as evidence sessions continued, it became a recurring theme throughout the year. The Carter and Carter Group episode exposed the apparent weakness or flaws in the procurement process, and the oral agreements that were relied on were not satisfactory. Stringent new measures must be put in place to ensure that agreements and bids are much more robust. I welcome the report's recommendation that formal written documentation must support any bids.

Apprenticeships are an important part of vocational training, a view that is supported by all sides of the House. Unfortunately, over the years, some young apprentices have been exploited as cheap labour. The Chairperson indicated that the legacy of the Jobskills programme was the exploitation of young labour.

There may still not be enough opportunities for apprentices; that is an area on which more focus is needed. The current apprenticeship occupancy levels mean that there is a risk that the Department may miss its target of 10,000 by 2010.

It would be a positive step to see all-age apprenticeships, proper wages and assistance for those who travel significant distances, whether in the form of an allowance worked into the scheme or some other measures.

Apprentices are hugely important, and the whole area should be given more of a push and promoted as a valuable opportunity for young people. It is important that the Department works with employers to create more level-3 apprenticeships, particularly in engineering and manufacturing technologies, to which the Chairperson also referred.

Vulnerable people must not miss out on career opportunities, and the Chairperson mentioned the Include Youth group, which made a powerful presentation to the Committee. Statistics and evidence suggest that young people in care are particularly vulnerable, less likely to attain academic qualifications and more likely to get into trouble with the law. Therefore, it is important that they do not miss out. Special attention is needed to prevent them from falling through the net.

It is important that young people with disabilities receive support and a tailored approach to learning and to employment, in order to ensure that they are given the same life opportunities as everyone else. I welcome the establishment of a disability subgroup for Training for Success.

In addition to all-age apprenticeships, the Committee considered the possibility of part-time apprentices, which would go some way towards helping those who cannot commit to a full-time apprenticeship. In particular, we considered mothers and young women. That group should be kept in mind.

We were told by several people that young people are not comfortable about classroom-based learning. Learning in that type of environment has turned many of them away from academic education. We must ensure that training is more relevant to them and less like being back in school. That is one way to attract more people into training. It is important that young people receive on-the-job training, which is one of the themes that emerged. Classroom training is important, but there must be a balance to ensure that people regard their training as relevant. I support the motion.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I commend the Committee and its staff for producing a substantial report.

First, I want to address something that the Chairperson said and that is worth repeating, because the theme must underpin everything that is done in the Department for Employment and Learning and in the Department of Education. The report calls for early and consistent messages to be delivered to young people throughout their schooling in order to enhance the perception that apprenticeship training is a path equal in quality to a more academic route. That is fundamental and underpins everything that we do as elected Members and as members of society.

We want to introduce recommendations and legislation that will enhance life for young people. A couple of weeks ago, the Assembly had a debate during which several Members referred to the kind of society that we want to have, and all the report's recommendations are key to achieving that society.

4.00 pm

The report contains 25 recommendations, one of which relates to wages. That issue must be tackled, and the educational maintenance allowance should go some way towards doing that. Many people may not know that there is no enforcement of the minimum wage until a person reaches 19 years of age. That gap must be dealt with.

The disability subgroup will report at the end of June; and the Committee did have an evidence session with a disability group. It will be important that Members take account of the subgroup's report.

I come from a rural constituency — West Tyrone — and I believe that the report's recommendation on travel must also be taken into account. For example, I know two young people who wanted to be apprentices but faced practical difficulties with travelling from home to the bus stop and then on to Omagh. Furthermore, no funding was provided for that travel, or, at least, the funding available did not cover the costs. Therefore, there is an anomaly in that. As I understand it, the Job-Ready strand is funded, but the apprenticeship strand is not.

There is an onus on whoever is responsible — whether it is employers, parents, training organisations or further education colleges, for example — to fund travel. It relates to the issue of equality that I mentioned earlier, and I very much hope that all those matters will be addressed when the Minister and the Department see the report.

Linked to that issue is local provision. The Committee had an evidence session with representatives of ANIC (Association of Northern Ireland Colleges), including the director of the North West Regional College, Mr Murphy. I was amazed when I asked him about electrical training in the north-west, because he told me — and I hope that I have got my figures right — that there is one cohort of electrical trainees in Limavady and that, in the geographical spread between Coleraine and Castlederg, there is a total of 10 electrical trainees. I was unsure about whether the young people in those areas, and in my area of West Tyrone, are not interested in doing electrical training or whether that training is not available in their areas.

Provision for travel costs must be put in place, and the Department must ensure that training is provided in local areas, because that is another equality issue. According to the Committee report, nearly 6,000 young persons are registered under Training for Success, and the target of having 10,000 apprentices by 2010 is unlikely to be met. All the issues that I have mentioned — travel, local provision and equality — are important, and I commend the report to the Assembly. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Cree: I support the motion. The Committee has worked constructively to produce the report, and I thank my colleagues for their work. Equally, to date, the Committee has had a good relationship with the Department and the Minister, and I hope that the report will add to the Department's efforts to improve apprenticeships and Training for Success.

In September 2007, Training for Success replaced the much-maligned Jobskills programme as the Department's primary professional and technical training programme. As my colleague has already stated, the Committee commends the Department for its hard work in restructuring professional and technical training, and it should also be commended for meeting demanding deadlines to ensure the timely introduction of Training for Success.

In recognising the speed with which the changes have been introduced and the complexity of the programme, the Committee hopes that the Department continually reviews Training for Success and its constituent parts and that, in the process of conducting those reviews, the Minister considers the recommendations in the Committee's report.

I have time to focus only on some issues in the report. The Committee felt that information, occupancy data and intelligence about trainees and business were fundamental to Training for Success and that it is crucial that we assess its performance against a macro-economic environment to ensure that the economy and businesses are facilitated. That is at the heart of the Programme for Government, and it is a goal to which the Minister is committed.

The Committee considers personal training plans a positive step; however, we are concerned that some course suppliers are not completing them on time. Therefore, we recommend that the Department ensures that all trainees have completed a personal training plan by the end of their second month on the Training for Success programme and that IT systems be improved.

Equally, we are concerned that the number of trainees in the higher levels of apprenticeships has reduced at a time when we are trying to create jobs and wealth through foreign direct investment and indigenous business growth. Although the downturn in the economy largely explains the reduction, it cannot be put down to one single factor, and the Committee believes that Training for Success would benefit from the introduction of a specific promotional and marketing measure, including direct employer engagement, to ensure that participation is maximised and geared to the precise requirements of key business sectors. Linked to that is a concern that there is a concentration of level 2 apprenticeships, and the Committee recommends that the Department review the criteria that are used to allocate people to level 2 and level 3 apprenticeships so that they are robust and reflect an apprentice's ability.

The Minister is committed to delivering a training and apprenticeship scheme that facilitates a modern economy and which will benefit those who pass through the programme, and I look forward to his response on the issues that have been raised.

The Committee heard a great deal of evidence about the lack of provision in the programme for those over the age of 25, particularly in non-traditional sectors, such as retail, hospitality and leisure. Only full-time courses are available, which may suit some applicants but not others. The Ulster Unionist Party believes strongly that all people should have an equal opportunity to benefit from training and professional programmes, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling. The ability of adults to retrain and refocus is becoming crucial in modern flexible economies and provides for more individual freedom and choice. Therefore, I was extremely pleased when the Minister recently announced that, from September, all apprenticeships will be available to people of all ages who are in employment.

In Northern Ireland, we are all too aware of what can happen when people do not have economic and social opportunities. Some, especially the young, can

become disillusioned and vulnerable and drift into activities and lifestyles that, ideally, they would not choose. Therefore, it is vital that the programme is a success. To ensure that it is, we must get right the small details that facilitate individuals, and we must also fit that into a macro-economic picture so that our economy can continue to grow.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Committee, the Committee Clerk, the Assistant Committee Clerk and the rest of the Committee staff for compiling the report. It is important that the report's findings be taken on board by the Department and the Minister.

All Members should recognise that the report focuses on only one aspect of Jobskills and the criticisms that accompanied it, and its successor — the Training for Success programme.

It should be recognised that many courses in the further education sector have been successful. Thousands of people have completed NVQs and Higher National Certificates and have entered employment and provided local businesses with the necessary skills to deliver the economy that we need.

That said, Training for Success and, to some extent, Jobskills focused on training people in vocational, professional and technical subjects. The scheme has been criticised because it was felt that vocational subjects and a vocational pathway were not as attractive for many young people as going to university.

Some positive aspects of Training for Success have not been touched on. For example, in the energy utility sector, the NIE, Training for Success and employers had a good partnership. The drinks and food sector also enjoyed a good working relationship with the further education sector and employers in delivering level 2 courses. Such examples should be taken on board.

There were concerns about Jobskills, which was heavily criticised in two reports. I know some people who gained from the Jobskills scheme; nonetheless, the main thrust of the NIAO (Northern Ireland Audit Office) and PAC reports was about the quality of the training that was provided and the low net employment impact. There was a view that people were not getting paid for what they were doing.

The evidence that the Committee gathered on Training for Success was about procurement and the capacity of some companies to deliver some of the programmes. The Chairperson of the Committee referred to Carter and Carter Group plc, and there may be other bodies. Although that was the main focus, the Committee recognised that Training for Success was doing much good work.

I hope that the Minister will act on the recommendations in the report. In order to avoid the criticisms that were

levelled at the Jobskills programme — which are difficult to recover from — it is important that schemes be monitored from an early stage. That issue should be borne in mind for Training for Success.

When the Committee was gathering evidence, some stakeholders criticised aspects of Training for Success, and those have already been touched on. There was a particular problem with the construction and automotive industries, which needs to be addressed. As I said, procurement and the capacity of some companies to deliver certain courses was an issue. Furthermore, the take-up, or occupancy as it is called, of some of the courses was also called into question. The report contains good recommendations on such issues.

My colleague Claire McGill said that travel issues were a barrier to people taking up courses. A travel allowance is paid to people who are in employment but not to those who are on a training course. That issue also needs to be addressed. Too many young people who were on the course did not have personal training plans drawn up by their employers.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I will try to cover as many issues as I can; however, there were many interventions, and I cannot guarantee that I will cover everything. I will ask my officials to follow up as best they can on anything that I miss.

I welcome today's motion, the involvement of the Committee for Employment and Learning in monitoring and scrutinising Training for Success and the publication of its first report.

During the past few months, the Department has demonstrated considerable responsiveness to the Committee and to all stakeholders in Training for Success.

I thank the Committee for recognising in its report the Department's hard work in restructuring the new professional and technical training provision.

4.15 pm

It has been a considerable journey, and we must always remember the context for the change, to which reference has been made; namely, 'Jobskills', the tenth report of the Westminster Public Accounts Committee from 2005-06. The Department has developed a close and successful working relationship with the Committee in accepting its first recommendation to continue the ongoing review of Training for Success. I hope that that relationship continues.

The Committee has substantially influenced the Department's thinking on how the present provision can be improved. The 25 key conclusions and recommendations in the first report are in line with the Department's actions after its initial review of the provision.

My Department and I are wholly committed to apprenticeships and employment training. It is one of the main vehicles through which we can support business, industry, employers and the Northern Ireland economy. Each year, training helps large numbers of young people to move from education into the world of work. The introduction of Training for Success last year was an undeniable, and necessary, improvement on the former Jobskills provision. The Department received feedback that, under Training for Success, the needs of trainees and apprentices are being better served; that employers are happy with the quality of training; and that individual sectors are better able to contribute to the provision while addressing their specific needs.

A fortnight ago, I received that feedback directly when I presented the apprentice of the year award 2008. I saw, at first hand, the quality of apprentices and the commitment of employers. Not only that, but I was able to see the pride that both apprentices and employers took — the first in their work, the latter in their protégés. Obviously, something is being done right. However, it is still not perfect, and I accept that. Any new provision, especially one that is introduced with such restrictive time frames, will inevitably require modifications and changes, which will be introduced once they have been identified after the initial roll-out. We should not be afraid to make those changes.

I also accept that, although apprenticeships are much less of a problem child, problems must be resolved for those young people who experience barriers to employment or who have not yet gained the necessary training and qualifications to help them get work.

It is for that reason that the Department has decided to separate apprenticeships from Training for Success. In doing that, we can focus on the two strands and clearly identify how we will improve our service. That is in line with the Committee's recommendation. From September, apprenticeships will be separately branded as a high-quality flagship provision under the title of Apprenticeships NI/Training for Success. It will exclusively represent the former Job-Ready strand, and will continue to provide young people with the training that they require to find employment or to progress to further training.

Although time does permit me to deal with all the recommendations in the Committee's report individually, I want to comment on a few of the more significant recommendations, as well as on any progress that the Department has made on those.

The Committee has recommended that the Department examine the age restrictions for apprenticeships. I was delighted to announce at the apprentice of the year awards that, from September onwards, apprenticeships will be available to people of all ages who are in employment.

Officials are already examining the possibility of reducing the current 35-hour-week work requirement to establish whether apprenticeships for part-time workers can be accommodated in the present Budget limitations.

It is clear that employers have a vital role to play in encouraging and facilitating apprenticeships, but it has also become clear that many employers are not aware of the benefits to them or of how to engage with the process. For that reason, I welcome the Committee's recommendation for an employer-focused marketing campaign. I confirm that officials are preparing to roll out such a campaign in the early part of the summer.

That work will also tie in with the higher level of direct engagement with sector skills councils and employers as part of the total development of apprenticeships under the Apprenticeships NI initiative.

Although the Committee has recommended that the Careers Service NI places apprenticeship promotion at the centre of its new strategy, we must be careful. Careers advisers provide independent and objective advice, which is designed to meet the needs of the individual.

It is obvious that they cannot promote apprenticeships at the expense of objective advice, which is in the interest of individuals. However, I assure Members that careers advisers will promote apprenticeship and Training for Success provision and information to individuals where it is identified as being suitable.

I am also conscious that wage levels have been an issue for apprentices, especially in light of the criticism in the original Public Accounts Committee report. I have already asked my officials to begin work on that issue, to which Alex Attwood and others referred. The Department is also aware that the Low Pay Commission has commenced a review and consultation process that will include apprentices. The Department will take part in the consultation, and, in doing so, will examine the possibility of introducing a minimum wage for apprentices linked to any funding arrangements for training. However, that is not a straightforward matter, and consensus from stakeholders will be required to guarantee that such a move will not affect the uptake of apprenticeships detrimentally.

With regard to the Committee's recommendation on front-ended training, I am pleased to say that a revised structure for each of the Job-Ready components has been agreed following consultation with training suppliers and the sector skills councils. In essence, that will provide the flexibility to reduce the required hours spent in the classroom and will thereby relieve the pressures on the young people and suppliers alike. That will also ensure that all young people on the provision are properly assessed, have a programme of learning and training that matches their individual

abilities, and that they will receive employability skills appropriate to their particular needs.

I thank members of the Department's expert disability group who gave freely of their time to examine how the provision could be improved for that important cohort of participants. The group is due to issue its report before the end of June 2008, and I agree with the Committee's recommendation that the report should be the first stage in an ongoing process that will ensure that the provision will best meet the needs of young people with a disability.

I am pleased to confirm that the training allowance payable to trainees will be replaced by a non-means-tested educational maintenance allowance from 1 September 2008, as was referred to earlier in the debate. That change is taking place to direct more funding at more vulnerable young people and their families.

The allowance rate of £40 per week will remain the same, but the change to the educational maintenance allowance will mean that young people and their families who are on means-tested benefits will be financially advantaged as the educational maintenance allowance will not be taken into account in the assessment of entitlement to means-tested benefits. The Committee was particularly keen for that to happen. The Department only received confirmation before lunchtime today that it was in a position to make this announcement.

The awarding of contracts was an unexpectedly contentious issue during the Committee's scrutiny. Working under the advice and guidance of the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate meant that the procurement process that led to the contracts for the delivery of training being awarded was carried out to the letter and with all applicable legislation and regulations. That process applied equally to all organisations that tendered for the work.

Mr Attwood, Mr Butler and the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning mentioned the Carter and Carter Group plc contract. I am not aware of any breaches of the process in the early stages of that contract. Mr Attwood asked what matters our departmental inspectors did not pick up that were picked up by the Education and Training Inspectorate in January 2008. It must be remembered that that contract only commenced in September 2007. Although the Department for Employment and Learning monitors the contracts, that process had only commenced a few weeks earlier. At an early stage, because of concerns, we decided to ask the Education and Training Inspectorate to look at what was going on. It found shortcomings that were then addressed by the Department.

I remind colleagues that that company was awarded a huge contract by the Department of Work and Pensions in London in December 2007. The fact that

the company was in huge difficulties arose only after its founder was killed in an accident. Difficulties arose from that point onwards.

We are strictly confined to the guidance given to us by the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel, and we have followed that guidance rigorously.

People say that we will not meet our targets. However, I am not abandoning those targets at this stage. Changes have been made, and we have removed the age limit. Furthermore, there was a slow take-up. Nevertheless, we can improve on our present performance, and I am not, at this stage, prepared to withdraw from those targets. Obviously, the targets will have to be examined as we progress.

Claire McGill asked about transport. Job-Ready participants are paid travel expenses, less £3, which is their provision. Apprentices are not entitled to travel expenses, although employers are expected to make a contribution as part of a fair-wage agreement. The two groups of people fall into different categories: Job-Ready participants have access to travel allowances and those in apprenticeships do not. However, we hope that that can be incorporated in a fair-wage agreement, and that is how we will approach the matter.

Anna Lo referred to removing the apprenticeships programme from Training for Success, and asked what facility would be available for young people who had completed the Job-Ready strand. The separation is mainly a branding and marketing issue. It is still anticipated that young people on the Job-Ready scheme can, and will, progress into apprenticeships, employment and further training. However, we must market the concept more effectively than we have hitherto, and giving it its own branding should encourage that. It was generally recognised that more had to be done in relation to marketing and branding, and we will roll that out from the end of the month — or certainly into the early summer — in order to attract apprentices for the new season.

Employers have a role to play. An insufficient number of employers recognise their bottom-line potential by having apprenticeships — and I have criticised them in the past for that. I welcome help from every Member to encourage employers to participate in the scheme.

I was struck by a comment from Robin Newton about our young people reaching for the sky while in training. That is the universal view of the Committee and the Department, and we must aim for the best for our young people. We have improved the delivery mechanisms, although they have shortcomings, and we must continue to do better.

I am conscious of the point that Robin Newton made about his visit to Omagh. An all-island skills

conference, based in the north-west, will be held later this year. One issue will focus on border areas and labour-market intelligence, and whether we match the needs of the employers in those areas with the trained students who leave the institutions. That issue will be referred to at that conference.

I commend the Committee, my staff, and all those who participated in producing the first report on Training for Success. It is a good document, and I am happy to try and implement as many of its recommendations as possible.

Mr Spratt: I thank all those who took part in this worthwhile debate. It was encouraging to see the extent of interest in Training for Success, not only from members of the Committee but from others who participated. I add my thanks to all the witnesses who appeared before the Committee; in particular, Mr Laurence Downey who, in his previous role with the Sector Skills Council Development Agency, worked with the Committee office to ensure that it received full briefings and evidence from all the key economic sectors.

I thank Hansard, the Assembly's Research and Library Services and the departmental officials who assisted the Committee at every possible level. Also deserving of mention are the Committee Clerk and his team, who assisted the Committee throughout the inquiry. I am delighted that the Minister is in the Chamber, and I thank him for making such a positive response to the Committee's report.

4.30 pm

The key issues have been discussed, and I do not intend to repeat all of them. I will make a couple of general points on the Committee's report before commenting on some of the issues that Members raised.

The report should not be viewed as an end in itself but should form the basis for the continual monitoring and improvement of the programme. Such a process will ensure that Training for Success will remain aligned to economic requirements. Tomorrow, the Committee will hear evidence from tourism and hospitality representatives on the sector in general and Training for Success in particular. There will, therefore, be a continuous work programme. The Committee looks forward to working with the Department on ensuring that improvements and adjustments are made to the programme in order to maximise the opportunities for young people and the entire workforce. The Committee wants to develop a format whereby it can work with the Department on Training for Success.

As the Chairperson mentioned, the approach that was adopted by the Committee proved successful in informing members of the wider economic sectoral issues. The compilation of the report was a beneficial

exercise that gave members an invaluable insight into the major training and employment issues of the day.

I want to touch on a couple of points that, due to time constraints, the Chairperson was unable to cover during her contribution. A key sectoral criticism to emerge, and one that the Committee endorses, is the lack of sufficient flexibility in the Training for Success programme to facilitate adult apprenticeships for those over 25 years of age or part-time apprenticeships. In some sectors, such as retail and hospitality, part-time working is the main work pattern, particularly for female employees. In addition, the Committee regards reskilling and conversion-type training as crucial elements in the ability to react to investment opportunities.

The Committee was particularly concerned about how Training for Success works for young persons with a disability, and there was wider Assembly interest in that issue. The Minister mentioned the report by a subgroup of the Department's disability liaison group. That is scheduled to be published at the end of June 2008, and the Committee looks forward to receiving a copy.

I will try to cover as many Members' contributions as possible. I hope that I will not exclude anyone, but, if I do, I apologise in advance.

Basil McCrea mentioned the importance of economic growth and how to facilitate matching skills to demand. He said that the Government's job is to steer but not to intervene directly. He shared the concern of some Committee members about the possible continued exploitation of apprentices; the Committee must keep a close eye on that.

My colleague Robin Newton mentioned that the Public Accounts Committee levelled several criticisms at the old Jobskills programme, particularly about its high drop-out rate. He stated that no one wants such problems to be repeated, and he agreed that Training for Success is a major improvement on the old scheme.

Alex Attwood said that he supports the Minister's review and acknowledges that Training for Success is a better programme, but that it is important to continue to monitor employees' pay—that should be an extremely important function. He also mentioned the problems around the targets, particularly the lower-level targets.

Anna Lo mentioned the concern about the target of 10,000 apprenticeships by 2010, and suggested that insufficient numbers of people were coming forward. She also referred to a concern over the concentration on lower-level apprenticeships.

Alastair Ross said that it is too early for assessment, but that it is important to begin early scrutiny. The Committee certainly intends to continue to keep an eye on the programme. He suggested that there should be increased focus on apprenticeships, and I know that the Department is keen to do that. He also mentioned

working with employers to ensure that the number of level 3 apprenticeships is increased. He further referred to the disability subgroup and the importance of part-time apprenticeships.

Claire McGill said that it was important for an early and consistent message to be sent to young people, and that DE and DEL need to enhance the value of apprenticeships. She was concerned that there is no enforcement of the minimum wage until the age of 19. She also mentioned — as she has consistently done in Committee meetings — the particular difficulties for folks in rural areas, and the funding gaps, particularly concerning travel. She outlined the importance of disability issues, as well.

Leslie Cree said that the Training for Success programme looks more positive than Jobskills, and that has been the general consensus running throughout the debate today. He also mentioned the importance of adult apprenticeships, and thanked the Minister for introducing those.

Paul Butler mentioned the importance of remembering other courses and provisions that need to be delivered through further education — particularly referring to the construction and automotive industries — and the importance of personal training plans, and the need for those to be improved.

I welcome the Minister's very positive relationship with the Committee — and, indeed, that all of his officials — during the inquiry. The Minister referred to the young people who face barriers to employment, and the need to promote apprenticeships and to increase the programme. He also mentioned a number of other engagements, and of course mentioned the good news, welcomed by all on the Committee, of DFP's approval today for the educational maintenance allowance to be paid from 1 September. That is something that the Committee welcomes very much. He mentioned other issues as well.

In closing, I again thank everyone, and commend the report to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the first report of the Committee for Employment and Learning on Training for Success (34/07/08R); and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to incorporate the report's recommendations into his Department's ongoing review of Training for Success.

Goods Vehicles (Licensing Of Operators) Bill

Committee Stage (Period Extension)

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr McGlone): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 31(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 31(2) be extended to 12 December 2008, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill (NIA Bill 15/07).

The Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill passed its Second Stage on 20 May 2008, and it was referred to the Committee for the Environment on 21 May 2008. The Bill is comprehensive, consisting of 61 clauses and six schedules. It will make provision to regulate goods-vehicles operators and will deal with partial regulation of freight operators; enforcement; road safety; organised crime; and environmental issues.

The Committee is committed to undertake scrutiny of the Bill and to enable a report, as required under Standing Orders. The Committee has already engaged with the Department in pre-legislative scrutiny, which has proven useful in drawing out some key issues. However, much more work remains to be done on the Bill. A public notice was placed in the three main local newspapers on 30 May to invite people's views on the Bill. The deadline for receipt of those views is 11 July. Committee staff will then collate and analyse the findings from those submissions during the summer recess.

After recess, the Committee will invite oral evidence from some of the parties who have submitted views before it carries out clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill and finally produces its report. I therefore seek extension of the Committee Stage of the Bill to 7 December 2008, in order to allow sufficient time for the Committee to consider the Bill and to report on its findings. I ask Members for their support. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom an rún a mholadh.

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 12 December 2008, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill (NIA Bill 15/07).

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Victoria Cross for Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne

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. One amendment has been selected and is 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.

Mr Shannon: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the bravery which was displayed by Lt Col Blair Mayne during the Second World War and calls on the Ministry of Defence to reconsider the application for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

I ask Members to imagine, with me, for a brief moment, a scene of terror. The air is filled with the screams of dying and the stench of the dead. You are gasping for breath as your lungs intake gulps of gunpowder-tinged air. You are lying in a ditch. The enemy is firing so often without break that the rat-tat-tat of bullets merges together. You know that each searing breath may well be your last. The officer that you look to for direction is dead. Deep in your heart, you believe that it will take a miracle to lift you from this scene of hell.

Suddenly, you hear a different sound: the roaring of an engine. With your last vestige of energy, you lift your head. With stinging eyes, you make out the form of a jeep that is cutting through the madness and mayhem. The man on board fires at the enemy like an avenging angel. He slows the jeep down at the ditch. On his way past, he calls: "I'll pick you up on the way back." Nothing flowery; no grand words — just a promise that gives you hope that, perhaps, it is not the time for you to die.

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

With a hammering heart, you watch as the man on the jeep forces the enemy to retreat, despite the fact that it holds all of the advantages of position, men and firepower. As the enemy retreats, the jeep turns around. This time, it stops. The avenging angel jumps to the ground amid a hail of bullets and holds out his hand.

Shaking, you grasp the hand as you are bundled in with your 11 comrades and wildly driven to safety. As you look to see what form your angel takes, you see that it is that crazy Ulsterman. It is "Paddy" Mayne, and everything falls into place. It is a man who is known for bravery and courage and for leading men to victory. A man who is and, in your eyes and the eyes of

your surviving family, will for ever remain a hero of epic fame.

That story is the true story of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Blair Mayne's actions as seen from one of the men who was saved by Colonel Mayne, or "Paddy", as he was affectionately known. The story does not take into account the fact that, before Colonel Mayne and Lieutenant Scott had driven the jeep into oncoming enemy fire, Mayne had summed up the situation. Ever a man of initiative and action, he entered the first house that had formed the enemy defences and, after checking to ensure that the enemy was dead, he moved out into the open and fired into the next house, taking out those behind the enemy fire before moving in to ensure that none of the enemy remained.

4.45 pm

After ensuring that clean sweep, he turned his attention to how best to save the trapped point men of the squadron. He noted that the enemy was well ensconced in the forest, and, with no way to surround them, he departed on what seemed to be a suicide mission in order to rescue those men. Not only did "Paddy" manage to rescue his colleagues, but he forced a retreat from the enemy.

It has been said that a level-one award such as the Victoria Cross (VC) is only given when the chance of death is 50% or more. A report from Brigadier Calvert, dated 11 June 1945, said:

"There can only be one explanation why Colonel Mayne was not killed by what had already proved deadly and concentrated fire: the sheer audacity and daring which he showed in driving his jeep across a field of fire momentarily bewildering the enemy."

He also said:

"Colonel Mayne from the time he arrived dominated the scene. His cheerfulness, resolution and unsurpassed courage in this action was an inspiration to us all".

Undoubtedly, it was a suicidal mission to rescue his comrades and ensure that the enemy retreated further. Colonel Mayne's mission was a complete success. In the words of Brigadier Calvert:

"Not only did he save the lives of the wounded but he also completely defeated and destroyed the enemy."

Ninety-six per cent of the people who have been awarded the Victoria Cross have been assisted in the actions for which the award was made. Colonel Mayne's story is the stuff of which legends are made. It is the stuff of which many of us dreamed as young boys and acted out in our gardens. Blair Mayne was certainly a hero of mine as a young child, many years ago. His actions were those of a man who put others first and went above and beyond the call of duty. There is no doubt that his actions on that day were heroic and worthy of recognition and commendation. That is why Brigadier Calvert recommended that Mayne be awarded the highest award, the Victoria Cross. Mayne was

informed that he was to be granted that well-deserved accolade, and he informed his mother accordingly, which made her even more proud of him.

I shall explain why I have told that war story, which could — and probably will — be made into a blockbusting film about a founding member of a covert special raiding squadron, a hero many times over, who is reputed to have single-handedly downed 130 enemy planes and was commended for the highest military award. The reason is that, six months later, a terrible mistake occurred. That mistake stripped Blair Mayne of his hard-won honour and much of his self-esteem.

The award of the Victoria Cross by the 1931 royal warrant is bestowed upon those who display acts of conspicuous gallantry and for a signal act of valour in the presence of the enemy. Mayne more than attained that standard, but the mistake lies with the word “signal”, which is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as:

“an event or statement that provides the impulse or occasion for something to happen.”

It was not a planned event, and Mayne certainly qualified for the award. However, the word “signal” was misread as “single”. Mayne had been accompanied in the jeep by Lieutenant Scott, who provided covering fire, and, therefore had not acted single-handedly, which meant that he was deemed to be ineligible for the award. That mistake by a high-ranking civil servant — Jack Ganning, a military secretary — resulted in Mayne being stripped of the award. Instead, he was given a third bar on his Distinguished Service Order (DSO).

As evidence that Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne was supposed to get the Victoria Cross, on his citation, “VC” was marked, but stroked out, for the commendation. That is important evidence, and it clearly demonstrates that he was meant to receive the Victoria Cross.

We are not the only people who cannot understand why that medal was not awarded. King George VI asked how it was that the Victoria Cross eluded “Paddy”, and he enquired into why the award was downgraded. When he asked Winston Churchill to explain the demerit, Churchill was said to have been shocked and saddened by the glaring omission.

Enquiries were also made by several officers, who also could not understand what had happened. They did not have the access that we now have to the files, which clearly show a mistake between a few letters in the words “single” and “signal”. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth’s uncle, Major General Sir Robert Laycock, who, at the time, was a serving officer in the forces, wrote a letter in which he stated that Blair Mayne deserved a Victoria Cross and would have received one had the proper authorities known their job.

As a consequence of someone’s misreading of a word, Blair Mayne did not receive the greatest honour

that this country can bestow. No matter how much being awarded the highest French accolade meant, to have been given, and then stripped of, his British honour haunted Mayne for the rest of his life. For that reason, I ask the Assembly to do all in its power to put right that wrong and ensure that a true war hero — one of Ulster’s and Newtownards’s special sons — is finally given that which is rightly his — the Victoria Cross.

I am not asking for a precedent to be set by this posthumous and retrospective award. The Ministry of Defence paperwork provides clear evidence that he was commended for the Victoria Cross and informed that it was his. I ask only that the mistake be rectified and that his honour be properly restored to him and his hometown, Newtownards, which is eternally proud of its courageous soldier.

The memory of Blair Mayne lives on in Ards people’s hearts, and, in the Public Gallery, we are joined today by people from the Blair Mayne Research Society in Newtownards, including Barry Abbott from England, who has been industrious in his research. People from all over the world are taking an interest in this matter. The Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales will debate the same motion, and it is also intended to raise the matter in the Houses of Parliament. In this Assembly, in Blair Mayne’s home country, I ask Members to support the campaign.

There is a statue of Blair Mayne in Newtownards town centre, and his image now adorns walls that once boasted murals depicting paramilitary paraphernalia. It is time that the memory of a man who lived for his colleagues and his country was restored to its full glory through the restitution of the Victoria Cross.

King George VI asked him how it was that he had not received the Victoria Cross, and he answered in a manner that sums up this courageous and honourable man:

“I served to my best my Lord, my King and my Queen, and none can take that honour away from me.”

Let us do better today and restore and replace that which was his.

Mr McNarry: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “bravery” and insert:

“of many men and women in His Majesty’s Forces during the Second World War, including that which was displayed by Lt Col Blair Mayne; and calls on the Ministry of Defence to reconsider previous recommendations made on their behalf for the application for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.”

We owe no apology to the Mayne family for debating this motion in the House; however, I must say that we have drawn a crowd. In this debate, the nationalist, non-unionist interest is unsurpassed, and I thank Mr Attwood and Dr Farry for their attendance. There is only one member of the SDLP, one member of the Alliance Party and Mr Deputy Speaker, who, dare I presume, would not be here either if he had not been

required to do his job. Five DUP and three Ulster Unionist Party Members have attended to debate this major issue.

Having said that, and having proposed the amendment, I am mindful of the fact that Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne was not alone in not receiving proper recognition for his considerable deeds of bravery and heroism. Research indicates that few Victoria Crosses were awarded to anyone during 1945. By that stage, the Allied Governments had decided that the war against Germany had been won, and all that remained to be done, in effect, were mopping-up operations.

It seemed that the Government needed heroes no longer and were turning their attention to the construction of the post-war world. Research also indicates that the vast majority of Victoria Cross recommendations were downgraded, or even ignored, by the awards committee.

Many heroes deserve to be recognised, just as Blair Mayne deserves to be recognised — for example, Group Captain Willie Tait, known as “Tirpitz Tait” after his most famous exploit, raiding the German Bismarck-class battleship Tirpitz in Norway. He was awarded four Distinguished Service Orders and two Distinguished Flying Crosses (DFCs). Many people like Willie Tait and Blair Mayne should have been awarded the Victoria Cross but were not; hence the wording of our amendment.

The failure to award the VC in no way diminishes the deeds of “Paddy” Mayne. He needs no VC to be remembered as a hero. In fact, he never exhibited any concern about the failure of the authorities to award him the Victoria Cross. Like most men of courage, he rarely mentioned his exploits after the war.

Turning to the motion, the arguments for it were best set up by an early-day motion signed by over 100 MPs in the House of Commons in June 2005, which stated:

“That this House recognises the grave injustice meted out to Lt Col Paddy Mayne, of 1st, SAS, who won the Victoria Cross at Oldenburg in North West Germany on 9th April 1945; notes that this was subsequently downgraded, some six months later, to a third bar DSO, that the citation had been clearly altered and that David Stirling, founder of the SAS has confirmed that there was considerable prejudice towards Mayne and that King George VI enquired why the Victoria Cross had ‘so strangely eluded him’;”

The motion continues:

“and therefore calls upon the Government to mark these anniversaries by instructing the appropriate authorities to act without delay to reinstate the Victoria Cross given for exceptional personal courage and leadership of the highest order and to acknowledge that Mayne’s actions on that day saved the lives of many men and greatly helped the allied advance on Berlin.”

“Paddy” Mayne was a controversial figure — heroes, and particularly military heroes, often are. His exploits, which were outstanding, showed the kind of heroism that this country badly needed in the dark days of World War II, when it stood at the edge of a disaster, facing an implacable and dangerous enemy with a

human rights record that has blackened the history books ever since. The small-minded people who denied Blair Mayne the award did not understand the spirit that makes ordinary men admire the heroism of the likes of “Paddy” Mayne. Even the King, who normally never commented on such matters, enquired as to why the Victoria Cross so strangely eluded Blair “Paddy” Mayne.

Historical wrongs have been righted before. Men who were suffering from shell shock were wrongly shot as traitors in World War I, and that wrong was righted in so far as it could be. Apologies were rightly given for the slave trade and its impact on Africans. Therefore, why can the Ministry of Defence not bend a little and give proper recognition to one — indeed, all — of this country’s heroes? Is the Ministry of Defence trying to pretend that it can never be wrong? Surely it must realise that its continued petty-mindedness on the awarding of a VC to Blair Mayne and on its treatment of other heroes diminishes the Ministry in all our eyes.

My colleague Alan McFarland and I gave considerable thought to introducing our amendment.

We received correspondence from the Blair Mayne Research Society on the motion. On the basis of that correspondence, we felt that our amendment was appropriate.

5.00 pm

In its letter, the society — an organisation formed in 1996, at the request of Ards Borough Council, to research the life and times of Blair Mayne in conjunction with the erection of a bronze statue of him in Newtownards town centre — offered these valuable and significant comments:

“It may be necessary to suggest at a distance of over 60 years that Paddy Mayne deserved a Victoria Cross, but how do we separate Paddy’s deeds from Willie Tait and many other brave men and women who fought and, indeed, sacrificed their lives for the freedom we all enjoy today? The answer is, we can’t. So, in supporting a VC request, we must include all the others who were recommended but never awarded ... Blair Mayne himself never felt bitter or sore about the denial of a VC. Indeed, like all heroes, he never really talked about it. The family have been gracious with regard to a Victoria Cross, with his brother saying: yes, he should have got it during or just after the war, but to award it now, who will they pin it on? ... Victoria Crosses are won on the field of battle, not in committee rooms or debating chambers. Support, if agreed, should be given to all, not just a few. How can we decide, just as that Awards Committee in 1945 decided, who deserves and who does not?”

With or without a Victoria Cross, Blair “Paddy” Mayne will always be a hero — the history books will confirm that. So, too, will many other brave men and women, who, like Blair Mayne, have been overlooked and denied the Victoria Cross. This amendment is not intended to detract from Blair Mayne’s war record. We fully support the reconsideration of an application for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross. In doing so, however, we ask the House to do as we have done,

which is to recognise that there are others equally deserving.

I did not meet or know Blair “Paddy” Mayne, but I guess that, if he was about to hear this debate, he, being the man that he was, would not only be proud to see what was being done in recognition of him, but probably feel quite embarrassed, too. Most certainly, though, he would be the first to say that others should be considered also.

Dr Farry: I endorse the campaign to recognise the heroism that was shown by Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne, otherwise known as “Paddy”. As a man from the town of Bangor, I speak with some trepidation. I declare, however, that I was born in Newtownards and lived there for perhaps a week. I am, therefore, capable of riding two horses at the same time.

I appreciate the real pride in Newtownards in the local hero, “Paddy” Mayne, who has been recognised through the erection of a statue. Locals also feel that it would be appropriate to recognise his deeds in the customary way of the British armed forces: through the award of a VC.

I appreciate the significance of the Victoria Cross. One of the sons of Bangor, the Hon Barry Bingham, was awarded the VC during the First World War. He was a resident of Bangor Castle long before it became the headquarters of Bangor Borough Council and, subsequently, North Down Borough Council. He was recognised for his heroism during the battle of Jutland in 1916, when he was a commander in the Royal Navy. He later became a rear admiral.

Many years ago, the honourable Barry Bingham’s Victoria Cross was bought by North Down Borough Council, and it was displayed at North Down Museum until someone was caught walking out with it in a pocket. However, it has now been put under lock and key, because it is a very valuable piece of memorabilia. We recognise the importance of recognising courage.

As Mr McNarry said, it is important to acknowledge that “Paddy” Mayne was a flawed character in many many different ways. However, it is fair to say that there have been many flawed characters throughout history. Indeed, most of our heroes have deep flaws. In fact, a certain amount of recklessness is required to merit a Victoria Cross or other medal, as conventional wisdom and procedures must be set aside to do the unconventional in order to achieve the objectives of protecting the lives of one’s comrades and defeating the enemy. In that context, it is appropriate to recognise the contribution that was made by “Paddy” Mayne.

Equally, we should recognise Private William McFadzean, who I believe — but I stand to be corrected — was the first resident from what eventually became Northern Ireland to receive the Victoria Cross during the First World War. Indeed, he was a teenage tearaway,

but when he threw himself on top of a live grenade to protect his comrades, his only concern was for the lives of his comrades. His actions are reflected in the way in which “Paddy” Mayne conducted himself in his contribution to the war.

Aside from “Paddy” Mayne’s bravery, his role in the formation of the SAS during the Second World War should also be recognised. That was very much an improvisation to meet an evolving set of needs.

Mr McNarry touched on the argument that has been made about politicians trying to second-guess decisions that were made by the military up to 90 years ago. However, as can be seen from the so-called shot-at-dawn campaign, with the passing of time and perspective of history, matters can appear in a different light. There are occasions when decisions that were made for the best reasons at the time need to be reconsidered in the light of history. It is only through the study of history that we can see events in a fuller perspective. For those reasons, there are significant grounds for calling on the authorities to reconsider this case and do the appropriate thing with respect to the award of the Victoria Cross. I support the motion.

Miss McIlveen: I thank my fellow party colleagues from the Strangford constituency for securing the debate. Northern Ireland is such a small country, but it is particularly blessed with iconic heroes, whether in sport: David Healy or George Best; in music: Van Morrison; in science: Lord Kelvin: or, indeed, the inventor of milk chocolate, another Strangford old boy, Sir Hans Sloane. We can be proud of our mark on the world.

In the military world, there are few who could match the exploits of Blair Mayne. Given his almost unimaginable bravery and ability during the Second World War, it is hard to believe that he did not receive the Victoria Cross during an already heavily decorated career.

When one reads about Blair Mayne, it is like reading about a fictional hero in a ‘Boy’s Own’ comic. Sometimes, there seems a need to double-check the books to ensure that it is not some work of fiction. Blair Mayne was honoured with a DSO with three bars, the Légion d’Honneur and the Croix de Guerre, and, as my colleague has stated, his denial of a Victoria Cross was queried by King George VI.

We have heard about the incident for which Blair Mayne was recommended for the Victoria Cross in 1945. The tales of bravery that accompany the awards of the Victoria Cross always astound me, displaying as they do amazing selflessness in the face of enemy onslaught.

I have read and heard about our own Blair Mayne, and his exploits surely rank among the acts of other recipients. He was, allegedly, denied the highest military honour as a result of the military establishment’s prejudice against him — that transgression must be rectified.

After taking out a farmhouse full of enemies and avoiding heavy enemy gunfire three times, Blair Mayne, without concern for his own safety, risked his life to single-handedly rescue a squadron of his troops by lifting them individually into his jeep — how can such bravery not merit the highest possible military honour? Throughout the Second World War, he continually redefined bravery and is credited with assuring the SAS's future and consolidating its position as a permanent part of the UK defence forces.

Even if the motion does not result in a posthumous award to this Ulster icon, it is appropriate that the House considers his exploits and bravery and that it acknowledge his place in the pantheon of the heroic. Flawed as he was, Blair Mayne was a true leader of men and an outstanding soldier. I support the motion. Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne should take his rightful place among Northern Ireland's 11 other recipients of the Victoria Cross.

Mr Poots: In this country, we sometimes have a habit recognising people's achievements, such as was the case with George Best, after their death. As was the case with Professor Frank Pantridge — who made a huge contribution to the world of medicine by designing the portable defibrillator — achievements are often not recognised because faces do not fit. Similarly, Harry Ferguson's contribution to engineering was never recognised; neither of those individuals fitted into the society in charge during their lifetimes. Unfortunately, the same applies to Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne.

Blair Mayne was not an ordinary soldier, and Mr Shannon eloquently described his bravery and his contribution during the Second World War. The SAS and Blair Mayne were made for each other. His characteristics and qualities were ideal for membership of an organisation that tackles the most difficult circumstances and is required to demonstrate a degree of bravery that borders on foolishness.

Blair Mayne had numerous qualities. He was well built, intelligent, and exceptionally brave, and he had an excellent physique and level of fitness, all of which resulted in a phenomenal soldier. Rambo, Arnold Schwarzenegger and James Bond accomplish fantastic acts. However, those acts are in the movies and on television — Blair Mayne accomplished them in real life during the Second World War.

At the time of the desert campaign, Rommel was one of the most skilled commanders in the German army, and he was exceptionally difficult to get the better of. However, Blair Mayne and his SAS colleagues destroyed 400 enemy planes in the desert. Their efforts in infiltrating enemy lines and destroying those planes contributed greatly to Rommel's defeat during that conflict.

He was then sent to Italy and southern Europe, and he later fought in France and Germany. It was there

that this period of exceptional bravery, which Mr Shannon described, became so evident.

5.15 pm

It is regrettable that an amendment has been tabled. It is, unfortunately, a generic amendment that refers to a great number of people as opposed to other, particular individuals. The Victoria Cross is awarded on a limited basis, and only a limited number of people are entitled to receive it. It is evident from the paperwork that Blair Mayne was one of those who should have received the Victoria Cross. To table such a generic amendment, suggesting that others deserve the award and without being specific, damages the motion greatly.

I was somewhat disappointed that a Strangford representative should table such an amendment, given that the motion is about Newtownards's greatest son. I have some interest in war history, and I believe that Blair Mayne was one of the people who was most entitled to receive the Victoria Cross.

Mr G Robinson: In Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne we had a man who was not only a qualified lawyer and international sportsman, but an example of what a soldier of any nationality should be — courageous, knowledgeable of battle strategy, with an almost unhealthy disregard for his own safety, and above all, protective of fellow members of his unit. Those are characteristics that all soldiers can aspire to, but few can achieve or emulate what Blair Mayne did.

Blair Mayne's war record attests to the tributes that I described, but, for whatever reason, he was — and has been — overlooked consistently for an award that he was most definitely entitled to, many times over. Indeed, I believe that Blair Mayne should join Lieutenant Colonel Martin-Leake, Captain Chavasse and Captain Upham as a multiple winner of the Victoria Cross, such were the number and heroic nature of his actions during the Second World War.

Blair Mayne, along with Sir David Stirling, was a founding member of the SAS, and after Sir David was captured, the SAS, under Mayne's sole leadership, fought some courageous and dangerous missions on the island of Sicily, mainland Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany and Norway. Lieutenant Colonel Mayne, as always, led from the front and was in the forefront of the fighting. This was a man who knew what leadership required. The very action that triggered his nomination for the Victoria Cross was to save comrades who were trapped by enemy fire. That was leadership in its truest form — leading by example. That is also heroism in its truest form.

The Victoria Cross is Britain's highest military award. It was established in February 1856 by Queen Victoria, and it is awarded for:

“most conspicuous bravery, a daring or pre-eminent act of valour, self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy.”

The citation for actions on 9 April 1945 at Oldenburg in Germany for the Victoria Cross, which was surprisingly refused, shows that it is obvious that Blair Mayne's actions can be placed easily within the criteria for this highest of bravery awards. His citation read that his:

“brilliant leadership and cool calculating courage”

was:

“a single act of supreme bravery”

The citation continued, saying that his “unsurpassed gallantry inspired all ranks”.

It seems that other reasons or considerations denied Blair Mayne the award that he so thoroughly deserved, as his citation was downgraded — if that is an appropriate term to use — to a third bar to his DSO. I saw two comments with regard to the debate that, in particular, focused my thoughts as to why this true hero was denied at least one Victoria Cross. His co-founder of the SAS, Sir David Stirling, described the failure to award the VC to Blair Mayne as “a monstrous injustice”, and King George VI apparently asked why the VC “so strangely eluded” Mayne. I can only agree entirely with those comments.

It is time that the Victoria Cross, which Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne so justly deserved, was awarded to him in recognition of his heroic actions and the lives that he saved on, at least, one occasion in 1945.

I hope that the motion will receive unanimous support from the Assembly, as Blair Mayne saw only the colleagues he was rescuing from certain death and nothing else. He defended democracy and showed extraordinary courage and leadership, yet he maintained a loyalty to his fellow soldiers that cannot be surpassed — all with disregard for his own safety.

I support the motion, and I look forward to reading about Lieutenant Colonel Blair Mayne VC.

Mr Attwood: I speak somewhat cautiously, given that many people — inside and outside the Chamber — have an appreciation of Blair Mayne's life beyond anything that I can contribute. However, in such a debate, it is important to acknowledge something that everybody knows. The British Army weaves in and out of the lives of many nationalist families in this part of the world. It is part of our history, and acknowledging that must be part of our understanding of the past.

My father's brother and brother-in-law fought in the Second World War, and I am named after a member of the First Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment, who lies in an unmarked grave in west Flanders and whose name is recorded on the memorial at Nieupoort. Therefore, the British Army has been involved in my

family's history, and in the history of many other families on the nationalist side.

This is neither the time nor the place to talk more generally about the British Army and the SAS, because it has woven into the lives of members of the nationalist community in a negative manner. As I said, this is not the time to probe that further.

I agree with Stephen Farry. An unusual feature of heroes is that they tend to have flawed backgrounds. Last Friday was the anniversary of the assassination of Robert Kennedy, a man who has had particular impact on my life. He certainly had a flawed background, but — perhaps like the man about whom we talk today — he rose to the moment and to the challenge of circumstances in a way that belied his past conduct.

I note that there is division between the unionist parties on the way in which to resolve this matter. It is not the SDLP's role to take sides in this matter. For that reason, we will not participate in the vote, although we acknowledge the merits of the arguments that have been put forward by the amendment and the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McFarland will have five minutes to make a winding-up speech on the amendment.

Mr McFarland: It is worth reminding Members that, on 9 April 1945, two armoured jeep squadrons of 1 SAS had been tasked with clearing a path forward for the Fourth Canadian Armoured Division near Oldenburg in Germany. An incident occurred, and, within around 48 hours, a citation had been written for a Victoria Cross by a chap called Major Michael Blackman — whom I knew in the 1980s — and a Captain Derrick Harrison.

The citation describes the incident as follows. A squadron under Dick Bond had been going forward and Lieutenant Schlee's jeeps had been hit by the enemy. They had bailed out, with two men injured, and the whole convoy had stopped on the road. “Paddy” Mayne stopped before he reached the killing zone and observed the situation. He then cleared a nearby house, because enemy fire was coming from a second house. He grabbed a Bren gun and went to the second house, killing and wounding the enemy and firing into the woods. He and one of his young officers then jumped into a jeep.

The pair headed up the road in the jeep and through enemy killing ground, while firing at Germans in the woods. They drove back down before going back up for a third time. On this occasion, they stopped, the citation says, under fire. “Paddy” Mayne had been driving the jeep. He jumped out, loaded the wounded into the jeep and drove them out of the firing line to safety. That left the enemy with the option of either retreating or being killed, and the squadron moved on.

By and large, that is what the citation describes. The story was passed from the brigade commander, Mike

Calvert, to the Canadian generals and to General Montgomery. “Paddy” Mayne was then recommended for a Victoria Cross.

However, it soon emerged that the situation had not been quite like that. I will outline what is now believed to have happened. Schlee had been hit and Bond had moved forward in an attempt to find out what was going on. Bond and his driver were shot by a German sniper. Therefore, at the scene there were two bodies, including the squadron commander, and two injured members of the forward troop. Mayne came forward again and, as a good commander should, assessed the situation. He got a Bren gun and with his driver, a Belfast chap called Billy Hull, cleared the first building and opened fire on the second building. He then moved a jeep up to fire on the second building. Next he jumped into another jeep with Lieutenant John Scott, and with a .50 Browning machine gun in the front and twin Vickers in the back, they went up the road and back down and, along with the other jeep, suppressed German fire.

It is a brilliant story of outstanding bravery. Indeed, it is in the mode of H Jones in the Falklands War: the attack bogs down; the commanding officer jumps up and moves forward; his troops move with him; and the situation is saved. That, too, was a demonstration of outstanding bravery.

However, Mayne’s rescue of the prisoners took place after that. He drove back up the road, and with Scott firing in the woods to make sure that there were no Germans firing at them — there were not at this stage — Mayne loaded the wounded troops and the two bodies into the jeep and drove them to safety. Therefore, there are two incidents to be considered.

It is worth reminding Members what the Victoria Cross is awarded for. The first criterion of the award is in recognition of an act of outstanding bravery that helped to turn the course of a battle. As Michael Blackman explains, this event did not, in itself, turn the course of a battle. Therefore, the Victoria Cross awarded to Mayne was based on the second criterion: the rescue of a comrade from an impossible situation without regard for personal safety.

It could be argued that Mayne was accompanied by Scott. Indeed, it has been argued that Scott did all the shooting while Mayne’s role was merely to drive the jeep. Therefore, there is an issue as to whether Mayne had any single-handed role in the rescue.

Notwithstanding, to be eligible for a Victoria Cross a candidate does not have to have acted single-handedly. Leonard Cheshire received a Victoria Cross in recognition of his participation in endless missions over Germany. Guy Gibson received a Victoria Cross for leading the Dambusters. Victoria Crosses are not awarded only in recognition of single acts of individual bravery.

The difficulty in Mayne’s case is that, on the discovery that the citation had been over-egged, there was reluctance further up the line to take the story at face value and, therefore, it was degraded. A book titled ‘Irish Winners of the Victoria Cross’ is worth reading and provides some interesting explanations. It explains that those proposed for Victoria Crosses sometimes came up with the rations. Henry Gallagher and Father Willie Doyle in the First World War and Corporal Jimmy Barnes and Major Desmond White in the Second World War were all highly recommended for a Victoria Cross but did not receive one.

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

Mr McFarland: If we are to consider giving a Victoria Cross to “Paddy” Mayne, the acts of bravery of many other people should also be re-examined. Blair Mayne’s is one of the cases that deserve reconsideration. I support the amendment to the motion.

Mr Hamilton: I thank my colleagues and other Members for their contributions to the debate on this very important issue. I am grateful for the general quality of the contributions because it makes my job easier. There is very little left to be said about Blair Mayne — although that has never stopped me in the past.

As has been said most clearly by my colleague Michelle McIlveen, the life story of Lieutenant Colonel Robert “Paddy” Blair Mayne reads like something from a novel. Anyone who has studied Mayne’s life story will realise that he achieved much more in 40 years on this planet than most of us would achieve in 400 years.

5.30 pm

He was a solicitor; he was an Irish universities heavyweight boxing champion; he gained six caps for Ireland and toured South Africa — one of the most difficult tours of all — with the British Lions. He was a scratch handicap golfer, I understand — a single-figure handicap golfer, certainly — at Scrabo Golf Club. Anybody who has played Scrabo Golf Club and lost a bag-full of balls will know that that in itself is merit enough to receive some sort of an honour around the town.

The concentration today has rightly been on Blair Mayne’s heroism in a time of war, a time when this country — and, indeed, our whole way of life and civilisation — faced its darkest threat. His service in uniform is the very epitome of gallantry and bravery. As has been said by nearly all Members, Blair Mayne was a founding member of the SAS, serving in various theatres of war, including North Africa, Italy, France and Germany.

Some of the particular acts of heroism that have been mentioned are so unbelievable as to strike you as something from a film — the sort of films that we all

watched as children and even watch to this day. During the raid on Tamet airfield — for which he received his first Distinguished Service Order — he single-handedly destroyed 14 aircraft. He was reputedly responsible for destroying more enemy aircraft than any fighter ace. What makes that all the more extraordinary is that he did it on the ground behind enemy lines, not in a plane.

He was parachuted, as has been said by Mr Poots, behind enemy lines into Nazi-occupied France after D-Day and was awarded three bars on his DSO. That has rightly given him an honoured place on the long list of Ulster military heroes alongside the likes of Montgomery, Alanbrooke and others.

He is the very definition of a local hero. It was when I attended Regent House school, his alma mater — that is where the similarities end between him and I — that I first learnt of his wonderful story. Blair Mayne was born and bred in Newtownards, lived there pretty much all his life, died in Newtownards and is buried there to this day. He has been commemorated by the commissioning of a splendid statue that stands in the square in Newtownards. Last Friday in Newtownards, I had the privilege, along with Mr Shannon and others, of attending the unveiling of a mural of the most famous picture of Blair Mayne. That mural is on a gable wall where once there was a loyalist paramilitary mural, and I think that it is right and proper to replace that awful blight on our past with something good from our past.

I want to comment briefly on the remarks made by Alex Attwood. We appreciate his contribution to the debate and the very fact that he has been here throughout. We are grateful for the tone and manner in which he conducted his comments, which were gratefully received by those of us on this side of the House and outside this Chamber.

I come now to the amendment. Of course we will all honour any and every act of heroism, whether by Blair Mayne or by some of the other names mentioned. We honour the service of those men and women from this part of the world who are in uniform around the world serving our country and defending our way of life and our freedoms.

To pick up on some of the points that Mr McNarry made, Blair Mayne may not have complained that he did not get a VC, but he certainly won it and deserves to get it. I would not be so arrogant as to surmise what a man who has been dead for over 50 years would think of the motion or the amendment before us today — all I know is that he deserved the VC and, therefore, he should get the VC. Whether there is someone to pin it on is irrelevant.

Mr McFarland's contribution did not particularly honour the service of Blair Mayne in the way that it should have done — the case of Lt Col H Jones in the Falklands was mentioned. That was another instance of

the posthumous awarding of the VC. Whether there is a body to pin it on or not, Blair Mayne deserves that VC.

Mr Shannon: Some clarity is needed, and I have a quotation that will provide that clarity. Blair Mayne changed the entire course of the battle in which he was involved. To quote from the actual citation:

“the survivors were unable at that time to influence the action in any way until the arrival of Lt. Col. Mayne. The Lt. Col. continued along the road all the time engaging the enemy with fire from his own jeep. Having swept the whole area very thoroughly with close range fire he turned his jeep around and drove down the road again, still in full view of the enemy. By this time, the enemy had suffered heavy casualties and had started to withdraw.”

He was awarded the VC — it is in the citation, the recommendation, and the commendation given by the commanding officer. It is only right that he should receive it. Does the Member agree?

Mr Hamilton: I agree with what the Member has said.

Members on this side of the Chamber do not support the amendment. We are not dishonouring other people whose citations for VCs were downgraded or not given at all. We honour those people, but this has been a long-standing, ongoing campaign, focused on the figure of Blair Mayne. To dilute that in any way does a disservice, and that is why the DUP holds fast to the motion.

As Mr Shannon and others have said, the citation is there — and it begs the question as to why the Victoria Cross was not awarded. It is the premier award for gallantry in this country and it is not dispensed willy-nilly. What Blair Mayne did was far from routine. It was in no way ordinary, and it was not everyday behaviour — it was the sort of behaviour of which most of us are totally incapable.

He was absolutely extraordinary in his bravery, and he was rightly recommended for the VC in the citation that Jim Shannon just read — he spoke earlier of the mistake that was made. Although Blair Mayne was a maverick, and not everybody's cup of tea within the military establishment, he was clearly deserving of the VC for which he was recommended.

Mr McNarry spoke earlier about the righting of wrongs, and sometimes one can be beleaguered when one hears our Government apologising for this and that. It is high time that this wrong was righted. Lt Col Blair Mayne's face may not have fitted — he may have been a flawed character. In listening to what has been said about him today, it is easy to forget that he was human, and, therefore, he was flawed. The stiff-upper-lip attitude that has sometimes characterised the military in this country in the past will no longer suffice. It is high time that the rightful award of a Victoria Cross was made to Blair Mayne.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the bravery which was displayed by Lt Col Blair Mayne during the Second World War and calls on the Ministry of Defence to reconsider the application for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [*Mr Deputy Speaker*]

ADJOURNMENT

Cocaine in Coleraine

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 10 minutes.

Mr Dallat: I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this debate to the House. The title of the debate is ‘Cocaine in Coleraine’, and concerns the future well-being of my constituency. It could apply equally to any town and village across the North, and I have no doubt that the Members representing those areas are no less concerned than me.

Analysis of drugs seized over the past two years in Coleraine shows that the quantity of cocaine has doubled, although the year is not half over. In the same area, seizures of cannabis resin are much higher: the quantity has trebled to 13,286g. In recent times, six cannabis factories have been dismantled, with cash seizures approaching £200,000. Ecstasy tablets (E tabs) are also in plentiful supply; the number of those recovered has reached 2,400, and it is rising rapidly.

The area that I represent is exporting plants. Fortunately, 1,105 cannabis plants, valued at more than £500,000, did not see the light of day. It is frightening that my area now exports illicit drugs that will be used to destroy children and young people, who deserve better than to be consigned to the dustbin of narcotics.

Increased support for policing has, without doubt, been a godsend; nevertheless, new markets for deadly drugs such as cocaine, cannabis resin, E tabs, speed and so on are increasing. Frightening, too, is the development of sophisticated marketing plans that are attractive to the innocent and naive. A drug addict, who recently called at one of my offices to seek help, told me that he could have £2,000 worth of drugs on credit within an hour of dialling a certain mobile telephone number. He told me that he did not need to repay all the money if he agreed to handle cash or drugs on behalf of the pushers. It is as simple as that.

The drugs trade is highly lucrative for those with no conscience or grasp of the evil that they are involved in; but it is extremely costly in health and welfare, self-esteem and employment. At the recent economic conference, one of the leading questions of potential investors — particularly those from America — was, without the shadow of a doubt, drugs and how they affect the performance of the workforce. Fortunately, it

has not become a major issue, but it will if we do not take seriously the upward trends and the switch to more dangerous drugs such as cocaine.

There is also the issue of the rehabilitation and resettlement of people who wish to kick the habit. Rehab provision is hopelessly inadequate — it scarcely exists. Provision is available in the Republic, but arrangements do not allow victims from the North to avail themselves of those services, and that needs to be addressed immediately.

I note that no Ministers are present for this debate. However, I hope that they will take the trouble to read the Hansard report.

Use of the Assets Recovery Agency is encouraging. I urge that its powers be strengthened so that it can seize cash that cannot be explained and which has not been declared to Revenue and Customs. We all remember the journalist Veronica Guerin, who lost her life when she took on the drugs barons. Her sacrifice was instrumental in changing the law and in making it possible to seize the millions of euro concealed by some of the deadliest criminals on this island. Let us hope that the North will not have to wait for a similar tragedy.

The call from the Assembly must be loud and clear: we support the police in their work of detecting and seizing drugs, arresting those involved, and calling for stiffer sentences for the drugs barons. We call on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to put in place a proper recovery plan for victims; we call on the Minister of Education to build drugs education into and across the school curriculum; and we demand a concerted campaign to unmask the pushers, the boys with the bling and the 4 x 4s. We fully back the whistle-blowers who are too frightened to approach the police; and we demand that communities are regained for the common and greater good of all.

I hope that, by having this debate, we raise awareness, not just in Coleraine but right across Northern Ireland and beyond, that this serious problem affects every town and village. Unless we, as a community, tackle the problem and work together, and unless Departments co-operate and exchange information, the problem will continue.

That is not the type of society that our parents and ancestors wanted — Ireland never needed or wished for a drugs-laden society.

5.45 pm

Now that we have an Assembly, and various Departments that have an important role to play, action will be taken, please God. It is hoped that there will be no hiding place for the drug pushers in Belfast, Derry, Coleraine or any other large town or city, or on any small housing estates in rural areas. We must get the message across, loud and clear.

We must also support calls for greater resources, and, above all, it is important that the public be encouraged to play a role. There is not an area of which I am aware in which people do not know the identity of the drug pushers, but, through fear, they choose not to report them. There are also instances in which those who are messing about with drugs have an important role to play in attempts to find the big pushers.

I am not sure of all the details, but the victims to whom I speak tell me that the drugs industry is a sophisticated business. If one were to apply the same marketing principles to legal goods, one would be a millionaire. God knows, those supplying the drugs are millionaires, and we must put out their light.

Mr McQuillan: I pay tribute to the PSNI officers who lead the daily fight to remove as many drugs as possible from our cities, towns and streets. The nature of their work means that we do not know who they are, but our gratitude for what they do must be expressed in the fullest terms.

The PSNI report 'Drug Seizures and Arrests: 1 April 2007 — 31 March 2008' shows that there has been another drop in the number of drug seizures in Coleraine in 2007-08. That shows that the PSNI's detection and seizure policies are correct. The nature of supply and use makes it difficult for officers to have success, but there has been a constant rate of success in the Coleraine area when it comes to catching suppliers and users.

Table 4.1 in the same report illustrates how the PSNI has been successful in detecting those engaged in supplying cocaine to the community in Northern Ireland. The figures show that the number of seizures has risen by two and a half times in two years. However, the amount seized has decreased by almost 10,000g. That demonstrates that the PSNI can successfully detect the people who carry small amounts of the drug.

However, the recent Coleraine seizure proves that the problem still exists, and constant vigilance is required to keep on top of the problem. Recent cannabis seizures in Coleraine and Castlerock show that the PSNI is ever vigilant in its hunt for drugs of any type.

It is also worth noting that there is a growing link between drugs and organised crime. That presents additional challenges to the PSNI in its work to eradicate the curse of drugs from our society, because the detection and seizure of drugs is made even more difficult by the secretive nature of organisations that deal drugs. Thankfully, the PSNI has had notable successes in the Coleraine area, which have resulted not only in the seizure of drugs and the prosecution of suppliers but in the reclaiming of money from the people who were engaged in that disgusting and evil activity.

It is sickening that people earn money by destroying people's lives — be it the life of the addict or the lives of their loved ones — and do so without conscience.

In a previous Assembly debate, I mentioned the effect that the use of drugs can have on people's states of mind and the tragedies that can, and do, result — be that through an accidental overdose or suicide. However, I am not saying that any of the tragic cases in Northern Ireland fit into that category. The potential for tragedy is greater when an individual uses drugs — an observation that is based on paragraph 13.4.1 of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs' report, 'Cannabis: Classification and Public Health'.

If an individual's mental state has been altered by a drug — one must remember that cocaine is a much more powerful drug than cannabis — it is reasonable to assume that the user will act in a manner that he or she would not normally.

It seems that young people are most at risk, and they are also our greatest asset for the future. Therefore, we must protect them, as far as possible, from the scourge of drugs. That is especially true in Coleraine and its surrounding area, with its university, and its popular and vibrant nightlife, which, apparently, contribute to the use of drugs.

Although I have spoken about young people, I am also fully aware that the problem extends to all ages and social strata. That may not be unusual in the United Kingdom context, but it causes me deep concern. I am saddened by doubt that we will ever eradicate the drugs problem; it is essential, however, that we recognise it.

I support the PSNI and all other agencies in their efforts to combat the drugs problem. Last year, 18 drugs gangs — an increase of 33% on the previous year — lost their drugs, money and, in many cases, their liberty. The drugs squad made seizures worth more than £4.3 million, for which I thank them.

Adjournment debates are a useful way of highlighting local issues, but we must never overlook the fact that illegal drugs are a Province-wide problem. I welcome the debate, not just because it draws attention to Coleraine, but because it calls for increased support for those in our communities who deal with the realities of cocaine and drug abuse in Northern Ireland in general.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise for leaving, but I have a meeting in Coleraine. I thank Mr Dallat for bringing the issue to the House.

Mr Brolly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the debate and Mr Dallat's assertion that, although the motion mentions Coleraine, he is as aware as am I that cocaine is available in every village and townland in Ireland; some of the bigger towns may be production and supply centres, but we all suffer.

People of my generation and that of most Members were probably not so much unaware as reluctant to accept that we were going to have a drug problem as

rampant and as terrible as that in any other part of the world. We buried our heads in the sand for years, hoping that not talking about it would make it go away.

However, from experience, I know that my own village of Dungiven has a problem with powerful drugs, not just cannabis. We must accept that. The generation gap is characterised by those, like us, who are reluctant to accept that it is happening and the younger generation who are flippant and comfortable about drugs and accept their use as a way of life. Their approach is exemplified by some of the names that they use for cocaine. I have a list of them that I would like to go through.

It is significant that young people substitute pet names for cocaine. I wonder whether young people are responsible for doing so or if it is the insidious way in which dealers try to give the impression that cocaine is not as harmful as it very definitely is.

"Charlie" is a humorous sort of name given to it; "chang" may be something to do with the Middle East; "coke", associated perhaps with Coca Cola rather than anything harmful; "gack" is humorous — people might ask where they could get some "gack". Other slang names are "toot" and "vialli"; then there is "showbiz sherbet". Sherbet is interesting stuff. "Snow", "white", "candy" — now what could be more harmless than candy? It is American, which gives it a wee bit of an upmarket sound. "Percy" must give cocaine some sort of aristocratic bent. I believe that cocaine is widely used as a recreational drug among people who consider themselves of a higher class. They are probably the people who call it "percy". The last name, "sniff", is ordinary, rock bottom, and probably used by most victims.

That is all fiercely insidious and dangerous, and it frightens me and people of my generation. What frightens me most is young people's acceptance of cocaine. It is a white flaky powder made from coca leaves — I do not know whether everyone else knew that, but I did not know it until today. The first time that I ever heard of a similar word was when, as children, we used to have a nice warm drink of cocoa, perhaps with a piece of toast, when we were going to bed on a winter evening. It is sad that something as harmless as a coca leaf can create this type of havoc in society, but that is what is happening.

Cocaine is odourless, soluble and a powerful stimulant. It can be used in different ways, but normally it is taken by sniffing. It is difficult to imagine using a straw to sniff stuff up into one's nose. In fact, I have also discovered that, sometimes, when a straw is not available, people use a rolled-up banknote, which suggests that they are not short of money, although they would not need to be if they are going to buy such stuff. Cocaine goes into the bloodstream very rapidly because it is sniffed up into the nose and the nasal membranes are so thin and

sensitive. The user experiences an intense feeling of euphoria for between 15 to 30 minutes. That is the limit — 30 minutes — and then, to use the common phraseology, the user starts to come down again.

It is interesting that, for the sake of those 15 or 30 minutes, people are prepared to accept some of the effects of coming down, which include anxiety, paranoia and depression. Sometimes, as a result of the ill-effects of coming down, the user is encouraged, naturally enough, to use some more so that he can go back up again. That is when cocaine becomes very dangerous and when overdosing and death may result. Other effects include tremors, twitching, a rapid pulse, nausea and high blood pressure. It is amazing what people do for recreation in this day and age.

The serious risks of using cocaine include chronic sneezing — naturally, because of the sensitivity of the nasal membrane — frequent nose bleeds, and permanent damage to the nasal membrane. Worst of all, because of the dependence that may build up as a result of the terrible effects of coming down, overdosing becomes another risk, as does death — it is as simple as that.

The law says that, in whatever form, cocaine is a class-A drug that it is illegal to produce, supply or possess. An indication of the seriousness of the cocaine problem, as with all such problems, is that there is now a group called Cocaine Anonymous. Such groups are not established unless a problem is widespread and severe. Cocaine Anonymous operates along the same lines as Alcoholics Anonymous, and we all know how widespread the abuse of alcohol is. It is evident that cocaine abuse is a very serious problem.

When we talk about the law, we should not understand it as referring only to the PSNI or the courts. People's attitude should be that the law starts with them — in their houses, in their homes. We must ensure that the parents of vulnerable young people are vigilant, and the next step involves asking teachers and young people's wider family circles to be vigilant and, of course, the wider community. The whole community must stand up against cocaine use, and we must do it in a way that ensures that we are not seen as spoilsports. We are trying to save lives, just as we try to combat speeding in cars or joyriding — or whatever people want to call it. Those are all measures that we must take in order to save lives.

When all else fails and we cannot handle the situation in our homes, our wider family circles, our schools or our communities, we must get behind the PSNI, give it every support and make it clear that we want it to do the business.

Adjourned at 6.00 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 17 June 2008

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

Rosslea Roadside Bomb

Mr Speaker: The Rt Hon Dr Paisley has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 23A. I shall call Dr Paisley to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I shall then call a Member from each of the other political parties, as agreed with the Whips; those Members will also have up to three minutes 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.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: We could have been meeting today under the darkest of circumstances and under the darkness of a great tragedy. I am sure that all Members were alarmed by the attack on PSNI officers at Rosslea, and I am sure that we wonder what our feelings would have been today had that murderous attack succeeded.

All Members must worry whether the police have the power and capability to deal with any attacks that may occur in the future. Making my own private investigations, I was alarmed when police officers told me that, had the attack been successful, they would not have had the facilities and the strength to deal with it effectively. That means that we need to take care of those areas that are now subject to attack by caucuses of people who are determined to bring back the bad old days of murder and mayhem in the Province.

Today, we need to alarm ourselves about what is happening. Although we can be confident that the majority of people in the Province have given up the bad and evil road of murdering men and women for their political and other views, we must guard against such attacks, which could continue and could possibly succeed in some cases in again bringing murder to the Province.

We would do well to realise that this is a serious matter to which we should give our minds. The Assembly, as a whole, should make representations to the Secretary of State on the matter so that he is in no doubt about how elected representatives in the Assembly feel about such a terrible matter and the threat on the whole Province as a result.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to put on record my party's rejection of current activities. Not only do I condemn them but I appeal, yet again, to those people who are involved in such activities to reflect on the fact that, in 2008, the vast majority of people in the nationalist and republican community have already set their faces towards a new future. They have spoken through their choices at the ballot box; they have supported our party and given us a substantial mandate. We have had, as a community, a very significant debate on those matters, often in public, but not least in private.

I ask those people who are involved in such activities to reflect, even now, on the futility of that type of operation, and to desist from it from here on in. Respect the will of the people, and respect people's confidence in their ability to further their political objectives to seek justice, freedom and equality in the country in the time ahead.

Mr Elliott: First, I thank the Member for raising the matter. Secondly, I wish those officers who were injured, and who are perhaps now off duty, well. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families.

From the outset, I want to say that that is a worrying development. It is worrying not only for the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone but the entire Province.

The device used was substantial and significant. If it had detonated fully it might have maimed or killed. I am informed that, although the officers raised their concerns with their superiors, they were still instructed to go to the scene in the early hours of Saturday morning. I am concerned that they went to the scene without any backup either being provided or being close at hand to assist them.

Police station closures and a lack of resources have raised concerns, to which Mr Paisley alluded, about the present capability of the police service to deal with a major emergency in the Province, whether it be terrorist-related or otherwise.

This morning, I was pleased to be informed that one person has been arrested for questioning in connection with the incident. That gives me some hope. In the days to come, I hope that we will see a resolution to the incident. I hope that the entire community will fall in behind the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the legitimate forces of the Province.

I hope that we will not see a resurgence of violence in the Province — we had that for far too long. It is time for everybody in the community to bond together and give their full support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and to the authorities. If that means that the security services and the Secretary of State must bring in backup services to support the police in the Province, that is what is required.

I say to the Secretary of State that that must be done. If army backup is required in border areas such as Fermanagh, South Tyrone, Armagh, or other areas throughout the Province, it should be provided.

Mr Gallagher: I, too, condemn the incident. That condemnation reflects the widespread view held in Rosslea and in the South Fermanagh area.

A fleá cheoil was held in Rosslea at the weekend, and the majority of people from the area — and many from outside the area — had a weekend of enjoyment at that community festival. However, a small number of people chose to invent circumstances that they knew would be responded to by the police and detonated a device as the police left the incident.

Fortunately there were no serious injuries or loss of life. Previous Members mentioned alarm and concern: everybody needs to take on board the fact that a small number of people intended to kill or seriously injure others. For that reason, I appeal to everyone who has any information to contact the police so that people who take such mad actions can be brought to justice.

It is very important that the police receive information so that an end can be put to this activity and the threat to life that it poses. The majority of people regard such behaviour as despicable and join us in condemning it.

Dr Farry: The incident is a chilling reminder of the ongoing threat of terrorism in society. That said; those people exist on the margins of society and with little support. However, we cannot afford to be complacent, as the incident in Rosslea so well illustrates. In recent times, we have been extremely lucky that the actions of dissident republicans have not led to loss of life.

The Assembly must send out a number of messages: first; that we in the Chamber stand shoulder to shoulder with all of the police officers right across Northern Ireland, who provide an outstanding professional service on behalf of the entire community. In particular, we should be mindful of the officers who operate in border areas, where they are in particularly vulnerable situations. There is no doubt that the Police Service will be seized of the importance of protecting its officers by ensuring that they have access to proper protection in the course of conducting their lawful duties. The Police Service also needs to address the threat that is posed to its officers, and I welcome the

fact that there has been at least one arrest so far in relation to the incident.

Secondly, and ultimately, we must convey the message of utter rejection of the notion that any political or other advantage in society, in any shape or form, will ever be gained from the use of violence. I am confident that everyone in the House will sign up to that message, irrespective of the other differences that we may have about the way forward in Northern Ireland.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: I have a number of matters to inform Members about today. I advise Members that I received correspondence from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, dated 12 June 2008, in relation to the referral of a ministerial decision to the Executive Committee. I quote from the letter as follows:

“We are writing to advise you of the views of the Executive on those matters on which it is required to respond to you under Section 28B (4) of the Act.

The Executive considers that the decision as described in the Assembly petition did not in its view contravene section 28A (1) of the Northern Ireland Act.

It is also the view of the Executive that the matter of environmental governance is both a significant and controversial matter.

The Executive noted the former Minister’s decision at its meeting on 22 May 2008 and at its meeting today (12 June) noted the intention of Mr Sammy Wilson MP MLA, the Minister of the Environment, to bring to the Executive for discussion and agreement any matters in relation to the implementation of the former Minister’s Statement of 27 May 2008 on Environmental Governance which will require its specific approval under the relevant provisions of the Northern Ireland Act and Ministerial Code.”

I have arranged for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library.

10.45 am

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On behalf of the 30 Members who signed that petition, I thank you for the speedy and efficient way in which you carried out your duties. However, you quoted from the letter, and I heard no reference to a formal consideration by the Executive of the matter, merely a noting of the proposals of the current Minister. Can you confirm whether that is the correct impression and whether any vote was taken in the Executive on the matter of an environmental protection agency?

Mr Speaker: A full copy of the letter is in the Library, and Members should take time to read it. The issue of an environmental protection agency is now a matter for the Executive. The Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Executive to notify the Speaker, and that is exactly what they have done.

Secondly, I advise Members that I have received correspondence from the nominating officer of the Democratic Unionist Party, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson, nominating Mr Mervyn Storey as Chairperson of the Committee for Education and Mr David Simpson as Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development. Mr Storey and Mr Simpson have accepted the appointments.

I also advise Members that Mr Simon Hamilton has been nominated as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and Mr Robin Newton as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment

and Learning. Mr Hamilton and Mr Newton have accepted the appointments.

I am satisfied that this correspondence meets the requirements of Standing Orders and, therefore, confirm that: Mr Mervyn Storey is now Chairperson of the Committee for Education; Mr David Simpson is now Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development; Mr Simon Hamilton is now Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; and Mr Robin Newton is now Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Finally, at the beginning of the sitting on Tuesday 10 June, Mr Attwood raised a point of order regarding the fact that leave had been granted for a judicial review against the Assembly Commission by former members of the Assembly Secretariat.

Although I am of the view that personnel matters relating to the Assembly Secretariat are best dealt with outside the Chamber — and, therefore, I do not intend to dwell on the matter — I wish to inform the Assembly that the application for judicial review to which Mr Attwood referred, and any allegation of bad faith or discrimination, has been withdrawn by the applicants. I will write to party leaders with further details.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Public Authorities (Reform) Bill

First Stage

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): I beg to introduce the Public Authorities (Reform) Bill [NIA 19/07], which is a Bill to make provision for, or in connection with, the abolition of certain public authorities.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

Civil Registration Bill

First Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): I beg to introduce the Civil Registration Bill [NIA 20/07], which is a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976; to provide for access to information relating to marriages and civil partnerships and information contained in the Adopted Children Register and the Gender Recognition Register, for the notification of the registration of marriages and civil partnerships, for the Registrar General to supply commemorative documents and for a register called the Record of Northern Ireland Connections; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): Mr Speaker, I wish to take the opportunity, with your indulgence, to thank on behalf of my mother and family circle all Assembly Members who, in the House and through cards, letters and so forth, conveyed their sympathy and condolences to me and my family on the passing of my father. It was deeply appreciated. I read the Hansard report of Thursday 5 June 2008, the date on which my father unfortunately passed away, and it was a source of comfort, particularly to my mother.

I also thank the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for stepping in at short notice last week to move the Supply resolutions and the Second Stage of the Budget (No.2) Bill. I wish her well with her new responsibilities in that role.

Budget (No. 2) Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to group the eight clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by three schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Child Maintenance Bill

Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to group the 42 clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by five schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 42 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 5 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Child Maintenance Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Charities 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 further amendments tabled to the Bill. As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity for discussion of the Charities Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at the Bill's Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): I beg to move

That the Draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

The Order is intended to ensure that those non-departmental public bodies that are companies, together with subsidiaries of non-departmental public bodies, should be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Before the Companies Act 2006, which applies throughout the United Kingdom, came into force, the Comptroller and Auditor General was excluded from auditing companies established by the public sector.

As a matter of principle, and in line with the recommendations of Lord Sharman's review of audit arrangements, it is no longer considered appropriate that the form of the organisation created by any public body should prevent the Comptroller and Auditor General from undertaking his work on behalf of the Assembly.

Members will wish to note that the Order lists those organisations that are defined in the Companies Act 2006 as non-profit-making companies that are subject to public-sector audit. To meet that categorisation, an organisation must be a company that is limited by guarantee, exercise functions of a public nature, or be funded substantially from public money, and it must be part of a group where every undertaking is non-profit-making. Although the Comptroller and Auditor General now has the authority to audit any company, it is not intended that that power will be used to audit private-sector companies. The list of non-departmental public body companies that is set out in the Order has been agreed with the relevant sponsor Departments, and the organisations that are concerned have been notified of the prepared change.

As required under the terms of The Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the proposal has been subject to consultation with the Public Accounts Committee. Passage of the Order will ensure that audit and accountability arrangements are modernised to reflect the changing forms of public bodies that are now in existence. The change will be made in England, Scotland and Wales in like manner, and it will bring us into line with international best practice, including with the arrangements that apply in the Irish Republic. The Committee for Finance and Personnel has considered the Order, and no objections have been raised. I commend the Order to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr McLaughlin): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister on his appointment and to

say on behalf of the Committee that it looks forward to having a good, constructive working relationship with him and to an early opportunity to meet with him.

As the Minister explained, for audit and accountability purposes, the draft Order will bring those non-departmental public bodies that are actually companies on to the same footing as statutory non-departmental public bodies. The Committee for Finance and Personnel considered the statutory rule on 23 April 2008 and was subsequently content with its policy implications. At a meeting on 28 May 2008, the Committee agreed unanimously to support the Department in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the Order. I therefore support the proposal.

Mr Beggs: I support the proposal to bring the financial affairs of arm's-length public bodies under the administration of the Audit Office. It is interesting that, in recent times, arm's-length bodies have come frequently to the attention of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) as a result of their poor financial management and of how they have conducted their business. I therefore welcome the introduction of a recommendation of the Sharman Report that will make those bodies, which are financed largely by public funding, subject to greater scrutiny. I hope that that will mean that public money will be better used and that there will be more accountability in its use.

It is interesting that Rural Cottage Holidays Ireland Ltd and the Northern Ireland Events Company are listed, as those two companies in particular have been highlighted recently because of several issues. Given that those companies and others are now under greater Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Comptroller and Auditor General scrutiny, I hope that the failings of the past will be less likely to happen in the future and that they will not happen again. I support the legislation.

Dr Farry: I am content with the draft Order.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank those Members who have commented on the Order, and I welcome their remarks. I thank the Public Accounts Committee and the Chairperson and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, which scrutinised the Order. I thank the Chairperson for his remarks, and I congratulate Simon Hamilton on his appointment as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee. I look forward to working constructively with both the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson and all the Committee members in the period ahead. I ask Members to approve the draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, and I look forward to its coming into operation very soon.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 be approved.

11.00 am

Donaghadee (Harbour Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): I beg to move

That the Donaghadee (Harbour Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No. 143) be affirmed.

The legislative framework for the harbour at Donaghadee dates from the nineteenth century, and the provisions under which the harbour operates must be modernised. The limits of the harbour need to be clearly defined in modern nautical terms, which will put it on a similar footing to other harbours in the North. The Order will modernise the limits of Donaghadee harbour in line with the manner in which other harbours in the North are established. In essence, the limits will be defined by a series of straight lines that are related to a nautical reference point, rather than by a circle that is drawn around that point.

The Order has been subject to public consultation in accordance with departmental guidelines. The Department welcomes the responses that it has received to the consultation and has noted that no objections were made to the Order. I am grateful for the consideration that has been given to the proposal by my Executive colleagues and by the Committee for Regional Development. The Examiner of Statutory Rules has also considered the Order and is content with it. That has allowed the Order to proceed to the House for the seeking of affirmation.

Donaghadee harbour has long ceased to have any significant commercial importance. Looking to the future, therefore, I believe that it should be transferred from its current status as a trust port to that of a municipal harbour. I intend to instruct my Department to draft a harbour Order that will transfer the undertaking at Donaghadee to the local council. That transfer is linked to the review of public administration (RPA) and the reorganisation of local councils and will happen in parallel with those arrangements. The legislation will be subject to public consultation in due course.

I therefore recommend the Donaghadee (Harbour Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 for the Assembly's affirmation. Go raibh maith agat.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. I am happy with the Order as it stands. I am conscious that responsibility for this matter is intended to be transferred to local government at some stage, in the context of the review of public administration. I am also conscious that the harbour requires a considerable amount of capital investment. Running costs must also be addressed. I

seek assurances from the Minister that, before any transfer takes place, proper consideration will be given to the burden of future capital investment, and that responsibility to deal with the legacy of underfunding will not simply be passed from the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to local ratepayers.

Mr Shannon: I want to ask a similar question to that of my colleague Stephen Farry, and I declare an interest as a member of Ards Borough Council, which I have represented for some 23 years.

Is the Minister aware that the council is unhappy that DRD might thrust responsibility for the harbour upon its shoulders? I am well aware of the importance of Donaghadee harbour. I am also well aware of the substantial damage that has been caused to the harbour by prevailing winds over the years. It has been intimated that the cost to refurbish the harbour and correct that damage could be in the region of £1.5 million.

Does the Minister believe that it is right that his Department shifts responsibility to Ards Borough Council — or, indeed, to the new council that will be created when Ards Borough Council takes over North Down Borough Council? I am extremely concerned that, right away, the matter will become the responsibility of Ards Borough Council.

The Minister must offer a clear assurance that the cost to upgrade the harbour so that it meets health and safety standards will not be a financial burden on the incoming council. Can the Minister confirm the status of that matter and offer those assurances? Ards Borough Council has expressed clear concerns about the financial burden that the Minister, with respect, is trying to shift towards it.

The Minister for Regional Development: I reassure both Members that, given that the proposition is to transfer the responsibility to the new council arrangements, which will be put in place under the RPA, the responsibility for Donaghadee harbour will not be thrust on Ards Borough Council. The new council will be a much larger entity than Ards Borough Council. The transfer of functions will be subject to legislation, on which there will be full consultation, and all the issues that Dr Farry and Mr Shannon raised can be dealt with in that discussion.

The North has a number of trust ports, as well as a number of smaller entities, of which two are Donaghadee and Coleraine. Those ports have long since come to the end of their life as significant commercial operations. The Department for Regional Development is responsible for managing its relationship with the trust ports at Derry, Warrenpoint and Belfast, which are important commercial ports. Those three ports have a significant impact on the entire region and are economically important. Smaller entities that are not as important, such as the harbours at Bangor and

Ballycastle, are operated by municipal councils. The intention is to transfer responsibility for Donaghadee harbour to the council, and consideration is being given to transferring responsibility for Coleraine harbour to the structures that emerge from the review of local government.

The purpose of the Order, and of the parallel discussions on the review of local government, is not to foist responsibilities on local government without providing the resources and the ability to deal with those responsibilities. Its purpose is centred on the discussion of the review of local government. As I said, legislation will be required, as will full consultation on that legislation. It will be part of the undertaking of the new configuration of the council areas, and I am sure that the resource issue will be dealt with in discussions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Donaghadee (Harbour Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No. 143) be affirmed.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Statutory Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As is the case with other similar motions, the motion on Statutory Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Edwin Poots replace Mr Sammy Wilson as a member of the Education Committee. — [*Mr Weir.*]

Child Poverty in Northern Ireland

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 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Kennedy): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (08/07/08R) on its Inquiry into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Executive to bring forward a detailed plan of action to deliver its targets to eliminate child poverty.

Before commenting on the substantive matter that is before the House, as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I wish to express my gratitude to the people who assisted the Committee during the inquiry. I offer my appreciation to the Committee Clerk and the Committee secretariat for their work in arranging what was a major inquiry, during which the Committee considered submissions from around 50 organisations. I also express my appreciation to the Assembly's Research and Library Services for the high-quality research and analysis that it provided to the Committee, and to Hansard for its patient and accurate reporting of evidence sessions with almost 30 organisations.

The Committee is grateful to all those who provided evidence during the inquiry, including officials from the seven Departments that were called to respond to questions from members on the policies and plans that the Executive are putting in place to tackle child poverty. I also thank my colleagues on the Committee for their commitment to the inquiry, and for the constructive and collective approach that they all adopted in trying to find evidence-based solutions to the challenge of child poverty.

Since the inquiry's early stages, it has been apparent that no single policy or programme will eliminate child poverty. That will require action by all Government

Departments and agencies and local partners in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. Furthermore, the elimination of child poverty depends significantly on the UK Government's actions on taxation and benefits policies.

I shall focus on recommendations for providing the strategic, co-ordinated approach that is necessary if there is to be any chance of achieving the Executive's ambitious target of eliminating child poverty by 2020. Before that, I shall comment on the changing economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, because, given that the price of an oil fill is rising towards £600, they have implications for families in, or at risk of, poverty.

It is generally accepted that, during the late 1990s and the early years of this decade, Northern Ireland benefited from a positive economic climate, which produced rising employment, decreasing unemployment and increasing incomes for many families. During that period, approximately 25,000 children in Northern Ireland were lifted out of poverty. Nevertheless, the unacceptable reality is that approximately 110,000 children still live in relative income poverty, and, in the past three years, that figure has not greatly changed.

As a consequence of matters that are often outside the Assembly's control, we now find ourselves in a time of credit crunches and rocketing fuel prices. The Committee was so concerned about the potential effect of spiralling food and fuel costs on low-income families that it asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to analyse the impact of rising costs on poorer families. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the Department's analysis revealed that the rising cost of necessities is having a much more significant impact on people who are already on low incomes compared to those from more affluent households. In such an environment, attempts to achieve the Executive's target of reducing child poverty by 50% by 2010 will be, to say the least, challenging.

My Committee recognises that, at some stage, that 2010 target may need to be reviewed; although, at the moment, the Committee does not consider that to be particularly important. It is important, however, that the Executive responds quickly to the reality of rising costs by developing a specific plan of action to tackle the problem for people on low incomes. Those costs threaten to wipe out the reductions in child poverty that have been experienced in the past decade. A key element of any such plan must be to seek to influence the Westminster Government to use the tax and benefit systems to assist families to deal with higher food and fuel bills.

Furthermore, the Committee believes that the Executive must ensure that Government services respond

decisively to the needs of low-income families. Therefore, the Committee welcomes the creation of the fuel poverty task force by the Minister for Social Development, and calls on it to ensure that, as well as considering options for increasing public-sector investment, it considers potential private-sector contributions — including those from the regulated utilities — to minimise fuel costs for people on low incomes.

Moreover, the Committee believes that, during future monitoring rounds, the Executive must prioritise the matter of high fuel costs and consider all options for financing the fuel poverty task force's recommendations.

I shall return to the Committee's recommendations for the implementation of an overall strategy for tackling child poverty.

The Committee is aware that the Executive will shortly consider a proposal to adopt the Lifetime Opportunities strategy as the framework for its strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Although, as it stands, the strategy has many limitations, the Committee believes that the Executive should move quickly to adopt Lifetime Opportunities so that it can focus its energy on the production of a properly resourced, cross-departmental, anti-poverty implementation plan which includes SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based) intermediate objectives, targets and programmes that are capable of delivering the long-term target of eliminating child poverty.

11.15 am

In the report, we have sought to identify the range of issues that must be addressed in a new anti-poverty implementation plan and a revised Programme for Government. In particular, the Committee recognises that work is the best route out of poverty and has called for action to remove the barriers to employment created by the current inadequacies in childcare provision. The Committee also recommends that the Executive should increase investment in early-years services, and it has recommended the development of a resourced programme of action to deliver improvements to services for disabled children.

The Committee is concerned that being in work does not always result in families having higher incomes, and it therefore recommends the development of a pilot project to test a "better off in work credit" in Northern Ireland. It also recognises that there must be a robust safety net for those who are unable to work, and has therefore recommended that the Executive develop a cross-departmental benefit uptake strategy.

Even if a new anti-poverty implementation plan that contains all of the above measures is produced, the Committee has major concerns about whether there are adequate systems in place to ensure that the programmes outlined in the plan are implemented by Departments.

We are not at all satisfied that OFMDFM has the necessary tools at its disposal to ensure — and, if necessary, enforce — the delivery of crucial child-poverty programmes by individual Departments. We have therefore recommended that a number of new systems be introduced to enable OFMDFM to manage departmental performance in contributing to targets for the reduction of child poverty.

Ultimately, if we are to make significant progress in reducing child poverty, the Executive and the Assembly must show leadership, and there should be the political will to make the radical changes to policy and policy delivery that are required. Through its inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland, the Committee has sought to develop constructive proposals to assist the Executive, the Assembly and future Administrations in developing a robust strategy to eliminate child poverty. I therefore commend the report to the House and seek the its support for the motion.

Mr Speaker: Mr Shannon, you have five minutes.

Mr Shannon: I congratulate all those who worked so hard to produce this weighty report, which, as Members will be aware, also includes a CD-ROM. The amount of time and effort that was put into its preparation is quite evident. I particularly want to thank the Committee Clerk and Committee staff for their industriousness and assistance, and the Chairman, who conducted business exceptionally well. If one wants an example of how an Assembly Committee can work on behalf of the people, then one need look no further than this Committee and this report. All the members agreed on the focus of the report, the issues and the importance of our efforts to address child poverty. Visitors to the Committee have told me how impressed they were by the Committee's work to produce the report.

To do this matter justice, I would need an hour and a half. However, Mr Speaker, you have told me that I have only five minutes, so that is impossible.

Sitting in the Committee meetings, I became more and more disheartened by how some children in the Province have to live and the fact that, for the most part, they have been forgotten over the years. However, the benefit of being made aware of the low point at which some children in the Province are stuck is that we know that the only way is up. We in the Assembly have the tools and the power to make a difference.

Child poverty, in particular, has been a heavy burden on my heart for years. In my constituency office, I am frequently shown evidence that many children do not have the carefree existence that they should enjoy by right.

I was not surprised that the town and borough of Newtownards are among the top-five hot spots of child

deprivation in the Province. I see many examples of that poverty every day, and it is not a picture that I like to see.

Children should be worried about only which game to play next. They should not be worried about whether they will have a glass of water instead of a snack when they get home from school because there is no food in the cupboard, or about not being able to afford the 50p admission to a youth club or for a bus in order to go out. Nor should children have to take on the burden of worry as they watch their parents scraping together the money simply to pay the bills and heat the house.

With the cost of living rising so significantly of late due to sharp increases in the price of electricity, oil and gas, more families will tighten their belts to the extent that it is painful and stops the circulation of life to the family. Fuel poverty was a major issue in the report, and I ask Members to support the recommendation to set up a taskforce to deal with rising bills.

This time last year, a loaf of bread cost about 89p. Today, the average price in a local garage is £1.29p — a 40p increase, or almost 50% of the original price. The rate of inflation is said to be 3%, but it is probably closer to 10%. The problem is that no wage or benefit in the Province has risen by 50%. As a consequence, the poverty bracket widens to take in more people.

It is for that reason that I commend the recommendation in the report that states that there must be more co-operation between Government Departments. The problem lies with not solely the Department for Social Development or the Minister Margaret Ritchie; it is a Province-wide problem that needs a cross-governmental and Province-wide solution. It is too easy to state the obvious and say that providing benefit and aid to families with no working parents should be extended. Similarly, after-school care, which is not a social development issue, has a major role.

I was heartened to learn that PlayBoard received further funding to continue its after-schools programme. PlayBoard, and other charitable institutions such as Home-Start and Sure Start, are essential tools in tackling fuel poverty. Childcare provision enables parents to get into work. It has been found that a child in a workless home has a 58% chance of being deprived and in poverty, yet that is reduced to 14% in households in which at least one parent works. Those statistics make it abundantly clear that Sure Start, PlayBoard and other after-school clubs are vital to eradicating child poverty in Northern Ireland.

There must be a concerted, co-ordinated and all-encompassing effort across all Government Departments. What is the use of the Health Service funding Sure Start if an education board neglects PlayBoard? All Departments must realise that they

have the potential to enhance the effort to eradicate child poverty and to halt its progress. For that reason, recommendation 17 in the report states that there should be:

“a system of financial incentives and penalties in relation to the delivery of cross-departmental priorities, such as child poverty”.

There should be sanctions for Departments that do not do what they should be doing; and encouragement for those which do. Only by working together can we end child poverty in the Province. Times may be tough for families, but the future is, I believe, bright, and the ability to end child poverty is well within our grasp if we work together in the Assembly. The first step in that endeavour is to support the report, and I hope that that support will be unanimous.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, acknowledge the work of the Committee staff and the way that the Committee worked cohesively during the inquiry. I appreciate having the opportunity to commend the report to the Chamber, because, as a member of the OFMDFM Committee, the child poverty inquiry has been a priority in my work for the past year, and in the work of many others on the Committee.

As a newly elected MLA, the first thing that I did when coming into office was to lobby for such an inquiry. The reason for that was because, like many in the Chamber, I was appalled by the levels of child poverty. In my Foyle constituency, there is a 34% rate of child poverty. I know, Mr Speaker, that you recognise that statistic. That means that more than one in three children in the city of Derry is living in poverty. It is a scandal, and that sense of scandal was shared by all members of the Committee.

The poverty in Derry, and in many other areas on which the Committee touched, is the result of decades of misrule, neglect and discrimination. In this new era of dispensation, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to begin to address the legacy that we have inherited.

The commitments that were given in the Programme for Government, particularly the target of eliminating child poverty by 2020, must be turned into reality. The findings of the inquiry have provided a road map that can enable us to achieve those aims. However, the Committee recognised that that must be supplemented by the proper implementation of equality impact assessments (EQIA) in all Departments so that we can tangibly change current patterns of disadvantage.

The report contains many recommendations that address key areas such as the benefits system, tax credit, affordable childcare, social housing, fuel poverty, and early-years provision. Last week, I attended an early-years conference in Derry, and I was extremely impressed by the wealth of evidence demonstrating

how generations of children are being damaged by entering formal education at a very young age; indeed, the Minister also recognises that. Therefore, I am pleased that the child poverty inquiry made specific reference to the need for the early-years strategy to be resourced properly and supported by all Departments.

I call on all parties to support the no-day-named motion on fuel poverty that I tabled some months ago. That calls for the Assembly to explore the possibilities of entering into an international trade agreement with Venezuela, which has already signalled its willingness to examine opportunities to support providing affordable heating oil to low-income families in the North. It is worth our exploring and discussing that option.

Although the implementation of the report's recommendations can make a real difference, there are many areas over which we have little or no control, and all members of the Committee recognise that. For instance, the report details the huge problems with the bureaucracy of the benefits system, which has abysmally failed thousands of low-income families to the extent that they simply cannot afford to heat their homes or feed their children. Yet there is little that we can do about that system, because it remains the responsibility of British Ministers who have not been elected by the people of Ireland and who spend billions of pounds waging wars on Iraq and Afghanistan while our children go hungry and cold. Surely there can be no more compelling reason for additional powers to be transferred to the Assembly than the welfare of our children. It does not matter whether Members represent the Bogside or Ballysillan — a hungry child is a hungry child, and that should unite us all. Indeed, I believe that it does unite us all.

However, without fiscal control, there is only so much that we can do within the confines of the block Budget from Westminster. We must take control of our destiny and that of our children. Otherwise, we will condemn future generations to poverty, disadvantage and exclusion.

Given that child poverty unites and moves us all, I am confident that the report will win the overwhelming support of all parties.

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

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the report and congratulate the Committee for producing it. It is a very readable document, and we can all agree that it is of great concern that child poverty remains a substantial problem in Northern Ireland. More than 100,000 children live in income poverty in Northern Ireland. That is totally unacceptable, and all parties share that view. We must ask how poverty can be eliminated and how the Assembly and the Executive can tackle the problem of child poverty. It is clear that the Committee's view is that progress can be made in

that direction, but the Executive must adopt a robust cross-departmental policy to tackle the multifaceted aspects of child poverty.

Progress was made in the 1990s but, since the commencement of this decade, there has been a slowdown in tackling the problem. That is a matter of great concern, and the recent horrific increases in fuel and food prices, as well as general living expenses, will impact adversely on the child poverty strategy.

11.30 am

The report highlights two issues. First, we must devise a strategy to create more good-quality jobs that generate higher incomes. In certain sectors, there is a substantial low-wage economy, which will not help to tackle child poverty. We must move our workers to a much higher wage situation. The connection between poverty and unemployment is clear — that is an obvious statement. However, it is curious and disturbing that many employed people — particularly lone parents — experience poverty. In many areas, the lack of effective childcare provides a further barrier to those seeking to re-enter the job market. We must tackle that situation to ensure that people have the opportunity to work.

Secondly, we must place an emphasis on education, because if people are properly equipped and skilled in their early years, they can break the cycle of poverty. Local schools — particularly primary schools — must play a central role in equipping young people and, indeed, their parents. Primary schools are the powerhouses of local communities; we must invest in them.

In my area, Star of the Sea Primary School has 75 pupils — of a total of 300 — with special educational needs. However, that school will employ one special-needs teacher next term, whereas it has two this year and, in the preceding three years, it had four. What chance is there to improve children's lives and equip them with vital skills?

Ms Lo: Mr Maginness has stolen my speech.

I support the motion and commend the Committee for producing a comprehensive report that highlights the serious issue of child poverty. Child poverty is a cross-cutting matter, and we must adopt a holistic approach to tackle it in both the short and long term. OFMDFM, the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Department of Education (DE), the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and other relevant Departments and outside agencies must commit to a joined-up Government programme.

Unemployment and low wages are highlighted in the report as the major causes of child poverty. Those factors also cause serious social exclusion in our communities. Interdepartmental collaboration is important in tackling unemployment and low wages.

I am a member of the Committee for Social Development, which is currently examining the neighbourhood renewal projects across Northern Ireland. Those projects are supposed to be supported on a cross-cutting basis by Departments in collaboration. However, some Departments are not buying into those projects, which will possibly lead to a reduction in expectations.

Mr F McCann: Anna Lo mentions the neighbourhood renewal projects and the impact that they should have on the 37 neighbourhood renewal areas in dealing with deprivation. However, the fact that some Departments refuse to buy into those projects weakens the neighbourhood renewal strategy. Furthermore, the intention to move responsibility for neighbourhood renewal to local government will have an impact on the ability of local government to deliver the Government's main strategy for dealing with deprivation. Should there not be more focus on the responsibility for neighbourhood renewal remaining with the Assembly so that more resources can be put into neighbourhood renewal to allow the projects to deal with deprivation?

Ms Lo: I agree with Fra McCann. The initiatives that were led by DSD should be supported on a cross-departmental basis. Their purpose should be to lift whole communities out of poverty. The Gasworks Business Park in Belfast opened to great fanfare a few years ago. It was intended to provide jobs in the surrounding area, but only a handful of people in the Markets and in the Donegall Pass and Donegall Road areas got jobs, most of which were low-paid cleaning positions on the periphery.

It is important to consider employability and education for our young people. We must also take affordable childcare into account. Many people, particularly women, are in part-time jobs that do not provide a high salary. Affordable childcare will allow parents to go into further education or training and into higher-paid full-time jobs.

We must not underemphasise the importance of education for our children. All rich countries have well-educated workforces. That is the way to go. We also need a good preschool system so that all children can obtain a good nursery education. Furthermore, it is such a nonsense that the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) are wrangling over the lead responsibility for after-school clubs. Those clubs are essential for many neighbourhoods in which there are people who cannot afford childcare. They also help with homework for children who, perhaps, do not get the same support at home as those children from middle-class families. Working-class families are in great need of after-school support in their

neighbourhoods, yet many of those clubs will have to close in the next few months.

Mr Spratt: It is with a sense of achievement that the OFMDFM Committee reports to the House today on its inquiry into child poverty, after many hours of considering evidence on the matter. A report is all well and good, and talk is cheap; however, action is required to tackle the crucial challenge that faces Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole.

I commend the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for establishing the elimination of child poverty as a principal long-term objective of the Executive, as outlined in the Programme for Government. Reducing child poverty by 50% by 2010 and eliminating it by 2020 are noble aims. However, the Committee identified several factors that could make those targets difficult to achieve.

The inquiry identified the rising cost of basic day-to-day necessities, such as fuel and food, as having the potential to increase child poverty in the short term. Granted, the Executive and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister have little remit on those matters, so we must examine ways of lessening the impact of the current economic climate in the United Kingdom. The cost of filling a tank of home heating oil is a major burden for many families in Northern Ireland, particularly those on low incomes. Increased child poverty could be a knock-on effect of such costs.

One major way in which to tackle child poverty is to tackle unemployment. The Committee identified that a child in a workless home has a 58% chance of being in poverty; therefore, getting people into work must be a priority. I welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to increase employment. If we can make more people economically active, we can make inroads into the problem of child poverty. To do that, barriers — such as lack of accessible childcare — must be broken down, and the path to employment must be made easier.

As a Member for South Belfast, I represent some of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland where child poverty is an everyday problem. In areas such as South Belfast, we will see real progress towards the eradication of child poverty if we proceed with an agenda of getting people back into work and of improving income through greater uptake of benefit entitlement.

South Belfast suffers from one of the problems that were identified by the Committee's inquiry; namely, it has pockets of deprivation that might be missed because they are surrounded by areas of wider affluence. It is crucial that such deprived areas are not missed when implementing the report's recommendations.

Much responsibility for the outworking of the report lies with the Executive as a whole. Tackling poverty and its causes requires the Executive to take a co-ordinated approach, as cross-cutting matters, such as employment, health, social development and education, are the keys to tackling the whole issue. Children who are trapped in poverty must be at the forefront of the Executive's thoughts.

The Executive have some good mechanisms in place — such as New Deal, early-years provision and Sure Start — to aid the implementation of the report's recommendations. Let us take steps to improve education and health in deprived areas.

To me, child poverty is the manifestation of the more deeply rooted problem of a society in breakdown. Evidence shows that deprivation is often passed down through generations. If a family's income is based on benefits, it is likely that the child will grow up to become a long-term recipient of benefits. Educational achievement follows a similar trend. Parents with low educational achievement often have low-achieving children. The key to eradicating child poverty is to break such cycles to remove the dependence on the state and to re-invigorate the family as an entity.

The problem cannot be solved simply by throwing money at either parents or children. It must be achieved through repairing the family.

11.45 am

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

Mr Spratt: I commend the report to the House and I thank the Committee staff for their help.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the report. I have some questions for the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and, indeed, for OFMDFM. Can the report's 47 recommendations be adequately assessed and implemented? The Committee for Employment and Learning's recent first report on Training for Success contained 25 recommendations. I declare an interest as a member of that Committee. Can so many recommendations be genuinely taken on board?

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for giving way and for her contribution. The answer to her question is found in the final part of the motion, which states:

“and calls on the Executive to bring forward a detailed plan of action to deliver its targets to eliminate child poverty.”

We seek to have all 47 recommendations addressed and implemented.

Mrs McGill: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for his intervention. Obviously, I

expect such a statement to be included in the motion. I am not being critical, but the question of whether all 47 recommendations can be implemented was one that occurred to me. I accept the Chairperson's point and look forward to the implementation of all the recommendations — that would be very welcome.

Strategy after strategy is produced, and recommendations on recommendations are made. It may be because I am fairly new to the process, but I have another, more general, concern. The report states:

"In addition, the Committee is proposing that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Finance and Personnel should consult on the introduction of a system of financial incentives and penalties in relation to the delivery of cross-departmental priorities, such as child poverty."

I wonder how that system can be implemented. When the Budget and the Programme for Government were being drawn up, I noted that — although equality and good relations were mentioned — an outline of how poverty would be tackled was not included. I did not comment on that at the time, although perhaps I should have done.

Departments are not fully tackling the issue of poverty. My colleague Fra McCann made that point in response to Anna Lo. I submitted a question to each Department that asked what it was spending on neighbourhood renewal areas. Neighbourhood renewal is aimed at tackling general poverty rather than child poverty specifically, but it is closely linked to the subject. The responses that we received indicated that not every Department knows what it should be doing in order to produce an anti-poverty strategy. Departments must make that a priority.

The report is to be welcomed. I am heartened by the Chairperson's assurance that the recommendations will be implemented.

Mr Shannon: As I am sure that Mrs McGill will have acknowledged, the key theme of Members' speeches so far is that all Departments should work together. If Departments do not work together, the report and its recommendations will fail. Does the Member agree that sanctions should be placed on Departments that do not deliver? That might help to ensure delivery.

Mrs McGill: That is certainly the case, but it is a question of how that is going to work out.

I wish to make a couple of points about some of the evidence that I have read from groups in my area — the Western Health Action Zone and Western Investing for Health.

A key point has already been made about planning in rural areas: sometimes, Government policies work against those outcomes that the Assembly wants — we saw an example of that with PPS 14. When a planning

policy forces young people to move from a rural area — leaving behind their friends and family; their homes; their entire community — it creates a poverty issue that must be addressed.

We need to be clear that Government policies of which we approve can have the opposite outcome to what was originally intended. I support the motion and I look forward to the recommendations being implemented, Go raibh maith agat.

Mr G Robinson: Our children are the future of our country, and I have a sincere desire to ensure that they have the benefits of twenty-first century life, enabling them to have a happy and healthy upbringing. That desire is not made any easier to achieve, however, when children in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland have seen funding for many of the extended-schools programmes withdrawn.

The withdrawal of that funding does not encourage parents — especially single parents, for whom indicators show a higher level of child poverty — to enter the workforce. Whether those jobs are part time, full time or job shares, the withdrawal of programmes such as breakfast clubs and after-schools clubs can only inhibit the likelihood of employment being achieved because parents understandably need to ensure that their children are safe and well supervised while they are at work.

Parents are increasingly left with less disposable income, which limits the opportunity for children to participate in activities that are not linked to schools but that must be directly funded by parents. That robs children of the opportunity to make choices and to try new or favourite experiences. Those are the realities of life for families in communities that suffer the greatest levels of deprivation.

All Members are fully aware that the consistent rise in the cost of fuel and food is having the greatest effect on the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. That not only results in much larger bills landing on everyone's mat, but it forces producers and retailers to increase their costs in order to remain solvent. Ultimately, everyone pays that bit extra for even basic foodstuffs. Research indicates that a poor diet results in a greater chance of a child doing less well at school. That should help us all realise that child poverty and poverty in general are linked, if not one and the same thing.

The Executive have made plans for the future that will ensure a higher number of people are employed and in better-paid employment. The Programme for Government and the Budget aim to grow our economy by concentrating on the four major economic drivers: skills, enterprise, innovation, and infrastructure.

The main way to decrease child poverty is to ensure the availability of well-paid jobs and a workforce with the necessary skills to fill them. As a result, there will

be more people working and greater household incomes, leading to reduced child poverty. To help to achieve that and to ensure that we stay competitive in a global market, business must have the capital to reinvest. The Executive have held down the level of derating, which gives a further boost to the private sector and provides a way of creating the jobs that are required to help to alleviate levels of child poverty.

The Executive are promoting Northern Ireland like never before — the recent US/Northern Ireland economic conference is a prime example of that. The investment that I am sure will result from that conference will be an essential boost to the positive steps that have already been taken by the Executive to address poverty in Northern Ireland in all its shapes and forms.

It is not a sensible way forward to simply state that we must reduce the public sector. Although that may happen in percentage terms over the middle to long term, the growing of the private sector is what we must concentrate on.

The Budget and the Programme for Government have pumped more money into health, social housing and infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Those areas will aid the economy as the private sector grows. Although a value-for-money principle must be applied to all Executive spending, suddenly reducing the size of the public sector will only increase the levels of child poverty that need to be addressed.

I am sure that every Member wants to reduce child poverty. However, there is no quick fix, or magic wand, that will make that happen overnight. A considered and targeted approach is the only way in which poverty can become a less significant factor in Northern Ireland's society. The Executive have correctly identified growing the economy as the key to reducing poverty, and they are doing what is required to ensure that that becomes a reality.

Mr Beggs: I support the motion, and I thank the Committee for its report and for highlighting issues that need to be addressed.

Poverty is the principal determinant of a child's life chances in Northern Ireland. Children born into poverty are more likely to suffer from childhood illnesses compared to those raised in other, more affluent, families. Children in low-income families are also less likely to stay at school, obtain qualifications, go to university or obtain well-paid jobs. Poverty in Northern Ireland — and in the UK in general — is perpetuated by current practices, and that is not good enough.

Low income has a stark effect on families' ability to meet the basic needs that the majority of us take for granted. Home-heating oil, a nutritional diet and the ability to participate fully in educational and social activities are all affected by low income. It was surprising therefore that the Minister of Education decided to

reduce the funding for extended schools drastically. That decision was hers, and it was disappointing that schools that had been receiving support for breakfast and after-school clubs through the extended schools programmes had their funding reduced.

It is shocking that around 40,000 young people in Northern Ireland live in severe poverty. Those children are from families with the lowest levels of income and life chances and are most likely to be in poverty for the longest periods of time.

I declare an interest as a member of Horizon Sure Start, which assists parents of children in the 0-4 age group in parts of Larne and Carrickfergus. Schemes such as Sure Start play a very significant role in increasing educational opportunities for preschool children; improving access to health provisions — things taken for granted in ensuring that needs are addressed at an early age — and improving parenting skills. Those skills are an important factor in increasing a child's life chances. The Committee was correct to examine policies to secure a standard level of income for the most vulnerable in society.

Although the Executive are not in control of taxation and benefits, the delivery system for benefits can have a significant impact on the levels of severe poverty. It is right that a cross-departmental benefit-uptake strategy is implemented to assist low-income families in obtaining their full benefit entitlement.

Low income is only one aspect of child poverty. Poverty affects a child's ability to achieve at school, have life choices, and improve their life situation. That concerns preschools provision as well as primary schools, and it is essential that children are given good educational opportunities from a very early stage in life.

UK-wide research has shown that there has hardly been any progress in the bottom 20% to 30% of the income range since the Labour Government came into power in 1997, despite the huge changes in taxation that were made to try and assist in the area.

Why is that? Around one in five children in the bottom 20% of the income range is persistently poor, and that figure rises to almost one in three in the bottom 30%. Over the decades, there has been a huge redistribution of taxpayers' money in the United Kingdom, but we still have some of the lowest levels of social mobility in Europe. Redistribution, associated with the welfare state, should be a safety net so that children and their parents cannot fall beyond a certain point. However, that is not the long-term answer. We need a strategy to address other issues, encourage social mobility and allow children to rise up through education to have better job opportunities.

12.00 noon

Members have stated that we need more jobs. That is so, but we must also ensure that everyone has the necessary skills and education so that they will be considered for job opportunities when they arise. We have more to do than improving benefits and providing jobs; we must increase the levels of skills and mobility in society.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I am sorry; I am coming to the end of my speech.

It is important that we address a range of issues to increase the life chances of all our children and ensure that society as a whole can benefit.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members and organisations that contributed to the production of this valuable and detailed report. I will refer to specific aspects of it.

Paragraph 197, which relates to state benefit uptake, represents extremely valuable work. As a founding member of a local benefits-uptake campaign, I know that the sharing of information across agencies is crucial. That applies to young people as well as older people, and particularly to those who have an entitlement on the foot of attendance allowance and the consequences that that might have on pension credits. That work is valuable and important.

Paragraph 226 relates to increasing costs. People would have to be totally unaware of their environment to fail to notice the spiralling cost of fuel. At the moment, some people are fortunate in that fuel costs are increasing during the summer months. However, I dread to think of the effects of those rises on people, such as pensioners, who are at the lower end of the income scale. During the winter, many of them are affected by cold-related illnesses. The dramatic increase in the price of fuel inevitably begs the question of why no increase in cold-weather payments has been forthcoming. The dramatic increase in fuel costs has resulted in a consequent and dramatic increase in revenue for the Exchequer by way of taxation. I hope that, when the report is passed to OFMDFM, that office makes representations to the Exchequer and asks how the revenue from net overall taxation of fuel can be made available to vulnerable sections of the community, such as low-income families and pensioners.

As the winter bites, hospitals will become chock-a-block with patients suffering from cold-related illnesses, and there will be a revolving-door syndrome, whereby people leave hospital only to have to be readmitted because they cannot heat their homes for their families.

In my constituency, I recently encountered a young expectant mother whom the state expects to live on £22 a week and another young woman who is expected to live on £44 a week. Last night, I was telephoned by a mother who has a dependent son and whom the state expects to live on a little over £90 a week. I have heard the argument that the solution lies in putting people into well-paid, full-time work. However, those people would love to work but are unable to do so because of disability. In another case, a woman has had to leave work because her disability has made it impossible for her to continue.

I am glad that Minister Ritchie has taken those situations on board and that she will make representations on the rates of benefit to Westminster, where they are determined.

The reality is harsh. The timing of the report could not have been more opportune, and it is hoped that it will be actively and vigorously acted on by OFMDFM in its efforts to look after the needs of people for whom times are difficult.

I have no hesitation in commending the report, supporting the motion and thanking those who put so much effort into bringing this important matter to the attention of the House. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and endorse the congratulations that have been paid to those who produced the report. The report is timely, but Committee members must be frustrated that, given the rapidly escalating fuel, energy and living costs, the most recently available statistics on poverty are almost redundant. We are relying on statistics that, in some instances, date back to 2006.

The devastating profile of poverty meant that more than 100,000 children were living in poverty or in households that were experiencing poverty in 2006, but that figure is out of date already. Unquestionably, that problem is deepening, and the report's many recommendations compel the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that there is a coherent and cross-departmental response.

There is no single silver-bullet solution to the problem, which affects education, health and employment opportunities, as well as the well-being of society. The Assembly supported, as a priority, the policy of developing the economy, so the Executive must recognise the debilitating effect that poverty has in the community — particularly on the most deprived and excluded — and must acknowledge how poverty will impact on that objective.

A healthy community is one that is secure in the knowledge that it is looking after its weakest and recognises that the benchmarks of a successful society not only relate to training, employment and benefits,

but to sustainable employment opportunities. Addressing the issues that inhibit the achievement of such a community is a deliverable priority of the Programme for Government, and it is a goal that compels and commends itself to every party in the Assembly.

For generations, society has known that there is an endemic problem of poverty, but not one of the previous Administrations have developed a sustainable response. That responsibility now falls to the Assembly. The recognition of that in the Programme for Government, and the priorities that have been mapped out, demonstrate that not only is there an awareness of those facts, but a commitment to deliver.

We must ensure that the action plan is followed through consistently by all Departments. It is regrettable that the report recognises that Departments have not yet adopted a joined-up approach or afforded the same sense of priority to matters relating to child poverty — but that is not the headline of the report. The locally accountable Executive members and their parties could — and should — address that, and I am happy to give Sinn Féin's commitment to doing so. We recognise the difficulties and the limitations; we do not have an infinite Budget, but, through prioritised programmes and action programmes, we can make a tangible difference to people's lives.

That is the type of action plan — with targets, timelines, budgets and resources — that we want to see emerge.

I support the work of the Committee members, the report that they have produced and its recommendations. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Weir: I am not a member of the OFMDFM Committee; therefore, I have not been involved with the production of this report. However, I commend the report to the House.

At times, the caricature of this Assembly will be the degrees of disagreement when there is argument across the Chamber. Those issues are sometimes picked up by the media; therefore, it will be interesting to see tonight's media coverage of a topic that is particularly vital for many people in Northern Ireland.

In many ways, the production of this report shows the Assembly at its best. No one could claim that it is an insubstantial piece of work. A great deal of work has gone into it, and I commend the members of the Committee.

The report shows a detailed examination of the issue and the consensus achieved among the members of the Committee. The tone of the report is shared by the Executive, in that it does not simply provide a list of measures required to tackle child poverty, but acts as a critical friend, suggesting improvements that can be made. I do not believe that the Executive would be so

arrogant as to suggest that everything is perfect in relation to child poverty in Northern Ireland. We have a long way to travel, and, to be fair, the Executive have been in place for only one year.

The mood of the report is, perhaps, best summarised by quoting directly from its executive summary:

“Eliminating child poverty will require leadership and political will. The Committee believes that, in unanimously agreeing the recommendations in this report it has demonstrated that the political will exists to tackle child poverty in Northern Ireland. The Committee is of the view that a collective approach to the elimination of child poverty in Northern Ireland, which involves all political parties, and key public, private, voluntary and community partners, can be constructed. The starting point for a consensus on child poverty would be a comprehensive response to this report and its recommendations, in terms of a properly resourced, robust anti-poverty implementation plan.”

There are various elements to that. There are issues that lie outside the remit of the Executive. There are areas — such as the creation of broad financial structures — that, as indicated by others, require lobbying to ensure that the tax and benefits systems do not trap people in child poverty. Furthermore, it has been recognised by several Members who have spoken in this debate that child poverty is not simply about children, but about families. Indeed, successful, financially secure families do help to tackle poverty.

Mr A Maginness: There are many difficulties in relation to tax credits. Indeed, people, through no fault of their own, have been asked to repay large sums of money, due to deficiencies in the tax credits system. The knock-on effect of children being deprived of access to free school meals leads to a reduction in the indices that mark out schools and the levels of poverty, therefore distorting the actual level of poverty in the community.

Mr Weir: Those are salient points. Tax credits and child tax credits, overall, have been good initiatives. However, there have been many problems in the implementation of the system and, on many occasions, things have gone wrong. I suspect that there is not a Member in this Chamber who has not received complaints of some unfair action taken by the tax credit office, sometimes demanding the refund of payments when the system — and not the participant — is to blame. Therefore, I agree with Alban Maginness that that is a knock-on effect.

12.15 pm

The report tackles a range of issues. Sure Start and Home-Start are among a range of groups that play a valuable role. We must ensure that they cover all of Northern Ireland. I have received complaints that Sure Start does not cover Millisle, for example. It may be that Millisle has mixed socio-economic levels of support. However, Millisle, like everywhere else, has its areas of poverty.

It is important, as Harold Wilson said, to realise that in a household in which everyone is unemployed, the unemployment rate in that household is 100%. We must move away from targeting particular areas and towards ensuring that families in poverty receive full support.

An accurate method of measuring poverty in specific areas must be introduced alongside all the other measures. We must then target those policies and actions in a way that addresses particular difficulties. Only then will we get to the real root of poverty.

I commend the Executive for their work, and I look forward to the Minister's response. The detail that has gone into the report provides a lot of food for thought and will generate many action points for the Executive. I commend the report to the House.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I apologise to the Committee Chairperson for being slightly late for the debate and missing his opening remarks.

I join other Members in commending the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for bringing forward the report and motion. I also want to commend the children and young people sector and organisations for ensuring that poverty remains an important issue and on the desks of all Members, at Committee and Executive levels.

This morning, the Commissioner for Children and Young People said that the report was a powerful reminder of the urgent need to tackle the misery that blights too many children's lives, and added:

"The scar of child poverty is that too many families end up living with too little and opportunities are severely limited for children and young people."

Those are the words of the Children's Commissioner, who is in an office that this Assembly fought long and hard to secure.

I, and every other Member, have raised the issue of child poverty time and time again. Therefore, I understand the frustration of my colleague Claire McGill — and there is no difference in her views and those of the Committee Chairperson — because child poverty has been mentioned countless times over the past year, and, indeed, before that, when some Members were involved in local government or local strategic partnerships, or, indeed, Sure Start.

The issue is so serious that the Executive have stated that they will eliminate child poverty by 2020. However, Martina Anderson made the point that that intent must become a reality. We must work now to achieve that target. I like the fact that the report contains not only short-term recommendations and goals, but a long-term strategy.

There is a serious issue about cross-departmental work, and the report states in black and white that all Ministers and Departments have roles to play. Some have a legal responsibility, but all of them have a moral duty and responsibility to implement the Committee's recommendations. Rather than rely on OFMDFM, Members must be told how Ministers and Departments plan to take forward those recommendations. That would go a long way towards ensuring that the frustration in this Assembly is reduced, and that progress is seen to be made through Departments such as Health, Social Development, Education, and Employment and Learning.

I look forward to a contribution to the debate from the junior Minister Mr Kelly. However, both he and junior Minister Donaldson have a duty and responsibility to consider some of the recommendations and report back on them to the Assembly, particularly because they took the lead in the ministerial subgroup on children and young people.

The report states that a lack of money and low levels of income are at the core of child poverty. We must question how that can be changed. The Committee raised the issue of the rising cost of basic items such as food and fuel, and the report states that that could result in a rise in the levels of child poverty, rather than a downturn. That is a worrying statement.

The report makes mention of a major impact on child poverty by 2012, and eliminating it by 2020. However, the report also states that because of the increasing cost of food and fuel, there is a strong possibility that the level of child poverty could rise, instead of going down.

The report also informs us:

"a child in a workless household has a 58% chance of being in poverty".

Therefore — and I believe that several other Members have mentioned this point — we must ensure that economic development and employment strategies focus on increasing the quality of jobs that are created. Rather than increasing the availability of low-paid jobs, we must focus on the quality of jobs that are created and their level of pay. If we want to increase the amount of money going into households, we should not create jobs for the sake of having more — we should ensure that there is a proper quality of paid jobs.

Members of the Committee are committed to improving the lives of the most disadvantaged children and young people here. Therefore, although I commend the motion, we must, as a matter of urgency, and before the summer recess, create an outline plan for how the report will be implemented. Go raibh maith agat.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): I wish to comment on the report and pay tribute to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Speaking as a

member of another Committee that recently brought recommendations to the House, I believe that this report is more substantive and has more of an impact than that other set of recommendations.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I note, in particular, the recommendations of the report to tackle long-term disadvantage in respect of the educational outcomes of families in poverty. Specifically, the report recommends:

“the Early Years Strategy being led by the Department for Education is properly resourced and is quickly followed by an implementation plan containing SMART targets.”

The Committee for Education is still waiting to be briefed by the Department on that policy and on its thinking on early-years provision, because, unfortunately, the Committee for Education must wait a considerable length of time for a briefing from not only the Department, but, specifically, from the Minister.

The Committee has discussed the critical importance of early intervention and investment in education, together with family-based approaches such as parenting initiatives. Speaking as a parent, I believe that we have a huge responsibility to ensure that we work with schools and statutory agencies to enhance the delivery of education and to deal with any problems that arise.

The Committee for Education’s response to the draft Budget, which was made last December, specifically raised concerns that the draft Budget was:

“removing key services targeting disadvantaged school children and other initiatives now established such as the Extended School, Renewing Community Programmes, and work engaging parents in the life and work of schools.”

The Committee also highlighted recent research from the University of Ulster, which concluded that schoolchildren in areas of high social disadvantage face a diminishing educational experience. We ought to be ashamed of that, because, currently, that is our legacy in respect of child poverty.

The Committee supports the Minister of Education, and I am sure that the Minister will welcome that support. Although we have grave concerns about the process that has led to the financial crisis for extended schools, we welcome the fact that the Minister has made a bid for £5 million in the June monitoring round to bring extended-schools funding for the current year back to its previous level.

We await the Minister’s proposals on the early-years education strategy, as we do with most proposals — we wait and we wait, and time goes on, and problems continue to arise. That is a regrettable situation. However, we can talk more about that later today.

The Committee for Education is pressing the Minister and her officials for short-term measures that significantly increase funding to primary schools. Last

week, a delegation of some 130 primary-school principals visited the Assembly. From experiences in their constituencies, all Members, regardless of party allegiance, will be aware of the problems that primary schools face. We must urgently address that issue and not allow the stagnation to continue, because it will have a knock-on effect on the rest of the education system in years to come.

Mr F McCann: The majority of Members who spoke in the debate mentioned education. However, does the Member not agree that cuts in the health budget also have an impact on child-poverty levels? Does he also not agree that housing is a cross-cutting issue and that poor housing has a detrimental impact on child-poverty levels? None of the Members who spoke in the debate mentioned the other factors that have a direct impact on child poverty.

The Chairperson of the Committee for

Education: The Member knows that, as Chairperson of the Committee for Education, I must refer to education matters. Despite the concerns of some Members, particularly those on the Benches opposite, I will endeavour to reflect accurately the concerns of my Committee, which, as a Statutory Committee, has a role to inform, challenge and monitor the Minister’s activities.

A reduced, or re-prioritised, budget in any Department will have a knock-on effect. Ministers are responsible for prioritising their resources. Therefore, it is the responsibility of Ministers and their respective Departments to ensure that the money that they are allocated is spent in a way that ensures the best possible outcome.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: A lot of people wish that that had happened a long time ago. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Elliott: I dare not comment on Mr Storey’s last remark.

As a member of the OFMDFM Committee, I welcome the debate. The issue has created much conversation — not so much debate — in Committee.

Child poverty is an issue that, rightly, causes much concern across the United Kingdom. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the Westminster goal of eradicating child poverty in the United Kingdom by 2020 and will work with all who are committed to making that goal a reality. However, since 1999, when the former Prime Minister Tony Blair announced the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020, the Labour Government have failed to meet targets that were part of their long-term strategy. It looks all but certain that the Government will fail to meet their target of halving child poverty by 2010.

Labour's welfare policies have had a detrimental effect on the eradication of child poverty, because they undermine the incentive to work. Frank Field, the Labour MP and welfare expert, said that Government policy:

"has missed its 2004-05 target of a reduction of a quarter in child poverty and fallen further behind last year; has seen no change in the numbers of children in severe poverty; and leaves one in five of poor children in persistently poor households."

To put it bluntly, the Labour Party has failed those children. However, the 2020 target should remain our goal. Across the political spectrum, both in Westminster and in this House, that commitment must remain.

12.30 pm

Members will be aware that I come from a rural area that for generations has seen many families work the land to support themselves. In light of increasing food and oil prices, and, indeed, shortages, the plight that faces many rural homes is, unfortunately, very real.

Figures released to my colleague Fred Cobain, based on the accepted definition of child poverty as children living in households with an income that is 60% or less of the median income, revealed that, from 2003-06, the number of children living in poverty in my constituency was 8,900. I know that that is not among the larger figures for Northern Ireland; however, given the ever-increasing pressures that face the rural community because of global economic conditions, that number will undoubtedly increase in coming years. Given the increasing costs that families have to meet, that is the future that children in rural homes face.

Given the turbulent global forces that dictate the economic fortunes of the rural community across the United Kingdom, a Government commitment concerning child poverty is of the utmost importance. The Westminster Government, supported by the devolved Administrations, must ensure that support for rural families is accessible and attainable.

Rural communities are built on the values of self-reliance and hard work, and have been so for generations. Cutting child poverty in rural areas has the potential to become a reality within the outlined time frames. However, that can happen only if the Government is committed to working with those values and to strengthening families and communities.

There are many practical measures that the Government could take to help. One significant issue that I have regularly highlighted is about school buses driving past children just because they do not live more than two miles from the school. Surely, there is the potential for a practical measure whereby school buses could pick those children up, especially if the buses are not full. It is a disaster that children have to be left to school by their parents, which involves a double run in a car, when buses actually drive past

them. I ask for simple, practical measures that will help the rural communities.

While seeking to eradicate child poverty immediately, we must also look towards the future to secure the progress that we make. Members know that education is the key to social mobility and that it is fundamental to affording children the opportunities that their parents never had. Statistics show that, unfortunately, children who live in poverty are failed on the issue of educational achievement. There are particular dimensions to educational underachievement in Northern Ireland, which a 2006 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report on literacy and numeracy showed.

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

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the timely publication of the report. As I said earlier, not many Members have raised the issue of housing. One of the factors that has a continued impact on child poverty is housing, or lack of it. With few social houses being built and high waiting lists, it is inevitable that people with no other course of action will be forced into the unregistered private market, which pushes up the rent levels that people are expected to pay. Although that impacts on everyone, it especially hits those families with low incomes who do not get assistance through housing benefit.

People who are in receipt of housing benefit are often forgotten. Housing benefit often does not cover the amount of rent being charged — in some cases, to cover their monthly rent, people pay several hundred pounds over and above the housing benefit that they receive. That places great pressure on families who continuously pay those exorbitant rates.

People who are in receipt of housing benefit are already paid below the poverty rate and have, on many occasions, to get into debt to cover their rent. That becomes a real danger to the survival of many family units. The choice of paying rent or feeding their family is not a difficult choice. However, when people are faced with the possibility of eviction because they choose to feed their family, it impacts on the mental ability to cope of many people.

The current housing crisis will have consequences. It points to our inability to bring that unregistered sector under control. It is a disgrace that a motion calling for the mandatory registration of private landlords, which was passed in the House last September, has been ignored. It also points to the lack of newbuild social and affordable housing schemes, and the direct impact that that has on child poverty. Housing is a cross-cutting issue.

Another feature of the housing crisis is the continued rise in interest rates, and the impact that has on those who increasingly find it difficult to cope. We

have seen huge increases in mortgage defaults, which are expected to rise again in the coming year. That also hits those who choose to put a roof over their families' heads, but who must go without life's essentials. That is child poverty at its worst.

Fuel poverty is another issue that, along with all the other elements, leads to child poverty. It is having a big impact. What are we to do about it? We await a response from the Minister responsible on how that will be tackled. To make matters worse — if that were possible — the Department for Social Development was late in submitting its response to the consultation, because it forgot about the deadline.

Child poverty needs our attention. We must ensure that those who are most in need in society are afforded the same quality of life as everyone else. We must ensure that the housing crisis is tackled as soon as possible. Building more social and affordable housing will go a long way to tackling child poverty. It is up to the Minister to deliver on that.

Miss McIlveen: In general terms, I am encouraged by the report. Child poverty belongs at the top of the agenda. The manner and conditions in which children are raised often provide a blueprint for the remainder of their lives. We often talk about the cycle of poverty; it is all too common to see disadvantaged children becoming adults and raising their children in poverty.

Members have spoken on a wide range of issues, such as the cost of living and funding for health, which have impacted on the outcomes of the report. Given that I have only a few minutes in which to speak, I do not want to repeat much of what has been said. Like my colleague Mervyn Storey, I have a particular interest in education, and that is the issue on which I want to focus.

Levels of educational attainment among young children living in poverty are a serious cause for concern. Only 37.6 % of school leavers who were entitled to free school meals achieved at least five GCSEs, compared to 70% who were not entitled to free school meals.

Although the report recognises that educational attainment has substantial significance for obtaining and sustaining employment, and that wage returns for GCSE and A levels are in the region of 15% to 25%, it does not significantly address how to improve the levels of educational attainment among children living in poverty. The attainment of qualifications and skills is vital to break the cycle of poverty.

The Committee recommends that more attention is paid to identifying and targeting population groups most at risk of poor educational outcomes. It identifies the need for evidence-based strategies and for those to be sustained over the long term. However, the report does not identify and assess the evidence for particular

policies and interventions. I ask OFMDFM to carry out that assessment and liaise closely with the Department of Education on the issue.

Given the Department of Education's recent decision to cut funding to the extended schools programme, it begs the question: what education policies are focused on assisting disadvantaged children with their educational attainments?

The extended schools policy demonstrated early success in improving educational outcomes in England and Wales. How will we be able to address the long-term implications of poverty if we cannot sustain policies designed to improve outcomes for any longer than 18 months?

Although I welcome that the Minister has submitted a bid in the next monitoring round, I want to ensure the situation does not happen again.

There is some mention of early intervention and early-years provision in the report, but there are no clear strategies for taking that forward and not enough focus on the evidence that, in the long term, it is the mechanism by which to address child poverty. That requires support for parents and children in addressing parenting skills, education and achievement. Research suggests that reading books at home from an early age has a significant impact on educational achievement, and that that is less likely to happen in disadvantaged households. It is important that any strategy to improve child poverty in the long term takes account of all the factors that help alleviate and address the experience of poverty. I again ask OFMDFM to pay particular attention to that issue.

In conclusion, I thank the Committee, its staff and all those who were involved in the preparation of the report. If we are to progress as a society, the causes and effects of child poverty require attention — it is not an issue that should be ignored like an elephant in the room.

Child poverty is an issue that is all the more important in these days of rising fuel costs and food prices. It may be tempting to pour resources into quick fixes, but medium- and long-term solutions to our poverty issues should be considered. Reports such as this, with tangible, common-sense recommendations, are required.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome this very detailed report on the very important subject of child poverty in Northern Ireland. I congratulate the Committee and its staff for the work, over the past few months, that has produced this lengthy document.

In the twenty-first century, with all the prosperity and advances that have been made in the Western World, it is hard to believe that the most vulnerable, defenceless and innocent members of our society —

children — are caught in the poverty trap in many parts of Northern Ireland.

Unfortunately, there are many reasons for that deplorable state of affairs: rent, fuel, the cost of living, et cetera. Other Members spoke about situations in which they saw child poverty and its consequences. As an Assembly, we must all put our shoulders to the wheel to eradicate that scourge once and for all. We have the opportunity; now we should take it.

Children must be at the top of our agenda. The report contains some 47 recommendations that cover all aspects of daily living. To fulfil all of those recommendations, all Departments must work together to ensure that all of their agencies are involved in lifting all of our children out of the poverty trap. In response to comments that were made by other Members, the Committee Chairman, Danny Kennedy, said that he is committed to seeing all of those 47 recommendations being implemented as soon as possible. I welcome that.

The targets that the Programme for Government set regarding child poverty are welcome, but the crux of its failure is that it does not propose sufficient actions. No one would disagree with a target of reducing and eliminating child poverty by a certain date. Unfortunately, other targets have been missed — an important one that comes to mind was in relation to the question of the multi-sports stadium. We are all aware of that episode — targets have been missed, and we may never see the stadium.

We have already heard today that this is a cross-cutting issue. We have heard about issues that are within the competence of the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department for Social Development. At this juncture, I commend the people involved in the Sure Start, Life Start and Home-Start schemes that are ongoing throughout our communities, and others who work in the field of child welfare.

There is also an issue for the Department for Regional Development concerning transport. Social exclusion is all too often a throwaway term. However, at its heart are issues of mobility — not just the issues that have already been raised. People must have access to appropriate educational facilities, high-wage employment and leisure centres, and they must have the means of getting to them. That is why the Alliance Party is calling for a more ambitious policy on public transport.

Mr Shannon: Does the Member agree that the work that Peninsula Community Transport did on the Ards Peninsula — and the work that other community transport bodies do across the Province — is one of the ways to address the transport issue?

Mr McCarthy: I thank my Strangford colleague for his intervention. As a member of Peninsula Community

Transport, I agree entirely. I very much appreciate the work that it has done and continues to do, and I appreciate the work done by similar organisations throughout Northern Ireland.

12.45 pm

Returning to the involvement of the Department for Regional Development, I expressed concern recently that more expense is being levelled on childcare providers by Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland (DVLNI). Members may know that that organisation asked private transport companies recently to pay further — and hefty — insurance costs to bring local children to nursery schools. I am glad to say that discussions on that matter are ongoing, and it is hoped that it will be resolved in the near future, to the pleasure of the providers.

Personal mobility is an issue that is causing difficulty, particularly for those who are registered as disabled. Every indication is that such people are more likely to experience poverty. Members could call for the immediate adoption of the Lifetime Opportunities strategy — which is referred to in the report — with a clear understanding that that is the start of a process that involves many Departments.

We must look again at the principles against which we judge the Executive's progress. Tackling segregation is essential to tackling social exclusion. People must be able to access relevant employment, and rebalancing the economy is essential if poverty is to be tackled. We cannot continue to subsist on low-wages and on old-fashioned employment and benefits.

The Alliance Party supports the report fully and wishes to see its recommendations implemented as soon as possible. Were that to happen, child poverty could be consigned to being an experience of the past.

Mr Wells: I apologise to Mr McCarthy, a Member for Strangford, for coming into the Chamber during his speech. However, I am confident that if I have missed any of it, I will be able to read it verbatim in next week's 'Newtownards Chronicle'. Therefore, I may not have missed anything. Given that I read that august journal each week, I am also certain that I will read Mr Shannon's speech.

The Committee was ambitious in tackling the subject of the report, and I pay tribute to the sterling work of the Committee staff, who lived with the project for many months. The final document is a testament to their labours. We had an enthusiastic reaction from those from whom we sought evidence, and, judging from the range of Members' contributions this morning, there is considerable interest in the issue.

However, it is an indictment on society that in 2008 — which is well into the twenty-first century — 100,000 children in Northern Ireland have been

assessed as being in child poverty, that is to say, they live in households with parents who earn less than 60% of the median income.

The Executive have a strategy for halving child poverty by 2010 and an equally challenging goal of eliminating extreme child poverty by 2012. However, we must be realistic. I hope that in his response, the junior Minister will admit to the House that those goals are unachievable. There may have been some prospect of achieving them when they were decided on, but events have moved on to such an extent that we must be honest and say that we are trying to hit a target that is moving so fast, it cannot be caught.

It was announced in Parliament recently that the rest of the United Kingdom — England, Scotland and Wales — has also failed to meet its goals on those important targets, which are moving away fast. That is worrying.

The one recurring theme that I picked up from the little bit of this morning's debate that I heard is that matters will get much worse. The situation in the real world has a frightening impact on child poverty. It now costs a fuel-poor family £600 to fill its heating-oil tank. I looked at a petrol pump the other day and realised that fuel costs 26 shillings a litre — that gives my age away — and thought that that sounded extremely expensive. *[Interruption.]* I will tell the younger Members later what that means. *[Laughter.]*

I remember first buying a gallon of fuel for £1·00 in 1977; it is frightening that it now costs more than five times that amount.

Mr Kennedy: Was it red fuel?

Mr Wells: I assure the Member that it was not. *[Laughter.]*

There has also been a dramatic increase in the price of food. Last week, a frightening statistic appeared in 'The Times': in the past 12 months, the input costs for the manufacturers of food products have increased by 28%. Although that does not necessarily mean a corresponding 28% increase in overall food prices, it indicates that a huge pressure is building on the price of basic foodstuffs on which those who live in poverty depend. Therefore, I suspect that by this time next year, the figure of 100,000 children living in fuel poverty will, sadly, be an unrealistic underestimate.

The inquiry into child poverty exposed the difficulties of cross-cutting themes within the Executive. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister deals with several issues that are meant to be cross-cutting, such as sustainability and child poverty. However, the problem is that people in the Executive and in Northern Ireland tend to stick to their silos. It was interesting to watch the inquiry progress, and I saw how difficult it is to

deliver results when 11 different Departments are involved in a particular issue.

Unless decisions are taken soon, there will be trouble. A massive campaign to encourage benefit take-up is required. It is ridiculous that the measures to tackle child poverty exist but cannot be implemented due to the lack of take-up. Childcare and rural transport issues must be dealt with as soon as possible.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion and the report. I approach the motion as a member of the Committee for Social Development. Mr Elliott mentioned that, in 1999, Gordon Brown and the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, committed to halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. That proved, and continues to be, a highly aspirational target. A recent report by Save the Children found that approximately 39% of children in my constituency of Newry and Armagh were living in poverty, which proves that child poverty is a scourge on society.

The Department for Social Development could take several actions to alleviate child poverty. It could intervene to support individuals and families in need through the Social Security Agency (SSA) and the Child Support Agency (CSA). It could also assist by providing social housing, which, as my colleague Mr McCann mentioned, is an important issue.

Work must be done on the regeneration of towns and cities because that could create jobs, contribute to the growth of the economy and act as the principal vehicle for alleviating poverty. The Government's neighbourhood renewal strategy must assist disadvantaged areas in which the levels of child poverty are much higher than elsewhere. Action is also required to support disadvantaged communities through the support of the voluntary and community sector. Neighbourhood renewal can also play a big part in that.

The benefits system should be central to alleviating the impact of poverty and severe poverty on individuals and families. The Social Security Agency, the Child Support Agency and the Housing Executive (NIHE) should play a key role in supporting individuals and families through the payment of benefits and maintenance, and an important element of their work should be to help households to claim their full entitlement to benefit. Mention was made of benefit take-up, and that is important when assisting people to maximise their benefits, thereby helping to alleviate poverty.

The Department delivers its most substantial support through the payment of social security benefits. Last year, more than £4·2 billion was distributed in benefits and pensions, of which means-tested benefits of £823 million were targeted at providing a minimum income level for recipients of benefit.

The Programme for Government refers to innovative ways in which Ministers could help to promote their Departments and alleviate particular problems. My colleague Martina Anderson has talked about that, and continues to talk about it. For instance, the Minister for Social Development could go a long way towards helping people who have benefit overpayments. At the stroke of a pen, those overpayments could be written off, particularly departmental overpayments, thus helping to alleviate stress and hardship in the families affected.

Tax credits, which are aimed at helping families in need and encouraging people to get back to work, particularly lone parents, have proved to be an absolute disaster. Childcare provision is abysmal, and for those lone parents and families who make use of childcare provision, the disregard for childcare provision in the tax credit system is only implemented if the child is being looked after by a registered childminder.

In my constituency, a survey carried out about four years ago found that we had some of the worst childcare provision in Western Europe, and that does not augur well for the relief of child poverty.

Members have said much about education: Mr Storey alluded to the fact that the Minister of Education has put in a bid for more funding in the June monitoring round. It is hoped that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will respond favourably to that bid. In conclusion, I hope that support is transformed into genuine commitment to taking the necessary steps to implement the recommendations of the report and finally end the scandal that should shame us all.

Mrs D Kelly: As the party of social justice, the SDLP will take its role very seriously — both in the Executive, through the Minister for Social Development, and in the Assembly — in ensuring that the issue is not lost sight of once the debate on child poverty has concluded. I welcome the initiative that has been taken by the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, who has written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell, asking him to consider, in particular, a sizeable increase in the winter fuel payment. I understand that Minister Ritchie will be meeting Mr Purnell and will impress upon him the need to look at the benefits system generally, and how it impacts on child poverty.

Mr Brady made a comment, which I can not let go unchallenged. He said that the Minister for Social Development could, at the stroke of a pen, cancel out all overpayments: that is not the case. The Department has a statutory requirement that all moneys must be repaid, and Mr Brady ought to know that there is no flexibility in the system.

As other Members have said, we are having the debate at a time of global economic gloom, and there is no one who has not, in the last few months, been

forced to rethink their approach to how they spend the money available to them. Although we are not, thankfully, experiencing the shortage of basic foodstuffs that is afflicting many parts of the world, sectors and people are suffering. Sectors such as the construction industry are in the doldrums, yet we have the ability here to assist that industry in some way, if we could get some decisions made by our Executive regarding work, schools, and regeneration projects on former military sites.

In November 2006, the direct rule Government produced the lifetime opportunities strategy, and my party believes that OFMDFM should at least adopt that as a framework. Although child poverty was prioritised in the strategy, it will not, as it stands, deliver for children in poverty. Delivery will depend on the development of policies and programmes that will tackle the root causes and impacts of child poverty, and then putting in place the necessary resources.

There is a need to revisit the targets in the strategy to ensure that they reflect the main issues affecting children who are living in poverty in Northern Ireland. I welcome the presence of junior Minister Kelly, and I hope that, as one of the children's champions, he will be able to give us some insight into how junior Ministers, who have responsibility for children in particular, are going to take forward some of the actions and recommendations contained in the strategy document.

We also note the finding that almost half of children who live in poverty are in households with at least one parent who works. From that statistic, we must deduce that the parent's job simply does not generate sufficient income for the household.

1.00 pm

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

Mrs D Kelly: I will conclude my remarks, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Assembly must, therefore, attract to Northern Ireland investment and high-value-added jobs that will offer much better payment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the debate will resume with a response from junior Minister Kelly. I warn Members that a quorum will be needed at 2.00 pm for the debate to resume. I hope that everyone will be in the Chamber.

The sitting was suspended at 1.00 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McClarty] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr G Kelly): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I welcome the publication of the report by the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following its inquiry into child poverty. I join other Members in thanking the Committee and its staff for the comprehensive approach that they adopted throughout the inquiry over the past nine months. I thank all the groups and individuals who took the time to write to the Committee and to present evidence to it.

I have listened to the contributions to today's discussion, and I thank Members for their considered views and opinions. There is almost unanimity across the Assembly on the matter. I use the word "discussion" rather than "debate", because all Members share the view that child poverty is unacceptable and must be ended. No section of the community, particularly young people, should face a future of hardship, poverty and inequality. It is our collective job to ensure that that happens.

On 5 June 2008, the deputy First Minister said:

"people expect results, and we have come here to deliver for the people. Our people want a future for themselves and for their children, and they want prosperity at a time when the cost of living is spiralling." — [*Official Report, Vol 31, p184, col 2*].

Many Members raised similar points, and they talked consistently about action. They said that, although strategies are necessary, action is needed. Our people do expect results, and the Programme for Government states clearly the Executive's determination to eliminate poverty, particularly child poverty. OFMDFM is in the process of tabling a paper to the Executive to agree our strategic approach and the actions that are needed to deliver on that commitment.

The Committee's report on its inquiry into child poverty is timely and welcome in that it lays out a comprehensive set of 47 specific recommendations. Having received the Committee's final report, OFMDFM will consult with the other Departments. As many Members also pointed out, child poverty is a cross-cutting issue. Consideration will be given to how to implement the full range of recommendations before responding formally to the Committee. Peter Weir said that the Committee was a critical friend of the Executive, and that is exactly how it should be, especially on this subject. We welcome the recommendations, and I look forward to studying them more closely.

The report highlights that around one in four children lives below the poverty line. That is unacceptable to me as a Minister, and it is unacceptable to the Executive and to the families who are condemned to lives of hardship and uncertainty. Since the restoration of

devolution, the Executive have repeatedly stated their commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion. Commitments have been made through targets in the Programme for Government. We have said that we will work to eliminate child poverty by 2020, reduce child poverty by 50% by 2010 and work towards the elimination of severe child poverty here by 2012.

Those targets are extremely challenging — Jim Wells said that they are unachievable. However, they are a part of the Programme for Government and, although they are challenging — particularly when considered against the additional pressures of the rising costs of basic necessities such as food and fuel, increasing inflation and uncertainty in the housing market — we must be determined to achieve those goals. Those challenges should increase the urgency of addressing poverty and of sharing the wealth.

We must act to prevent families from falling into poverty, to help people to escape from poverty and to break what is a recurring cycle of inter-generational poverty. The targets in the Programme for Government will stretch and challenge us in delivering and improving public services, but they must be met if we are to grow as a community. Everyone must contribute to, and benefit from, the opportunities that are now available and ensure that no one is left behind.

Child poverty cannot be considered in isolation. The definition of child poverty is children from families who have an income below what is considered to put them at risk of living in poverty. As the report highlights, children from families who live in poverty are at greater risk of underperforming educationally and of suffering from poor health, poor diet and poor housing conditions.

Indeed, several Members pointed out that child poverty involves all those factors, which have implications for all Departments.

A lack of income impacts on those factors, limits children's opportunities and destroys hope. Tackling child poverty and its causes will help to ensure that we treat those problems at source, break the cycle of deprivation and, hopefully, prevent poverty and provide a route out of it.

The Executive is committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion in whatever form they are found in our society. Since the restoration of the devolved Administration, OFMDFM has been examining the policy that was established under direct rule to combat poverty and social exclusion, particularly the Lifetime Opportunities strategy, which was mentioned by several Members and was launched in November 2006. That policy promotes a life-cycle approach to tackling such matters, and it retains the principles of targeting objective need and promoting social inclusion. The Committee's report recommends the adoption of the Lifetime Opportunities strategy as the basis of the Executive's strategy,

and we welcome that endorsement. Furthermore, OFMDFM recently circulated proposals to Executive colleagues that outline its plans for the formal adoption of an overall strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion, including the adoption of the broad framework contained in the Lifetime Opportunities strategy.

Although policy and strategy are important, ultimately, it is what we do that makes a difference. The Executive will agree the priority actions for tackling poverty and to make a real difference for the most vulnerable people in our society.

An overall strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation here that is based on objective needs will require concerted, co-ordinated action from a range of departmental programmes, which, collectively, will be able to address many cross-cutting matters, some of which have been mentioned today.

Of course, we, as a devolved Administration, do not have all the policy levers that are required to tackle poverty — specifically child poverty. Although that is important to mention, we do have power, and we must use it. We have many important policy levers that can directly affect the quality of public services that we deliver. In that context, we must: consider ways to break down employment barriers, including skills training and childcare; maximise job opportunities and pathways to employment; maximise the benefits of Government spending and increase social investment; maximise the uptake of benefit entitlements; and provide support for parents during key transition phases in their children's lives. The Committee's report makes specific recommendations concerning those areas, and they will be given careful consideration.

In that context, I wish to mention our Department's good work in developing policies to tackle social exclusion among lone parents. Considering the latest headline poverty figures for 2005-06, it is estimated that approximately a quarter of our children were living in poverty. Of those children, 35% lived in lone-parent households. Therefore, it was extremely important to complete that work, which, as well as having significant input from the voluntary and community sector, benefited from the work of the British-Irish Council's social inclusion strand. Our findings will soon be presented to Ministers, and the report will be reinforced by some of the messages emerging from the Committee's inquiry, particularly in respect of barriers to economic activity.

On examining statistics relating to lone parents, we discovered that 45% of adults from lone-parent households are economically inactive — a fact that practically guarantees that children from such families will be among the most disadvantaged in society. Therefore, it follows logically that any action to positively promote the social inclusion of lone parents will have a beneficial

impact on children in such households and will help us to achieve our Programme for Government child-poverty targets.

We are concerned with results, and families that face an uncertain future due to rising costs expect us, as elected leaders, to deliver change. I thank the Committee for its work, and, by working together, the Executive and the Assembly can tackle the significant challenges that we face, meet our Programme for Government commitments and deliver an equal and more prosperous future that is free from poverty. I know that the Assembly is united in that goal, and we will, of course, carefully consider the report when we produce our strategy. Go raibh maith agat.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mrs Long): As the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I reiterate the Committee's thanks to all those who contributed to the inquiry, whether through written or oral evidence. I also thank the staff in the Assembly secretariat for their assistance during the inquiry, and I place on record my appreciation of the contribution that was made by the organisations that submitted evidence. Whether from local government, central Government, statutory bodies, charities, voluntary or community groups, social services and various sectors — including health, education, employment, enterprise and housing — the breadth of experience and expertise that was made available to the Committee during that period was invaluable and has helped it enormously in the preparation of the report. A diverse range of groups had input to the process, and I trust that when they study the report, they will be able to see their contributions reflected in it. In addition, I am grateful to all the Members who contributed to the debate this morning and to junior Minister Kelly for his positive response to the report.

In his opening remarks, Danny Kennedy reflected on the changed economic realities. Even during the inquiry, those realities changed. Although the macroeconomic factors are largely beyond the control of the Assembly, the Executive are under additional pressure to address urgently the consequences of those factors. Jimmy Spratt and Dolores Kelly voiced those concerns. Jim Wells echoed the concerns of several contributors to the inquiry when he questioned how realistic the current targets are in the context of the difficult financial climate. Indeed, some felt that we would need to run very hard just to stand still. I hope that the Executive will be able to prevent more families from falling into the poverty trap, even if they are not able to completely eradicate child poverty in the foreseeable future.

If poverty is not to grow, it is essential that we make the effort to address those issues and to ensure that

Departments have well-defined and measurable targets. Jim Shannon mentioned that the Assembly has the tools and the power to address child poverty. He also recognised the need to work with Westminster and other partners in order to address the wider issues; indeed, Patsy McGlone reflected that point.

Jim Wells and Anna Lo both recognised that lack of access to childcare, to play facilities and to early intervention is not only a barrier to work for parents but is an impediment to children reaching their full potential. Indeed, it can compound that cycle of poverty and deprivation that is experienced by households generation on generation.

Martina Anderson referred to the importance of the early-years programme and of school readiness. Those issues are particularly pertinent in disadvantaged areas, and many Members mentioned the need for more creative thinking. Education was also a central theme in Alban Maginness's speech. He also highlighted the issue of cross-departmental working, which was a recurring theme in the inquiry. He referred to the progress that had been made in the 1990s, which was, I think, due largely to two factors: the realignment of the benefits system; and underlying economic growth. Neither of those is on our side at this point in time. Indeed, most people feel that changes in the benefits system mean that there will be room for improvement only at the margins and that more creative approaches are required.

Anna Lo also mentioned short-term interventions for emergency situations, but she believed that those had to be made in the context of a long-term strategy to guide cross-departmental working. Like many other Members, she mentioned the link between poverty and social exclusion. She highlighted the issue of after-school clubs and homework clubs — we would like to see the wrangle between Departments on that issue being resolved.

Jimmy Spratt and Sue Ramsey both highlighted OFMDFM's role in dealing with cross-cutting matters and how fulfilling that role would require leadership. Claire McGill touched on the same issue, and she also mentioned sanctions, with which the report deals. We were not prescriptive about that matter, but we felt that penalties would more likely be the responsibility of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) than OFMDFM, given how Government operate. Claire McGill also mentioned strategy fatigue, which is taking over from "consultationitis" as a major affliction in the system. If we are to have a strategy, we must be careful that people can see that it has outcomes.

Both Claire McGill and Martina Anderson mentioned poverty proofing. The Committee examined that in some depth with regard to the notion of policy proofing and to incorporating policy measures into a process that

is similar to the equality impact assessment process. We are recommending that matter for further consideration.

George Robinson, Michelle McIlveen and Roy Beggs raised the issue of extended schools and highlighted the impact on the most needy families, with regard to the financial and time pressures that they will face as a result of changes and cuts in that service. Mervyn Storey, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Education Committee, rightly reflected on the fact that bids were made in an attempt to rescue the service.

The issue is the service's position in the priorities of individual Departments. I hope that all Members of the Executive, guided by the work in this report and by the OFMDFM team, will work together to address that issue as a matter of priority, rather than focus on departmental silos. What may be the problem of the Department of Education today, with regard to lack of educational achievement, will be the problem of the Department for Employment and Learning, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, tomorrow. Therefore, it is important that people work together.

Roy Beggs raised the issue of social mobility, which the Committee explored. We do not have specific answers on that, but there is a conflict there — one that the Assembly will need to tease out in the years ahead — about the emphasis on social mobility as opposed to social equality. The issue is not simply about moving people out of poverty, but about alleviating poverty for those who are not moving out of it. Northern Ireland fares worse, in European terms, than both poorer and richer countries as a result of the degree of social inequality in the system.

Patsy McGlone and Kieran McCarthy raised the issue of the impact of disability on a household, and its risk of increasing poverty. Families with a parent or child who has a long-term illness or a disability are at much higher risk of poverty, and specific interventions will be needed in order to alleviate that situation.

Peter Weir described the approach of the Committee as being that of a critical friend. I am sure that the Minister feels that, at times, the Committee was more one than the other. On this occasion, however, hopefully we have got the balance right. The approach is about supporting and challenging the Executive and OFMDFM to take the matter forward. It is not purely about being critical, but about being supportive and creative in what the Committee is trying to achieve.

2.15 pm

Mr Weir also highlighted the issue of isolated families living in poverty, whereby people, particularly the working poor, live in communities that might not be perceived as being deprived, but are, nevertheless, living in poverty. That is an important and difficult group to reach. In such a case, one approach will not fit all.

Mervyn Storey and Michelle McIlveen raised the issue of parenting initiatives in the context of early intervention and general family support. Hopefully, through the Committee for Education, they will be able to pursue that issue in the cross-departmental working of the Department of Education. The Committee hopes to see some proposals coming forward.

Tom Elliott and Kieran McCarthy raised the issue of rural poverty and the impact of transport poverty with regard to the additional costs and barriers to employment and education that are experienced by many people in the rural community who are on low incomes. Fra McCann identified the issue of housing, and, in particular, the gap between housing benefit and rent. The Committee recognised that there was a balance to be struck between meeting the needs of families who are dependent on housing benefit and the fact that simply matching the rents that are being charged could cause rent inflation, which could precipitate a crisis. The Committee was aware that the problem has become much worse due to high rents and inflation as a result of the particular financial consequences of multiple occupancy. That issue will require a cross-departmental approach.

Michelle McIlveen and Dolores Kelly raised the issue of cross-cutting issues, and how that creates problems. Michelle McIlveen, in particular, spoke about a lack of detailed strategies. The task of the Committee was, where possible, to give direction while respecting the fact that other Committees had their own responsibilities, and we were trying not to step on any toes. Kieran McCarthy helpfully highlighted the complexity of the problem and the range of influencing factors.

I want to turn to the response of OFMDFM, and I thank the junior Minister for having attended throughout the debate. The Committee welcomes his verbal commitment to ending child poverty and breaking the cycle of deprivation, and hopes that we will see that through the actions of the Department and the Executive in the coming months. I also welcome the fact that the junior Minister will consult other Departments before responding formally.

I trust that, despite the complexity of the issues and relationships involved, there will be an urgency to that process. The proposal formally to adopt the framework of the Lifetime Opportunities strategy as a basis for progress, albeit that it will be tweaked for our local circumstances, is also welcome, and the Committee hopes that that happens quickly.

Today represents the conclusion of the Committee's inquiry into child poverty in Northern Ireland, but it does not signal the conclusion of the Committee's interest in this matter.

The motion calls for the Executive to bring forward a detailed plan of action to deliver targets and eliminate

child poverty, and the Committee will work with OFMDFM to ensure that such a plan is brought forward as soon as possible. In addition, we look forward to receiving the formal response of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to a report in the autumn session and to examining how the Executive intend to respond to the Committee's recommendations.

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

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In conclusion, we hope that the report has helped to highlight this important issue, and we hope that there will be major progress in the autumn session. I commend the report to the House and ask Members to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (08/07/08R) on its Inquiry into Child Poverty in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Executive to bring forward a detailed plan of action to deliver its targets to eliminate child poverty.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question Time commences at 2.30 pm. Therefore, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.20 pm.

On resuming —

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

Heating Fuel for Schools

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Education to outline her proposals for managing the cost of oil in schools; and what additional resources will be made available for capital and revenue costs relating to energy and energy efficiencies. (AQO 3964/08)

16. **Mrs McGill** asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to assist schools with the rising cost of heating fuels. (AQO 4034/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I shall answer questions 1 and 16 together.

Tá freagracht ar gach eagraíocht brú airgeadais a bhainistíocht i gcoinne tosaíochtaí iomaíocha taobh istigh de na hacmhainní a thugtar dóibh. Ach is eol dom go raibh ardú suntasach ann i gcostas téite, go háirithe i gcostas ola.

It is the responsibility of all organisations to manage financial pressures against competing priorities within the resources allocated to them. However, we all recognise that there have been significant increases in the cost of heating, particularly in oil. Under the common funding formula arrangements for delegated budgets, all schools receive a budget to meet all their associated running costs, including staffing and non-staffing costs.

I have recognised that there has been a significant increase in fuel costs in recent months, and I have registered a significant bid for additional resources to meet those costs in the course of the formal monitoring round that is under way. No additional capital resources have been made available for energy efficiencies in my Department's budget. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel administers the central energy efficiency fund (CEEF), the aim of which is to improve energy efficiency in public sector buildings through provision of capital funding. In 2008-09, the education sector has been allocated £844,000 in capital funding from a total central energy efficiency fund budget of £2 million.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will know that, in the distant past, children in Ireland brought a piece of turf to school to fight back the cold. God grant that we never return to that again. Does the Minister agree that there is an opportunity to rid every school in Northern Ireland of those draughty and leaky old huts that must be adding to the cost of heating?

The Minister of Education: I remember bringing a couple of bits of turf to school — turf that we cut ourselves. I agree with the Member: none of our schools should be draughty. One of the reasons that we are putting significant investment into our schools is to ensure that our children are being educated in high quality schools that are fit for purpose. I agree that it is important; but equally, there are other issues that we must examine, such as provision — given the increased fuel costs — and climate change.

Mr Storey: Last week, the Minister told the 'Belfast Telegraph' that in general terms, people already knew what the criteria for post-primary transfer would be. On my first day in the Chamber as Chairperson of the Committee for Education, may I say that the Minister can bay at the moon and howl at the wind, but she will not get agreement until she faces up to the political reality of academic criteria.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The question is purely about the heating of school premises. I ask the Member to stick to the substance of the question.

Mr Storey: I thought that I was going to raise the temperature in the Chamber at no additional cost to the taxpayer. On the matter of the Minister's financial management — and following on from the question about heating oil — how can anyone have confidence in her to manage properly the cheque book, let alone the Department's finances, given her record to date in bankrolling Irish-language schools, wasting £500,000 in my constituency on the amalgamation of two schools, cutting funding for the extended schools programme and wasting money in her attempts to avoid the legal position over post-primary transfer?

The Minister of Education: First, I respectfully suggest that the next time the new Cathaoirleach — the new Chairperson — speaks at Question Time, he should read the relevant question and stick to it. Secondly, I welcome the fact that, true to form, Mr Storey has mentioned Irish-language schools in his first outing as Cathaoirleach. He will be glad to know that I have just come from the launch of two new schools in Fermanagh — Bunscoil an Traoine and Naiscoil an Traoine. On behalf of the House, I welcome those schools and the new work that they have to do; they are tremendous schools.

We are not wasting money on Irish-language schools. We are treating children in the Irish-medium

sector in the same way that we treat children learning through the medium of English.

People are getting tired of listening to the rant against the Irish-medium sector.

With regard to extended schools funding being cut, I will meet the Committee later — I look forward to meeting the Member as Chairperson or Cathaoirleach of the Committee — and we can talk about trying to reinstate extended schools funding, if he wishes. The Member will know that I wrote to his party leader many times about extended schools funding, because it is one of the most important and successful programmes in the North of Ireland. I managed to mainstream £16 million of funding, but, unfortunately, that is not the entire amount required. I look forward to the Member's support, as Cathaoirleach, for getting money for the extended schools programme.

Mr K Robinson: Perhaps someone will light a turf burner behind the Members who sit at this end of the Chamber, because it is extremely draughty.

How will the Department encourage school authorities to make maximum use of renewable energy resources, such as wind and solar power, and the biomass initiatives that are currently in use in many rural schools? Will the Minister undertake to move the balance of energy supply in those schools to sustainable energy?

The Minister of Education: That is a very good question. Sustainable construction is about building and refurbishment projects that promote environmental, social and economic gains now and for the future. Designers of new schools are encouraged to produce innovative designs that will conserve energy, water and natural resources.

My Department's building branch issues essential guidance on sustainability to all education providers in the North of Ireland in the form of technical notes published by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). Those notes cover topics such as: general roles and responsibilities in relation to sustainable construction; targets for recycling; proper disposal of construction, demolition and excavation waste in public procurement contracts; and the reuse and recycling of bulk materials in construction in order to reduce consumption of natural resources, energy, transport costs and waste going to landfill.

All school projects that receive capital funding from the Department are expected to comply with the requirements that are detailed in the technical notes. Building branch has also written to all school authorities that have capital projects in planning, informing them of the requirements of the Achieving Excellence in Construction initiative for the North of Ireland, particularly the 'Achieving Sustainability in Construction Procurement' action plan. Building branch also stresses

the importance of all projects' compliance with those guidelines, in particular the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method, which is used to assess the environmental performance of new and existing buildings.

In addition, projects funded in the education sector through the central energy efficiency fund, which is administered by the Department of Finance and Personnel, complement the need for the overall schools capital programme to take account of energy efficiency and renewable technologies in school buildings.

Several newbuild schools have renewable energy sources. For example, the design of Cavehill Primary School in Belfast has resulted in low projected energy consumption and high thermal efficiency; it maximises the use of natural light; it employs natural ventilation; and it minimises water consumption by means of a rainwater harvesting system. That school also has several photovoltaic solar cells and a wind turbine, which provide a relatively steady supply of renewable energy throughout the year. Enniskillen Integrated Primary School has been provided with a geothermal heating system, and Mount Lourdes Grammar School in Enniskillen and Victoria Primary School are operating biomass boilers to provide heating.

Increased costs of fuels such as oil put a premium on energy efficiencies. I ask all sectors to recognise that reality. Furthermore, all Departments must work together to deal with that important issue and also sustainable energy. I look forward to working with the new Minister of the Environment in developing renewable energy and sustainable development. I welcome his thoughts on all those matters.

Links Between Education Authority and Library Authority

2. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to ensure that the proposed single education authority will have formal ties to the new library authority. (AQO 3953/08)

The Minister of Education: Tabharfaidh mé isteach reachtaíocht faoin athbheithniú ar riarachán poiblí maidir le Bille a chuirfeas dualgas ar an údarás oideachais agus scileanna seirbhísí leabharlainne a chur ar fáil do scoileanna a fhaigheann deontas agus do fhorais eile a fhaigheann deontas ón Roinn nó ón údarás.

I will introduce legislation contained in the RPA — an education Bill — that will place a duty on the education and skills authority (ESA) to make library services available to grant-aided schools and to other education establishments that are grant-aided by the Department or by ESA. In addition, my Department is developing a new school library policy that will issue for consultation in early 2009.

The Department provides over £3 million annually in support of school libraries in recognition that the school library is the heart of the school. The school library empowers learners to achieve their full potential and is integral to the success of the school and its pupils. We are all familiar with the statistics and we know that literacy is fundamental to achievement across the curriculum. We know that poor literacy is associated with lower skills, fewer employment prospects and greater risk of social exclusion. Research shows that young children who love books begin reading sooner and go on to fare better in all curriculum areas at school. Books help to develop imagination and curiosity about the world. By embedding a love of reading in our children, we open a world of opportunity and possibility to them.

The school library policy will enable school libraries to fulfil their potential by empowering learners to succeed. My Department and ESA will co-operate closely with colleagues in the new libraries authority and in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) during the development of the policy. That co-operation may lead to formal ties between ESA and the new library authority. The development of the school library policy comes in the context of a changing education environment. Therefore, it is aligned with policies such as the new school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, and the revised curriculum.

Mr McNarry: I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. It is obvious that the absence of officials from their boxes is due to their being exhausted from writing answers for the Minister. Can the Minister assure me that the new single education authority will not snub the new library authority, or vice versa? The House would be interested to know whether the Americans snubbed the Minister yesterday, or whether the Minister snubbed the Americans. Will snubbing be common practice if there is no ESA? In that event, how will the Minister propose integration with the library authority?

The Minister of Education: I am well capable of answering questions myself. My officials are busy doing what is important — working on policies and answering all of your questions. As Members know, the Department of Education receives as many questions as any other Department, if not more. On Members' behalf, I thank my officials for all the time that they spend answering those questions.

I totally refute the suggestion that I snubbed the American people yesterday. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister welcomed the President of the United States of America to the North of Ireland in their official capacity.

It is important that the Department of Education and the new library authority co-operate closely. It is also important that we give young people a love of books and reading. Parents, teachers, educationalists, health workers and everyone else need to work together to improve literacy and numeracy among young people. We are all aware of the relevant statistics, and I am not going to rehearse those now. The Department of Education and DCAL must work together. Indeed, I look forward to working with my colleague Mr McNarry in that regard.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat. The Minister said that the main function of ESA is to improve educational outcomes. What educational improvements does she envisage will emerge from the ESA project?

The Minister of Education: The RPA will provide scope for significant savings in administration, which will free up resources for redeployment to service delivery. However, the more significant benefit of the RPA is that it will improve support services to schools and youth service organisations.

The RPA is the foundation stone for other essential education reforms. It is key to dealing with unacceptable levels of underachievement, and to building on our success. It is key to ensuring equality of access to a curriculum that matches provision with the needs of learners, and to ensuring that education fuels the development of our economy. It is key to managing the transition to new post-primary transfer arrangements; to the better use of resources in dealing with over 50,000 surplus school places; to modernising the schools estate; and to our approach to planning and delivering that estate.

2.45 pm

The case for educational change is clear. Too few of our young people are reaching their full potential. In 2006-07, over a third of year 12 students failed to achieve five GCSE grades A* to C. In disadvantaged areas that figure was over two thirds. There is a wide variation in performance between schools, including grammar schools. In 2006, the percentage of grammar-school pupils achieving three A levels at grades A to C ranged from 35% to 97%.

There is inequality of service provision — for example, access to special education varies significantly between education and library boards, as does the cost of school meals and transport. By supporting and challenging schools, the RPA will lead to improved outcomes for all learners. The ESA will be a critical friend for school leaders: celebrating and rewarding success; identifying and addressing underachievement; and providing improved local access to support services on the basis of equality.

Mr Gallagher: Will the Minister tell the Assembly how teaching appointments will work under the new

authority? The special ethos of the denominational schools here — both Catholic and Protestant — which is supported by the great majority of parents, has come about because those school authorities insisted on the right to appoint their teachers. Will the Minister tell the House whether that right will be protected under the new authority or will be taken away from the school authorities and handed over to somebody else?

The Minister of Education: Proposals for the reform of school governance will be in the second RPA Bill. The proposed changes to nomination rights have been screened, and I have concluded that a formal equality impact assessment (EQIA) is not necessary at this point. In developing the policy I will make sure that employment rights and equality rights are respected. I am working closely with all the different sectors who are employers: the Catholic trustees; the transferors; and the education and library boards. I meet on a monthly or six-weekly basis with the chairpersons of all of those different organisations and issues such as the one that the Member has raised are discussed at those meetings.

The rights and the ethos of the different sectors will be respected; however, at the same time, we need a single authority and that is why we need the ESA. In the past there were different organisations with different policies — we need to bring them all together now.

Female Principals

3. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of principals at (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary level are female. (AQO 4045/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é 50·36 an céadátán de phríomhoidí baineanna sna bunscoileanna agus is é 30·30 an céadátán de phríomhoidí baineanna sna hiarbunscoileanna.

The percentage of female principals at primary level is 50·36% and the percentage of female principals at post-primary level is 30·30% — that is against a background where approximately 75% of the total teacher workforce is female. Given those figures, I would certainly wish to see more women apply and be selected for principalship.

My Department has made significant investment in the development of school leadership skills, particularly through the professional qualification for headship (PQH), which was introduced in 1999 to prepare teachers for the role of principal. Training is carried out by the regional training unit, and the programme has been very successful, producing 952 graduates to date. It is extremely encouraging to note that from the most recent graduation almost 63% were female.

The employing authorities stressed that the fundamental cause of the imbalance is that females are less inclined to apply for principal posts. Corrective action must therefore focus on addressing those factors that may act as disincentives or obstacles to women who might otherwise wish to apply. With those considerations in mind, employers have put in place a range of family-friendly policies — for example, more flexible working hours and job sharing — to help individuals balance their school and family commitments and to encourage female staff to participate in the professional qualification for headship training programme.

Almost two thirds of current graduates from the PQH are female, although it will obviously be some time before that feeds through into the headline statistics. However, I welcome the question, and I am delighted that focus has been put on that gender imbalance.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. What is her Department doing to address the gender imbalance that exists in the employment of school principals?

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. My Department has consulted with employers and trade unions and is finalising the terms of reference of the review of the school workforce. That review will cover a range of issues, including the gender balance at school-leadership level and in the teaching profession in general.

The Department of Education is committed fully to integrating equality and diversity into its core priorities and functions. I recognise the importance not only of promoting equality — including gender equality — in education, but of the contribution that education can make to promoting equality throughout society.

The Department has made a significant investment in the development of school-leadership skills. I have mentioned the national professional qualification for headship, which was introduced in 1999 to prepare teachers for the role of principal; indeed, I have been to a graduation ceremony for those teachers. That programme has been successful and has produced 952 graduates to date, 63% of whom are female.

There is an under-representation of women in society at every level, and it is the job of us all to deal with that gender inequality.

Miss McIlveen: I submitted a question for written answer to the Minister in April that was similar to the question on the gender imbalance in schools that the Member for North Antrim Mr McKay asked. The Minister responded that she was finalising the terms of reference of the review of the school workforce. I am disappointed to hear that those have not been finalised. Will the Minister tell us when they will be finalised and whether she will bring them to the Committee for Education? Will she assure the House that any strategy

that she enforces will not be a scheme of affirmative action and that people will be appointed on merit?

The Minister of Education: The terms of reference will be finalised soon, and I will bring them to the Committee immediately.

Thirteen years ago, I attended the Beijing women's conference. One issue that was discussed was how Governments across the world should sign up to programmes to ensure that women would not be discriminated against, as they are in every society in the world. The Irish and British Governments signed up to similar policies, but to date, neither of those Governments have fulfilled what they signed up to.

It is important that the Executive ensure that women are treated as they should be. It is also important that women are represented at every level of Government and society. Section 75 of the 1998 Act lists gender as one of the nine grounds on which statutory bodies have a duty to promote equality of opportunity. It is therefore important that policies examine any adverse impacts on or obstacles to women's success.

It is good to see that the Executive are fairly representative of gender — there are four women Ministers. That is still not enough, but it is important to have broad political representation and to ensure that women are well represented.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister will be aware that there are significant difficulties in filling vacancies in the primary-school sector with leaders of any gender. Are those difficulties a result of the antisocial hours, insufficient financial resources, the huge amount of red tape, or the fact that the Minister of Education will not listen to the education sector? Which of those issues does she think makes the job less attractive to women?

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. There are many different obstacles. First is the lack of childcare in our society. Secondly, women multitask in many different roles and have enormous responsibilities. Thirdly, women often choose not to apply for positions because of the inbuilt sexism that exists in our society.

I refute the point that I do not listen to people. I do not know where the Member has been living, but I have been out and about, speaking with and meeting representatives of every different sector in education, listening to the trade unions, and engaging in exhaustive discussions with people.

Yes, there are huge challenges in education. However, if, as I do, the Member went out and about and listened to a broad cross-section of teachers, he would hear them say that they love their jobs. This morning, in Fermanagh, I met teachers who told me how much they love their jobs, and that their jobs are fantastic. Teachers play a tremendous role in our society. Therefore,

Basil should work with me rather than try to pick holes in everything.

North Down: Secondary School Provision

4. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education what action her Department is taking to ensure adequate provision is made for the intake of new pupils at secondary level in North Down in September 2008.
(AQO 3975/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá soláthar imleor ann do dhaltai a bheas ag aistriú go hiarbhunscoileanna i dTuaisceart an Dúin 2008.

There is adequate provision for pupils who are to transfer to post-primary school in North Down in September 2008. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised the Department that 45 children are currently unplaced in the area. However, 252 places are available in schools that serve people who live there. I am happy to write to the Member to provide him with a breakdown of the figures.

Mr Weir: The Minister is correct when she says that 45 children remain unplaced. However, no places are available for them in North Down, and parents are being advised to look to places as far afield as Lisburn. Rather than say that provision is adequate, will the Minister consider increasing the number of children that Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College can take this year? That could sort out the problem temporarily — it represents one solution.

The Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised the Department that the unplaced children reside in Bangor, Newtownards, Holywood, Donaghadee and Dundonald. Transport links enable those children to attend schools in Newtownards, Donaghadee, Dundonald and east Belfast. As the Member knows, there is a long tradition of children from North Down attending schools in Newtownards, Dundonald and Belfast.

The Member mentioned Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College. As part of open-enrolment policy, the Department is willing to consider requests for temporary increases to the admissions number of any school. However, when considering such requests, the Department must take into account the availability of places at other schools within a reasonable travelling distance. The purpose of that is to maintain a viable schools estate.

Newtownards is within a reasonable travelling distance for the children who are currently unplaced. Furthermore, an oversubscribed school must offer places to applicants according to how they meet the school's admission criteria. Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College has a tradition of serving pupils in

Newtownards and Conlig, as well as Bangor, and its admission criteria reflect that. Therefore, even if additional places were given to the school, they would not necessarily be given to children who live in Bangor.

Mr Cree: I support my North Down colleague's view. Bangor needs to have a brand new academy, and a temporary arrangement set up whereby it can take up the slack this year.

Can the Minister explain why she is closing Donaghadee High School? Parents in the constituency cannot place their children in the area, because parents from other constituencies have already applied, and their children have been offered places at Bangor Academy and Sixth Form College. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has asked the Department to allow alteration to the academy to allow it to take up the slack, but that request has been refused.

Is the Minister satisfied that that represents a good way forward? Should people from North Down be advised to send their children to places in the outback, such as Lisburn or Newtownabbey, or to travel other ridiculous distances? *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Education: One of the reasons why we are reforming post-primary education is, as the Member knows, that large numbers of children from North Down transfer to Belfast grammar schools. Figures for this year are not available at present. However, as an indication of the numbers involved, the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised the Department that, as part of this year's admissions process, 850 pupils who attended primary schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area now travel to Belfast. Therefore, many children in North Down travel substantial distances and, bearing in mind the Belfast traffic, they spend a substantial amount of time doing so.

One reason why we are changing the education system is that so many children travel outside their areas. We are considering the number of unplaced children, the number of unfilled places in the area and where the best place for those children might be. However, the solution is not to increase one school's enrolment in order to leave places empty in schools nearby.

3.00 pm

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Vocational Education

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on proposals to promote

and reform vocational education and training.

(AQO 3983/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The question relates to an area that is of high strategic importance to the work of my Department. The promotion and reform of the vocational education and training system is being progressed through the implementation of Success Through Skills: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland and Further Education Means Business.

The reform of the vocational qualification system is a major development. Employers, through their sector skills councils, will have a meaningful input into the design and content of qualifications. The reform will also ensure, through unitisation, that qualifications can be delivered in a sufficiently flexible way to match the learning needs and styles of individual learners and to fit in with the organisational needs of employers.

The delivery of skills and qualifications to individuals is of prime importance. The provision by further education colleges of a more economically focused curriculum and the implementation of a revised Training for Success programme — both of which will be effective from September — will ensure that learners gain qualifications that are valued by employers.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his full answer. I presume that there is liaison between his Department and the Department of Education. How frequently has the Minister for Employment and Learning met the Minister of Education with regard to developing a secondary and tertiary level education system that will deliver proper vocational training?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: There is a great deal of co-operation between the two Departments, particularly as we develop the 14- to 19-year-old strategy. The Member will also be aware that the careers strategy that is being developed between the two Departments will have a major bearing on the development of training.

As the Member will know, the review of Training for Success is ongoing. We are changing the arrangements for apprenticeships — which is an important issue — and attempting to make them more focused and economically relevant. That is an important development.

The further education colleges will continue to be funded to provide a wide range of courses that meet the needs of an equally diverse range of learners. They will be driven through the workforce development forums by the needs of employers, because there is no point in training people if there are no jobs for them. Likewise, there will be a demand for courses that relate to business areas that have vacancies. That is one of the key objectives of the strategy.

Mr Ross: The Minister will be aware that young people who suffer from disabilities or who are from vulnerable groups are less likely to succeed academically and be involved in training schemes. What measures does the Minister intend to put in place to ensure that those groups are not excluded?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member is correct. Through the disability advisory service and through special arrangements and contracts, the further education colleges are required to ensure that people with disabilities are given opportunities to avail themselves of training schemes, for instance, and they are provided with the resources to do so.

The assistance that is available to people with disabilities will vary, depending on the nature of the disability. They may be provided with special equipment; an individual may be available to accompany someone who is visually impaired; and help will be provided for people with hearing difficulties. As the Member will know, the Department is investing more in the training of sign language tutors. I assure the Member that the Department takes the issue seriously.

However, as Mr Ross said, the success rate to date of people progressing and getting qualifications and jobs is below the level at which we would like it to be. In working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, we are acutely aware of the needs of certain hard-to-reach learners. That is one of the areas in which we are having difficulty in achieving the right balance between what is possible in the further education sector, for instance, and what has to be done in the day centres that are run by the trusts.

I am aware that several Members have raised that issue in the past year or so, and it lies very much at the heart of my Department's policy to ensure that people with disabilities can gain the qualifications that will provide them with the basis for rewarding careers.

Mr Gardiner: The Minister has rightly placed economic objectives at the heart of the further education strategy, but will he confirm that, in the coming years, there will still be a substantial number of publicly subsidised recreational courses in further education colleges?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member is correct to say that we have placed the economy at the heart of the Programme for Government. The Member is also aware that we regard the further education sector as a key delivery mechanism. However, I can assure him — and other Members from whom I have received a large volume of correspondence — that that does not mean that other forms of learning will be disadvantaged. Significant sums are still being provided for recreational and leisure courses. That will continue to be a feature of further education colleges.

The emphasis has shifted towards economically driven courses, but the Department recognises that that is not the only function that the further education sector performs. Significant resources will continue to be put into those recreational and leisure courses.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

St Mary's University College

3. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what meetings he has had with representatives from St Mary's University College since the restoration of devolution. (AQO 3942/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I visited St Mary's College in September 2007 and met Bishop Walsh, the acting college principal, and a number of staff and students during a tour of the campus. I am due to meet the college principal again, later this week. Of course, my officials are in regular contact with the college principal and his senior staff.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for his reply. Will the Minister confirm that a substantial number of recently qualified teachers are either unemployed or underemployed at present? Does the Minister share my view that it would be irresponsible to continue to churn out an unchanged number of trainees, regardless of their employment prospects?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member will be aware that teaching is held in high esteem by our community. The figures show that eight to 10 students apply for each teacher-training place. However, he is also correct to say that the profession is under great pressure with respect to numbers, due to the demographic trends that have been established over a number of years.

Furthermore, the scheme for the early retirement of teachers changed on 1 April 2008. It has been the custom to retire between 550 and 584 teachers who qualified for the early retirement scheme each year for the previous three years. However, that will not continue under the new scheme, and that will have further significant implications for those who have trained as teachers but who are not yet in post.

When all those factors are combined, there is high demand, but, unfortunately, there is not sufficient places at the moment. Approximately 30% of teachers who are not yet in permanent posts, and who are on the subbing list, are below 30 years of age. That equates roughly to a couple of thousand young people who have very good qualifications. The Department is proud of those qualifications. However, unfortunately, there is huge pressure on numbers.

Mr Attwood: The St Mary's University College situation is much more complex than the Minister has

outlined in his reply to Mr Kennedy. However, I trust that we will have a full debate on that subject next Monday. Does the Minister acknowledge that a potential crisis situation has now arisen for his Department in respect of St Mary's University College?

Earlier this year, the college authorities made provisional offers of 130 places for the incoming academic year for liberal arts degrees. Those figures were based on conversations and communications between the college and the Department between July 2007 and February 2008. However, the Department has now told the college that it can recruit only 33 students to those courses.

How will your Department explain to those students, to their parents and to their families that provisional offers have been withdrawn? Is that not a situation that the Department must address immediately?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department did not make provisional offers; that is a matter for the college. However, the college has been aware of the situation for several months. It was made clear to it last summer that the custom and practice of diversifying the decreasing number of teaching places to other subjects was to be discontinued. Therefore, colleges have been well aware of that for a number of months.

I am discussing the details with both colleges, because that issue is not confined to St Mary's College. That process is ongoing. I held meetings on the matter earlier today, and I have others scheduled later today and this week. However, I caution the Member about his use of a type of language that may, even unintentionally, have a negative impact.

Vocational Courses: Needs of Contemporary Economy

4. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what co-operation there has been with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on provision of vocational courses relating to the needs of the contemporary economy.

(AQO 3982/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department works closely with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI to align skills provision with the needs of the economy. That takes into account the needs of individual sectors, as advised by the 25 sector skills councils, through their sector skills agreements, which articulate the needs of employers. Invest NI is part of the quality assurance of those agreements.

The needs of employers in particular geographical areas are also advised through the work of the six workforce development forums, overseen by quarterly

liaison meetings among senior management teams of my Department, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI, with whom we have a memorandum of understanding.

The range of initiatives that we have undertaken includes training and conversion courses, particularly in the priority areas of financial services, information and communication technology (ICT), and in the development of an ICT action plan to address the short- to medium-term needs of employers.

Mr Neeson: I thank the Minister for his answer. When the DETI Committee met the board of Invest NI last Friday, the chairman of the board outlined the very close co-operation between the board and the Minister's Department.

However, the Minister may remember that, a few years ago, when Nortel was going well, local further education colleges created special courses to provide skills that were necessary for that company. Does the Minister envisage similar schemes happening in the future? Does he agree that all Departments must co-operate in order to maximise the potential to grow the economy?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I vividly recall the Nortel situation because I was DETI Minister at that time. The further education colleges successfully tailored specific courses to the needs of Nortel. Sadly, the world economic situation at that time, and the difficulties faced by the ICT sector, meant that many people who had been trained for Nortel ended up with the qualification but no job in Nortel. However, most of them went on to find rewarding jobs.

We are discussing precisely that type of issue with Invest NI and DETI, and that was referred to in the second Varney Report. I can confirm that if we are given notice of specific skills needed by a potential investor or an indigenous investor, we pursue the concept of training — even when to do so involves some risk. If we get that information early enough, we are able to put in place delivery mechanisms. We closely follow the model used in South Carolina, where the college network system, which is the equivalent of our community colleges or further education colleges, is used as a tool for economic development.

From day one, when potential investors are identified, those college networks are involved and can train staff for those investors, including providing on-site training. We are also prepared to do that, and I want us to move closer to that model because it is more effective. At the economic conference on 8 May this year, we gave an undertaking to provide such training.

3.15 pm

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister confirm that future vocational courses will be offered in direct response to the skills that are required to ensure that, at all times, there is a well-trained workforce in Northern Ireland, with the skills that are required by employers and investors?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: That is our key objective. I am not saying that we have achieved it, but that is where we are heading. The workforce development forums that are based around each college region and which include representatives of the colleges and key local employers are designed to feed information into the colleges about the needs of the local area and labour-market intelligence from local employers.

The Member will know of recent difficulties in his constituency and that news is not always good. However, the aim of the policy is to do precisely as the Member suggests.

Mr Beggs: Do local businesses recognise the value of vocational skills by offering places for apprentices? What success has the Department for Employment and Learning had in providing vocational-skills training for the foreign direct investment projects that have been announced in recent years?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member has touched on a sensitive issue, since only employers can provide apprenticeships. Some employers have been exceptionally positive in providing such apprenticeships; sadly, others have not. Many employers have not yet made the connection between the bottom line of their business and having well-trained apprentices available to take up new positions. We face a great deal of difficulty in that area.

In discussions some time ago, Mr Attwood asked whether we would abandon our target of reaching 10,000 apprenticeships in the next two years, given our current level of approximately 6,000. I told him that we would not, because we have already opened up the adult apprenticeships scheme and we will continue to encourage employers to take up the slack.

The Citi investment is an example of a recent foreign direct investment success. We had advance knowledge of that investment and, therefore, can now help to train people for positions in that company. Indeed, we now run a graduate conversion course aimed specifically at the information and communications technology sector so that persons with any qualification can do a 26-week course and gain a properly accredited qualification. Such training can be, and has been, provided. However, the question is whether we can extend that training to meet our targets.

Employment Agencies: Enforcement Powers

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update and timescale on the proposals to enhance existing enforcement powers in respect of employment agencies. (AQO 3981/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As Members may be aware, on 2 June, I launched a public consultation that includes proposals to amend employment-agency legislation to allow very serious offences to be tried in the Crown Court. That will allow for the imposition of unlimited fines — the current maximum fine in the magistrates' courts is £5,000 — which will deter persistent and serious offenders who seek to exploit vulnerable workers. The proposals will also give my Department the power to seek financial records from third parties when serious offences are suspected. If adopted, the proposals will require primary legislation, which I hope to introduce in the Assembly next year.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his response; I am aware of the consultation. I believe that the Minister's proposals will be welcomed by most employment agencies, employers, and individuals seeking employment.

If the Department is given the additional investigative and enforcement powers that the Minister wants, does he plan to enhance his Department so that it can deal with those new powers, given its considerable underspend?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Enforcement will be provided through a programme of inspection by the Department's two employment-agency inspectors, who will also investigate complaints of alleged offences. However, we seek greater powers, including the ability to seek financial records, which is a way of proving whether an offence has been committed.

The Member will be aware that the qualifying period is an issue. On 9 June, the EU Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs agreed a directive on temporary agency workers. The United Kingdom Government will introduce a 12-week qualifying period, which means that an agency worker who works for longer than 12 weeks will have the same rights as any other worker. My officials will carry out a full public consultation on any proposed legislation, and it will be up to the Committee for Employment and Learning and the Assembly to pass the legislation that I hope to introduce next year.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Construction Industry Training

7. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the training

available in the construction industry; and whether the further education sector is equipped to help people who wish to diversify and develop their building trade or construction industry skills in other areas of work.

(AQO 4004/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Twenty-five sector skills councils, including construction skills, are working to ensure that skills training meets the requirements of employers. Workforce-development forums in each of the six regional college areas help to ensure that the training provided meets the requirements of individuals and business. The further education sector offers a wide variety of course provision in all priority-skills areas, including construction. Colleges will provide guidance and retraining to those who wish to diversify into other areas of work. Apprenticeship training is built on frameworks for specific occupational areas. Although part of that framework is specific, much of the learning is transferable to other occupational areas.

Mr Boylan: Given the crisis in the construction industry, does the Minister agree that it is important for those who work in the building trade to have a diverse range of skills? Will he guarantee that there are robust measures to ensure that young people who enter further education wishing to follow a certain course can dovetail into other areas?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member's question strikes a chord because although we have had a prolonged period of buoyancy in the construction sector, the recent downturn in the housing market has had an unquestionable impact on construction workers. For example, in the Republic, about one quarter of construction workers are in severe difficulty because of the downturn.

The colleges are aware of the situation, and we understand the desire of people to transfer to a different occupational apprenticeship and continue to receive training. Consideration of that is on a case-by-case basis. However, as a general rule, the Department wants to provide support — especially if the requirement is due to economic change, such as a downturn in the construction sector.

There is an opportunity for students to seek careers advice and guidance, because if they feel that they are training for a job that does not exist, they will become nervous and seek guidance and help. There will be a positive response from colleges; however, if the Member discovers otherwise, I would be grateful if he drew it to my attention. The support available includes improving skills in a student's existing profession, self-employment or entrepreneurship; and the development of skills that are appropriate to other sectors of the economy. There are opportunities. However, if Members tell me that transfers are not

being considered on a case-by-case basis, I will address that.

Mr Shannon: Is the Minister aware of the close liaison between the manufacturing sector and the South Eastern Regional College (SERC) campus in Bangor for the purpose of training? Furthermore, will he confirm whether there is an intention to develop the relationship between the construction industry and the Ards campus of the college, which would ensure that alternative job options are available for those students?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Bangor campus of what is now SERC, and I was impressed at the drive towards technology and the development of useful skills for industry.

Although I cannot provide the Member with answers about specific colleges in his constituency, I am aware that, as a general rule, there has been a close working relationship with the manufacturing sector in that area. Indeed, because of its history, that college probably enjoys a closer relationship with the construction industry than is the case with other colleges.

The nature of the construction industry means that demand for its services is more prone to ebb and flow. That creates difficulties, because students may have started an apprenticeship or a course only to discover suddenly halfway through that the market has deteriorated. The question is what my Department and the college can do to help those young people. A mechanism exists to help students should they want to transfer to another course or proceed to finish their apprenticeships and subsequently seek work. Help will always be available, whether through the careers service or through the college. I spoke about that issue in my previous answer. Such issues can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If the Member is aware of any students who have difficulties, I urge him to ask them to go to the college authorities and discuss the problems with their tutors.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the high number of construction apprentices in the Training for Success programme, will the Minister outline what evidence exists of apprentices dropping out of the training programme, or, subsequently, losing employed status because of the downturn in the building trade?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am unable to give the Member specific figures; however, I am aware of anecdotal information. Although I have no evidence of students dropping out of such courses, obviously I am aware of the current downturn. It is a cyclical downturn; it happens in the construction industry as well as in other sectors, and I hope that it does not last long.

My Department can offer guidance. The Member, from his experiences in his own constituency, will know that building contractors are under pressure. However, in my experience, there is always a place for someone who is well qualified and who has those skills, because there is always demand for such people.

There is no doubt that in the current cycle, the industry is in difficulties, and the same amount of work is not available. To my knowledge, that has not manifested itself in people withdrawing from, or failing to complete, courses, but I am happy to advise the Member should I become aware of any such information.

European Social Fund Priority 1: Match Funding

8. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what arrangements he has put in place for public match funding of successful projects under priority 1 of the European Social Fund. (AQO 4006/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for 2007-2013 provides projects with 65% programme funding, which is made up of 40% from EU funds and a 25% contribution from my Department. The remaining 35% match funding must be secured independently from other public sources by the project promoters. The same procedure was used for previous ESF programmes.

On 29 January, the Department of Finance and Personnel notified other Departments about the match funding needs that were forecast by successful applicants. The Department for Employment and Learning may contribute to match funding when a project meets the specific policy objectives of the Department.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he aware that up to 52 projects in the women's learning and education sector are in danger of collapsing if match funding cannot be found?

Will he explain why match funding was a condition for a project to secure funding when it is clear that public bodies are either unwilling or unable to match those moneys?

3.30 pm

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As I said, the conditions this time are no different to those in the previous round. Members need to be aware that the slice of cake from the European Social Fund has now dropped by 50%, which, in cash terms, means that the European contribution is down by half. The Department for Employment and Learning has tried to help by making a 25% contribution, which it did not make

in the past from baselines. That leaves 35% to be found from possibly more than one other source.

So far, about 70% of match funding has been found for a significant number of projects. I am hopeful that further funds will be found soon. There is a difference between the amount of money available and the number of projects, and the Member is correct in saying that some projects, particularly in the women's sector, have not yet secured match funding. Perhaps some of them will secure funding over the next few weeks. However, we will have to assess the situation when that work is concluded. I stress that it is the same process that was undertaken in the previous round.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Renewable Electricity Generation

2. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much electricity is currently being generated from renewable sources. (AQO 4002/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): In the year ended 31 March 2008, 441 GWh of electricity were generated from renewable energy sources in Northern Ireland. That represents 5% of all electricity consumed in Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her answer. I congratulate her on her appointment to her present post.

That figure, which she has released, shows that although we may well be on line to meet short-term targets for renewable electricity in Northern Ireland, we are not going to meet the long-term targets set at a UK level.

Will the Minister give a commitment that she will engage with other Ministers, especially the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of the Environment, to ensure that blockages to increasing the amount of renewable energy in Northern Ireland are removed and that we can start to make progress given all the natural advantages that we have.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I thank the Member for his supplementary question.

Speaking with my former ministerial hat on, I am sure that the Member knows that the Department of the Environment (DOE) introduced planning policy statement 18 for that precise purpose — to ensure that the proper policy was in place to deal with renewable

energy. The present target for renewable energy is that by 2012, 12% of total electricity consumption will be met from indigenous renewable energy sources. As I said in my previous answer, 5% of Northern Ireland's total electricity consumption currently comes from renewable energy sources.

On the basis of existing installed capacity, and providing that all the planning applications, which are at various stages in the planning system, receive approval — bearing in mind that only one wind farm has ever been refused planning permission — there will be sufficient capacity to meet the 2012 target. Wind is only one part of the renewable energy agenda, and the Member will be aware of the SeaGen tidal stream turbine installed by Marine Current Turbines in Strangford Lough, and the fabulous work that went on there. Some groundbreaking work has been carried out as regards sonar devices to deal with marine mammals.

I am happy to work with the Department of the Environment and DARD on renewable energy, because we need to address the issue soon.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat. I congratulate the Minister and wish her well in her new post.

Will she provide an update on any recent developments in the establishment of the single electricity market (SEM), and comment on any initiatives taken by her Department to create an all-island energy market? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As the Member probably knows, the SEM was established in November 2007. That should result in downward pressure on wholesale electricity costs. I hope that will ultimately be reflected in lower retail prices, which is the objective.

The benefits are there from a larger, more efficient and competitive market, and those benefits will become more apparent as the single electricity market matures. It will take some time for consumers to experience the benefits, but there will be benefits for consumers. That will be of some comfort to those who face increasing prices at present, as we all do.

Mr Armstrong: I congratulate the Minister on her new appointment and hope that she continues as she has started. We look forward to working with her.

Do the Minister or her Department have any plans to provide financial incentives for electricity consumers to install wind turbines and generate their own electricity from wind power?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member will be aware of the Reconnect programme, which ended a short time ago. It enabled domestic users to apply for grant assistance. The Department is assessing how well that programme was delivered in relation to renewable energy and value for money —

which is something that we always have to bear in mind as politicians. We want to assess how that Reconnect grant system worked, and we will then make proposals as to how we move forward in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Electricity and Gas Profits

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is her assessment of the level of profits made by electricity and gas businesses. (AQO 4005/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The profits of the electricity and gas companies in Northern Ireland are derived from their network businesses. The rates of return are closely regulated by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Limited competition means that the profitability levels that are allowed to the supply companies are very low, at 1·5% margin on turnover for gas and 1·8% margin on turnover for electricity. The comparable rates in Great Britain are typically 6%-8%. Trading in electricity and gas is also closely regulated, given the current level of competition in the market.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her reply, and I congratulate her on her appointment and wish her well.

Is the Minister satisfied that the regulator was justified in allowing a 14% rise in electricity prices, given that Northern Ireland Electricity paid out a dividend? The amount may well have been low, but nonetheless, a dividend was paid out at a time when people have to choose between heating and eating.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The recent 14% price rise was unwelcome for all consumers. However, the wholesale price of fuel is rising, and there are increasing costs in power generation — hence the increase in electricity charges. It brings us back to the question of renewable energy sources. Northern Ireland is 98% reliant on fossil fuels. As I indicated, the regulator has to keep a tight rein on those issues.

I accept what the Member says about the context of those price rises, but we need to put them in the context of what is happening in Europe and in the Republic of Ireland. While our prices are 2·1% above other regions in Great Britain, they are 9% lower than the western European average and 9% lower than in the Republic of Ireland. I accept that things are not good — particularly when the price of electricity has increased by 14% — but the situation must be put in the worldwide and European contexts.

Mr Ross: I also welcome the Minister to her new role. What impact will the AES Kilroot judicial review have on energy prices?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I very much welcome the ruling of Lord Justice Girvan in the judicial review that was sought by the power generator AES Kilroot against the regulator. The ruling of the judge confirms that the single electricity market enables the regulator to cancel the contract of AES Kilroot in 2010. That is very much in the interests of consumers.

The long-term Kilroot contract that was established at the time of electricity privatisation in 1992 is widely considered to be one of the historical factors that led to our electricity prices being higher than those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The determination of the regulator that was under review was not a cancellation of the long-term AES Kilroot contract, but a statement that the single electricity market satisfies the conditions that are necessary to allow the cancellation decision in 2010, if, at that time, the regulator considers that decision to be in the best interests of consumers.

I reiterate that it is a very welcome judgement and it came at the same time as other matters, which was good. It is a good decision, and I welcome it.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra, agus déanaim comhghairdeas léi. I wish the Minister well in her new position. Has she met the regulator to find out what impact he feels the decision will have on a social tariff?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As yet, I have not had the opportunity; however, I envisage a meeting with the regulator, when that subject will be raised.

Inward Investment in North Antrim

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many first-time Invest NI inward investment projects were located in North Antrim between 1998/1999 and 2006/2007. (AQO 4044/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During that period, Invest Northern Ireland and its legacy agencies offered £8.5 million of assistance to support five projects undertaken by externally owned clients in the North Antrim area. All of those projects were reinvestments by existing clients and, combined, they leveraged £47 million of investment, safeguarded 1,300 jobs and promoted 35 new jobs. No first-time inward investors from the manufacturing and international tradable services industry sectors chose to invest in the area.

Although the question focuses on inward investment activity, it is important to emphasise that, during the period in question, Invest NI and its legacy agencies offered £23 million of assistance to locally owned clients in the constituency, leveraging investment of £121 million. In addition, since it was established in 2002, Invest NI has also supported the creation of over 1,100 new business starts in the area.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister on her new post. The Minister failed to refer to the 1999 report from the Westminster Public Accounts Committee, which highlighted the glaring regional investment inequalities faced by socially deprived areas, such as Moyle in my constituency of North Antrim. That report also stated that in the preceding eight years since 1991, the Industrial Development Board failed to locate any new inward investments in Moyle. Does the Minister agree that Invest NI must urgently be instructed to redress those long-standing patterns of regional investment inequalities across the North, by applying fully the general authorising duty, under section 75 of the NI Act 1998:

“to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity”

in discharging all of its functions, including the location of major inward investments?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There have been 793 offers of assistance from Invest NI in the North Antrim constituency, which have sustained a large number of jobs. When Invest NI looks for foreign direct investment, its role is to promote the entity of Northern Ireland as a place to invest in. It does not go out to potential investors and tell them that they must come to North Antrim, or, as I would say, to Fermanagh and South Tyrone, or to any other constituency. Invest NI does not determine the locations for a potential investor. That decision is taken by the investor.

Having said that, Invest NI works closely with different companies in preparing visits, and the Member should work closely with Invest NI to promote the benefits of North Antrim. Other Members should also promote their own constituencies as premier places and attract investors to Northern Ireland. The regional office does a lot of outreach work, and I hope to visit all the regional offices soon to hear what they are doing in their areas, and to talk not only about foreign direct investment but about those indigenous industries, to see what more we can do to help them to move out of the Northern Ireland market into wider markets.

Mr Beggs: Scotland is considering Donald Trump's foreign direct investment project. Does the Minister agree that there would be huge dangers to the tourism product in the Causeway Coast and glens were the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to

encourage inward investment projects, such as those being considered in Scotland, which would be sustained by large-scale house-building in environmentally sensitive areas?

3.45 pm

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Invest NI has carried out some good work on tourism in north Antrim, and, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, assisted nine tourism accommodation projects in the area during the period to which the Member referred. Galgorm Resort and Spa represents an excellent example of that work, and I recently visited the new Royal Society for the Protection of Birds centre on Rathlin Island. That is an excellent facility, and it is hoped that the number of visitors to the island will increase from 11,000 in 2007.

As the Member suggested, the sustainability of tourism projects must be examined. My officials and I will work closely with the Planning Service and DOE — in particular with the Environment and Heritage Service on the World Heritage site — as we consider which projects are sustainable in North Antrim. The Department wants to protect its assets but, at the same time, to attract tourism, and we must ensure that the necessary facilities exist to accommodate visitors who come to see the beauty of Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Loan: I too wish the Minister well, on her account and on behalf of the people for whom her Department's economic performance is of the utmost importance. Without intending to criticise officials who may be doing their best in Invest NI as it currently functions, the inescapable fact is that every report that emerges, including Varney II, recommends change to its operation to enhance its performance. The Assembly must move beyond analysis.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please ask the question.

Mr O'Loan: The question is coming.

Mr Deputy Speaker: So is Christmas, Mr O'Loan.

Mr O'Loan: What are the Minister's plans for improving the performance of Invest Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Member and I spent a long time sitting through the debate on the Supply resolutions, and he is, therefore, aware that Varney II recommended a review of the workings of Invest NI. I am awaiting a report on Varney II from the Department of Finance and Personnel to include how it considers that the issues should be progressed, and, on its receipt, I will consider the findings on Invest NI.

Investment and Tourism in Fermanagh and South Tyrone

6. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Fermanagh/South Tyrone area, what strategy she has to improve investment; and to outline any additional steps she is taking to further develop tourism. (AQO 3926/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

The Executive's Programme for Government established economic growth as the key priority. For the next three years, my Department will focus on building on the successes that have been achieved to date. From 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2008, Invest NI issued more than 1,000 offers of assistance, totalling approximately £35 million, to businesses in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area. That money generated total investment of £215 million, including key investments by British Telecom, the Quinn Group and Kerry Foods.

Since its inception, Invest NI has offered £5.3 million to support the development of 15 tourism accommodation projects in the area, including the Lough Erne Golf Resort. Fermanagh and South Tyrone is also a key area for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) activities. NITB is assisting the Western Regional Partnership to promote the area and plans, subject to approval, to launch a tourism innovation fund later in 2008. The fund will provide assistance to tourism businesses that undertake innovative projects, including those located in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area.

In the long term, 'Destination Fermanagh — The Vision for Tourism 2006-2016' is the tourism strategy that was developed in partnership with the local council and industry stakeholders, and it provides the basis for investing in Fermanagh's tourism product. To date, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Fermanagh District Council have contributed £41,000 and £35,000 respectively to the strategy, and I am pleased to note the latter's recent progress on that.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply, and I join other Members in wishing her well in her new post. Bearing in mind that Northern Ireland is emerging from a 35-year terrorist campaign, and Fermanagh received more than its fair share of that, does the Minister believe that Fermanagh is being properly developed, exploited and marketed?

Is it not true that there is much potential for tourism in County Fermanagh, and will the Minister assure the House today that all steps are being taken to ensure that that potential is being realised in a way that will attract many more tourists to that part of Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

Clearly I am very keen to see that Fermanagh's tourism potential is exploited. It was clear when the signature

projects were being discussed that there was a need to look at what could be done for Fermanagh. That is why the council, in association with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, came up with a 10-year vision and spatial strategy entitled 'Destination Fermanagh — The Vision for Tourism 2006-2016', which sets out its key objectives and targets. I hope that Fermanagh District Council will continue to work with the NITB, as they have a very good relationship. Funds have been levered in — £41,000 from the NITB and £35,000 from Fermanagh District Council. That partnership is working well, but if I need to revisit that at any time, and if any Member has any concerns in relation to that, I am quite happy to do so.

Mr Cree: I congratulate the Minister on her new portfolio. It was interesting to hear of the plans for tourism in that part of Northern Ireland, particularly with the regional tourism bodies. Will the Minister update the House on the plans to open the inland waterway system from Fermanagh to Lough Neagh?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is in the lead in relation to that issue, and if the Member has any particular concerns, he should raise them with the Minister for that Department.

Mr Gallagher: As a constituency colleague, I extend a very warm welcome to the Minister on her first Question Time as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Given that work with a value totalling in excess of £450 million is in the pipeline in respect of the hospitals at Enniskillen and Omagh, will the Minister ask Invest Northern Ireland if it will help local companies who are interested in preparing bids, so that they can sub-contract for a slice of that work? As regards tourism, will the Minister raise NITB's strategy with them again? It seems to me that they are not getting it right at the moment, as they continue to exclude Fermanagh and Tyrone from their list of signature projects.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It will come as no surprise to my constituency colleague that, before I was appointed to my current ministerial position, I was one of the greatest critics of the decision not to include Fermanagh as a signature project, and I have had many a tussle with the chief executive of NITB on that issue. It was very visionary of the council to take on the role of producing the destination Fermanagh strategy — as Fermanagh was not one of the signature projects, the council felt that it needed to do something about that, and therefore it came together with the NITB and produced 'Destination Fermanagh — The Vision for Tourism 2006-2016'. I know that the Member, like me, will want that to be a success, and it is certainly something that my Department will work on with the NITB.

As regards the Member's question about the hospitals and the availability of construction work there, that is something that I will look into. There may be legal difficulties as regards one part of Government helping people to take money from another part of Government. If there are no legal issues involved, I cannot see why Invest NI could not help in that particular part of the world.

Inward Investment and Exports: Emerging Economies

7. Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to attract inward investment from, and exports to, India and other emerging economies. (AQO 3960/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI focuses actively on inward investment opportunities and developing businesses for local companies, in both new and emerging high-growth markets. Invest NI now has an office in Mumbai seeking new trade and investment opportunities, and has a successful record in securing good quality investment from India. To date, Indian companies have invested more than £85 million in eight projects, promoting over 3,000 jobs. That has included significant investments by leading Indian Companies such as HCL and Tech Mahindra.

Just last month, Firstsource Solutions announced expansion plans that will create over 800 new jobs in Northern Ireland. In 2007, two trade missions, which involved 32 companies, visited India; in April 2008, 14 companies visited, and approximately 20 companies will visit in September 2008.

Invest NI established a permanent presence in Shanghai in December 2005, which has allowed the agency to seek out new trade opportunities. Invest NI has a successful record in taking Northern Ireland companies to China. During the past five years, it has taken 214 companies to that market, which represents the largest participation by any UK region.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I join my colleagues in congratulating the Minister on her new portfolio. I wish her well and look forward to working with her in the future.

Although it is recognised that the United States is the largest direct investor in Northern Ireland, does the Minister agree that emerging economies' growth rates suggest that they are more immune to the current economic downturn and that in the short term, at least, efforts to attract investment and create export markets should be spread more evenly?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I absolutely agree with the Member. He is right to point out that most Northern Ireland companies concentrate on growing their businesses in established markets such as the USA and, indeed, in some of Northern Ireland's European counterparts — Germany, the Netherlands and, obviously, the Republic of Ireland.

New and emerging markets offer the most high-growth potential for Northern Ireland's trade and investment. Those markets include India and China, which is why there will be another expedition to India later in 2008. I understand that there are also plans to visit Hong Kong and China later in the year. Certainly, the Department and Invest NI will try to exploit those markets during the current difficult times for world economies.

Mr G Robinson: I congratulate the Minister on her new portfolio. Will she assure the Assembly that her predecessor's great work to promote ties on a global scale, for which I give Minister Dodds full credit and thanks, will continue under her leadership of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One would hope that I would do so. I pay tribute to the former Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who is now the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in particular for his work in connection with the US/NI investment conference and the great hopes that have arisen from it, and, as the Member rightly points out, his outreach to emerging markets. The former Minister carried out tremendous work in those areas.

As well as the development of markets for Northern Ireland's products in India, China and such places, benefits have come from that direction. As I indicated in my previous answer, much investment has come from India; over 3,000 new jobs have been created from eight projects, and planned investment comes to over £85 million. Those efforts have, therefore, been extremely worthwhile. I wish that, when certain elements of the media comment on Ministers' travel, they consider those figures, which represent tangible investment in Northern Ireland's people.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh leis an Aire as a ceapúchán ina post úr agus guím gach rath uirthi ina cuid oibre san am atá le teacht.

I congratulate the Minister on her appointment and wish her success in her future work. Which emerging industries and industrial segments have her Department and Invest NI identified that would provide long-term strategic advantage for Northern Ireland, given the industrial and technical advantages of emerging economies? What discussions has she had with her counterpart in the Department for Employment and Learning on investment in courses and research and

development in relevant subjects and at appropriate geographical locations? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One of my first tasks as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was to chair a meeting of the Economic Development Forum, which was attended by the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister for Regional Development.

That was a well-focused meeting, because it dealt with issues such as where skills should be placed and how we might facilitate those who wish to invest in Northern Ireland. Consideration must be given to satisfying supply and demand, and to how the two can be matched up. I look forward to a close working relationship with the Minister for Employment and Learning to match up those skills so that, when companies from India or elsewhere express an interest in coming to Northern Ireland, we have skilled people in place for them. We do not want to have to tell them we would love to have them here had we the appropriately skilled workforce. We do not want to be in that position in Northern Ireland, and I know that the Minister for Employment and Learning also wants to deal with that issue.

4.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 8, 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Mr Craig: I congratulate the Minister on her appointment, and I ask question 11.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Please just ask the question.

US Financial Crisis: Economic Impact

11. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the likely impact of the current US financial crisis on the Northern Ireland economy. (AQO 4049/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Current global economic conditions, particularly developments in the financial markets, present significant challenges. The economic slowdown will have an impact on the overall volume of inward investment that is available and on the demand for our exports globally, at least in the short term. Therefore, the economic priorities and targets that are set out in the Programme for Government will be kept under regular review. However, the success of the US/NI investment conference, recent investment announcements and our actions to implement the Programme for Government should make the economy more competitive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. That concludes Question Time.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I notice from today's lists of questions for

oral answer that several Members who were listed to ask questions were not in their place when their name was called. Mr Deputy Speaker, do you have any discretion on that matter, and is it your intention that, in future, Members who are not in their place but are down to ask a question will be penalised in some way and that other Members will not be disadvantaged as a result?

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will deal with Lord Morrow's point of order first. If Members are not in their place, they are not in their place. It is for the respective Whips to ensure that Members are in their place or to inform the Table that a Member's question is to be withdrawn.

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not a sad indictment of the workings of the Assembly that we had a day off yesterday, yet we are knocking off at 4.00 pm today?

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, order. That is not a point of order. I am not aware of any Member who had a day off yesterday. Most, if not all, Members were at least in their constituency office. If you had a pleasant day off yesterday, Mr McCarthy, I congratulate you.

[Laughter.]

Earlier today, Mr McCarthy, the explanation was given as to why no plenary sitting took place yesterday. Plenary sittings must be held in public session. Since members of the public were not allowed on the estate for security reasons yesterday because of a certain visit, a full meeting of the Assembly could not take place.

Mr McCarthy: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker —

Mr Deputy Speaker: It cannot be further to that point of order, because it was not a point of order in the first place. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I sympathise with the point that Lord Morrow raised, but he implied that certain Members were culpable for their absence. That does not apply to all Members who were not present. I know of at least two Members who could not attend because of difficulties — one had other duties in another place and the other was ill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have already answered that point of order. The Committee on Procedures, of which Lord Morrow is the Chairperson, will undertake an inquiry into procedures, particularly those that pertain to Question Time. That report will reach the Assembly in due course.

Adjourned at 4.05 pm.

Committee Stages

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

28 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
Ms Dawn Purvis
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

| | | |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Ms Hilda Hagan | } | Department of Finance and Personnel |
| Mr Seamus McCrystal | | |
| Mr Gerry McKibbin | | |

The Chairperson (Mr McLaughlin): This session will be recorded by our colleagues from Hansard, and so I ask members to ensure that mobile telephones are switched off.

Mr Beggs: It is appropriate that I declare an interest as Carrickfergus Borough Council’s representative on the north-eastern building control committee.

The Chairperson: I welcome Seamus McCrystal, Hilda Hagan and Gerry McKibbin from the Department of Finance and Personnel. With members’ agreement, I suggest that we go through the Bill clause by clause.

The Committee Clerk: A short briefing paper has been provided to assist the Committee’s consideration of the clause-by-clause scrutiny. As members are aware, the Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill will amend the Building Regulations (Northern

Ireland) Order 1979, which is known as the principal Order. The clauses of the Bill are explained in the explanatory and financial memorandum.

The Committee has taken a detailed analysis of the many issues that arose during the evidence-gathering process. The Department has clarified some of the issues to the satisfaction of the Committee, and has indicated where proposed amendments can be effected more appropriately through subordinate legislation or in the associated guidance issued by the Department.

The Committee may wish to make recommendations on some of those issues, and that can be covered by the Committee’s report on the Bill, which will be drafted after today’s meeting. The Committee will consider the first draft on 11 June.

This session is about the clauses of the Bill — it does not include consideration of the many policy or other issues that have arisen during the evidence-gathering process.

The Chairperson: Seamus, perhaps you and your colleagues will take us through the clause-by-clause scrutiny, and members will ask questions on issues that concern them.

Mr Seamus McCrystal (Department of Finance and Personnel): The Committee Clerk referred to the 1979 Order, and it may be useful to the Committee to refer to a copy of it that we have included in our submission with the proposed amendments highlighted in red ink. The inclusion of a new clause appears relatively straightforward, but where a few changes are recommended it can be difficult to read.

Clause 1 (Building regulations)

Mr McCrystal: Clause 1 amends article 2 of the principal Order by introducing proposed new paragraph (4), which refers to “low or zero carbon system” and which gives an interpretation of such a system.

Paragraph 4 refers to “a source of energy or a technology”, and an interpretation of such a source is given in paragraph 5. Paragraph 6 defines the “other greenhouse gases” mentioned in paragraph 5(j).

Clause 1(2) relates to schedule 1 of the principal Order, which lists the matters that may be included in building regulations. We propose several inclusions to schedule 1 to extend those matters to cover the broader area of sustainability. Should I go through those inclusions in detail, Chairman?

The Chairperson: I do not think that that will be necessary unless members feel that those inclusions are an issue. If the Committee is satisfied with clause 1, we will move on to clause 2. Do members have any comments on clause 1?

Dr Farry: I am not sure whether this is the right point at which to raise the wider discussion about

microgeneration and whether there should be an overall target for renewables. Should that be left to regulations or to wider environmental policy, to Building Control Northern Ireland or to the Planning Service?

If the Committee was minded to suggest micro-generation or to set targets for the use of renewables, would this be the relevant clause to have that considered? If the Bill is a read-across with the 1979 Order, that is a relevant question.

Mr McCrystal: In clause 1(2) proposed new paragraph 17(D) to the principal Order states that: “Measures affecting the use of fuel or power (including the amount of fuel or power to be derived from a particular source or sources).”

That would give us the primary power to require that a specific amount of energy used in a building be derived from a particular source, such as the low or zero-carbon systems in proposed new paragraph 4. Proposed new paragraph 17D gives us the power to regulate in future.

Ms Hilda Hagan (Department of Finance and Personnel): We would detail that in subordinate legislation.

Dr Farry: The Chairman made the point last week that that issue presents a big challenge for the Committee, the public and the construction industry. Whether those powers should be determined by regulations — which are not as transparent as primary legislation — sparks debate, which in turn heightens awareness of what is going on.

Should targets be contained in the primary rather than in the subordinate legislation? We should be trying to do more up-front through primary legislation rather than leaving it to regulations. I am not sure whether other members agree with me, but it is something that the Committee should consider.

Mr Beggs: I will be interested to hear the views of the departmental officials, but as targets vary over time they should be dealt with through secondary legislation or regulations.

Ms Hagan: The Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC) supports that approach. Primary legislation provides a broad power to enable issues to be dealt with more specifically in subordinate legislation. Subordinate legislation can be changed quickly and is made using a more streamlined process.

With regard to the issue of transparency, it may comfort the Committee to know that we consult on the policy options that we submit; we must also carry out a regulatory impact assessment on the stages in creating subordinate legislation. There is transparency before a regulation is made. That is why we generally stick with broad powers in primary legislation and subsequently specify those powers in subordinate legislation.

Mr McCrystal: When we consulted on making amendments to the primary legislation, we received very few responses, and those that we did receive showed a clear misunderstanding of what primary legislation entailed. Indeed, we received only specific comments on the technical points of the regulations.

Therefore we believe that the technical regulations are better known and understood. By and large, the construction industry dips into primary legislation only when it has to — generally in relation to the appeals mechanism. There is not a wide understanding of the primary powers.

The Chairperson: The Committee can say that instead of saying “can do”, the regulations must stipulate “must do”. That should reassure members of the importance that the Committee attaches to the matter. Not only is using the combination of primary legislation and regulations — which can be amended in the light of experience — a tried and trusted approach, it also allows for a future tightening of the regulations if the industry does not respond in the way that the Committee expects.

Do members have the secretariat paper? It has been prepared by the staff and reflects the key policy issues picked up in the evidence sessions; it will help us to work through this very technical document.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Dr Farry: I wish to record that I would like to reserve my position on that point and reflect on it further.

The Chairperson: That has been noted. Please bear in mind the point about recommendations.

Clause 2 (Protected buildings)

Mr McCrystal: Clause 2 will insert a proposed new article into the principal Order to ensure that district councils give due regard to the desirability of preserving the character of protected buildings when interpreting the regulations.

The words “have regard to” are included in proposed new paragraph 3A. We have agreed with the Committee to replace that phrase with the stronger “take account of”, as that would strengthen the requirement and the duty on district councils.

Mr O’Loan: What difference would that make to a building control officer in taking a decision?

Ms Hagan: You could argue that it would not make a great deal of difference. Some people could interpret “have regard to” quite tightly as meaning that they must do x, y and z. However, when I spoke to the Office of the Legislative Counsel about amending the phrase, its advice was that “take account of” had been

used in earlier legislation as it was interpreted as being stronger than “have regard to”.

One must demonstrate that one has “taken account of” something, whereas being asked to “have regard to” something means that one can choose to regard it or disregard it.

One could argue semantics about whether there is a great deal of difference between the two terms. However, the advice of the Office of the Legislative Counsel was that “take account of” was slightly stronger and that the district councils would have something more to prove.

Mr O’Loan: I welcome that improvement. If the lawyers say that those words have more force, we should take it seriously.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 2, line 28, leave out “have regard to” and insert “take account of”.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 2, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *agreed to.*

Clause 3 (Building Regulations Advisory Committee)

Mr McCrystal: This clause makes one change: it substitutes the word “persons” for the word “bodies” in article 4 of the principal Order. That reflects the requirements of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Appointments to committees such as the Building Regulations Advisory Committee should be based upon the individual’s knowledge and should not be seen as a nomination of someone from a body. In that circumstance, we notify all the professional bodies and interests concerned and ask them to bring any vacancies that we have on the committee to the notice of all their members. Members then submit applications to us individually.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Further provisions as to the making of building regulations, etc.)

Mr McCrystal: The “deemed to satisfy” provision is removed and replaced by a guidance-based system. The scope of building regulations is extended to include protection and enhancement of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5 (Guidance documents)

Mr McCrystal: Where we make regulations that are supported by “deemed to satisfy” provisions, we set out the procedures under which guidance will be prepared and published.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 (Type approval)

Mr McCrystal: This clause gives district councils the power to type-approve non-site-specific building matters — for example, types of superstructure — in consultation with prescribed bodies, and that will allow greater flexibility. Applicants may appeal against the decision of a district council to the Department, and building regulations will detail the matters for which type approval may be sought.

The Chairperson: Are members content?

Mr O’Loan: I am content, although type approval is a significant issue. There is a great need for voluntary co-operation on that at present, which is fine if all works well. However, we can envisage situations in which developers will encounter hold-ups if district councils withhold approval. Apart from the proposals in the legislation, we need assurance that that is being addressed properly.

Mr McCrystal: If a developer submitted plans to a district council, the council would have to determine whether they met the requirements of building regulations, and if they did, it would have no option but to approve the plans.

The member may be concerned that a district council might not give type approval to allow a developer to use a house type in another district council area. In that case, there is provision for the developer to appeal to the Department against a decision to withhold type approval. We will make a decision on that. I hope that that reassures the member.

Mr O’Loan: How long would such an appeal take?

Mr McCrystal: It depends on the complexity of the case. As soon as we have all the information that we require for an appeal, we usually turn it round in a couple of weeks, unless there is a backlog.

Mr O’Loan: We are all concerned about the planning system, but we have been largely unaware of the problems involved in building control.

We are conscious of the frustration that occurs when proper economic development is delayed, and we do

not want anything built into the system that creates unnecessary bureaucratic delay.

Mr McCrystal: A developer could start more than one development in different district council areas at exactly the same time. If a developer appealed to us after being refused type approval, we would hope to have made a decision before he started a development in another district council area.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7 (Power to require or carry out tests)

Mr McCrystal: Clause 7 gives the Department the power to prescribe in building regulations the type of tests that a district council may carry out or require to be carried out to ensure that building regulations are not contravened.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clause 8 (Contravention notices)

Mr McCrystal: District councils will not be allowed to issue contravention notices after a time. We will specify in regulations that that time will not exceed 12 months after the date on which the entire works are completed. That will be prescribed in building regulations. Regulations will be made by the Department to make it mandatory to inform a district council of the date when those works were completed.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 (Registers of information and documents to be kept by district councils)

Mr McCrystal: The Department proposes a new requirement for district councils to keep registers of information for public inspection. That would formalise current practice and allow the Department to prescribe the format and content of such registers.

Ms Purvis: Proposed new paragraph 19A(4)(c) states that a district council: “shall, in prescribed circumstances, provide to members of the public, on request, copies of information and documents”.

The Committee has concerns about unsolicited sales material. Does the proposed new article allow for the prevention of such unsolicited material?

Mr McCrystal: No. The Department discussed that issue at a previous evidence session. Unsolicited advertising material goes to anyone who applies for or who receives planning approval or building regulations approval. That is simply because approvals are listed

and put into the newspapers. The addresses are in the public domain, and organisations collate that information on behalf of companies and bombard successful applicants with it.

Ms Purvis: Therefore it is not through this register.

Mr McCrystal: No. This relates to getting specific information from district councils. However, we will prescribe and consult on the information that we expect district councils to keep and how they handle that information. We are concerned that there are data protection and freedom of information issues, and the matter will have to be looked at in much more detail.

The Chairperson: There are so many sources of information.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 (Civil liability)

Mr McCrystal: Article 20 was to be omitted as it had never been activated and the Department had not received representation asking it to do so. However, the Minister will oppose clause 10's being part of the Bill.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and negated.*

Clause 10 disagreed to.

Clause 11 (False or misleading statements)

Mr McCrystal: Clause 11 inserts proposed new paragraph (1A) creating a new criminal offence for knowingly or recklessly submitting false information to a district council.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 (Application of building regulations to the Crown)

Mr McCrystal: Article 22 in the principal Order had never been commenced, but, to reflect modern procurement practice in the Crown Estate, we propose to commence that article and to include a redefinition of a Crown building as one occupied by the Crown and to require Crown buildings — except where prescribed — to be compliant with the substantive requirements of building regulations.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 12 agreed to.

Clauses 13 to 15 agreed to.

Clause 16 (Commencement)

Ms Hagan: Small amendments are proposed to clause 16(1) and (3) to take account of the fact that the civil liability provisions of article 20 will no longer be repealed.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 7, line 17, leave out “repeal of paragraphs (8), (9) and (13) of” and insert “repeals relating to”.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the clause be amended as follows: In page 7, line 22, leave out from “repeal” to “Article” in line 23 and insert “repeals relating to article 22 of the principal Order”.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 16, subject to the Department’s proposed amendments, agreed to.

Clause 17 agreed to.

Schedule

Ms Hagan: The repeals will remain as they are listed in the schedule, except that “Article 20” will be removed and paragraph 4 of article 22 will not be repealed.

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the schedule be amended as follows: In page 8, line 14, leave out “Article 20”.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Question proposed:

That the Committee recommend to the Assembly that the schedule be amended as follows: In page 8, line 15, leave out “paragraphs (3) and (4)” and insert “paragraph (3)”.

Question put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the Department’s proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Schedule, subject to the Department’s proposed amendments, *agreed to.*

The Chairperson: Thank you. The Committee’s draft report is due by 11 June 2008. Seamus, issues may arise that require a response from the Department, and I ask you to bear in mind our tight time schedule. The Committee Clerk will work with you on that. Thank you again for your time and expertise.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

5 June 2008

GOODS VEHICLES (LICENSING OF OPERATORS) BILL (NIA 15/07)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Patsy McGlone (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Billy Armstrong
Mr Trevor Clarke
Mr David Ford
Mr Tommy Gallagher
Mr Samuel Gardiner
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

| | | |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Mr Donald Armstrong | } | Department of the Environment |
| Mr John Brogan | | |
| Mrs Gillian McIntyre | | |

The Chairperson (Mr McGlone): We now move to the departmental briefing on the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill. The Committee has been provided with a copy of the departmental briefing, which includes a summary of the overall purpose of the presentation; a document outlining how road haulage operator licensing functions under the existing legislation; information about changes in the licensing system that will be enabled by the Bill; and a list of key potential issues to be addressed by the Bill. Members may wish to identify other issues. We have also been provided with a Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill master file, which contains the documents for the Committee's consideration of the Bill. It will be updated and retained by the Committee staff after each meeting.

I welcome Mr Donald Armstrong, Mrs Gillian McIntyre and Mr John Brogan.

Mr Donald Armstrong (Department of the Environment): Thank you for the invitation. The

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill is now at Committee Stage, so we have drafted a short presentation, which aims to put the Bill into context and to focus on the key issues for scrutiny.

The Bill is not a riveting read; some people might consider it a cure for insomnia rather than an inspiration. Nevertheless, some aspects are worth mentioning. We will outline the philosophy behind the Bill, comment on the Bill's powers and draw the Committee's attention to specific areas of detail that we must begin to consider. We will comment on the range of documentation and guide members to the most useful sections. Finally, without telling the Committee how to do its job, I will outline how the Department can help with the process.

During the drafting of the Bill, the Department sought advice from a range of people, including our counterparts who use the Bill in GB. They advised that the Bill should be as straightforward as possible and contain basic enabling powers, the detail of which should be carried into subordinate legislation. With the agreement of the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC), we have followed that advice, and Gillian McIntyre has drafted the instructions for the Bill on that basis. Therefore, the Bill is essentially an enabling document, and, upon scrutiny, members will recognise that much detail is missing. Those details will subsequently be included in subordinate legislation. We will discuss and research those details more thoroughly, consider the options and reintroduce those details in the subordinate stages. However, we recognise that the Committee needs to know details, which will be discussed over the next few months.

The Bill attempts to focus on the drivers for change — road safety, fair competition, environmental impact and combating organised crime — that were discussed during previous presentations. In the coming months, we hope to demonstrate that the Bill addresses those issues, and members will, undoubtedly, have plenty of questions about that.

At a previous briefing, my colleague John Brogan provided an overview of the Bill, which he will now revisit. He will not go into the Bill in detail, but he will outline some of the Bill's key powers and what those powers seek to achieve.

Mr John Brogan (Department of the Environment): Unlike other Bills, the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill is not divided into neat chapters, so it can be a daunting read. However, it has several distinct areas or clusters, and I shall identify those during my presentation.

The first area is covered by clauses 1 to 22. Those clauses comprise almost the entire first page of the contents list, and they refer to the powers of the operator's licence. They establish the requirement to

hold an operator's licence and provide for exemptions. That section outlines the two different types of licence — the restricted licence and the standard licence — the application process and, importantly, determines the factors that will be used to assess applications. All applicants will have to demonstrate that they are fit to hold a licence and that they have the finances that are required to maintain and operate the business' vehicles safely.

Standard licence applicants will also have to demonstrate standards of good repute, appropriate financial standing and professional competence. The reason for that is that we want operators to show strong standards of fitness and reputation, particularly those that are involved in hire-and-reward work. They will be required to show that they are professional, and that they are able to maintain their vehicles in a roadworthy condition.

The Bill also includes powers to attach conditions and undertakings. Those are intended to reduce road safety problems around operating centres and to reduce any adverse effects on environmental conditions around the operating centres. The licence holder will also have to inform the Department of anything that might affect the licence. That condition is generally applied to all licences; they must notify the Department of any relevant convictions, of an event that could affect their repute and any prohibitions, for example, for overloading. The reason for that is that the power to place conditions on a licence provides the Department with an element of discretion when making a final decision on an application. That leaves an option other than outright refusal.

The second area concerns disciplinary powers, and those are covered by clauses 23 to 26. Those powers are intended to keep a firm level of control on the operators. They should provide a deterrent to those who have a disregard for road safety and road traffic laws, and they should contribute to the image of a clean industry. They include the powers to revoke, suspend or curtail a licence and to take action against a licence holder in a range of circumstances, from a breach of conditions, to a failure to meet specified standard licence criteria. The Bill also includes the power to disqualify someone whose licence has already been revoked from holding or obtaining a further licence.

The third area is covered by clauses 27 to 31, and it deals with operating centres. It contains powers to carry out a review of an operating centre every five years and to close a centre down if necessary. The Department would seek to alleviate any problems that were found during the review. The Department would be able to attach certain conditions to the licence, or even vary existing conditions, which would, hopefully, resolve the problems without taking the drastic action

of closing down an operating centre. The Bill includes provision relating to environmental matters in and around operating centres.

The next area, which is covered by clauses 32 to 35, deals with legal issues. It includes powers to hold public inquiries into applications, or into disciplinary actions taken against a licence holder. It also includes provision for all decisions to be reviewed by the Department, and for an appeal to be heard by the Transport Tribunal if necessary. The Bill refers to that as the Upper Tribunal. In April 2009, the Transport Tribunal will be subsumed into a grand Upper Tribunal, so we have taken the opportunity to use the name by which it will be known when the Bill comes into force.

The fifth area contains the enforcement powers of the Department; those are covered by clauses 38 to 45. All the main powers, bar one additional power, have been in place in Northern Ireland since 1967, and they are currently in use to enforce the operator licensing system. They have been copied from the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967, and placed in the Bill, because they work well. Among other powers, those include powers of entry to vehicles and premises and powers to seize documents and obtain information. The one new power relates to the impounding of vehicles and their contents. That will take place when a vehicle is detected as being used on a road without an operator's licence.

The remainder of the clauses appear under the headings "miscellaneous" and "supplementary". They deal with a range of miscellaneous matters, and I do not need to talk about those today. The final section of the Bill includes the schedules. Schedules generally deal with provisions that contain detail, as distinct from principles, which should always be in the main body of the Bill.

Detail can also be included in regulations, and that is the case with this Bill. Some detail has been outlined in schedules to the Bill, and some has still to be developed and drawn up in the regulations. There are six schedules, the most notable of which include the arrangements for the transfer of an operating centre from one licence to another and provisions for the detention of vehicles used without an operator licence, which I mentioned earlier.

Many of the powers that I have described can be linked to the four drivers for change that Donald mentioned: fair competition; road safety; environmental impact; and combating organised crime. To ensure fairer competition, all operators will have to be licensed. As regards road safety, the Bill's powers are designed to maintain an element of control in vehicles, whereby every vehicle should be related to an operator's licence, and it should be possible to trace any vehicle

that is involved in an offence back to an operator. The operator must be held responsible for certain actions of his or her drivers. The environmental factors will be taken into account in the assessment of applications, and they will be kept under review. The measures to tackle organised crime will again involve all vehicles being registered and traceable to an operator. Vehicles that operate illegally will be impounded, along with their contents.

Mr D Armstrong: Members will become more familiar with the details of the Bill as times goes on, but I hope that John's overview has set out the broad blocks of the Bill and the main areas: its application; discipline, the operating centres, and so on.

It is clear from reading the Bill that it contains very little detail — it has all been taken out. Broadly speaking, it provides enabling powers. Recently, Gillian McIntyre and I have looked at some of the key areas that must be addressed for the regulation stage. I have no doubt that the Committee will be interested in what is happening in that area. Gillian will expand on the four or five key areas on which we need to work over the summer and on which we hope to bring the Committee information.

Mrs Gillian McIntyre (Department of the Environment): As Donald said, the Bill is really a framework for the licensing of operators of goods vehicles in Northern Ireland. As members will know, much of the detail of the scheme will be contained in the regulations. We have identified five areas on which we feel that we must focus at this early stage so that we can develop proposals for regulations that will be workable and acceptable, both to the Department and the industry.

The first issue is that of operating centres, which has been mentioned many times, both by the Committee and at industry briefings. The main concern is the potential impact that the requirement for an operating centre may place on small businesses. In Great Britain, all operators are required to have an operating centre that is big enough, has safe access and meets environmental standards. In Northern Ireland, standards for operating centres are applied to the hire-and-reward sector only.

Mr T Clarke: Chairman, may I ask a quick question?

The Chairperson: Perhaps we will wait until Gillian has finished her presentation before taking questions.

Mrs McIntyre: The hire-and-reward operators here have to have an operating centre, although they do not have to meet the same stringent environmental standards as operators in Great Britain. The Bill will require all operators to have an operating centre. Given the large number of small operators out there, many of

whom have only one vehicle, we are considering what an appropriate standard for Northern Ireland might be.

For example, we understand that many of the small operators in Northern Ireland park at home. In Great Britain, operators who wish to park at home must be able to drive into their driveway, turn and come out again in a forward gear. We are considering whether that standard would be appropriate for Northern Ireland. We are also considering other options, such as the granting of grandfather rights to existing operators. There is much work to be done in that area.

We are also researching the role of the traffic commissioner in Northern Ireland. During consultation, it was decided that there would not be a traffic commissioner for Northern Ireland. However, the Bill gives the Department all the powers that traffic commissioners in GB have. The traffic commissioners in GB are the issuing authorities. They issue licences, hold public inquiries and take decisions on disciplinary matters. They have wide discretionary powers, and they are accepted by the industry, largely because of the degree of independence that they have. We are considering how best that function can be carried out. For example, we are considering whether the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), which is, and will continue to be, the issuing authority, should carry out that role, or whether it would be better for the Department to carry out that function and keep it separate from the DVA. Those are further issues requiring our consideration.

One of the issues that was raised most at the industry meetings was exemptions, and the Department has been asked to examine that issue as a matter of urgency. GB has a long list of exemptions, and a list of exemptions also applies to the hire-and-reward sector in Northern Ireland. However, the exemptions are complicated and, in some cases, outdated. The DVA and our colleagues in the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) advised us that the Bill may provide a good opportunity to examine the list of exemptions more closely and consider a suitable list of exemptions for Northern Ireland. For example, we are determining the breadth of the definition of Crown vehicles and to which vehicles that will apply.

The Committee asked us to work closely with our counterparts in Ireland on the introduction of operator licensing in Northern Ireland. As the Committee knows, the current system of operator licensing in Ireland meets EU requirements and is similar to the current system here. A short time ago, we met officials in Dublin and, although a recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers recommended that the Irish Government consider the introduction of full operator licensing, our information to date is that they have no plans to do so. We will continue to work closely with our Dublin counterparts to share information on our

respective plans and to co-operate where possible, for example, on enforcement.

In introducing the proposals, we are aware that they present a considerable change to a large number of operators. The wide-ranging change will present a challenge not only to operators but to the Department's staff. We want to avoid peaks every five years when licences are up for review. We are considering, for example, how we might migrate the existing hire-and-reward sector to the system and how to introduce the own-account sector so that there is a transitional period. The Bill gives us the power to introduce appropriate transitional arrangements. We are considering various options: phasing in operators by fleet size; perhaps phasing in the standard at renewal stage; and the possibility of granting grandfather rights to existing operators.

Mr D Armstrong: Members can see that much work lies ahead of us over the next few months. Although the detail is to be provided through subordinate legislation, it is important that we get on with the work and bring the Committee some detail on what is happening to give members a flavour of the major issues that will arise.

The last stage of our presentation deals with the long list of documentation that the Committee has received. Gillian will go through the list and highlight to members the documents that she considers to be most useful to them at this stage of their consideration of the Bill.

Mrs McIntyre: It may be helpful to point out several documents that will give members a good background to the Bill. Early on, the Committee received copies of the policy memorandum that outlines policy and gives details of the consultations, the various options and the key measures. Today, members received a further two documents that set out how freight operator licensing operates under the existing legislation. Another document illustrates the changes to the licensing system that the Bill facilitates. All those documents provide good background information.

To gain an understanding of the contents of the Bill's clauses, the explanatory and financial memorandum gives a brief policy summary and a short commentary on each of the main clauses. The summary of the main provisions of the Bill should be read together with that memorandum. It provides a fuller commentary on the content of the various sections of the Bill that John Brogan outlined. It is not a clause-by-clause examination, but it follows the structure of the Bill.

Members also have notes from the stakeholder meetings, questions and answers and the Bill itself.

Mr D Armstrong: I shall finish with our hopes and thoughts about working with the Committee during the next several months. Our team of three wants to give you as much support and be as helpful and as informative as possible. That may include providing clarification on the meaning of clauses, about which John is our expert, or helping to align the contents of the Bill with the submissions that members receive in response to the Committee's call for views. That process will complete by 11 July 2008. We can answer questions, explain any aspects of the Bill and help the Committee to understand the freight industry as it is and as it will be in the future. We want to be as helpful as possible and to give Committee members as much assistance as they require.

In conclusion, we want to produce a good piece of legislation. To date, we have received a lot of help from the industry and from stakeholders. We hope that the Bill will be good for the future. Bad legislation is worse than none at all. We aim to create a good piece of legislation and we want to help members as much as possible to achieve that.

The Chairperson: Good. We look forward to working with you towards a productive outcome.

Mr T Clarke: I want to raise a few points because I might have missed the essence of Gillian's comments on England and centres for small operators. Do small operators need a full operating licence for 3·5 ton vehicles?

Mrs McIntyre: A full operating licence is needed for any vehicle that weighs over 3·5 tons.

Mr T Clarke: So, licences are needed for all vehicles that weigh over 3·5 tons. That is OK.

The summary of main provisions, which refers to operator's licences, says that it will not apply to certain vehicles, including small goods vehicles that weigh under 3·5 tons; vehicles that are used by a haulier who is established in another member state; and vehicles that are used by a haulier who is established in GB and not in NI. Does that basically mean that if a haulier is established elsewhere and not in Northern Ireland, it does not need a licence?

Mrs McIntyre: A haulier who is established outside Northern Ireland will not require a Northern Ireland operating licence.

Mr T Clarke: Therefore, if I were to establish a business in the Republic of Ireland and move the operation to Northern Ireland, would I be exempt from needing a licence?

The Chairperson: To clarify, a licence would not be needed in Northern Ireland; although one may be required in GB. A business established south of the border will not need a licence. The potential driver or

owner of the business may not have a licence. Is that what you are saying?

Mr T Clarke: It refers to a haulier who is established in another member state. Therefore, if someone from Northern Ireland wanted to establish a haulage business in the Republic of Ireland, then move the operation to Northern Ireland, that person would not need a licence because he or she is established in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr D Armstrong: If someone wants to establish an operation in the Republic of Ireland, he or she is free to do so. As a foreign operator, his or her vehicle could come in and out of Northern Ireland. However, he or she cannot establish as an operator in the South of Ireland and work from the North.

The Chairperson: I understand Trevor's point. Potentially, someone from Newry could simply move his or her operation down the road to, for example, Drogheda or Dundalk. Likewise, someone in Derry could move his or her business out the Letterkenny Road, and, bingo, he or she does not need a licence.

Mr D Armstrong: That is correct. However, that haulier would be classified as a foreign operator who is registered and hired for work in another member state, namely the Republic of Ireland.

The Chairperson: That would not affect the haulier's work and business operationally, other than to lessen the cost that he or she potentially would have to pay and the regulation that he or she have to work under as a consequence of the Bill.

Mr D Armstrong: If a haulier has an operating centre or operates a business in Northern Ireland, and wants an operator's licence in Northern Ireland, all the vehicles covered must be registered in either GB or Northern Ireland. Vehicles that are registered in the Republic of Ireland would not to be covered. If the haulier transfers its operation to another base —

Mr T Clarke: According the definition in the summary of main provisions, that will not apply to a vehicle that is used by haulier established in another member state. We had a presentation earlier from a representative of a business that has operated for over 100 years. I am sure, though, that the representative was not about when the business was established.

The Chairperson: He certainly did not look it, Trevor.

Mr T Clarke: According to that definition, there is nothing in the legislation to say that if someone moves an established business that has been formed in a state other than Northern Ireland, he or she is exempt from holding a licence.

Mr D Armstrong: If that person was to move that business and re-establish it in Northern Ireland —

Mr T Clarke: If someone established a business — for example, “McGlone Transport” — in Drogheda, and then moved it to Northern Ireland, it has been established in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr D Armstrong: That is different. There is no exemption for someone who transfers a business to Northern Ireland that has been established in another country. There is no provision for that. The legislation refers to operators and operating centres that are established in another member state, and can send their vehicles in and out of Northern Ireland. There is nothing to stop them from doing that.

The Chairperson: A haulage operator from Derry, for example, may operate a mile down the road across the border for all sorts of reasons, not least because of fuel costs. Have you picked up from the industry that it thinks that the extra regulation could potentially tip it over the edge?

Mr D Armstrong: We have not found that. The briefings that we gave and the questionnaires that we issued showed little interest in the issue of flagging out, as transferring business across the border is sometimes called. First, the standards that will be applied to vehicle roadworthiness and compliance with the law will stand, regardless of where the vehicle is registered. Secondly, the cost of licensing under the Bill will not be business-breaking money; it is a relatively small cost. Most businesses will not notice a huge difference in cost. It is less than the cost of one tyre for one vehicle a year.

Mr T Clarke: That is not a valid point.

Mr D Armstrong: Those issues were raised at our briefings, and we did not find any indication that significant numbers of operators wanted to flag out. Only around 11% of the questionnaires that we received raised the fact that they would even consider flagging out, let alone decide to transfer their business. Other costs are associated with transferring a business across the border that would not be incurred in the North. From our briefings, it has not come across as an issue that people wanted to register in the Republic of Ireland and would try to operate in Northern Ireland. As more detail emerges, that may well become an issue.

Mr T Clarke: Donald, can you find a location at which I could buy an operating centre for less than the price of a tyre?

Mr D Armstrong: No.

Mr T Clarke: The cost is more than the price of a tyre, so you are misrepresenting the case. For someone to have an operator's licence, he or she must have an operating centre. Mr Armstrong said that the cost of licensing was less than the cost of one tyre for one lorry for one year. If an operator does not need an

operating centre, the licence is an additional cost; therefore, what he said is incorrect.

Mr D Armstrong: We are talking at cross purposes. I am talking about the cost of licensing.

Mr T Clarke: As am I; and an operator must have an operating centre to have a licence.

The Chairperson: If you finish your point, Trevor, we can get clarification on that issue.

Mr T Clarke: To have an operator's licence, someone will be required to have an operating centre. I count the cost of acquiring the operating centre as being part of the cost of acquiring the licence.

The Chairperson: Are you referring to someone who works from home and who parks their vehicle outside their house?

Mr T Clarke: It will include anyone who operates a vehicle weighing 3.5 tons and over.

Mr D Armstrong: When we refer to an operating centre, we mean the place where a vehicle is normally kept, stored or parked when it is not in use. In Northern Ireland, a significant number of people park their vehicles at home, and others park their vehicles at the roadside. Parking at the roadside will not be an acceptable way of storing a vehicle; people will have to find somewhere else to park their vehicles. As Gillian said, if the GB standard were to be applied in Northern Ireland, operators would have to be able to drive in and drive out of their driveways. They would have to be able to drive in, turn and drive out again.

Gillian mentioned that consideration must be given to whether that standard is acceptable in Northern Ireland. Given that lots of people in Northern Ireland park in their driveways, it may not be acceptable. It may be that our impact assessment results in that standard being changed. We do not anticipate that people who do not currently have somewhere to park their vehicles will have to buy operating centres. Everyone currently has somewhere to park their vehicle, but people who park on the roads will have to find somewhere else to park.

The Chairperson: Perhaps I am being a bit stupid, but do you define a road as being somewhere that is adopted by Roads Service?

Mr D Armstrong: That is the definition that we use for a public road when considering on-street parking.

The Chairperson: Potentially, that could affect quite a lot of people.

Mr D Armstrong: Yes, that is possible.

Mr B Armstrong: What will be done about a person who has a vehicle in the Republic of Ireland, lives in Northern Ireland and parks their vehicle on the edge of the road?

Mr Boylan: A mechanism is needed to check on drivers who come across to park outside homes in the North, because operating centres are not required in the South. Is that being considered?

Mr D Armstrong: It is currently unacceptable for people to regularly park goods vehicles on a public road.

Mr Boylan: That is the clarification that we were seeking.

The Chairperson: Members have all been out and about around housing estates and have seen lorries or vans parked outside houses on public roads. It may be unacceptable, but it happens. To pick up on what Mr Clarke said, the consequences of the legislation may be to enforce penalties and to force people to address the issue. We need to know what will be done and what the repercussions may be. Operators will have to find somewhere else to park vehicles and deal with the financial impact of that. The parking of vehicles on a road may be perfectly workable at present. However, whether it is acceptable is a different question.

Mr D Armstrong: That is correct. For owners to get an operator's licence, an operating centre will have to be specified. When Gillian spoke about that, she said that we need to consider what it will mean for operators who currently park in a driveway or on a public road. We will have to conduct a lot of research to ascertain what will happen in such cases. The impact of insisting on the GB standard and of insisting that operators park off-road — as they ought to at present — will have to be considered. It is unacceptable for operators to park on-road at present; we are not changing legislation in that respect. However, as a requirement for an operator's licence, operators must be able to specify where they will park, and it must be off-road.

Mr T Clarke: I want to return to the subject of operating centres. It was said earlier that there is no reason why an operating centre should not be from a private home, provided the vehicle can turn in the driveway and drive out again. There is possibly an option of doing that. However, the Department's letter of 16 April 2008 states: "Additionally and separately, an operator will have to ensure that any proposed operating centre meets the requirements of planning law."

Most elected Members are aware that if someone applies to operate a registered business from a rural dwelling, planning permission will be refused. That means that rural operators will have to move their businesses to another operating centre.

Mr D Armstrong: We are not experts in planning. However, if a person has been parking in a driveway over a period of time, it is deemed as having been approved by the Planning Service.

Mr T Clarke: Not necessarily.

Mr D Armstrong: Approval of an operating centre and planning approval are separate issues. We talked about that at a previous meeting. We will not be involved in the planning constraints of an operating centre. However, planning law will impact on new operators, because existing operators, for the most part, will be deemed to have received planning approval, provided they have been operating in that fashion for years.

Mr T Clarke: Yes, provided they have been operating for at least 12 years.

The Chairperson: Trevor is correct about running an established business. We will return to the issue of the legislation's knock-on effects.

Mr Boylan: My point is related to that. Many members have raised the issue of operating centres. We worry about it because there are a substantial number of single operators. We discussed that at a previous meeting, and we will come back to it.

We received a presentation from representatives of a transport company who discussed a level playing field. What are your views on exemptions? I do not refer, as Trevor has, to operators across the border who will have exemptions. I mean exemptions from licensing for Crown vehicles, and so on. Gillian has already referred to it, but perhaps she could elaborate on it.

Mrs McIntyre: At present, there is a list of vehicles that are exempt from complying with operator licensing, including emergency vehicles, such as fire engines, ambulances and certain military vehicles. The list is long and complicated, and, because of the wording, enforcement teams find it difficult to interpret. Provisions for Crown vehicles are the subject of discussions with officials in GB. We are uncertain what the final definition of Crown vehicles will be. Potentially, it could include the vehicles owned by local authorities and Departments.

Mr T Clarke: That is unfair.

Mr Boylan: I do not have an issue with emergency vehicles. We will wait for your reply, but the question needs answered. Emergency vehicles should be exempt, but a level playing field is required.

Mr Ford: I want to follow up the points that have been raised about ineffective flagging out, which the industry does not consider to be a particular problem. Therefore, we accept that. However, there is an issue about vehicles that are registered elsewhere being parked on the street; that will not lead to a level playing field. For example, it could be possible for somebody with a Monaghan or Donegal registration to regularly park in a housing estate in Antrim. There must be some way of regulating that. Will provision be

included in the regulations, because there is none in the Bill?

Mr D Armstrong: I cannot give you an answer on that issue. I cannot imagine, for example, that the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Bill will contain provisions for vehicles that park on a road in a residential estate. I am happy to investigate the issue to ascertain how it will be addressed, and I will then respond. However, such a provision will not appear in the Bill or in the regulations.

Mr T Clarke: There should not be a provision for that. If someone with an operating licence in Northern Ireland cannot park in the street — with the greatest respect, and I do not care where they are from — no one else should be allowed to do so. Why should we tie the hands of people from north of the border?

Mr Ford: That is the point that we tried to make during previous discussions on the issue. We wanted to ensure, as far as is possible, that there is a level playing field. About once a year, a Polish lorry driver may stop in the street, but that is not the same as parking regularly.

The Chairperson: As you can see, we have a flavour of some of the issues that are ahead of us.

Mr D Armstrong: I am gratified by that, because those are the issues that Gillian talked about in her presentation.

Mr T Clarke: I want to return to the issue of tractors used for purposes other than farming. A letter from the Department stated: "Subject to further consideration, a person using a tractor for purposes other than farming would be required to hold an operator's licence."

Agricultural contractors are not deemed to be farmers because they have to use clear diesel in their vehicles. I believe that their vehicles should be classified the same as a tractor. That is an issue that must be tied down.

Mr D Armstrong: Farming and forestry vehicles will be included when we consider exemptions. A decision must be made as to whether they are classified on the basis of the function that they perform or on the type of vehicle. That is a huge area.

Mr T Clarke: A problem exists with that issue. Agriculture contractors are expected to use clear diesel because they have contracts, even though the purpose of their work is agricultural.

The Chairperson: The point has been well made. I am conscious of the time. We will revisit the issues that were raised. I thank Gillian, John and Donald for their time.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 30 May 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Post Office Closures

Mrs McGill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the announcement that 96 Post Offices are earmarked for closure, and given the adverse impact this would have, particularly on rural communities, to explore with the Executive the relevant services that could be delivered at Post Office franchises, in a one stop shop facility.
(AQW 5315/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rev Dr I Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): The proposed closure of 42 Post Offices, announced by Post Office Ltd, whilst regrettable has been caused by a variety of factors such as lifestyle changes, and the technological and competitive environment that today's Post Office has to operate in. Executive Ministers are considering whether there is scope for the delivery of additional public services through the Post Office. However, it must be recognised that individual Post Offices are commercial enterprises and Government cannot simply allocate major commercial undertakings to outside bodies without appropriate and transparent public procurement procedures.

People have a choice, with greater mobility and more options, as to how they secure their services and ultimately it must be for the Post Office itself to consider and implement innovative solutions to attract people to them.

Press Office Staff

Mr Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the answer to AQW 4533/08, to detail the number of staff working in

the department's press office, broken down by grade.
(AQW 5389/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Two Principal Information Officers (Grade 7) and two Senior Information Officers (Deputy Principal) provide direct support to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the two Junior Ministers.

One Senior Information Officer (Deputy Principal) and three Information Officers (Staff Officer) provide additional support and advice to the Department on media relations and forward planning. They also provide media planning support to the other 10 departments.

Ethnic Minority Community Organisations

Mr A Maskey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of Ethnic Minority Community organisations that are in receipt of core funding.
(AQW 6197/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are fully committed to building a shared and better future for all people here. To this end, and as part of our ongoing work to combat racism and to promote good relations, on 15 May we were delighted to announce funding awards of almost £1 million for 2008-09 under the OFMDFM funding scheme for minority ethnic communities. A full list of funding awards (both core and project funding) has been placed in the Assembly Library.

19 different projects covering 18 different organisations have been awarded core funding under the scheme. In addition, 8 organisations have been awarded project funding. Under the previous scheme from 2005-2008, 15 organisations were awarded 'development' (core) funding.

The awards announced on 15 May represent a very substantial increase on previous years. These come from additional funding of almost £7.5m over the next 3 years for promoting good relations and good race relations which we announced in the Budget. Our total investment for the period 2008-11 to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all will be almost £29 million.

The funding scheme is open to both ethnic minority organisations and community or voluntary groups which work to promote good relations, community cohesion and integration between people from different racial groups and the majority community.

Equality of Opportunity

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm that (i) the

Executive is committed to (a) observing the general authorising statutory duty arising from Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, namely to have due regard for the promotion of equality of opportunity; and (b) enforcing the detailed scheduled duties arising from Section 75(4) of, and Schedule 9 to, the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and (ii) the delivery and review of the Executive's Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy over the next 3 years will be informed by the outcome of a full equality impact assessment. (AQW 6361/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We can confirm that the Executive is committed to observing the general authorising statutory duty arising under Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Each individual Department within the Executive is a designated public authority for the purposes of Section 75.

Schedule 9 to the Act provides for the enforcement of a designated public authority's duties under Section 75 and is given effect by Section 75(4). Accordingly, each Department is obliged by the statutory duty arising under Section 75(4) to effect the enforcement of its relative duties under Schedule 9.

In that context the Executive is collectively committed to enforcing the relative duties arising under Section 75(4) of, and Schedule 9 to, the Act. The Executive will seek to ensure that Departments, Government agencies and relevant statutory authorities continue to meet their obligations under Section 75, including Schedule 9.

In relation to part (ii) of the question, the Executive published a draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) carried out at a strategic level at the end of January, in relation to the Programme for Government, Budget and Investment Strategy. The consultation period closed on 23 April.

We can confirm that the Executive has collectively agreed that the outcome of the final EQIA, carried out at a strategic level, will be taken into account and will influence final decisions in the ongoing delivery, review and implementation of the Programme for Government and Investment Strategy, and in the future allocation of Executive Resources, including the in-year Budgetary Monitoring Rounds. The delivery of policies, programmes and capital projects at Departmental level will be informed by the outcome of the EQIA.

Good Relations Initiatives

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the plans it has to promote good relations initiatives in the North Belfast

constituency, particularly as summer approaches.

(AQW 6494/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Our focus presently is on delivering targeted programmes that those communities need and want over the summer months. Simultaneously, on an inter-agency basis we have begun work for the medium to longer term to address the issues affecting the communities in North Belfast.

Our Department and the Community Action Unit is continuing to engage with communities on an inter-departmental basis to address the important interface and conflict resolution issues which exist in this area. Over the last period the Community Action Unit has been facilitating a North Belfast Interface Working Group, made up of representatives from statutory agencies and community groups, to develop an Action Plan for Interfaces in North Belfast. The Action Plan contains ten key recommendations for addressing interface issues.

The Unit is continuing 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 contained in the Action Plan.

In his closing statement during the Adjournment debate on Interfaces in North Belfast on 22 April 2008, Junior Minister Donaldson confirmed that the Member's proposal to create a taskforce for the North Belfast constituency would be considered. We will liaise with the Minister for Social Development, the North Belfast Community Action Unit and elected representatives on the issue.

We also recognise the invaluable work which communities have undertaken to build sustainable relationships which have been the foundation for the peaceful summers over recent years. Recognising this, we can confirm that funding of up to £100,000 will again be made available in the current financial year to provide a programme to be targeted at young people at risk of becoming involved in interface violence over the summer months when community tensions can increase. This will be in addition to summer diversionary programmes funded by OFMDFM through the Belfast Education and Library Board.

Graffiti and Murals in Housing Estates

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to ensure that grants and monies are made available for Housing Estates to promote reductions in paramilitary flags, murals and graffiti. (AQW 6575/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Our Department is part of an inter-agency consortium (comprising the Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure) which is implementing the Re-imaging Communities Programme, delivered by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Since the programme opened for application in October 2006, the Shared Communities Consortium has invested a total of £1,865,372 in 88 projects throughout Northern Ireland. Of that total, £945,556 has been awarded to projects based within local housing estates to help eliminate paramilitary imagery. This Department contributes £250,000 per annum to the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure towards the Re-imaging Communities Programme.

The promotion of Good Relations is a key objective set out in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Good Relations Strategy. This strategy sets the course to safer, stable neighbourhoods and promotes a more inclusive society whilst recognising that trust and safety will ultimately dictate the pace of change.

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of money spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008.

(AQW 6652/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

A total of £117,610.18 was spent on publicity and advertising by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in 2007-2008. This total includes £63,928.33 for recruitment advertising and public notice advertising and also £31,511 for cross-departmental initiatives including "Your Government – Making A Difference"; and promoting the Government Department's exhibition at the Balmoral Show; and a supplement in the Washington Post.

North-West Gateway Initiative

Mr Doherty asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail projects under the North West Gateway Initiative that will enable practical co-operation and economic growth in (i) the Strabane-Lifford area; and (ii) the Castlederg-Finn Valley area.

(AQW 6736/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The North-West Gateway Initiative was established to provide a focus for the development needs of the North-West focusing on the Councils of Derry, Limavady, Strabane and Donegal County Council. It

aims to encourage a more co-ordinated approach to the region's development on a cross-border basis.

The initiative has facilitated the development of a range of actions to date including agreement on a major roads investment programme, investment in the City of Derry Airport, the preparation of a Draft Spatial Planning Framework for the North-West, approval of funding for a cross-border international telecoms connectivity project under INTERREG IVA, the establishment of the North West Workforce Development Forum, a pilot out-of-hours GP scheme to allow patients to access GP services across the border and agreement to permit referral of patients in Donegal to Belfast City Hospital for radiotherapy treatment, support for higher education collaboration between Letterkenny Institute of Technology and University of Ulster, the launch of the North West Business and Technology Zone, agreement on proposed tourism projects to benefit the North-West and joint applications for EU funding.

The initiative has helped to facilitate a more co-ordinated approach to the development of the North West and in delivering a range of actions which have brought benefit to the area. We believe that in completing the current work programme, the initiative will continue to encourage practical co-operation and bring economic benefits to the entire region including areas such as Strabane-Lifford and the Castlederg-Finn Valley.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) when a communication strategy will be produced in relation to the Sustainable Development Strategy; and (ii) the research being undertaken to determine the barriers to behavioural change for sustainability. (AQW 6853/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: An OFMDFM internal working paper on communications, which, it is anticipated, will inform any future Communications Strategy for sustainable development, has been circulated to members of the Sustainable Development Stakeholder Group for information. No decision has been taken at this time as to the date of publication of the Communication Strategy, and given the decision by Ministers to develop a new Sustainable Development Strategy, there is a strong likelihood that the existing Communications Strategy will be subject to some minor amendments, prior to publication, to harmonise it with the newly developed Sustainable Development Strategy.

OFMDFM has conducted research into behavioural change in line with targets and actions published in the Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a Stakeholders Forum will be established in relation to the Sustainable Development Strategy. (AQW 6854/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

As part of our plans for progressing sustainable development, we are currently considering the potential role a Stakeholder Forum could play, and the added value such a group could provide. No decision has been taken at this time as to when, and if, such a group will be created.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress on the first Implementation Plan in relation to the Sustainable Development Strategy and to outline when consultation will begin on the second Implementation Plan. (AQW 6855/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Information on progress on the Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan was provided in response to AQW/2499/2008.

Our Department has consulted with stakeholders on the way forward following the end of the Implementation Plan period.

We are currently conducting a review of the Sustainable Development Strategy, the findings of which will inform future developments in this area.

Fair Employment Legislation

Mr K Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many employers are exempt from fair employment legislation. (AQW 6893/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion. The Order applies to all employers regardless of size.

As well as prohibiting discrimination in the workplace, the Order also places a duty on all except the very smallest employers to register with the Equality Commission and to monitor annually the religious composition of their workforce. Those exempt from the requirement to monitor are the self employed, those on government training schemes, the unemployed, school teachers and those working

in private sector concerns with 10 or less employees. The latest Annual Monitoring Report produced by the Equality Commission (released December 2007) shows that monitoring covers an estimated 73.2% of employee jobs here. It does not record information on the number of employers who are exempt from the requirement to monitor.

Maze Stadium

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what information, in relation to the evaluation of a business case for the Maze stadium, it has sent to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. (AQW 6993/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

In relation to the evaluation of the business case for the multi-sports stadium at Maze/Long Kesh, the Department of Finance and Personnel has received both the stadium outline business case and the stadium business plan.

Sustainable Development Sub-Committee

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it intends to take following the suggestion by the Minister of the Environment that a sustainable development sub-committee be established. (AQW 7065/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We have received correspondence from the Minister of the Environment on this matter and we are currently considering her recommendation for the establishment of a Ministerial sub-group on sustainable development in the wider context of our plans for reviewing the existing sustainable development agenda.

Sectarianism and Segregation

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the recent BBC Panorama programme on the financial and social costs of division, what action it is taking to address sectarianism and segregation. (AQW 7103/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are totally committed to moving society forward and making a real difference to the lives of all our people. Our vision is for a future based on tolerance, equality, mutual respect and respect for the rule of law.

We are now at an advanced stage of development of the detailed proposals for a 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better

future' which we signalled in the Programme for Government.

Our officials briefed the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the current stage of development of the Programme on 9 April.

This Programme will tackle issues affecting both the established communities as well as new arrivals. It will build on some of the excellent work which is already being done, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals.

Both PfG and Budget clearly demonstrate that the principles of good relations and good race relations are mainstreamed within Government's policies and plans for the 2008/11 period.

We believe that by tackling the causes of division in our society, sectarianism and racism, that a reduction of consequential costs will follow.

Additional funding of almost £7.5m over the next 3 years from 2008/2011 has been provided to take forward this work. Total investment will therefore be approximately £29m to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all.

Financial Cost of Divisions in NI

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5852/08 what plans it has to publish, on the Department's website, the report of Deloitte Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide. (AQW 7106/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The report by Deloitte Touche was commissioned, conducted and finalised during direct rule. Copies of the report have already been placed in the Assembly library and made available to the OFMDFM Committee and to Assembly Members.

If any individual contacts the department for a copy of the report an electronic version will be provided. Given the wide accessibility of the report there are currently no plans to publish it on the Department's website.

Economic Investment Conference

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the remarks of the New York City Mayor, linking economic development to addressing local divisions. (AQW 7108/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

In our Programme for Government, we recognise that we cannot grow our economy in isolation from determined efforts to transform our society. If we are to attract the investment and skills needed to grow a vibrant and successful economy, it is essential that we build a prosperous, fair and inclusive society.

Real progress has been made in recent years and our society is continuing to be transformed. We will continue our efforts to address local divisions and tackle poverty. We will bring forward a programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration to achieve measurable reductions in sectarianism, racism and hate crime. We will also bring forward a strategy to tackle poverty and barriers to employment. As an Executive, we have agreed to work to create a high quality of life for those who wish to live and work here. We are also committed to supporting business and creating the conditions where enterprise can flourish.

Maze Stadium

Mr McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether and when its accounting officer will sign off the Department's outline business case for the Maze Stadium project. (AQW 7183/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Outline Business Case for the Maze/Long Kesh stadium proposal is a matter for the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure.

Cross-Atlantic Initiative on Autism

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will give recognition and priority to a cross-Atlantic initiative on Autism by inviting and welcoming an early Congressional delegation on Autism to the Assembly; and to initiate dialogue on an exchange of best practice and research within a jointly funded programme which includes public representatives, key non-profit organisations, as well as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the Department of Education. (AQW 7212/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are supportive of any initiative on Autism but as this is the remit of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, it would be for the Minister of that Department to initiate and take forward any actions.

Basic Training in Sustainable Procurement

Mr McFarland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm if the target for providing all procurement staff with basic training in sustainable procurement by 2009 will be met.

(AQO 3635/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Although our Department is currently responsible for delivering a sustainability training programme across the NICS, specific responsibility for delivery of training in sustainable procurement currently rests with the Department of Finance and Personnel. We can, however, confirm that Central Procurement Directorate of that Department intends to meet the target to deliver basic training in sustainable procurement for all procurement staff by March 2009.

In more general terms, the Sustainable Development Unit in our Department has been working with the Centre for Applied Learning to incorporate aspects of procurement into its training courses on both Sustainability Awareness and Sustainability for Decision Makers.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr W Clarke asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to progress the three interlinked pillars of sustainable development within any new sustainable development strategy.

(AQO 3683/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We clearly recognise that the principle of sustainability can only be achieved by effectively balancing the underpinning themes of the economy, society and the environment in our decision-making processes. We have shown by our actions in developing our Programme for Government, that we are committed to delivering our ambitions in a sustainable way. That is why we have identified sustainable development – along with a shared and better future for all – as being a cross-cutting key theme to support our priorities. We have stated clearly and unequivocally within the Programme for Government that the principles of sustainability will underpin our approach to our economic, social and environmental programmes.

We also recognise the importance of creating conditions which will ensure that sustainability objectives are embedded within the Programme for Government. The current Sustainable Development Strategy, which was published under the previous direct rule administration, does not appropriately reflect the wider policies and programmes of this administration and does not adequately reflect the three interlinked pillars of Sustainable Development,

namely social, economic and environmental. We want to consider our options and examine ways in which a revised Sustainable Development Strategy reflects these priorities.

Review of the Civic Forum

Mr P J Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what process is being used to appoint senior civil servants to review the Civic Forum.

(AQO 3672/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The review of the Civic Forum seeks to canvass as wide a spectrum of opinion as possible and welcomes contributions from interested members of the public and organisations. Members of this House, political parties and stakeholders are being consulted. The former Chairperson, members and nominating bodies of the original Civic Forum will also be asked for their views. Regular updates will be provided to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The review is being carried out by a team of officials. A member of the Senior Civil Service was identified as Team Leader for the review through the normal internal Senior Civil Service management process.

Corporation Tax

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what recent discussions it has had with the UK Government on the issue of Corporation Tax under its economic policy remit.

(AQO 3593/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We met with Sir David Varney on 26th February 2008 to express our views on the importance of corporation tax as an economic development tool. We subsequently wrote to Sir David reiterating our views.

The publication of the second Varney Review on 30th April 2008 confirmed that Sir David and HM Treasury did not see merit in granting a corporation tax dispensation. We are disappointed at this conclusion given that we are a society emerging from decades of conflict and underinvestment. While we may continue to pursue this matter we recognise that our future prosperity does not entirely depend on a reduced rate of corporation tax. Through our Programme for Government we have set out a range of interventions to make our economy more competitive, deliver increased prosperity and tackle disadvantage and poverty.

Fuel Costs

Mrs McGill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to minimise the impact of increasing fuel costs on families with low incomes. (AQO 3688/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In line with the statutory obligation under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 we will shortly bring to the Executive proposals for the adoption of an overall strategy to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need including fuel poverty.

Tackling poverty and its causes, including poverty brought about through price increases in basic necessities such as fuel, requires concerted, co-ordinated action across a range of Departmental programmes which collectively can address the many cross cutting issues.

The Executive does have policies in place to deal with energy efficiency and to tackle fuel poverty over the longer term and the interdepartmental Taskforce on Fuel Poverty, chaired by the Minister for Social Development and with all the relevant departments and agencies involved, is currently looking at the most effective short term proposals for a package of measures to help those in greatest need during the winter.

Carbon Footprints

Mr McKay asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has measured its own carbon footprint. (AQO 3687/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our Department has not, to date, measured its carbon footprint. The 2008 draft OFMDFM Action Plan for Sustainable Development contains a commitment to “calculate OFMDFM’s carbon footprint and then more accurately assess the need for additional action.” This draft Plan is presently under consideration by OFMDFM officials.

Poverty Action Zones

Mr Cobain asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration it has given to the creation of poverty action zones, with specific anti-poverty targets for specified areas. (AQO 3591/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Tackling poverty and its causes, including area based poverty requires concerted, co-ordinated action across a range of Departmental programmes which collectively can address the many cross cutting issues

such as employment, education, health and social development.

In line with the requirements under section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1988 we will shortly be presenting proposals to the Executive Committee for the adoption of an overarching strategy to tackle Poverty and Social exclusion. It is expected that under that strategy Departments will, in line with previous practice, continue to seek to identify those areas, groups and individuals most at risk of poverty and to skew efforts and resources towards those in greatest objective need.

Within the Programme for Government ‘Neighbourhood Renewal’ is the Executive’s main vehicle for tackling area based deprivation and disadvantage. The Neighbourhood Renewal strategy is targeted on 36 urban neighbourhoods where the levels of multiple disadvantage are greatest and the strategy aims to deliver real and measurable improvements in the quality of life and life chances of people living there.

Violence Against Women

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) its objectives in relation to violence against women; and (ii) how it is measuring its progress against these objectives. (AQO 3671/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Violence against women not only harms women but can also have a devastating impact on children and the wider family unit. There is also a need to ensure that perpetrators are properly supported to prevent any recurrence. In all its forms, violence against women is completely unacceptable and we are committed to achieving its eradication.

One of the nine objectives of OFMDFM’s Gender Equality Strategy (2006-2016) is to eliminate gender based violence in society. The Strategy is being implemented through mainstreaming and through the actions and programmes of all government departments. In the matter of violence against women, DHSSPS, DSD, NIO and our Department all play key roles in prevention, protection, justice and support.

Our Department monitors progress against the objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy and reports annually to Ministers on cross-departmental action plans to implement the Strategy, so that the Executive as a whole may consider progress and agree on priority actions for the year ahead. Departmental action plans allied to the gender equality strategy should include short to medium and long term targets, which will allow the Executive to measure progress.

The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety has established an Inter Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence so that Ministers can ensure there is a focus for the issue of violence against women, with the involvement of key service providers, and voluntary and statutory partners. The Group will work together on all the issues associated with domestic violence, sexual violence and abuse. The Junior Ministers represent our Department on that group.

Review of the Civic Forum

Mr Campbell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what annual resources would be required for any re-constituted Civic Forum. (AQO 3578/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Following the restoration of devolution in May 2007, we decided to commission a fundamental review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the current structure, operation and membership of the Civic 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.

Any resource requirements for future years will be dependent on decisions taken following the review of the Civic Forum. Cost effectiveness will be a factor for consideration in the review.

Childcare Provision

Mr McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has held with the Minister of Education to improve childcare provision. (AQO 3653/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Employment is an important route out of poverty and, for many families with children, affordable, accessible childcare is a key support in facilitating the move into employment.

This is particularly evident in the case of lone parents and adequate provision has been highlighted as a challenge through the recent work of the BIC Social Inclusion Strand and the emerging findings of the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) work focusing on lone parents.

Individual Ministers take the lead on issues which are the responsibility of their departments. Co-ordination on cross-cutting issues is taken forward by the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People which is chaired by the Junior Ministers. The Minister for Education is a member of this Sub-Committee which has agreed in

principle 6 key priorities, one of which focuses on a comprehensive early years strategy and affordable access to high quality early years provision. A subgroup of officials will be set up to develop actions under this priority and will report back to the Sub-Committee.

At the first meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee in March, the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development presented a report in relation to rural childcare. All relevant Ministers, including the Minister for Education, have looked at the recommendations of this report and are examining how to take them forward.

Economic Investment Conference

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it intends to take to address what the First Minister described as 'an imperfect system of government' during the Economic Investment Conference.

(AQO 3590/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We constantly seek to review and refine the operation of government and ensuring the highest standards of good governance.

To this end we have initiatives monitoring the effectiveness of government Departments and progress on the impending mechanisms to monitor progress/delivery of the Programme for Government. Further to this the Assembly and Executive Review Committee has been established to exercise the functions set out in Section 29A and 29B of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and Standing Order 54 which provide for the Committee to, inter alia, consider matters relating to the functioning of the Assembly or the Executive Committee as may be referred to it by the Assembly.

We continue to strive for the highest standards in governance by promoting participation in decision making, the high standards in openness and transparency of government, independent oversight of public appointments, as well as legislative and policy safeguard on the process of decision making.

We will of course continue to review and refine this work.

Improving Participatory Democracy

Mr McElduff asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on establishing new mechanisms for hearing the views of civil society and for increasing participatory democracy. (AQO 3679/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

There are many mechanisms by which Northern Ireland Departments currently engage with civil society including joint participation on statutory public bodies and non-statutory fora, formal and informal consultation processes, and social research.

The Civic Forum, which held its inaugural meeting in October 2000, was established as a mechanism to consult civic society on social, economic and cultural issues. A review is currently under way to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the current structure, operation and membership of the Civic 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. The review is expected to report to us later this year.

Economic Investment Conference

Mr McCarthy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the outcomes of the recent Economic Investment Conference. (AQO 3677/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are pleased to report on the enormous success of the USNI Investment Conference which took place earlier this month. We were delighted to welcome the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Special Envoy Ambassador Dobriansky and Ambassadors Tuttle and Foley to the Conference. Over 150 business leaders including many potential investors came to Northern Ireland to hear about what Northern Ireland has to offer the international business community. Many of the delegates had come to Northern Ireland for the first time.

New inward investments by NYSE Euronext and Cybersource were announced at the conference. These investments have the potential to create over 120 new quality jobs. These, along with major investments announced by Bombardier and Independent News and Media added to the success of the event.

Media coverage and editorials reflected extremely positively on the impact of the event and initial feedback from delegates has been very positive. We will be working hard with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment over the next six to twelve months to put in place a comprehensive follow-up campaign to capitalise on the success of the Conference.

Anti-Sectarianism

Mr O'Dowd asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to

promote anti-sectarianism over the summer period. (AQO 3691/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: As we have stated on many occasions the Programme for Government confirms our commitment to challenge racism, sectarianism and intolerance and we remain fully committed to addressing those divisions which mar our reputation, blight our economic prospects and have a corrosive effect on our society.

On 12 May we confirmed our intention to continue the invaluable work that is ongoing in North Belfast by providing funding of £100,000 this financial year to provide a diversionary programme to be targeted at young people at risk of becoming involved in interface violence over the summer months when community tensions can rise. We continue to work closely with all our partners in this area and in particular the North Belfast Community Action Unit.

Moreover, our Department funds all 26 District Councils to operate community relations based programmes such as small grants schemes for community groups engaged in cross-community activities. Other initiatives currently operating include bonfires initiatives which include challenging sectarian behaviours, youth-based activities targeting issues around sectarianism and racism and integration of minority ethnic people into host communities.

Funding of £400,000 per annum is provided by the Department to the Department of Education for the provision of a range of Summer Intervention Programmes, which are delivered by the Education and Library Boards. These Programmes are targeted at supporting work at interface areas and challenging those behaviours associated with interface violence. We have also contributed £250,000 to the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure towards the Reimaging Communities Programme which is designed to help communities tackle the visible signs of racism and sectarianism and is delivered through the Arts Council for Northern Ireland.

Our Department's sponsorship of the Community Relations Council enables it to fund a broad range of regional and local activities and initiatives including the core-funding of interface workers; conflict resolution workers and programmes; small grants for cross-community events and research on good relations issues.

The Department is also part of an inter-agency partnership that oversees the implementation of the Flags Protocol whereby local agreements are encouraged to enable the display of intimidatory and or sectarian flags to be taken down within an agreed timeframe or removed completely if the prevailing local circumstances require it.

Economic Investment Conference

Mr McCartney asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the impact of the recent Economic Investment Conference. (AQO 3689/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The recent Economic Investment Conference was an enormous success. The Conference was attended by the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Special Envoy Ambassador Dobriansky and Ambassadors Tuttle and Foley and over 150 business leaders.

At the Conference, NYSE Euronext and Cybersource announced new inward investments which have the potential to create over 120 new quality jobs. These, along with major investments announced by Bombardier and Independent News and Media added to the success.

We are extremely encouraged by the positive reflections in the media on the immediate impact of the conference. Initial feedback from delegates is also very encouraging. We will be working hard with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment over the coming months to capitalise on the success of the event.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Removal of Light Dues from the County Down Fishing Fleet

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 6345/08, what action she has taken to lobby the Department of Transport in England for the removal of light dues from the Co. Down fishing fleet. (AQW 7007/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): I am aware that the Department for Transport reviewed its policy on light dues in 2004 and subsequently reaffirmed that an exemption from light dues for fishermen should not be introduced. I am also aware that the DfT had responded accordingly to representations from national fishermen's organisations on this issue. However I have written to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State responsible for shipping to ask that the Department of Transport re-consider this matter and I will inform you of his response in due course.

Slaughter Premium Scheme

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm, where payment is denied on animals claimed for under the terms of the Slaughter Premium Scheme because of ineligibility due to No Movement Notification status set against them, and are further penalised in the Beef Special Premium Scheme, that they then regain eligibility for payment under the Slaughter Premium Scheme. (AQW 7025/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Beef Special Premium Scheme (BSPS) and the Slaughter Premium Scheme (SLPS) ceased on 31 December 2004. Animals with a NMN status (No Movement Notification) were ineligible for premia under either Scheme. If an NMN status was applied to a BSPS animal it was ineligible for premia under that scheme and a penalty would have been applied. Provided the animal's movement was subsequently properly notified to the veterinary service before an application was made for SLPS, it would be eligible for SLPS premium. If the animal movement was not properly notified before the SLPS application was submitted, it would be ineligible for SLPS and a penalty would apply.

Cattle Tuberculosis Prevention Policy

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's Cattle Tuberculosis prevention policy in recent years. (AQW 7039/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department's policy in relation to bovine Tuberculosis (TB) in cattle in recent years has focused on reducing the transmission of TB between cattle. The TB programme in the North is based on the detection of diseased or high risk animals, the compulsory removal of these animals from their herd of origin to slaughter, and the restriction of movements of cattle from infected herds until they are tested clear. Following a confirmed TB breakdown, adjoining farmers are alerted and their herds may be allocated a contiguous risk herd test.

We have made considerable progress with TB in recent years. Since peak levels for the disease in 2002, the herd incidence has been reduced by nearly 50%. Our cattle-based TB control programme has been successful in reducing TB in the North. We believe that the enhanced TB measures that were introduced in 2004 in the North, particularly the tighter restrictions on overdue TB tests and changes to the valuation system, have contributed to the reduction in disease here.

My Department has also issued advice on how farmers can help to protect their herd from TB and this includes the practical steps they can take to reduce the contact between cattle and badgers. The advice leaflet is given to all farmers who have a TB breakdown in their herd and it is also available on the DARD website and through the local Divisional Veterinary Offices. It is important that farmers take all reasonable precautions to protect their herds from possible infection by other cattle or badgers, by adopting good bio-security such as secure boundary fencing and taking practical steps to reduce badger and cattle contact.

Whilst it is established that there is a link between TB in badgers and TB in cattle, the direction of transmission is not clear. The evidence from Britain and the South in recent years around the impact of the removal of badgers on TB in cattle is complex. It is not certain what role the badger might have in the spread of TB to cattle in the North, or if there are other factors involved in maintaining TB infection in cattle here. We have various strands of work on-going to look at this whole area. The Badger Stakeholder Group, which is chaired by my Department and includes both farmer and environmental interests, has played an important role in this work in recent years and has recently reported its conclusions and recommendations. My officials have also been working with officials from the DOE's Environment and Heritage Service in respect of the role of badgers in cattle TB.

Growth of Farmers' Markets

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to encourage the establishment and growth of farmers' markets. (AQW 7040/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As you know my Department has no regulatory role in relation to Farmers' Markets but we have previously provided financial support to a number of markets across the North under the Leader + and Peace II funding programmes.

Opportunities for future support for farmers' markets may exist under the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013, although this is dependent upon the priorities set within the local development strategies carrying forward from the Local Action Groups and Council clusters.

Diseases in NI Herds

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the advice she has

received in relation to the deliberate introduction of diseases into the Northern Ireland herd.

(AQW 7042/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have been advised that there have been cases where it has been claimed or alleged that animals have been deliberately infected with Brucellosis. The deliberate introduction of disease is a serious matter from both a disease and a fraud perspective and my Department investigates all such claims and allegations.

Such action has the potential to cause the spread of disease to neighbouring farms and places innocent farmers in the position of having their herds restricted due to the unscrupulous actions of others. It also has the potential for significant additional costs for my Department in terms of the cost of monitoring additional herds and compensation payments.

Any deliberate infection of an animal with Brucellosis would be a very real threat to our efforts to eradicate Brucellosis completely from the North.

DARD must be in a position to deal with anyone who is found to have deliberately introduced disease into a herd and we need the powers to take punitive action which will deter potential offenders and protect the majority of law-abiding farmers.

The new Diseases of Animals Bill proposes a new offence of deliberate infection of an animal.

Rural Tourism

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what co-operation she has received from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop rural tourism as a key element in rural regeneration. (AQW 7043/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department have liaised with the NI Tourist Board (NITB) throughout the development of Axis 3 of the new Rural Development Programme, specifically measure 3.3 'Encouragement of tourism activities'. This measure is targeted at developing rural tourism as a key element in rural regeneration. Just over £12 million is available under this measure to private individuals, private companies, social economy enterprises/community groups and non departmental public bodies. My department continues to work at a strategic level with NITB as the programme is rolled out. Most recently presenting details of the programme at a NITB hosted seminar for Craft NI.

Current Honey Bee Population

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to make a statement on the size of the current honey bee population. (AQW 7056/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In mid-summer, the population of healthy, managed bee hive can number upwards of 40,000 bees. It is estimated that there are currently 1,000 beekeepers, maintaining about 4,000 hives here. Bee numbers normally fall about 10 – 25% during the winter and rise again during the spring and summer.

Feral bee colonies are not monitored by my Department.

Tuberculosis in Badgers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many tuberculosis outbreaks resulted in one or more badgers being culled in each of the last three years. (AQW 7075/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The existing control programme in the North in relation to bovine Tuberculosis is based on measures to limit cattle-to-cattle transmission of the disease. The culling of badgers does not play a role in the existing TB control programme. No badgers have been culled over the last three years due to tuberculosis outbreaks here.

New Divisional Veterinary Office in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff will be employed at the new Divisional Veterinary Office at Kiltonga Industrial Estate in Newtownards. (AQW 7076/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: A total of 42 Divisional Veterinary Office staff, who previously worked at Robert Street, Newtownards, will transfer from their temporary locations in Dundonald House and Portaferry Road, back to Newtownards to the new DVO premises based in Kiltonga Industrial Estate.

New Divisional Veterinary Office in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the end date of the current lease for the new Divisional Veterinary Office at Kiltonga Industrial Estate in Newtownards. (AQW 7077/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The lease term is 5 years from 1 June 2008 with a Tenant's break option after the first 3 years. Therefore the end date will be 31 May 2013, if the Department of Finance and Personnel decides not to take the break option.

New Divisional Veterinary Office in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her plans are for the new Divisional Veterinary Office at Kiltonga Industrial Estate in Newtownards; and will she consider using this site as a 'one-stop-shop' as previously indicated. (AQW 7078/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department of Finance and Personnel have agreed a lease for new premises at Kiltonga Industrial Estate, Newtownards. The lease will come into effect from 1 June 2008 for 5 years with a tenant's break option after 3 years. Works are currently being carried out to ensure the building at Kiltonga meets the required standards. All the Divisional Veterinary Office staff temporarily located at Portaferry Road and Dundonald House will relocate to these new premises in Newtownards in mid August 2008.

You may be aware that my Department proposes to establish a network of DARD Direct offices across the north that will deliver the main DARD services within a reasonable distance of customers' businesses. DARD are working with DFP on these locations. No decisions have been taken yet on the location of these offices, with the exception of Inishkeen House, Enniskillen, as it already has been modified to test the DARD Direct service delivery model.

I have asked my Department to prepare an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) document for the roll-out of DARD Direct and that EQIA document is now at an advanced stage. Public consultation on this EQIA will take place over the next few months. This exercise will provide everyone with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the proposals and to feed their views and concerns into the process. Only after the findings of the public consultation have been fully considered can a decision on the final locations of the DARD Direct offices be made.

Network of DARD Direct Offices

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has considered designating Ards as a one-stop-shop for agriculture for the

Strangford area due to the large number of beef and dairy cattle in that area. (AQW 7079/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: You may be already aware that my Department proposes to establish a network of DARD Direct offices across the North, within a reasonable distance of customers' businesses. No decisions have been taken yet on the location of these offices, with the exception of Inishkeen House, Enniskillen, as it already has been modified to test the DARD Direct service delivery model.

I have asked my Department to prepare an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) document for the roll-out of DARD Direct. This is now at an advanced development stage and will hopefully progress for consideration by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in June. A public consultation on the EQIA will follow. This exercise will provide everyone with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the proposals and to feed their views and concerns into the process. It will be after the findings of the public consultation have been fully considered that a decision on the final locations of the DARD Direct offices will be made.

Organic Food

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what incentives her Department is offering for the production of organic food.

(AQW 7104/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Under the NI 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. The following amounts will be paid 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.

In addition, a number of Schemes are open, or are planned to open, to assist organic and conventional producers under NIRD 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 NI Regional Food Programme towards the set up of an organic guide and web facility for producers and consumers.

Additionally, DARD provides a great deal of support to organic farmers. 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. Through funding for the Organic Action Plan Group, DARD also sponsored organic study visits for local producers to England in August 2006 and March 2008, and to the South in October 2007, and funded items including a consumer information leaflet, educational material for schools, an organic market study and an Organic Supply Chain Conference.

Organic Food

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many hectares of agricultural land was used for organic produce in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 7105/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Organic production in the North has increased steadily over the past three years.

In 2005, there were 9,058 hectares of agricultural land either fully converted to organic production, or in conversion. This figure rose to 9,127 hectares in 2006, and to 11,104 hectares in 2007.

I believe that my introduction of a new Organic Farming Scheme will provide valuable support to the sector, and further encourage a greater uptake of organic farming methods.

Producers and Retailers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to connect producers and retailers. (AQW 7107/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Supply Chain Development Branch within DARD work to strengthening linkages between producers and retailers, both directly and indirectly through food processors, and has instigated a number of initiatives leading to improved communication and co-operation within local supply chains. Many of these initiatives are targeted at supporting farmers' groups, encouraging collaboration and co-operation in the supply base, but they also provide support and advice to individual farmers wishing to improve or develop supply chain linkages.

Current examples include facilitation of discussions on the Marks & Spencer Price Pledge for sheep producers wishing to supply Rissington Lamb, and between cut flower and foliage growers with retail florists and wholesalers through the NI Lily Group and the Cut Flower and Foliage Development Group.

Since 2003, DARD has delivered the Supply Chain Awareness Programme organising farmer visits to retail outlets with discussions between producers and retailers. This has allowed both parties to increase their knowledge of each others businesses and explore ways in which they can expand the local supply base. To date 1090 producers have participated in the programme with 231 of these going on to study examples of supply chain linkages operating outside NI. In addition, DARD brought representatives of the major retailers to a farm-based presentation allowing farmers to promote the benefits of a local supply chain.

Evolving out of this programme my Department has developed and successfully piloted the Supply Chain Development Programme. This programme and the Agriculture and Forestry Marketing and Development Grant Scheme, will provide finance and facilitation support to groups of farmers wishing to build new supply chain relationships or further develop existing arrangements. Both schemes will be launched later in 2008 as part of the NI Rural Development Programme.

New Crops

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to introduce new crops. (AQW 7109/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department, through the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) at the Loughry Campus, currently has 30 hectares

dedicated to developing and demonstrating the potential of non-food crops within the North of Ireland. The farming community are informed of this potential through open days and training programmes. Presentations are also made at farming meetings. During 2007/08 over 1400 farmers were made aware of the opportunities from the non-food crops.

My Department also continues to support the establishment of Short Rotation Coppice Willow as a crop for producing energy and is sponsoring research at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), which aims to assess the potential of Miscanthus (Elephant Grass) as a bioenergy crop.

AFBI continues to be proactive in seeking out new crops for the local industry and in conducting underpinning research, which either enables their use to assist the profitability of the existing farming enterprises or provides new diversification opportunities. A recent example has been the AFBI research that assisted the significant uptake in the use of Forage Maize by the grass-based animal sector. AFBI, also, provide sound specialist advice to the industry on the suitability, or otherwise, of new crops for our changing climatic conditions and the industry's utilisation needs.

Bluetongue

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has sought derogation from the European Union for on-farm burial of farm animals should flocks or herds have to be put down because of Bluetongue disease. (AQW 7122/08)

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 any derogation from the burial ban under the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 will not be required.

Bluetongue

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place for the removal of carcasses should flocks or herds fall victim to Bluetongue disease. (AQW 7123/08)

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. However, once we confirm that disease is circulating between animals and the midge vector population we may no longer cull animals as a method of disease control. In England in 2007, only 5 animals were culled before that position was reached.

In the event of an incursion of Bluetongue here it is not expected, given the experience in northern European countries including England, that there will be any significant levels of mortality in the first year, by which time ample vaccine supplies should be available.

As there will not be any mass culling of animals for Bluetongue disease, nor are high levels of mortality anticipated, special plans are not being developed for removal of carcasses should flocks or herds fall victim to Bluetongue disease.

Bluetongue

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the event of an outbreak of Bluetongue Disease if her Department will meet the full cost of disposing of carcasses. (AQW 7124/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I have explained, 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.

Also, in the event of an incursion of Bluetongue here it is not expected, given experience in northern European countries including England, that there will be any significant levels of mortality in the first year, by which time ample vaccine supplies should be available.

As there will not be any mass culling of animals for Bluetongue disease, nor are high levels of mortality anticipated, it will not be necessary to consider meeting the cost of carcase disposal from the public finances.

Veterinary Service's Portal Inspection Branch

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the arrangements in place at airports and ports to enable persons entering Northern Ireland to report to departmental officials following visits to farms in other countries or arriving directly from farm holdings. (AQW 7125/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Department officials of Veterinary Service's Portal Inspection Branch are present on a permanent and full time basis at the ports of Belfast, Larne and Warrenpoint and at Belfast International, George Best Belfast City and City of Derry airports. They provide an inspection service for all livestock, pet and animal product imports, and their work includes provision of specific advice on relevant precautions to people who have visited farms.

Potato Industry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what special promotions she is undertaking on behalf of the potato industry, given that the United Nations has designated 2008 as the International Year of the Potato. (AQW 7126/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: 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; benchmarking for potato businesses; and the Knowledge and Technology Transfer programme.

Tuberculosis in Badgers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many of the tuberculosis outbreaks in the last three years were due to badgers. (AQW 7139/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Whilst it is established that there is a link between TB in badgers and TB in cattle, the role of the badger and the significance of that role in causing TB in cattle herds in the North is not clear. It is therefore not possible to state with absolute certainty that the badger is the cause of any of the TB breakdowns in the last three years.

Blackwater Regional Partnership

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when and where the Blackwater Regional Partnership will commence and what is the role of her Department. (AQW 7141/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Previously known as the Blackwater Catchment Scheme, the Blackwater Regional Partnership (BRP) was formed in 1994. It is divided between three administrative authorities – Armagh City and District Council, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council and Monaghan County Council. The BRP has its offices in Caledon, Co Tyrone.

In relation to the role of the Department, the BRP has developed a number of projects and one of these is the Transboundary River Basin Action for Community and Environment (TRACE) Project, which aims to improve water quality in the River Blackwater catchment by best management practices. My Department was represented on the TRACE Project management steering group since it began in 2004, providing advice on nutrient loss from farmyard and farm activities. The project ended in February 2008.

Also, officials in the Department's Forest Service have met with stakeholders including the Blackwater Regional Partnership to take forward the development of eco-trails on Forest Service land at Parkanaur Forest in County Tyrone and Gosford Forest Park in County Armagh. This project is in the final stages of development and will become operational in June 2008.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff in her Department have a disability. (AQW 7142/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The total number of staff in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and its agencies with a disability is 282, of which 260 are non-industrial staff and 22 are industrials.

Rural College in Draperstown

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why she intends to cease funding to the Rural College, Draperstown. (AQW 7153/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My department has a current Letter of Offer with the Rural College, Draperstown for the delivery of a part-time MSc in Rural Development until June 2009. The department will not be commissioning the delivery of any new educational or training services until a Departmental Education and Training Policy has been developed. I have asked that the rural development aspect of this should be available in advance of the overall departmental policy. Any such new services will be subject to an open procurement process which the rural college, along with others, will be able to bid for delivery.

Average Age of Agricultural Workers

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for the average age of people who cite agriculture as their employment. (AQW 7157/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Information on the age of farmers and farm workers is collected by DARD every two to three years as part of the European Union Farm Structure Survey. The average (median) age of farmers recorded in the 2007 Survey was 57 years. The average (median) age of all farm owners and workers recorded in the 2005 survey was 50 years.

Lisbon Treaty Referendum

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the consequences for Northern Ireland agriculture should the Republic of Ireland deliver a 'Yes' vote in the Lisbon Treaty referendum. (AQW 7158/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: If there is a "yes" vote in the Lisbon Treaty referendum and it is ratified by all EU Member States, it will come into effect from 1 January 2009. The main consequence for agriculture will arise from granting co-decision making powers to the European Parliament in relation to future reforms (after 1 January 2009) to the Common Agricultural Policy. This could mean that the decision making process will take longer but it is not possible at this stage to say how the European Parliament might influence the direction of future EU agricultural policy decisions.

My party and I also feel that under Article 188 of the Lisbon Treaty the livelihoods of farmers would be

put at risk by giving the EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson even more power and removing the Irish Governments right to veto bad trade deals in the future.

Lisbon Treaty Referendum

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assessment she has made of the consequences for Northern Ireland agriculture should the Republic of Ireland deliver a 'No' vote in the Lisbon Treaty referendum. (AQW 7159/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The main impact on agriculture in the North of Ireland arising from the Lisbon Treaty concerns decision-making within the EU and, in particular, with regard to the Common Agricultural Policy. In the event of the South of Ireland delivering a 'No' vote in the Lisbon Treaty referendum, then the Treaty cannot be ratified and, consequently, will not come into effect. The existing EU Treaties will continue to apply (unless and until a new treaty is agreed and ratified) and, therefore, the status quo will prevail.

Rural Development Programme

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the monetary value and the percentage of the first £50 million to be allocated to each of the seven clusters appointed to administer the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. (AQW 7160/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Officials within the Department recently issued financial allocations for the first £50m of Axis 3 of the NIRD to the seven council clusters. These allocations were incorrect and based on an erroneous application by officials of the methodology for calculating deprivation. This was brought to my attention by a statement issued by Sinn Féin MLAs Martina Anderson, Francie Brophy and Pat Doherty. I have asked the senior DARD official concerned to apologise for this mistake to the lead council in each of the seven cluster and to ensure that the allocations are calculated correctly and brought to my attention for authorisation as soon as possible.

Slaughter Schemes for Closed Herds

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will consider introducing a Slaughter Scheme for bull calves of closed herds to help relieve farmers' financial hardships. (AQW 7192/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

At present, I have no plans to introduce a Slaughter Scheme for bull calves of closed herds in the North.

Animal disease compensation is paid for animals slaughtered as a result of TB and Brucellosis. The compensation arrangements for animals slaughtered as a result of TB and Brucellosis are set out in the Diseases of Animals (NI) Order 1981, the TB Control Order (NI) 1999 (as amended) and the Brucellosis Control Order (NI) 2004. There are no provisions in the legislation for compensation to be paid for loss of earnings incurred as a consequence of movement restrictions being imposed.

Pork Prices

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why there is a lack of parity between the price of pork in Northern Ireland compared to that in Great Britain; and what action will be taken to remedy this situation. (AQW 7211/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The price of pork in Britain compared with the price in the North is dictated by market forces. Under the NI Act 1998 competition issues are a reserved matter and are therefore the responsibility of the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and the Office of Fair Trading.

I can assure you that my Department continues to support the intensive production sector. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise provides a comprehensive range of education and training programmes for producers and processors. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute supports the sector through research and development work, which provides an important science and expertise base to support industry development.

I have no direct influence over retail prices but do believe that I have a role to encourage and facilitate dialogue to increase understanding about issues. I have therefore met with the main supermarkets with a view to encouraging them to work with the industry, recognising the economic pressures on producers. I hope that this will bring some improvement.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Ulster-Scots Agency

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the membership of the board of

the Ulster-Scots Agency; and (ii) the annual salaries of board members. (AQW 5619/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): A list of all the new Boards, including Chairpersons and vice-chairpersons was placed in the Assembly library on 17 December 2007 following a North South Ministerial Council institutional format meeting. The remuneration amounts agreed were as follows - Chairperson €14,000/ £ 9,250 per annum; Vice-chairperson €11,500/ £7,820 per annum and Member €9,000 /£6,120 per annum. The membership of the board of the Ulster-Scots Agency consists of the following members Mark Thompson Chair; Dr Ian Adamson; Dr Aileen Douglas; Angela Graham; William Humphrey; William Leathem; Jacqui Reed and Dr William Roulston.

The Arts Council and Ulster-Scots Agency Funding

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of funding that has been awarded to bands through (i) the Ulster-Scots Agency; and (ii) the Arts Council, in each of the last three years, (a) in total; (b) broken down by council area; and (c) broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6638/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The funding awarded to bands for the years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 by the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council is shown in the following tables:

TOTAL AMOUNTS PAID

| | Ulster-Scots Agency | Arts Council |
|---------|---------------------|--------------|
| 2005/06 | £6,223 | £64,540 |
| 2006/07 | £9,954 (i) | £174,835 |
| 2007/08 | £68,838 (ii) | £203,490 |

(i) Excludes £1,446 paid to bands in the Republic of Ireland

(ii) Excludes £1,863 paid to bands in the Republic of Ireland.

ARTS COUNCIL PAYMENTS BY COUNCIL AREAS

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Antrim | £5,000 | - | £5,000 |
| Ards | - | £3,630 | - |
| Armagh | £7,122 | £3,263 | £7,795 |
| Ballymena | - | £15,000 | £18,690 |
| Ballymoney | - | £9,890 | £4,525 |

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Banbridge | - | £4,594 | £5,000 |
| Belfast | - | £10,585 | £4,605 |
| Carrickfergus | - | - | - |
| Castlereagh | - | - | £3,438 |
| Coleraine | - | £6,000 | £4,999 |
| Cookstown | £9,540 | £7,465 | £15,450 |
| Craigavon | £3,950 | £2,957 | £8,320 |
| Derry | £1,102 | £8,320 | £5,000 |
| Down | - | £6,298 | - |
| Dungannon | £5,611 | £9,984 | £24,082 |
| Fermanagh | £8,390 | £35,633 | £21,041 |
| Larne | - | £5,000 | £4,000 |
| Limavady | £5,000 | £6,750 | - |
| Lisburn | £11,657 | £3,500 | £24,621 |
| Magherafelt | - | £8,000 | £20,010 |
| Moyle | - | - | £4,013 |
| Newry & Mourne | £7,168 | £8,773 | £3,000 |
| Newtownabbey | - | - | £5,000 |
| North Down | - | - | - |
| Omagh | - | £14,193 | £9,901 |
| Strabane | - | £5,000 | £5,000 |
| Total | £64,540 | £174,835 | £203,490 |

ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY PAYMENTS BY COUNCIL AREAS

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Antrim | - | - | - |
| Antrim | - | - | - |
| Ards | - | - | - |
| Armagh | - | - | £1,762 |
| Ballymena | - | - | £3,600 |
| Ballymoney | - | - | £10,360 |
| Banbridge | £1,700 | £450 | £4,412 |
| Belfast | - | - | - |
| Carrickfergus | - | - | - |
| Castlereagh | - | - | - |
| Coleraine | - | - | - |
| Cookstown | - | - | £2,739 |
| Craigavon | - | - | - |
| Derry | - | - | £700 |

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Down | £975 | - | - |
| Dungannon | £1,298 | £3,325 | £14,272 |
| Fermanagh | £1,200 | £390 | £7,050 |
| Larne | - | - | - |
| Limavady | - | - | - |
| Lisburn | - | £2,750 | £2,377 |
| Magherafelt | - | - | £7,447 |
| Moyle | - | - | - |
| Newry & Mourne | - | £294 | £7,369 |
| Newtownabbey | - | - | - |
| North Down | - | - | - |
| Omagh | £1,050 | £1,595 | £2,175 |
| Strabane | - | £1,150 | £4,575 |
| Total | £6,223 | £9,954 | £68,838 |

ARTS COUNCIL PAYMENTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Antrim, East | - | £5,000 | £4,000 |
| Antrim, North | - | £24,890 | £27,228 |
| Antrim, South | £5,000 | - | £5,000 |
| Belfast, East | - | - | £3,438 |
| Belfast, North | - | £7,000 | £9,605 |
| Belfast, South | - | £3,585 | - |
| Belfast, West | - | - | - |
| Down, North | - | - | - |
| Down, South | - | £10,071 | £8,000 |
| East Londonderry | £5,000 | £12,750 | £4,999 |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | £14,001 | £45,617 | £31,135 |
| Foyle | £1,102 | £8,320 | £5,000 |
| Lagan Valley | £11,635 | £3,500 | £24,621 |
| Mid-Ulster | £9,540 | £15,465 | £49,448 |
| Newry & Armagh | £14,290 | £8,263 | £7,795 |
| Strangford | - | £3,630 | - |
| Upper Bann | £3,950 | £7,551 | £8,320 |
| West Tyrone | - | £19,193 | £14,901 |
| Total | £64,540 | £174,835 | £203,490 |

ULSTER-SCOTS AGENCY PAYMENTS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Antrim, East | - | - | - |
| Antrim, North | - | - | £13,960 |
| Antrim, South | - | - | - |
| Belfast, East | - | - | - |
| Belfast, North | - | - | - |
| Belfast, South | - | - | - |
| Belfast, West | - | - | - |
| Down, North | - | - | - |
| Down, South | £975 | - | £10,181 |
| East Londonderry | - | - | - |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | £2,498 | £3,715 | £22,583 |
| Foyle | - | - | £700 |
| Lagan Valley | £1,700 | £2,950 | £3,977 |
| Mid-Ulster | - | £250 | £7,899 |
| Newry & Armagh | - | £294 | £1,762 |
| Strangford | - | - | - |
| West Tyrone | £1,050 | £2,745 | £7,776 |
| Upper Bann | - | - | - |
| Totals | £6,223 | £9,954 | £68,838 |

Awards for All Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many groups have received 'Awards for All' funding in the North Down constituency over the last 12 months; and what amount has been paid to each. (AQW 6876/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: During the period May 2007 to May 2008, 27 projects in North Down Constituency received funding from Awards for All totalling £177,559.

These are as follows:

| Organisation | Project name | Amount awarded |
|----------------------------|--|----------------|
| North Down Over 50's Forum | Residential, health event, equipment and social events | £10,000 |

| Organisation | Project name | Amount awarded |
|--|--|----------------|
| Guide Association of Ulster - Girlguiding Ulster Peer Educators | 4ward, 4self and 4others | £3,264 |
| North Down Borough Council | Art on the Seafront | £10,000 |
| Golden Camel Association | Golden Camel Awards | £4,154 |
| Donaghadee Male Voice Choir | Trailer, trolleys, VAT | £8,095 |
| Kilcooley Community Forum | 10yr Anniversary Celebration | £6,460 |
| Bangor Drama Festival | Drama Festival | £800 |
| Hollywood Music Festival | Festival costs | £2,500 |
| North Down Volleyball Club | Belfast Urban Tour | £5,650 |
| Irish Deaf Bowling | Bowling Across Borders | £6,885 |
| Redburn Youth Group | Travel, training, photography | £7,627 |
| Bloomfield Community Association | Strategy Programme | £5,375 |
| Sullivan Upper School Fencing Club | Protective fencing clothing, scoring equipment | £9,739 |
| Bryansburn Rangers Football Club | Upgrade of ground premises | £8,149 |
| North Down & Ards Women's Aid | Strategic Planning Day | £1,090 |
| Seacourt Print Workshop Ltd | Print Knowledge Exchange | £9,953 |
| Drumaroad Community Regeneration | Community Consultation & Development Plan | £9,360 |
| Oi Yin Women's Group | Tools for Democracy and Empowerment | £7,926 |
| Hollywood Boys Football Club | Development programme for girls and boys | £3,850 |
| Ballygrainey Rural Development Association | Community Involvement at Ballygrainey | £9,994 |
| Bangor Operatic Society | A week long performance of Carousel | £5,000 |
| Tiny Toons Playgroup | Our Summer Activity | £10,000 |

| Organisation | Project name | Amount awarded |
|-------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Groomsport Football Club | Improvements at Meadow Playing Field/ Coaching Project | £1,000 |
| Crawfordsburn Playgroup | Educational toys and computer equipment. | £5,284 |
| The Percy French Society | The Jarvey Project | £9,835 |
| St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor | Outdoor Adventure Playground | £9,569 |
| Castle Juniors Football Club | IFA Coaching courses | £6,000 |

Library Services

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to improve library services. (AQW 6963/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am committed to the modernisation and improvement of public library services. My vision for the public library service is:

‘To provide a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential’.

The main elements of my plan to improve the Library service are:

- Delivering a major programme of capital investment;
- Driving service improvement in line with the Public Library Standards; and
- Restructuring the library service into a single service for all Northern Ireland, managed and delivered by a new body, the Library Authority.

I have secured substantial capital resources to improve and modernise the library estate. £31 million pounds is available over the next 3 years with a further £107 million available in the following 7 years.

I will also work to improve services provided by our public libraries, which includes improving access and increasing the books and materials available.

Finally, I have worked to establish the Northern Ireland Library Authority which will deal solely with the library service and provide a dedicated focus on libraries. This will improve the quality of service through transmission of best practice to all, lead to coherent planning across the region, and produce efficiencies in administration.

Sports Stadium Development

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is available for sports stadium development. (AQW 7063/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Primary responsibility for making funding available for the development of sports stadia rests with the owners of such venues. There is also a role for the relevant governing body. The recently announced capital budget for sport is £111.6m over the next 3 years. Sport Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, is currently considering how these funds can be allocated across sport.

Funding for Ulster-Scots Language Society

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, further to AQW 5905/08 (i) what funding was provided to the Ulster-Scots Language Society by his Department or by the Ulster-Scots Agency, in each financial year from 2002-2003; and (ii) when was he last provided with an annual report and audited accounts by the Ulster-Scots Language Society. (AQW 7074/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department does not provide direct funding to the Ulster-Scots Language Society.

The Ulster-Scots Agency has provided the following funding to the Ulster-Scots Language Society since 2003-:

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 2003 | £7,435.83 |
| 2004 | £38,349.53 |
| 2005 | £38,137.71 |
| 2006 | £26,630.80 |
| 2007 | £24,962.33 |
| 2008 (to date) | £632.00 |

The Ulster-Scots Agency received a copy of the 2007 Ulster-Scots Language Society Audited Accounts in April 2008; they do not receive an Annual report from the Language Society.

Awards For All Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding was given by 'Awards for All', broken down by parliamentary constituency, for each of the last five years. (AQW 7117/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The table below details the total amount of funding given by Awards for All broken down by parliamentary constituency for each of the last 5 years.

FUNDING BY CONSTITUENCY

| Constituency | 2003/04 £ | 2004/05 £ | 2005/06 £ | 2006/07 £ | 2007/08 £ |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Belfast East | 96,885 | 123,160 | 149,118 | 160,683 | 86,709 |
| Belfast North | 123,492 | 206,594 | 212,707 | 324,671 | 302,716 |
| Belfast South | 163,591 | 187,643 | 190,490 | 289,359 | 275,507 |
| Belfast West | 119,699 | 101,533 | 181,403 | 182,876 | 143,883 |
| East Antrim | 120,307 | 108,402 | 147,396 | 132,181 | 116,736 |
| East Londonderry | 121,069 | 151,437 | 192,016 | 178,298 | 178,471 |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | 215,376 | 134,629 | 274,797 | 276,479 | 282,769 |
| Foyle | 142,921 | 184,101 | 232,296 | 352,812 | 355,103 |
| Lagan Valley | 127,587 | 133,126 | 127,640 | 151,959 | 166,023 |
| Mid-Ulster | 187,008 | 218,387 | 260,169 | 375,651 | 336,250 |
| Newry & Armagh | 175,521 | 171,547 | 268,483 | 352,969 | 280,020 |
| North Antrim | 178,325 | 143,316 | 175,494 | 199,588 | 213,431 |
| North Down | 94,615 | 87,314 | 98,172 | 107,044 | 167,980 |
| South Antrim | 108,560 | 140,122 | 189,659 | 251,515 | 140,218 |
| South Down | 208,795 | 141,731 | 164,228 | 375,079 | 250,445 |
| Strangford | 74,957 | 119,653 | 77,719 | 106,806 | 88,753 |
| Upper Bann | 199,945 | 150,463 | 169,850 | 274,722 | 196,617 |
| West Tyrone | 158,348 | 144,024 | 153,982 | 264,590 | 213,899 |

Music Royalties

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with the Music Royalties and Performing Rights Society to address anomalies with royalties for local song writers.

(AQW 7140/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Music Rights Society on two occasions and I have requested further information on the feasibility of the proposal before I can progress discussions with them and other stakeholders.

Music Royalties

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if and when he will bring forward legislation to support a Music Royalties Society. (AQW 7176/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have requested further information on the feasibility of the proposal and will determine the need for further action when this has been considered.

Bookstart Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the contribution, per parliamentary constituency, to the Bookstart Scheme and the libraries taking part in this scheme. (AQW 7177/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department allocated a total of £312k towards the Bookstart scheme in 2007/2008. This was used to purchase 20,000 Bookstart Baby packs and 23,310 Treasure Chests of which each of the five Education and Library Board received a notional allocation of 20%. Each Board administers the scheme throughout their respective area solely on the basis of need. Bookstart packs are allocated to geographical areas on the basis of the number of children of the appropriate age within that area. It is not possible to provide details of the contribution per parliamentary constituency.

Public Record Office

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when construction on the new Public Record Office of Northern Ireland at the Titanic Quarter will commence; and when it will be completed. (AQW 7179/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The construction of the new Public Record Office of Northern Ireland at the Titanic Quarter, Belfast is programmed to commence in August 2008. The building is scheduled for completion in April 2010 and will be open to the public in August 2010.

Northern Ireland Film Industry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what was achieved on his trip to the USA; and what feedback he has received on promotion of the Northern Ireland film industry. (AQW 7214/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: During my visit to the USA I had a series of meetings with senior executives from a number of major production companies and I briefed them of the many factors that make Northern Ireland an attractive place to make films.

Since the visit I have had a telephone conference with UK Film Council representatives in the US, the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington and Northern Ireland Screen to develop the contacts made. Initial feedback is positive and Northern Ireland Screen will be following up on these leads.

Northern Ireland Languages Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what input his Department (i) has had; and (ii) will have, into the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy currently being conducted by the Department of Education. (AQW 7241/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Officials from my Department have attended three stakeholder events hosted by the Queen's University and University of Ulster Joint Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, who have been commissioned by DE to make recommendations on a languages strategy for Northern Ireland, in relation to promoting language learning here.

At the most recent stakeholder meeting in February 2008, my officials highlighted the need to ensure that the strategy for language education and the cross-departmental indigenous minority languages strategy in relation to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages work together to complement each others goals. To this end, my Department has contacted the Joint Subject Centre and requested a meeting, to include the appropriate DE officials, to discuss the remit of the languages strategy and the likely recommendations.

My Department has also brought the matter to the attention of the Cross-Departmental Group responsible for implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Northern Ireland.

EDUCATION

Area-Based Planning

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail the terms of reference of the representative central group for area based planning. (AQW 4870/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Tá na dréacht-théarmaí tagartha do na grúpaí lárnaí agus limistéir á bplé ag na comhlachtaí rannpháirteacha sna grúpaí pleanála limistéir.

The draft terms of reference for both the central and area groups are under consideration by participating bodies in the area planning groups.

I will make the terms of reference available when they have been finalised.

Youth Services in the Western Education and Library Board Area

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail how the additional budgetary allocation for youth services will impact on delivering youth services in the Western Education and Library Board area in the 2008/2009 financial year. (AQW 6168/08)

The Minister of Education: Déanann an Roinn maoiniú a leithdháileadh ar gach ceann de na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne i gcomhair seirbhísí óige. Tá gach Bord freagrach as dáileadh an mhaoinithe de réir riachtanas na ndaoine óga ina gceantar áitiúil.

The Department allocates funding to each of the five Education and Library Boards for youth services. Each Board is responsible for the distribution of the funding according to the needs of the young people in voluntary and statutory youth clubs in their local area.

In 2007/2008 the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) was allocated a core budget of £3.406 million. In 2008/2009 the WELB has been allocated a core budget of £3.498 million, an increase of £92,000. The Chief Executive of the WELB has provided a breakdown for the provision of youth services, both core and additional earmarked amounts, summarised as follows:

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

| | 2007 – 2008 (000's) | 2008 – 2009 (000's) | Increase (000's) | Funding used for |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Core Recurrent | 3,406 | 3,498 | 92 | Increases in staff costs, across the voluntary and controlled sectors, Inflationary increase will be applied to all budget units block grants, additional 2.5% will be applied to all major units for fuel costs, expected increases in rent and rates will be met in full, proposed that part-time leadership rates will rise by inflation. |

| | 2007 – 2008 (000's) | 2008 – 2009 (000's) | Increase (000's) | Funding used for |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Additional for Outreach Initiative | 200 | 223 | 23 | A proposal to establish five outreach posts, was passed at the recent Joint Youth Committee. The areas to be covered by the posts are: Fermanagh South; Fermanagh North; Limavady/Rural Foyle; Rural Strabane; Young Traveller's Group – based in Derry. |
| Additional for Child Protection | 25 | 45 | 20 | WELB Youth Service is currently in the process of recruiting a full-time Child Protection Officer, based in WELB Headquarters, covering the Board area. |
| Additional for Youth Intervention | 60 | 50 | | An initial, earmarked, allocation of £50,000 has been received from DE to "engage young people in meaningful activities during the summer months and other holiday periods to reduce tensions in interface areas". Officers on a five Board basis are developing a scheme to attract applications for this funding. |
| Additional for Youth Information Website | 60 | 61 | 1 | Maintain existing services to young people |

Grammar Schools

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to advise what representation voluntary grammar schools have on the central area based group. (AQW 6850/08)

The Minister of Education: Déanfaidh ainmnithe ó Chumann na gComhlachtaí Rialaithe agus Iontaobhaithe ón earnáil bhainistíochta Chaitliceach ionadaíocht thar cheann na scoileanna gramadaí deonacha ar an ngrúpa lárnach bunaithe ar limistéir.

The voluntary grammar schools will be represented on the central area based group by nominees from The Governing Bodies Association and the Trustees of the Catholic managed sector.

Primary School Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to increase funding for primary schools to a level comparable with funding for secondary schools. (AQW 7029/08)

The Minister of Education: I am committed to ensuring that all our children and young people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential through quality education services, and have signalled my intention, within available resources, to improving the balance of funding between primary and post-primary schools.

As outlined in my announcement of 12 February 2008 on Education funding, provision has been made to increase the proportion of funding made available to primary schools under the delegated Local Management of Schools funding formula, alongside additional funding outside of the formula in support of primary schools.

Under the delegated funding formula I have increased the primary Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) which is the main funding factor in the formula. This means that, on average, additional primary per pupil increases in 2008/09 are higher than those for post primary schools. I have also signalled my intentions to increase further the primary AWPU weighting over the next two years of this budget period.

Sna trí bliana amach romhainn tá maoiniú breise ar luach £12 milliún nach mór curtha in áirithe agam chun cabhrú le príomhoidí bunscoile atá ag múineadh, agus £32 milliún breise a chabhróidh le bunscoileanna an Bhonn chéim den churaclam athbhreithnithe a sheachadadh.

Over the next three years, I have been able to secure additional funding of almost £12 million to help primary school teaching principals and a further £32 million to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum. Additional provision is also planned, over the next

three years, for Literacy and Numeracy measures, implementation of the Special Education Needs and Inclusion Review, an Emotional Health and Wellbeing programme in primary and special education, and additional Early Years provision.

Primary School Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how the funding allocated to primary schools, per pupil, as a percentage of funding per secondary school pupil, compares to other parts of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 7030/08)

The Minister of Education: Is deacair comparáid fhiúntach a dhéanamh idir leibhéil mhaoinithe i gcomhair scoileanna anseo agus i réigiúin eile i Sasana, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag ar chúiseanna éagsúla, lena n-áirítear na socruithe éagsúla maoinithe agus struchtúracha a bhíonn i gceist.

It is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the levels of funding here and in other regions for schools in England, Scotland and Wales for a variety of reasons including the different funding and structural arrangements that apply.

The Department of Education does not hold the information in the format requested. However, it is the intention of the Department to take forward a programme of work to provide for comparisons of funding levels between schools here and those in the other Administrations.

As outlined in my earlier answer to AWQ 7029/08 the department is directing more of the available budget share towards the primary sector.

Gransha Boys High School in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans she has for the empty site at the former Gransha Boys High School in Bangor. (AQW 7097/08)

The Minister of Education: Aithníodh cuid den láthair dí-áitithe mar shuíomh oiriúnach do scoil nua do Scoil Ghramadaí Bheannchair. Choinneodh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iardheiscirt an fuílleach chun cuspóra oideachais.

Part of the vacated site has been identified as a suitable location for a replacement school for Bangor Grammar School. The remainder would be being retained by the South Eastern Education and Library Board for educational use.

Pupil Profiles

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what additional funding will be made available to primary schools to assist with the development of pupil profiles. (AQW 7110/08)

The Minister of Education: The Pupil Profile provides a standardised format for the annual report all schools are already required to provide to parents. It will ensure that parents receive consistent information regardless of the school their child attends, in a format they recognise. Manageability for teachers has been a key consideration in the development of the Pupil Profile.

Níor chóir gurb aon ualach breise ar scoileanna an tuarascáil bhliantúil ar Phróifíl na nDaltaí a chomhlánú, agus mar sin ní gá go mbeadh maoiniú breise de dhíth air.

Completing the Pupil Profile annual report should not create an additional burden for schools, and therefore should not require additional funding. Other support is being provided for its phased implementation, including training for teachers. An electronic report writer is available for teachers to use, if they so wish, in completing the Pupil Profile and teachers have been offered separate training in the use of this tool. Guidance and support materials continue to be available on the revised curriculum website.

Free School Meals

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education (i) how many pupils are currently entitled to free school meals; and (ii) the percentage of the school population that this figure represents, for each primary school in the (a) North Belfast; and (b) West Belfast constituencies. (AQW 7292/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

FREE SCHOOL MEAL ENTITLEMENT IN PRIMARY¹ SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH BELFAST CONSTITUENCY AREA 2007/08

| DENI Ref | School Name | Total pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % entitled to free meal |
|----------|----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1010063 | Currie Ps | 83 | 123 | 67.5 |
| 1010266 | Seaview Ps | 73 | 281 | 26.0 |
| 1010282 | Carr's Glen Ps | 55 | 314 | 17.5 |
| 1010283 | Grove Ps | 44 | 94 | 46.8 |

| DENI Ref | School Name | Total pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % entitled to free meal |
|----------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1010296 | Ballygolan Ps | 59 | 125 | 47.2 |
| 1010323 | Edenbrooke Ps | 109 | 180 | 60.6 |
| 1010325 | Ligoniel Ps | 30 | 112 | 26.8 |
| 1010831 | Cavehill Ps | 28 | 349 | 8.0 |
| 1016076 | Ballysillan Ps | 57 | 135 | 42.2 |
| 1016483 | Cliftonville Ps | 60 | 171 | 35.1 |
| 1016485 | Glenwood Ps | 237 | 447 | 53.0 |
| 1016532 | Wheatfield Ps | 79 | 179 | 44.1 |
| 1016537 | Lowwood Ps | 76 | 227 | 33.5 |
| 1016647 | Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | 38 | 71 | 53.5 |
| 1030194 | Holy Cross Boys' Ps | 175 | 344 | 50.9 |
| 1030313 | Our Lady Of Lourdes Ps | 28 | 626 | 4.5 |
| 1030326 | Our Lady's Girls' Ps | 140 | 311 | 45.0 |
| 1030329 | Edmund Rice (Cb) Ps | 153 | 317 | 48.3 |
| 1030331 | Holy Cross Girls' Ps | 94 | 149 | 63.1 |
| 1036041 | Mercy Ps | 91 | 225 | 40.4 |
| 1036042 | St Vincent De Paul Ps | 118 | 212 | 55.7 |
| 1036048 | St Mary's Star Of The Sea Ps | 56 | 163 | 34.4 |
| 1036132 | St Therese Of Lisieux Ps | 29 | 446 | 6.5 |
| 1036464 | Star Of The Sea Girls' Ps | 148 | 298 | 49.7 |
| 1036471 | Sacred Heart Ps | 104 | 224 | 46.4 |
| 1036566 | Holy Family Ps | 159 | 384 | 41.4 |
| 1046596 | Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 37 | 119 | 31.1 |
| 1066531 | Hazelwood Ps | 118 | 455 | 25.9 |
| 1620028 | Ben Madigan Preparatory School | 0 | 176 | 0.0 |
| 3010827 | Whitehouse Ps | 79 | 375 | 21.1 |
| 3010862 | Abbots Cross Ps | 84 | 287 | 29.3 |
| 3010895 | Rathcoole Ps | 73 | 183 | 39.9 |
| 4036635 | St Mary's Ps | 92 | 384 | 24.0 |

**FREE SCHOOL MEAL ENTITLEMENT IN PRIMARY¹ SCHOOLS
IN THE WEST BELFAST CONSTITUENCY AREA 2007/08**

| DENI Ref | School Name | Total pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % entitled to free meal |
|----------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1010205 | Forth River Ps | 56 | 200 | 28.0 |
| 1010221 | Springfield Ps | 30 | 67 | 44.8 |
| 1010307 | Springhill Ps | 82 | 268 | 30.6 |
| 1010321 | Vere Foster Ps | 56 | 81 | 69.1 |
| 1010863 | Suffolk Ps | 34 | 92 | 37.0 |
| 1016059 | Blackmountain Ps | 68 | 111 | 61.3 |
| 1016498 | Malvern Ps | 76 | 116 | 65.5 |
| 1016604 | Harmony Ps | 110 | 207 | 53.1 |
| 1030316 | St Aidan's Christian Brothers Ps | 119 | 176 | 67.6 |
| 1030317 | St Bernadette's Ps | 121 | 186 | 65.1 |
| 1036091 | St John The Baptist Girls' Ps | 59 | 287 | 20.6 |
| 1036092 | St John The Baptist Boys' Ps | 65 | 321 | 20.2 |
| 1036388 | St Mary's Ps | 92 | 116 | 79.3 |
| 1036565 | St Kevin's Ps | 149 | 451 | 33.0 |
| 1036576 | Holy Child Ps | 120 | 523 | 22.9 |
| 1036589 | St Teresa's Ps | 85 | 392 | 21.7 |
| 1036602 | St Oliver Plunkett Ps | 224 | 593 | 37.8 |
| 1036620 | St Peter's Ps | 163 | 299 | 54.5 |
| 1036621 | St Joseph's Ps | 108 | 239 | 45.2 |
| 1036623 | Holy Trinity Ps | 298 | 620 | 48.1 |
| 1036624 | St Paul's Ps | 105 | 252 | 41.7 |
| 1036630 | St Clare's Primary School | 167 | 456 | 36.6 |
| 1046501 | Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | 39 | 294 | 13.3 |
| 1046571 | Gaelscoil Na Bhfal | 77 | 211 | 36.5 |
| 1046593 | Bunscoil An Tsluibhe Dhuibh | 57 | 168 | 33.9 |
| 1046654 | Gaelscoil An Damba | 15 | 29 | 51.7 |

| DENI Ref | School Name | Total pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % entitled to free meal |
|----------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1046671 | Gaelscoil Na Mona | 31 | 72 | 43.1 |
| 1046672 | Gaelscoil An Lonnain | 22 | 44 | 50.0 |
| 4036081 | St Luke's Ps | 163 | 222 | 73.4 |
| 4036134 | St Mark's Ps | 243 | 480 | 50.6 |
| 4036285 | The Good Shepherd Ps | 209 | 348 | 60.1 |
| 4036480 | St Kieran's Ps | 284 | 387 | 73.4 |
| 4036591 | Our Lady Queen Of Peace Ps | 54 | 383 | 14.1 |
| 4046600 | Scoil Na Fuiseoige | 67 | 133 | 50.4 |

Source: NI school census 2007/08

Note 1: Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes

English as a Second Language

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently being taught English as a second language in the North Down constituency, broken down by each primary and post-primary school. (AQW 7328/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

**EAL¹ PUPILS AT PRIMARY² AND POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN
THE NORTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY – 2007/08**

| DENI Ref | School Name | School type | No. of EAL pupils | Total enrolment |
|----------|--------------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 4011265 | Ballyvester Ps | Primary | 0 | 67 |
| 4011631 | Hollywood Ps | Primary | 5 | 332 |
| 4011645 | Crawfordsburn Ps | Primary | * | 188 |
| 4011650 | Ballyholme Ps | Primary | * | 600 |
| 4011654 | Donaghadee Ps | Primary | * | 418 |
| 4011670 | Clandeboyne Ps | Primary | * | 188 |
| 4011681 | Millisle Ps | Primary | * | 146 |
| 4011688 | Redburn Ps | Primary | 5 | 83 |
| 4013023 | Bloomfield Road Ps | Primary | * | 307 |

| DENI Ref | School Name | School type | No. of EAL pupils | Total enrolment |
|----------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 4013032 | Conlig Ps | Primary | 0 | 43 |
| 4013045 | Grange Park Ps | Primary | 0 | 364 |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley Ps | Primary | 0 | 127 |
| 4016067 | Rathmore Ps | Primary | * | 482 |
| 4016111 | Towerview Ps | Primary | * | 385 |
| 4016192 | Kilmaine Ps | Primary | * | 654 |
| 4016430 | Ballymagee Ps | Primary | * | 404 |
| 4031628 | St Patrick's Ps | Primary | 8 | 237 |
| 4033008 | St Anne's Ps | Primary | 12 | 34 |
| 4036146 | St Comgall's Ps | Primary | 8 | 286 |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's Ps | Primary | 16 | 321 |
| 4051680 | Bangor Central Ps | Primary | 24 | 562 |
| 4053020 | Glencraig Ps | Primary | 0 | 228 |
| 4610097 | Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept. | Prep dept | 0 | 76 |
| 4620015 | Bangor Grammar School Prep. Dept. | Prep dept | 0 | 137 |
| 4620044 | Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept. | Prep dept | 0 | 184 |
| 4210031 | Donaghadee High School | Secondary | 0 | 213 |
| 4210296 | Bangor Academy And 6th Form College | Secondary | 10 | 1,289 |
| 4230107 | St Columbanus' College | Secondary | 5 | 545 |
| 4250024 | Priory College | Secondary | * | 423 |
| 4410097 | Glenlola Collegiate | Grammar | 18 | 1,073 |
| 4420015 | Bangor Gs | Grammar | 9 | 894 |
| 4420044 | Sullivan Upper School | Grammar | 0 | 1,061 |
| | | Total | 143 | 12,351 |

Source: NI school census 2007/08

Note 1: A child with English as an additional language is defined as one for whom English is not their first language and who has significant difficulty with the English language and requires assistance.

Note 2: Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

** denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Brunswick Street Further Education Campus

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has for Brunswick Street Further Education Campus following the construction of the new campus on Titanic Quarter. (AQW 7232/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Belfast Metropolitan College are in the process of procuring a new campus at Titanic Quarter to replace the Brunswick St and College Sq East Campuses. When the new accommodation becomes available, still subject to contract but expected sometime around the end of 2010, the sites at College Sq East and Brunswick St will become surplus to requirements. BMC are planning to sell the sites on the open market at that time and to use the proceeds to offset the cost of the new accommodation.

Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of Northern Ireland's top 100 companies are formally engaged with his Department in addressing the skills needs as identified in the Regional Forecasts (2006), Occupational Forecasts and Replacement Demand Analysis for Northern Ireland, 2005-2015. (AQW 7234/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Success through Skills, the Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, aims to identify current and future skills needs both at a regional and local level and seek appropriate interventions. This demand led system facilitates the articulation of employers' skills needs through the Skills Expert Group, Workforce Development Forums and Sector Skills Councils.

Work by Regional Forecasts (2006) predicted strong growth in demand for a wide range of occupations including professional, managerial and personal service occupations.

From the top 100 companies listed in the Belfast Telegraph in 2008, 37 have participated in the Department's Management Development Programmes and five have members on the Skills Expert Group. A further 12 are directly represented on their local Workforce Development Forum and 22 are recognised Investors in People, through the NI Quality Centre (This does not include those multinationals that may be recognised through other IiP Centres). Ninety-two of Northern Ireland's top 100 companies are currently engaged, or have engaged in the past, with the Department's Employment Service to fill their job vacancies. Seventy of the companies are engaged

with the Further Education colleges to deliver a wide range of training. In addition many of the companies listed engage with third party organisations that are contracted by the Department to provide support, through provision such as Training for Success and Essential Skills.

Southern Regional College

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he will make a decision on the release of the pension fund for the eight remaining managers being made redundant from the Southern Regional College. (AQW 7306/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is doing everything possible to assist Further Education Colleges to facilitate outstanding redundancies under the Teachers' Premature Retirement Scheme. A business case has been submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in order to support the substantial public expenditure required and discussions are ongoing between the two departments.

The Department has emphasised the urgency of the situation, but, in the meantime, no further redundancies can be progressed until the outcome of the business case is known.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Inward Investment in Belfast

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the inward investment from all sources secured for Belfast; and to outline (i) the companies and developers involved; and (ii) a geographical breakdown of this investment. (AQW 6177/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): Table 1 presents a geographical analysis (in terms of distance from Belfast city centre) of the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI towards planned inward investment projects, during the six years 2002/03-2007/08. To aid interpretation, Figure 1 highlights the location of announced projects on a map of Belfast District Council Area. This clearly demonstrates that inward investment in Belfast is concentrated within a three mile radius of the city centre, and because of this accessible central location provides employment opportunities for all who live in Belfast, and further afield. The mobility of labour is

illustrated by the fact that 74% of those who work in South Belfast live in other areas.

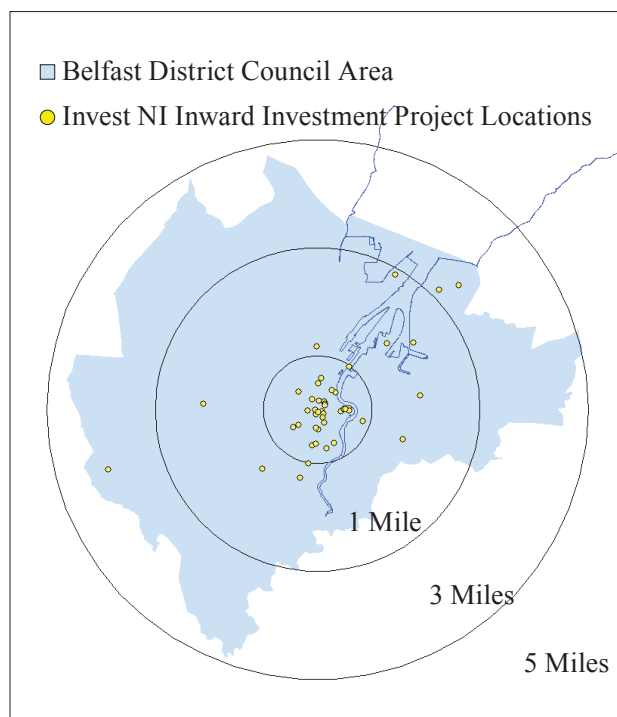
TABLE 1
INVEST NI INWARD INVESTMENT PROJECTS IN BELFAST DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA BY DISTANCE FROM BELFAST CITY HALL (2002/03 - 2007/08)

| Distance from Belfast City Hall | Total Assistance Offered (£m) | % Cumulative Assistance Offered | Planned Investment (£m) | % Cumulative Investment |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Less than 1 mile | 36.2 | 38 | 231.3 | 49 |
| 1 to 3 miles | 55.0 | 96 | 226.8 | 97 |
| 3 to 5 miles | 4.0 | 100 | 13.0 | 100 |
| Total | 95.2 | | 471.1 | |

Notes:

1. 2007/08 figures are provisional and subject to change.
2. Planned investment includes assistance offered, and relates to the year in which it was reported.
3. Figures include both first time inward investments and reinvestments by existing clients.
4. Table totals may not add due to rounding.

FIGURE 1
INVEST NI ANNOUNCED INWARD INVESTMENT PROJECTS IN BELFAST CITY COUNCIL 2002-03 TO 2007-08



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Table 2 provides a listing of those inward-investment projects, which have been announced by Invest NI in Belfast DCA. The total planned investment in Table 2 will not equal that in Table 1,

as projects that have not been announced have been excluded to protect the commercial interests of the companies involved.

TABLE 2

**INVEST NI ANNOUNCED INWARD INVESTMENT PROJECTS
IN BELFAST BY DISTANCE FROM BELFAST CITY HALL
(2002/03 - 2007/08)**

| Distance From City Hall | Company Name | Planned Investment (£) | Country Of Ownership |
|-------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------------|
| Less than 1 Mile | 3pardata Inc | 9,309,000 | USA |
| | Abbey National | 5,500,000 | GB |
| | Aepona Ltd | 8,060,000 | ROI |
| | Afa Systems (Ni) Limited | 35,000 | GB |
| | Allen Systems Group Inc | 3,629,000 | USA |
| | Axa Insurance Limited | 2,165,000 | France |
| | Bank Of Ireland Securities Services | 10,734,693 | ROI |
| | Borland Software Inc | 1,975,000 | USA |
| | British Airways Plc | 650,000 | GB |
| | Controlled Electronic Management Systems Limited | 17,690,000 | USA |
| | Danske Bank (Northern Bank Ltd) | 268,554 | Denmark |
| | Fighting Bull Broadcast Technologies Ltd | 1,149,316 | USA |
| | Firstsource Solutions Uk Ltd | 12,099,782 | India |
| | Independent News And Media Plc | 25,078,000 | ROI |
| | International House Belfast Ltd | 657,480 | Spain |
| | Latens Systems Ltd | 2,461,000 | GB |

| Distance From City Hall | Company Name | Planned Investment (£) | Country Of Ownership |
|-------------------------|--|------------------------|----------------------|
| | Liberty Information Technology Ltd | 10,655,163 | USA |
| | M&M Software | 52,740 | Germany |
| | Mformation Technologies Inc | 15,700,000 | USA |
| | Microsoft Ireland | 677,613 | ROI |
| | Mobile Cohesion Limited | 2,795,500 | GB |
| | Modern Eyewear | 119,973 | GB |
| | Northbrook Technology Ni Ltd | 55,655,111 | USA |
| | Oracle Ireland | 1,143,216 | ROI |
| | Payzene Ltd | 391,352 | ROI |
| | Reed Managed Services | 9,968,000 | GB |
| | Swan Labs Limited | 986,000 | USA |
| | Tech Mahindra Limited | 14,080,000 | India |
| | Wombat Financial Software Europe Limited | 6,058,000 | USA |
| | Yell Group Plc | 2,263,338 | GB |
| Total | | 222,007,831 | |
| 1 to 3 Miles | | | |
| | Abf Grain Products Ltd | 800,000 | GB |
| | Audio Processing Technology Ltd | 40,000 | GB |
| | Biancamed Limited | 856,875 | ROI |
| | Bombardier Aerospace -Shorts | 114,724,950 | Canada |
| | British Bakeries Ltd | 7,767,000 | GB |

| Distance From City Hall | Company Name | Planned Investment (£) | Country Of Ownership |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| | Broadsoft International, Inc | 427,659 | USA |
| | Citibank International Plc | 27,386,371 | USA |
| | Fidessa Plc | 678,119 | GB |
| | Fujitsu Services Limited | 8,439,976 | Japan |
| | Hcl Technologies Bpo Services Ni | 15,222,000 | India |
| | Howden Power Ltd | 794,219 | GB |
| | Lbm Holdings Ltd | 21,350,000 | GB |
| | Morson Projects Ltd | 2,516,426 | GB |
| | Polaris Software Lab Limited Uk | 7,424,566 | India |
| | R F Integration Limited | 241,000 | USA |
| Total | | 208,669,161 | |
| 3 to 5 Miles | | | |
| | Assystem Uk Limited | 2,740,000 | GB |
| | Icemos Technology Ltd | 9,600,000 | USA |
| | Newell & Budge Ltd | 647,000 | GB |
| Total | | 12,987,000 | |
| Grand Total | | 443,663,992 | |

Notes:

1. 2007/08 figures are provisional and subject to change.
2. Figures include both first time inward investments and reinvestments by existing clients.
3. Some clients offered assistance during this period may have since ceased trading.

These figures relate to Invest NI's externally-owned client companies, which are in the export-oriented manufacturing and tradeable service sectors. Therefore, they do not include inward investment in the retail and distribution, and other sectors, which primarily serve the local marketplace.

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 in the two main cities 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.

Further information and analysis on Invest NI support of inward investment is available in the Invest NI Performance Information Report which was published at the end of January 2008 (<http://www.investni.com/performance-report0203-0607.pdf>)

Economic Investment Conference

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the Economic Investment Conference and its effectiveness in attracting investment over the next two to three years. (AQW 7132/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The US/NI Investment conference was a significant example of the Northern Ireland Executive working together to seize the opportunity to deliver a better future for all.

My assessment is that the US/NI Investment Conference which took place between the 7th and 9th May was enormously successful. Initial feedback from the delegates is very positive with follow-up meetings about potential projects already taking place.

The results flowing from the Conference may take some time to come to fruition. Projects can often take 18 to 24 months to fully complete.

Invest NI

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the work of Invest NI in promoting the West during the recent visit by American Investors. (AQW 7250/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The US/NI Investment Conference explored the high-level Northern Ireland business proposition and sought to position Northern Ireland as a regional entity that is highly competitive against alternative regions of the British Isles and Western Europe.

Invest Northern Ireland showcased all of Northern Ireland in the presentation at Blackstaff Studios and at the various exhibitions.

The Conference Exhibition, in particular, used material and images from District Councils from all areas of Northern Ireland, including the West.

Sustainable Energy Market

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans his Department has to take forward initiatives to develop the Sustainable Energy Market, particularly to develop Renewable Energy Sources. (AQW 7349/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The development of renewable sources of energy is an important element of current energy policy and will continue to be so in view of the strategic importance for Northern Ireland to address security of supply and reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels. We have a target that by 2012, 12% of electricity consumed will be from indigenous renewable sources and from 2007 overall consumption of electricity within Northern Ireland will be reduced by 1% per annum until 2012. In addition, the forthcoming EU Directive on Renewable Energy sets a target of 20% of the EU's energy consumption to come from renewables by 2020. The proposed target for the UK is 15% of total energy consumption across electricity, heat and transport.

The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) is the Government's key initiative in support of renewables development in Northern Ireland. Since its introduction in 2005 it has proved very successful and electricity generated from renewable sources increased by 60%. On 19 May 2008, DETI issued a preliminary consultation on proposals to enhance the NIRO by offering higher levels of support to encourage the greater use of less well developed technologies such as marine renewables and microgeneration.

The all-island electrical Grid Study which was completed in January 2008 is a comprehensive assessment of the ability of the electrical power system and the transmission network (the grid) to absorb large amounts of electricity produced from renewable energy sources. The study has highlighted the need for significant grid strengthening to accommodate increased levels of renewable energy, and wind in particular. Further specific work relating to Northern Ireland will be required going forward.

DETI also commissioned a study earlier this year into the potential for a sustainable bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland, the results of which will inform the development of a cross departmental strategy later in 2008-09.

A review of the Sustainable Energy Market in Northern Ireland which completed in December 2007 made various recommendations outlining how best to drive this market forward. It examined all sectors of the Sustainable Energy Market - domestic, industrial, commercial, voluntary and community sector and the public sector - and looked at large scale renewables, small scale renewables and energy efficiency. DETI is currently examining the high level recommendations emerging from this report, in particular in terms of cost and economic viability and in consultation with key stakeholders.

A UK wide consultation on a Renewable Energy Strategy is planned for the summer and NI will play a part in this prior to the development of an updated Strategic Energy Framework later in the year.

Social Entrepreneur Programme

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding Invest NI will commit to a new Social Entrepreneur Programme; and how does this compare with the existing programme. (AQW 7350/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme offers a range of assistance to help new and existing social economy enterprises to develop and grow into sustainable and viable businesses. An evaluation of the programme has been commissioned and the interim findings are very positive stating the programme to be "the right product at the right time". The report also confirms that there is a case for a future programme noting that the "precise form that it should take is less clear".

Invest NI have committed that support for social entrepreneurship will continue across the Corporate Plan period (with an increasing focus on business growth) and, at this stage in the planning process, options are being appraised around a new programme specification and the costings thereof. An indicative budget allocation of £400,000 is reflected across each of the three Corporate Plan years.

The level of Invest NI spend on the programme in 07/08 was £240,000

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Costs

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment, in the case of ref G/NAT/03/17, to detail the total costs incurred by her Department in using external

consultants, including arboriculturalists.
(AQW 6942/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster): I am unable to provide the costs for this case, as the Department considers this information to be commercially sensitive.

Single Housing in the Countryside

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment when a new rural planning strategy for single houses in the countryside will be available.
(AQW 7155/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I expect to submit a revised draft PPS 14 to the Executive shortly with a view to issuing for public consultation.

Planning Policies in the Countryside

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm whether any new planning policy will make provision for single houses in the countryside beyond that of farming, replacement, barn conversion and restrictive infill.
(AQW 7156/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Work is continuing on the revision of draft PPS 14 and it would not be appropriate to comment at this stage on specific aspects of it.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment if she has any plans for a public inquiry into the restrictions placed on George Best Belfast City Airport.
(AQW 7199/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The restrictions placed on George Best Belfast City Airport are included in the 1997 Planning Agreement which is currently the subject of a review. As part of the review an Examination in Public (EiP) was held and the EiP Panel recommendations are currently being implemented. A revised draft Planning Agreement issue on 22 May 2008 to the local councils and the Airport Forum Group

I have no plans to hold an additional Public Inquiry on this matter. The need for a Public Inquiry in relation to any further application including the proposed runway extension will be considered on its merits at the appropriate time.

Listed Buildings in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the names of the listed buildings in the North Down constituency.
(AQW 7219/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The information sought for this area and all of Northern Ireland may be found on Environment and Heritage Service's website at: www.ehsni.gov.uk/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment when the Planning Service will publish a statement with the adopted plan, outlining the decisions that it has reached, in relation to the Ards and Down Area Plan.
(AQW 7238/08)

The Minister of the Environment: 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 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 and publish a Statement outlining the decisions reached as quickly as possible.

Northern Ireland Electricity

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any correspondence her Department has had with Northern Ireland Electricity, in relation to the new North-South Interconnector.
(AQW 7248/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service staff met NIE representatives during October 2005, February 2006, June 2007, September 2007 and February 2008. The meetings dealt with the need for an Environmental Statement to accompany a planning application and scoping advice as to the content of the environmental statement.

NIE wrote to the Planning Service on 10th and 19th July 2006 seeking comments as to the content of the Environmental Statement being prepared for the scheme. After consulting widely, Planning Service responded on 7th September 2006 providing advice as to the issues to be addressed within the Environmental Statement for the proposed Electricity Interconnector – Tyrone to Cavan.

Officials in the Environment and Heritage Service have not had any direct contact with NIE about the new North-South Interconnector. They have however provided information to Faber Maunsell/Aecom, the

consultants appointed by NIE, on various aspects such as cultural heritage, potential sites of land contamination and designated sites within the general vicinity of the proposed route.

Planning Applications

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been deferred until the outcome of the review of Planning Policy Statement 14, broken down by district council area. (AQW 7259/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The numbers of planning applications deferred until the outcome of the review of Planning Policy Statement 14, broken down by district council area, are detailed in the table below:

NUMBER OF DEFERRED APPLICATIONS SINCE PPS 14

| Division | District | Number of deferrals |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Omagh | Dungannon | 89 |
| | Omagh | 179 |
| | Strabane | 60 |
| | Cookstown | 56 |
| | Fermanagh | 243 |
| Total | | 627 |
| Northern | Ballymoney | 46 |
| | Moyle | 27 |
| | Coleraine | 30 |
| | Limavady | 52 |
| | Derry | 44 |
| Total | | 199 |
| Craigavon | Banbridge | 27 |
| | Craigavon | 31 |
| | Armagh | 199 |
| | Newry & Mourne | 170 |
| Total | | 427 |
| Downpatrick | Ards | 20 |
| | Down | 22 |
| | Lisburn | 16 |
| | North Down | 1 |
| Total | | 59 |
| Ballymena | Ballymena | 60 |

| Division | District | Number of deferrals |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | Antrim | 32 |
| | Magherafelt | 50 |
| | Larne | 15 |
| | Carrickfergus | 1 |
| Total | | 158 |
| Belfast | Castlereagh | 3 |
| | Newtownabbey | 8 |
| | Belfast | 0 |
| Total | | 11 |
| Overall Total | | 1481 |

Strategic Planning Unit

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration is given by planning officials to the economic merits of a planning application going through the Strategic Planning Unit; and who do the planning officials consult when determining the economic merit of such a proposal. (AQW 7274/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The economic merits of a planning application constitute a material consideration and as such are given full and careful consideration during the processing of the application – balanced, of course, against other factors including the potential impacts of the particular proposal on the environment.

In terms of the consideration of economic benefits associated with a particular application which is being dealt with by the Strategic Projects Team, my officials can, if deemed necessary, consult a range of experts such as, the Department for Regional Development's Economics Unit, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Industry or commission consultants to carry out an independent economic appraisal.

Road Improvement Schemes

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail her Department's objections to planning application Y/2000/0704/F, which was for a comprehensive road improvement scheme to include alterations to Saintfield Road, Purdysburn Road, Beechill Road and Primrose Hill. (AQW 7379/08)

The Minister of the Environment: This planning application for the comprehensive road improvement scheme was to facilitate access to a major retail proposal (applications Y/1999/0209 and Y/1998/0410).

In respect of both applications, planning permission was refused following a Public Inquiry, which was held in June 2000. Decision notices to refuse both applications were issued in May and November 2004. This scheme is therefore not necessary to facilitate any extant permission.

Road Safety Improvements

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment what additional funds she plans to use to improve road safety. (AQO 3626/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's budget for road safety for 2008/2009 is approximately £59 million. This comprises allocations of £5 million for Road Safety Division and £54 million for the Driver Vehicle Agency. This does not take account of any income.

Additional funding for Road Safety Division, which was approved in the last Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), amounted to approximately £500k in 2008/09, £1.2m in 2009/10 and £1.6m in 2010/11.

West Tyrone Area Plan

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current status of the West Tyrone Area Plan. (AQO 3658/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As you may be aware, my Department has recently been involved in legal proceedings related to the judicial challenge of the Environmental Reports which accompanied the draft Northern and Magherafelt Area Plans. The judgment of the High Court in this particular case raised a number of issues regarding the role of the Department in the strategic environmental assessment of area plans. Following careful consideration of the case, my Department has lodged an appeal against certain aspects of the Court judgment.

In light of the judgement and the ongoing legal proceedings it would not be appropriate to continue work on the draft West Tyrone Area Plan until the outcome of the appeal is known. I very much regret that as a result, for a temporary period, my Department has ceased to carry out any further substantive work on the preparation of the plan. I am unable therefore to provide a timetable for the completion of the West Tyrone Area Plan at this point in time.

I will, of course, review the position again once I have had the opportunity to consider the judgment handed down following the appeal proceedings.

I remain committed to the preparation of development plans as expeditiously as possible within the framework set out by European Directives and the Regional Development Strategy.

Strangford Lough Ecological Change Investigation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the key findings of the Strangford Lough Ecological Change Investigation. (AQO 3604/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The key findings of the Strangford Lough Ecological Change Investigation (SLECI) indicated a severe decline in horse mussel (*Modiolus*) biogenic reefs and changes in their associated communities due to habitat disturbance by mobile bottom fishing gear, although the investigation suggests that other factors may be preventing their recovery. From the SLECI report, my officials have determined that the biogenic reefs in Strangford Lough are not in favourable condition.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency. (AQO 3633/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In my Environmental Governance statement this morning I outlined the steps my Department will take to further modernise its regulatory and enforcement system and to deploy its resources to greater effect. Central to this is the Better Regulation Programme; an agenda of action through which we will make our regulatory system more risk-based, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted. It will maximise the environmental benefit and minimise the cost to business.

I also explained that we will ensure that appropriate structures are in place to drive this work forward.

Climate Impact Assessment

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment if her departmental policies are subject to a Climate Impact Assessment. (AQO 3638/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I stated in a previous answer (AQW 5927/08) there is no stand alone climate impact assessment tool that is applicable to government policy.

Built Heritage

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she is taking to help promote the Built Heritage. (AQO 3610/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I recently launched a conference aimed at raising the awareness of key opinion formers on the potential of our built heritage to increase social and economic regeneration. This is the first in a number of events that should follow over the next year or so to increase public awareness of the historic built environment in general.

During the major conference last week I announced a number of initiatives, including a new and more comprehensive grant aid scheme for 'listed' buildings. This has extended assistance to almost all listed buildings for the first time since the mid 1980's. In other words, all secular listed buildings graded at B2 are now also eligible for grant aid. In addition the percentage of grant-aid has been increased from a 'norm' of 20% to a very significantly enhanced 35%.

In support of this new scheme the budget has been increased this year from £2.2m to almost £4m. These initiatives and financial increase should have a major and visible impact upon the promotion of our built heritage - particularly when these conservation schemes start on site.

As part of the overall review of grant-aid I also launched a scheme aimed at supporting charities that want to acquire buildings at risk with a view to securing their long-term sustainable future. This is part of a wider programme to help increase public awareness of this issue and to encourage direct action to tackle the repair and development of a positive sustainable future for these buildings.

I also announced the establishment of a Ministerial Forum with a broad range of representatives to consider strategic policy issues affecting the historic heritage.

I also announced the creation of an opportunity for owners – including BPTs – to meet with the Department from time to time to discuss key issues of concern.

Finally, I also announced a review of Traditional Building Craft Skills throughout the construction industry in Northern Ireland and in partnership with the Republic of Ireland.

These initiatives will build on other EHS events including the European Heritage Open Days that attracted 48,000 visitors last year alone.

Severance Packages for Councillors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on her plans to introduce severance

packages for councillors and the likely introductory date for these packages. (AQO 3621/08)

The Minister of the Environment: As I said in my statement to the Assembly on 31 March 2008, I intend to introduce a severance scheme to recognise the contribution of long-standing councillors who opt not to stand for re-election. In order to do so I need to bring forward legislation to give my Department the power to make a severance scheme. I intend to do so in a forthcoming Bill on local government finance which would enable the necessary power to be in place in mid 2010. In the meantime I have asked my officials to begin work on outline policy proposals for a severance scheme using the recommendations of the Councillors' Remuneration Working Group as a starting point.

Town Centre Boundary in Portadown

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of the Environment when the decision will be made on the town centre boundary for Portadown. (AQO 3622/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently preparing the Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries and Designations Plan 2010 for adoption. The designation of a town centre boundary for Portadown will be an integral part of the final plan. The work on the adoption process is well advanced and whilst I am not as yet in a position to provide a specific publication date it is anticipated that the launch will be prior to the end of June.

Environmental Protection Agency

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what action she has taken to establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency following the motion passed by the Assembly on 25 September 2007. (AQO 3625/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In my Environmental Governance statement this morning I outlined the steps my Department will take to further modernise its regulatory and enforcement system and to deploy its resources to greater effect. Central to this is the Better Regulation Programme; an agenda of action through which we will make our regulatory system more risk-based, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted. It will maximise the environmental benefit and minimise the cost to business.

I also explained that we will ensure that appropriate structures are in place to drive this work forward.

Building Sites

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the fact that she has no plans for legislation, what action she will take to ensure that developers keep building sites in good order. (AQO 3608/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no legal mechanisms available to my Department to regulate the condition of building sites. I therefore have no powers in this respect and as previously stated have no plans to bring forward legislative changes in relation to this matter.

Vehicle Testing

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she is taking to reduce the backlog for vehicle tests carried out by the Road Safety and Vehicle Standards Division. (AQO 3651/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Driver & Vehicle Agency is responsible for the delivery of vehicle tests. The Agency's Ministerial target is 85% of vehicle test applications will be appointed within 21 days or at a later date requested by the customer. At 10 May the Agency was achieving 88% for the current operating year. The average waiting time for a vehicle test across Northern Ireland was 17 days. The number of applications received from 1 April to 10 May increased by 20% on the same period last year. The Agency continually recruits staff in response to the demand for tests. A recruitment competition for additional staff is in its final stage and new staff will take up post over the next few months.

Climate Change Unit

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the role, responsibilities and actions of the Climate Change Unit. (AQO 3599/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Climate Change Unit plays a key role in informing the Northern Ireland policy position on climate change. The remit of the unit stems from the Programme for Government Key Goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025 and the associated Public Service Agreement 22 to take forward strategic action to reduce our carbon footprint.

The Unit is taking forward the UK Climate Change Bill within Northern Ireland, including the legislative consent motion approved by the Assembly on 10 December 2007. The unit has specific responsibility to develop policy for the EU Emissions Trading Scheme and the Carbon Reduction Commitment. Both these

"cap and trade" schemes aim to deliver absolute carbon emission reductions.

However, the unit also contributes policy advice to government departments and public bodies on other climate change policy, programmes and actions.

A key area for the unit is to assist with the UK publication of Greenhouse Gas Inventories. These are key to understanding whether targets for greenhouse gas emissions are being met. The Climate Change Unit is leading a research project with the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) to provide a method to assess Northern Ireland's emission projections to 2025

The unit also looks at other carbon policies such as neutrality and offsetting. Work has been ongoing with the Sustainable Development Commission, Defra and the other Devolved Administrations.

Adaptation to climate change is a growing area of focus for the unit. It is working with England, Scotland and Wales to develop a UK Adaptation Framework. It produced a report "Preparing for a Changing Climate in Northern Ireland" in January 2007 providing an assessment of risk posed by climate change. The unit also supports the Northern Ireland Climate Change Impacts Partnership in improving knowledge and understanding on the issue of climate change.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Infringements of Competition Law in the Construction Industry

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each of the last 5 years, (i) the projects that have been carried out for the Northern Ireland public sector by any of the companies listed in the Office of Fair Trading investigation into widespread infringements of competition law in the construction industry; and (ii) the cost of each project. (AQW 6556/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has advised that two Public Private Partnership (PPP) contracts, Omagh College and the East Tyrone College, have been awarded to Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) Belfast Educational Services (Omagh) Limited and Belfast Educational Services (Dungannon) Limited. Interserve PFI Holdings, an investment partner and facilities management provider to the SPVs, is a subsidiary of Interserve PLC. Interserve PLC together with another subsidiary, Interserve Project Services Limited, have been listed in the OFT investigation. The DEL PPP contracts

which were signed in September 2003, are for a period of 30 years and each has a capital value of £16m. The value of the Interserve element is unknown.

All other Departments have reported that none of the companies listed in the OFT investigation have carried out work for them, their Agencies or NDPBs during the last 5 years.

Infringements of Competition Law in the Construction Industry

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm if (i) his department has been kept informed of the Office of Fair Trading investigation into widespread infringements of competition law in the construction industry; and (ii) these abuses extend to public sector contracts. (AQW 6574/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel has been kept informed of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) investigation into alleged infringements of competition law in the construction industry in England.

Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) has drawn the OFT 'Information Note' and associated OFT / Office of Government Commerce guidance on mitigating the risks of anti-competitive behaviour to the attention of all Centres of Procurement Expertise.

The alleged infringements of competition law being investigated by OFT extend to both the private and public sectors in the East Midlands, neighbouring areas of Yorkshire and Humberside and elsewhere in England.

Civil Service Industrial and Non-Industrial Staff

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the actual and percentage composition of Northern Ireland Civil Service Non-industrial and Industrial staff by each Grade Level within each Department/Agency, annually between January 2003 and January 2008 inclusive, by reference to total number and broken down by (i) gender; (ii) community background (including non-determined); (iii) ethnic background; and (iv) disability. (AQW 6597/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people qualified to issue Energy Performance Certificates in each parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6768/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is not held by the Department and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. Properly trained and accredited local Domestic Energy Assessors may operate anywhere within Northern Ireland and England & Wales.

Energy Performance Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a timescale within which an Energy Performance Scheme for Northern Ireland will be introduced. (AQW 6804/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 (SR 2008 No.170) sets out the implementation date for the introduction of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) as follows:

| Date | Extent of EPC requirement |
|-------------------|--|
| 30 June 2008 | Sale of existing dwellings |
| 30 September 2008 | Construction of all buildings |
| 30 December 2008 | Rental of all buildings Sale of existing non-domestic buildings |

Land Registry Office

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the Land Registry Office has a customer service charter with commitments in relation to standards of service. (AQW 6925/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land Registry, as part of Land and Property Services, adheres to the Northern Ireland Customer Service Standards in terms of replying to correspondence, answering telephones and meeting customers.

However, given the unique nature of some of its work, Land Registry also has specific targets for average processing times (provided all the necessary information has been supplied). These include:

- Land Registry - 20 working days
- Registry of Deeds - 6 working days
- Statutory Charges Registry - 15 working days

- Compulsory First Registration - 60 working days
- Land Information Services - 4 working days.

Land Registry Requests

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Land Registry requests were processed in (i) 3 months; (ii) 6 months; (iii) 12 months; (iv) 18 months; (v) 24 months; (vi) 36 months; and (vii) 60 months. (AQW 6927/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The response is contained in the attached table.

| Year | 2002 Requests Processed | 2003 Requests Processed | 2004 Requests Processed | 2005 Requests Processed | 2006 Requests Processed | 2007 Requests Processed |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 3 months or less | 115708 | 200422 | 301843 | 402167 | 501895 | 564794 |
| 3-6 months | 4596 | 4614 | 5635 | 6283 | 5047 | 6132 |
| 6-12 months | 6519 | 5672 | 7231 | 7869 | 5091 | 4894 |
| 12 -18 months | 3120 | 3579 | 3901 | 3751 | 2662 | 1847 |
| 18-24 months | 515 | 1815 | 2400 | 2037 | 1425 | 961 |
| 24-36 months | 50 | 739 | 1541 | 1743 | 1106 | 922 |
| 36-60 months | 3 | 20 | 95 | 338 | 407 | 375 |

Land Registry Requests

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average length of time it takes to process Land Registry requests. (AQW 6928/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The average time taken to process a Land Registry request in the 2007/08 financial year was 15.12 days

Not-For-Profit Community Organisations

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will consider permitting rating relief for 'not for profit' community based organisations operating industrial premises, rating relief where they have short term vacancies in units for which they must currently pay rates. (AQW 6966/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member will be aware that I and my Ministerial colleagues consider economic growth to be the key priority for this Executive. In keeping with this vision, one of the measures I took to the Executive and this Assembly in my first year in office was to hold rates for manufacturing at 30%. Therefore I can confirm that all undertakings engaged primarily in manufacturing, are entitled to 70% relief. This includes 'not for profit' community based organisations and firms that occupy industrial premises provided by 'not for profit' community based organisations.

Turning to unoccupied properties, if any property is a "qualifying industrial property", then it is free from all rating liability while it remains vacant. To qualify for exemption from empty property rates, the property in question must have been constructed or adapted for use as a factory. It is worth noting that vacant factories are now rateable in England from April this year but I have decided not to introduce such a measure here at this time.

Furthermore, my Department introduced new Regulations which came into operation last year specifically for other types of buildings provided by local enterprise agencies and which are liable for empty property rates. This change was made in recognition of the fact that they operate in special circumstances, building flexible multi purpose space on a speculative basis and on a large scale, often in disadvantaged areas, where void periods are part and parcel of their activities

The Regulations provide an extended initial exemption period of 12 months instead of the normal 3. It applies to companies limited by guarantee within the meaning of Article 12(2) of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. To my knowledge most, if not all, 'not for profit' community based organisations who provide industrial space are set up in this way, including those affiliated to Enterprise NI and others which are not (such as Mayfair and Brownlow). This measure was introduced as a direct consequence of approaches made to my Department from Enterprise NI.

The property in question must also provide accommodation and support services for a trade or business and be funded in respect of its capital costs, in whole or in part, by a public body. After the 12 month period has elapsed the unoccupied property rate becomes payable and that is at 50% liability of the normal rates.

All of the provisions described above are unique to Northern Ireland and do not exist elsewhere in the UK.

Peace III Programme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money will be available for rural communities through the new Peace III programme. (AQW 7041/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The PEACE III Programme is worth €333 million and is intended to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region. Whilst rural communities are not specifically targeted in the Programme they can still apply for funding where it is clearly demonstrated that the objectives of the Programme are being met.

Peace III Programme

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the projects, whose Peace II funding is due to run out at the end of June and August 2008, that have been notified on whether or not they have been successful in securing Peace III funding. (AQW 7052/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: No Letters of Offer have yet been issued in respect of the PEACE III Programme. Sixty-four applications to PEACE III have been received to date. Eight, as listed below, have been approved by PEACE III Steering Committees, and are now subject to final appraisal.

Theme 1.1 (local)

- Belfast Peace Plan - Belfast City Council
- North East Cluster - Ballymena Borough Council
- North West Cluster - Derry City Council

Theme 1.1 (regional)

- Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up - Coiste na n-Iarchimí
- Irish Peace Centres - Co-operation Ireland

Theme 2.1

- River Foyle Foot and Cycle Bridge - Ilex
- Clones / Erne East Community Sports Partnership - Monaghan County Council
- Oasis - Omagh District Council

All the lead partners in these eight projects have received support under the PEACE II Programme. However, the new PEACE III projects would be substantially different in nature and scale to the type of project funded under PEACE II. It is expected that Letters of Offer will begin to issue from June 2008. No currently live PEACE II project has applied as a lead partner to PEACE III. Some organisations with

live PEACE II projects are involved within the sixty-four applications received.

Current Quangos in Operation

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list, by department, the quangos in operation. (AQW 7059/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The latest information on all the public bodies sponsored by Northern Ireland departments is contained in the 'Public Bodies Report 2007' and can be accessed through the following link: http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/public_bodies_2007.pdf

Public-and-Private Sector Pay Levels

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm whether, in addressing, the wage differential between the public and private sectors, he will seek to maintain pay parity across the United Kingdom in those areas of the public sector where parity exists. (AQW 7167/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive agreed in May 2007 to adopt HM Treasury pay policy. The implementation of HM Treasury pay policy guarantees a link with national agreements when there is a clear contractual entitlement. However, it should be acknowledged that, where appropriate, there is a need to take account of local labour market conditions in the determination of public sector pay awards.

Realignment of Local Councils

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the potential longer term efficiencies in relation to overall public expenditure that could arise from a realignment of the current local authority clusters. (AQW 7204/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My officials are continuing to work closely with their DOE counterparts and the local government sector to fully evaluate the potential efficiencies and savings that could arise from the realignment of local councils. Our best estimate at this stage is in the order of £15 million per year.

Workplace 2010

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the impact on the scheduling of

Workplace 2010 given the current drop in property values and the credit crunch. (AQO 3644/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The impact on the Workplace 2010 bids will become clearer when the BaFO bids, which will be submitted to the Authority in June, are evaluated over the following weeks.

Due to the long term nature of the Workplace 2010 deal short term fluctuations in property values are not expected to have a significant impact on the Workplace 2010 deal. However, market conditions may result in lower valuations for buildings which may be disposed of in the early part of the contract.

Certainly it is true to say that the current credit crunch has caused debt to be more expensive, nevertheless, I still consider Workplace 2010 to be an attractive deal in the current market due to the strong covenant that government tenancy creates.

The Workplace 2010 contract will still be subject to a vigorous business case assessment before any decision is made to progress to the preferred bidder stage of the procurement.

Regional Economic Strategy

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on preparations for a Regional Economic Strategy. (AQO 3630/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Now that the second Varney review has concluded my officials will commence work on creating a new, devolved Regional Economic Strategy – the previous draft Regional Economic Strategy was very much a direct rule document which reflected the rather limited aspirations of that administration.

The conclusions and recommendations from the second Varney Review will provide a useful starting point for developing the Regional Economic Strategy as it helpfully provides a comprehensive policy analysis of the Northern Ireland economy.

My officials will liaise with other Government departments and key stakeholders in drafting the Regional Economic Strategy. The aim will be to have an agreed Strategy in place in time to assist in the formulation of priorities for the next Executive Budget.

Number of Senior Civil Servants

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any targets in place to reduce the number of senior civil servants. (AQO 3589/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: “Fit for Purpose” set stretching targets for reductions in Senior Civil Service (SCS) posts (7.2%) to be achieved between April 2004 and March 2008. The target reduction of 14 has been achieved.

I will be considering with my officials the possibility of setting reduction targets for the NICS, including the Senior Civil Service for the Budget period 2008 – 11.

Sale of Public-Sector Assets

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the Prime Minister’s recent commitment to increase the Executive’s share of asset sales for £1bn to £2bn. (AQO 3661/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The commitment announced by the Prime Minister on the 8th of May is that receipts generated from the sale of public sector assets over the next three years can be retained by the NI Executive in full, up to a new limit of £2.2 billion.

The previous limit of £1.1 billion was based on the Executive’s forecast of what was achievable over the CSR period, as set out in the draft Budget document last October.

The subsequent work of the Capital Realisation Taskforce identified further potential for asset sales and these, together with other options identified by Departments, were factored into our final Budget plans. Under existing rules, we would only need to go back to the Treasury in the event that we might exceed these by more than 20%.

In the context of the current property market, achieving our published plans for the sale of assets, let alone exceeding them, will be a significant challenge.

Overall, therefore, the new limit is not of material significance in terms of delivering on the Executive’s investment strategy.

Steel Commission

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the potential implications for Northern Ireland of the conclusions of the Steel Commission that advocates greater fiscal controls and powers for the Scottish devolved administration. (AQO 3605/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Steel Commission was established by the Scottish Liberal Democrat party rather than the UK Government or the Scottish Executive. Therefore the conclusions and

recommendations set out in its 2006 Final Report do not have any direct implications for Northern Ireland.

I await with interest the findings and recommendations from the cross-party Commission, chaired by Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, which is currently reviewing the provisions of the Scotland Act 1998, in light of the experience over the past 10 years.

I understand that the Steel Commission has been reconvened to provide input into the Calman Commission.

Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the recently published Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland by Sir David Varney. (AQO 3657/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not surprised at the outcome of the Varney 2 Report.

I welcome the fact that this second Report has endorsed the Programme for Government's focus on economic development - it confirms that the Executive is prioritising resources in the right policy areas.

It also provides an objective and robust analysis of the Northern Ireland economy and it highlights the many positive strengths and opportunities that exist to increase economic growth and prosperity.

Sir David emphasises that increasing productivity is a key driver for a successful economy in Northern Ireland.

With respect to tax credits, Sir David made several observations, namely that: a dispensation for Northern Ireland would be legally difficult; and it would also be inefficient in terms of generating deadweight costs. He also argues that a grant-based scheme, which is already within the Executive's remit, would be more effective and more easily administered.

I am currently engaging with Executive colleagues on this second Varney study and I intend to collate views into a consolidated Executive paper that I will submit to the Chief Secretary in due course.

Varney II Report

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to ensure that the Central Procurement Directorate puts the tackling of social and economic disadvantage at the centre of any public procurement contracts or tenders. (AQO 3666/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Procurement Board, which I chair, has produced guidance - aimed at policy makers and procurement professionals - on how to more effectively integrate equality and sustainable development, which includes social, economic and environmental considerations, into Public Sector Procurement.

The guidance, which was drafted by Central Procurement Directorate and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, encourages policy makers and procurement practitioners to work together to identify equality and sustainable development outcomes early on in the procurement process.

The guidance will be launched on 29 May 2008 and will be supported by training to be delivered to all procurement staff by March 2009. Central Procurement Directorate will be in the lead on delivering this training.

Varney II Report

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his response to the refusal of Sir David Varney to create enhanced research and development credits and training credits. (AQO 3619/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not surprised at the outcome of the Varney 2 Report.

I welcome the fact that this second Report has endorsed the Programme for Government's focus on economic development - it confirms that the Executive is prioritising resources in the right policy areas.

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I am currently engaging with Executive colleagues on this second Varney study and I intend to collate views into a consolidated Executive paper that I will submit to the Chief Secretary in due course.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit's remit covers the energy efficiency and performance of public buildings. (AQO 3655/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Buildings Standards Branch is directly responsible for the energy efficiency and performance of Public Buildings and, with it being located within my own Department, its work would not be beyond the remit of PEDU.

Varney II Report

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of Sir David Varney's second report. (AQO 3582/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not surprised at the outcome of the Varney 2 Report.

I welcome the fact that this second Report has endorsed the Programme for Government's focus on economic development - it confirms that the Executive is prioritising resources in the right policy areas.

It also provides an objective and robust analysis of the Northern Ireland economy and it highlights the many positive strengths and opportunities that exist to increase economic growth and prosperity.

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I am currently engaging with Executive colleagues on this second Varney study and I intend to collate views into a consolidated Executive paper that I will submit to the Chief Secretary in due course.

Central Procurement Directorate

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to introduce further guidelines for local food procurement within the Central Procurement Directorate. (AQO 3656/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Central Procurement Directorate has, in cooperation with officials in the Department of Agriculture and Rural

Development, produced new guidance for procurers, to encourage them to develop specifications which will deliver fresh, seasonal produce and for which local food producers can compete. This guidance will be published shortly.

Varney II Report

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to make a Ministerial Statement on the Varney 2 Report. (AQO 3632/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not surprised at the outcome of the Varney 2 Report.

I welcome the fact that this second Report has endorsed the Programme for Government's focus on economic development - it confirms that the Executive is prioritising resources in the right policy areas.

It also provides an objective and robust analysis of the Northern Ireland economy and it highlights the many positive strengths and opportunities that exist to increase economic growth and prosperity.

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I am currently engaging with Executive colleagues on this second Varney study and I intend to collate views into a consolidated Executive paper that I will submit to the Chief Secretary in due course.

Varney II Report

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on the outcome of the Varney 2 Report. (AQO 3629/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not surprised at the outcome of the Varney 2 Report.

I welcome the fact that this second Report has endorsed the Programme for Government's focus on economic development - it confirms that the Executive is prioritising resources in the right policy areas.

It also provides an objective and robust analysis of the Northern Ireland economy and it highlights the many positive strengths and opportunities that exist to increase economic growth and prosperity.

Sir David emphasises that increasing productivity is a key driver for a successful economy in Northern Ireland.

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I am currently engaging with Executive colleagues on this second Varney study and I intend to collate views into a consolidated Executive paper that I will submit to the Chief Secretary in due course.

2009-2010 Budget

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans are in place for 2009-10 budget process. (AQO 3670/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In January 2008 the Assembly approved the Executive's expenditure plans for 2008-11, which sets out firm spending allocations to NI departments for that period.

In light of the fact that there will not be a national Spending Review in 2008, and thus the clear expectation that there will not be significant additional resources available to the Executive beyond those already allocated in Budget 2008-11, the Executive agreed in March that there should not be a formal Budget process this year. Instead, there will be a short strategic stocktake of the expenditure plans for 2009-10 and 2010-11, which is due to take place in the autumn.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Ambulance and Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of (i) fire engines; and (ii) ambulances, attacked or vandalised in each of the last three years, broken down by district council area. (AQW 6958/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): The information is not available in the form requested.

Ambulance and Fire and Rescue Service Vehicles

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the cost of repairing or replacing (i) fire engines; and (ii) ambulances, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6960/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is shown in the tables below. Separate information on the repair and maintenance of fire engines (as distinct from other fire and rescue vehicles) is not available.

(A) FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

| | 2005/06 (£) | 2006/07 (£) | 2007/08 (£) |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Repairs and maintenance (all vehicles) | 852,526 | 1,036,516 | 948,219 |
| Replacement Appliances | 2,012,857 | 1,691,689 | 2,596,119 |

(B) AMBULANCE SERVICE

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Repairs and maintenance | 1,299,000 | 1,258,000 | 1,394,000 |
| Replacement Vehicles | 121,000 | 216,000 | 481,000 |

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many working days were lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6983/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is outlined below. It should be noted that the information provided includes absences which are purely stated or recorded as stress. The Department has no way of identifying other conditions which may or may not be stress-related.

| Month | No of Working Days Lost | Month | No of Working Days Lost |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| May 2006 | 94 | May 2007 | 52 |
| June 2006 | 125 | June 2007 | 84 |
| July 2006 | 112 | July 2007 | 95 |
| August 2006 | 140 | August 2007 | 110 |
| September 2006 | 95 | September 2007 | 128 |

| Month | No of Working Days Lost | Month | No of Working Days Lost |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| October 2006 | 108 | October 2007 | 172 |
| November 2006 | 83 | November 2007 | 143 |
| December 2006 | 78 | December 2007 | 113 |
| January 2007 | 72 | January 2008 | 77 |
| February 2007 | 83 | February 2008 | 71 |
| March 2007 | 46 | March 2008 | 80 |
| April 2007 | 21 | April 2008 | 83 |

New Fire Station in Ballymena

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the provision of a new fire station in Ballymena. (AQW 7000/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The planned replacement of fire stations across Northern Ireland is primarily a matter for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The need for a new fire station for Ballymena has been identified by the Fire and Rescue Service, subject to availability of land and matching funding.

Investment in Fire Stations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the planned investment for fire stations located in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; and (iii) Ballymena, for (a) 2008-09; (b) 2009-10; and (c) 2010-11. (AQW 7002/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to reply to your Written Assembly Question AQW 7002/08, by the 27 May 2008. I will reply as soon as possible.

Investment in Fire Stations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the investment in fire stations located in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; and (iii) Ballymena, for each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7003/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It will not be possible to reply to your Written Assembly Question AQW 7003/08, by the 27 May 2008. I will reply as soon as possible.

Underage Drinking

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support his Department is giving to children and young people groups that are working towards reducing the level of underage drinking and street drinking. (AQW 7021/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD), which was launched in 2006, identified addressing underage and binge drinking as key priorities – and addressing underage drinking was also identified as a key priority in the allocation of the additional funding received for public health through the comprehensive spending review (CSR) process.

At the local level, in support of the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, the four Health Board-based Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams commission and fund a range of services, initiatives and programmes in support of their own local action plans. These provide support to children and young people's groups that are working directly and/or indirectly towards reducing the level of underage drinking and street drinking.

Support is also provided to children and young people's groups that are working directly and/or indirectly towards reducing the level of underage drinking and street drinking in some local areas through local small grants schemes, Investing for Health Funding and Children Services Planning.

The Health Boards also commission comprehensive Addictions Treatment Services within secondary care (community and inpatient) which are open and accessible to all residents including young people aged over 18. All residents (including children and young people) also have access to generic primary/secondary care services who will meet other physical/mental health needs that may arise because of the misuse of alcohol.

Millstone Mountain

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what costs were incurred by the emergency services following the fire on Millstone Mountain in the high Mournes mountain range. (AQW 7046/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has advised that the fire on 8 May in the Mournes mountain range was at Donard rather than Millstone. The total cost incurred by NIFRS for attending the incident is estimated at £17,590. There will also have been costs incurred from other emergency services and agencies which are outside

the remit of my Department, not to mention the environmental cost in terms of damage to wildlife and the countryside in one of Northern Ireland's best known national heritage areas.

Underage Drinking

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many underage drinkers have been admitted to hospital for alcohol related conditions in each of the last 5 years.
(AQW 7057/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of admissions for people aged 17 years and under, to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, with a diagnosis of an alcohol related illness/condition is shown in the table below:

| Year | No. of Admissions |
|-----------|-------------------|
| 2002/2003 | 262 |
| 2003/2004 | 230 |
| 2004/2005 | 251 |
| 2005/2006 | 211 |
| 2006/2007 | 224 |

Source: Hospital Inpatient System/Hospital Episode Records System

Foster Carer Figures

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm that he is committed to increasing foster carer numbers by 300 by March 2010, as outlined in Priorities for Action; and to provide a baseline breakdown by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 7068/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm I am committed to increasing the number of foster carers by 300 by March 2010 compared with the baseline at 31 March 2006. The intention is to provide spare capacity in the foster care system so that children can be matched with foster carers. This should increase the stability of foster care placements.

By 31 March 2008 179 additional foster carers had been recruited above the baseline of 31 March 2006, details are given below.

| Name of Trust | Baseline @ 31 March 2006 | Position @ 31 March 2008 |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Belfast | 396 | 454 |

| Name of Trust | Baseline @ 31 March 2006 | Position @ 31 March 2008 |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Northern | 398 | 421 |
| South Eastern | 275 | 308 |
| Southern | 217 | 250 |
| Western | 242 | 274 |
| Regional | 1528 | 1707 |

Upgrading of the Ulster Hospital's Infrastructure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to upgrade the Ulster Hospital's infrastructure.
(AQW 7086/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A major redevelopment programme has been ongoing at the Ulster Hospital over recent years to upgrade the hospital's clinical facilities and site infrastructure. This initial phase of redevelopment includes a new Renal Unit, Maternity Unit and terraced car park. 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.

The Trust is working closely with my Department to develop a business case for further redevelopment work to be carried out at the Ulster Hospital. Proposals include development of the main ward, including A&E, outpatients, radiology, treatment centre, children's unit and main entrance. A decision on these projects cannot be given until the business case has been appraised and approved by the Department.

In light of the constraints on funding I will obviously need to carefully consider any future investment proposals alongside many others, in terms of priorities, when determining final allocations of capital investment funding.

Renal Dialysis Unit at The Causeway Hospital

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of a new Renal Dialysis Unit for the Causeway hospital.
(AQW 7087/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Plans to establish dialysis capacity

for the Northern Ireland population are based on the Renal Services Review 2002, which addresses estimated demand to 2010.

One recommendation of the Review was to create two new renal Units, one at Causeway Hospital and a second in the east of the Province. The proposed renal unit at Causeway is to be considered once expansion of stations at existing units (Altnagelvin, Antrim, Belfast City, Daisy Hill, Tyrone County, and Ulster Hospitals) is complete.

Haemodialysis Patients

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many haemodialysis patients there are from each council area, and the locations where these patients can receive treatment. (AQW 7088/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The estimated number of people obtaining haemodialysis treatment during 2006/07, at Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, by Local Government District is shown below:

| Local Government District | Number of Patients |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Antrim | 26 |
| Ards | 34 |
| Armagh | 22 |
| Ballymena | 31 |
| Ballymoney | 12 |
| Banbridge | 10 |
| Belfast | 147 |
| Carrickfergus | 34 |
| Castlereagh | 51 |
| Coleraine | 24 |
| Cookstown | 14 |
| Craigavon | 32 |
| Derry | 39 |
| Down | 35 |
| Dungannon | 8 |
| Fermanagh | 16 |
| Larne | 13 |
| Limavady | 10 |
| Lisburn | 46 |
| Magherafelt | 20 |
| Moyle | 7 |

| Local Government District | Number of Patients |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Newry & Mourne | 34 |
| Newtownabbey | 35 |
| North Down | 28 |
| Omagh | 14 |
| Strabane | 4 |
| Non NI Postcode | 30 |
| Total | 776 |

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

There are currently six hospitals carrying out haemodialysis treatment in Northern Ireland, they are Belfast City, Ulster, Antrim, Daisy Hill, Altnagelvin and Tyrone County. In addition to those treated in a hospital setting, there are 14 patients receiving haemodialysis treatment at home.

Health Prescription Charges

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the motion passed in the Assembly on 15 May 2007 in relation to Health Prescription Charges, what progress has been made on the review of the list of conditions that currently entitle patients to free prescriptions. (AQW 7112/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I established the cost and benefit review of prescription charges as promised in the Assembly debate on this issue in May last year. The review group have completed their analysis of the current system of prescription charging and sent their report to me, which I am currently considering. In the interim, and in recognition of the fact that I am still considering my options, I have frozen prescription charges for 2008/2009.

Renal Services Review 2002

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the Renal Services Review 2002. (AQW 7150/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Recommendations for 6 of the 7 key areas identified to sustain the renal service as set out in the 2002 Renal Services Review have been implemented. These are:

- Opening of a new renal unit at Altnagelvin Hospital in December 2005

- Expansion of dialysis capacity at Antrim, Daisy Hill (Newry), Tyrone County, Altnagelvin and Belfast City hospitals. A sixth unit opened at the Ulster Hospital in November 2006
- Implementation of a prevention strategy
- Further expansion of the consultant surgical capacity
- Recruitment and training of additional renal physicians
- Recruitment and training of additional renal nursing, technical and support staff

A remaining key recommendation concerns the development of a new renal unit at Causeway Hospital and I would refer the member to my answer to AQW 7087/08 which deals with this issue.

Causeway Angina Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the findings of the Northern Trust Working Group on Causeway Angina Services. (AQW 7151/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Causeway Angina service has received very positive evaluation with patients reporting improved quality of life and reduced symptoms from their cardiac disease. Other outcome measures have also shown improvement with reductions in blood pressure and reductions in lipid and obesity levels. Hospital admissions have also been reduced.

The Agenda for Change

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure that, under the Agenda for Change, no individual employee will suffer financial detriment as a result of delays in pay bandings, particularly in the Speech, Language Therapy and Pharmacy professions. (AQW 7154/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is important that in the interest of equality the same rules are applied to all Health and Social Care staff moving to the Agenda for Change rates of pay. This Agreement provides for pay protection for up to four years at 1 April 2005 rates where an individual received a higher rate of pay under the old arrangements. 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.

Mental-Health Facilities

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm if an acute mental health facility can safely operate independently without the back-up of acute medicine either on-site, or in close proximity to the facility. (AQW 7189/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The purpose of acute mental health facilities is to provide care and treatment for people with acute mental health problems. If these patients have other medical conditions, either on admission, or emerging during admission, there should be appropriate liaison arrangements in place with acute medical services to provide either support, or in extreme cases, transfer to an acute medical facility if required. At any rate, all patients in an acute mental health hospital setting should have the same access to acute medical facilities as he/she would have in the surrounding community.

Dental Services

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why delays are occurring in the treatment of patients requiring specialist care in the restorative department of the School of Dentistry; to confirm if the appropriate staff are spending their time actively treating patients; what actions his Department is taking to improve the service; and what investment there is to train staff in the primary care sector to treat routine cases, allowing prioritisation of resources, similar to the provision of orthodontic services. (AQW 7208/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The restorative department of the School of Dentistry has two functions; it delivers a service to patients on a referral basis and provides a teaching function to the undergraduate dental students. 6 consultant restorative dentists have a dual role of service delivery and teaching provision; while a further 2 full time health service consultants provide services for the Belfast Trust and also outside the Belfast Trust area. These staff spend their time treating patients and teaching dental students as their contracts dictate.

An analysis of the patients referred to the restorative department has revealed that a significant

number of these referrals are inappropriate and could be treated in a primary care setting. The School of Dentistry is taking steps to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals. A new consultant has recently been appointed and a further 3 trainees are due to complete their training soon. The measures taken to ensure appropriate referrals coupled with the increased staffing should reduce any delays experienced. The dental service within the Belfast Trust has met all access targets to date and will continue to do so.

Dental graduates are trained to treat routine restorative cases in the primary care setting. I have recently provided additional funding to the School of Dentistry to train an extra 5 dental students per year to meet the needs of the service and I provided an additional £7.9 million for primary care dentistry in the last financial year to further support this sector.

Home-Help Service in Strabane

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reduction in Home Helps for the elderly in the Strabane District Council area; how many clients will be affected by this reduction; and what steps he is taking to address this reduction. (AQW 7239/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that there has been no reduction in the allocation of resources for Home Help in the Strabane District Council area. All clients in the area are assessed for Home Help services using Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care with services provided according to assessed need.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Assembly Questions

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the delays; and (ii) the costs incurred by his department, in translating answers to written Assembly questions into Irish. (AQW 5398/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): My Department has not translated any answers to written Assembly Questions into Irish.

The Department is currently reviewing its policies towards the use and promotion of the Irish language.

Free Travel for Over 60s

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a timescale within which (i) the forms for free travel for the over-60's will be issued; and (ii) the first passes will be issued. (AQW 5463/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Subject to the outcome of the policy consultation and consultation on the equality impact assessment, I intend that the application process will commence in July with passes issued in time for the scheme to commence in October.

Abandoned and Disused Culverts

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of abandoned or disused culverts in North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 6819/08)

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 the North Down parliamentary constituency.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency has also advised me that there are no designated culverted watercourses in the North Down constituency that have been abandoned or are disused.

Traffic Lights

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for the number and location of traffic lights in Derry/Londonderry with a facility to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross. (AQW 6939/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6939/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 46 traffic signal and pelican crossing installations in Derry with facilities to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross. They are sited at the following locations:

- Drumahoe Pelican Crossing;
- Woodburn / Dungiven Road Junction;
- Bond's Hill / Limavady Road / Glendermott Road;
- Clooney Terrace;
- Bond's Hill Pelican;
- Duke Street / Craigavon Bridge;
- Foyle Road / Lower Deck;
- John Street Pelican;
- Abercorn Road / Bishop Street / Barrack Street;

- Water Street / Harbour Square;
- Water Street / Orchard Street / Foyle Street;
- Orchard Street Pelican;
- Ferryquay Street Pelican Crossing;
- Guildhall Square;
- Creggan X Signals;
- Northland Rd at Asylum Rd Pelican;
- Duncreggan Road / Northland Road Junction;
- Strand Road / Rock Road Junction;
- Buncrana Road / Racecourse Road Junction;
- Culmore Road / Greenhaw Road Junction;
- Culmore Road / Garden City Junction;
- Limavady Road / Nelson Drive Junction;
- Northland Road Pelican at Magee College;
- Glenshane Road / Belt Road Junction (Altnagelvin);
- Meadowbank Avenue / Strand Road / Sainsbury's Access;
- Madam's Bank Road Pelican;
- Buncrana Road Pelican;
- Carlisle Road Pelican;
- Guildhall Pelican;
- Racecourse Road Pelican;
- Abercorn Road Pelican;
- Glengalliagh Road at St Brigid's;
- Glengalliagh Road at Northside Toucan;
- Crescent Link at Kingfisherbridge Toucan;
- Creggan Road at Kylemore Park Pelican;
- Creggan Road at Grangemore Pelican;
- Culmore Road Pelican at Magnet Bar;
- Crescent Link at Retail Park Toucan;
- Strand Road Pelican Crossing;
- Lonemoor Road at Blighs Lane Pelican;
- Rock Road Pelican;
- Rosemount Pelican;
- Crescent Link at Kilfennan Toucan;
- Queens Quay Pelican;
- Claudy Main Street Pelican; and
- Skeoge Link Toucan.

With regard to AQW 6940/08, the number of traffic signal and pelican crossing installations in each Roads Service Division, with facilities to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross and the percentage they represent in terms of overall traffic signal provision in each Division, is as follows:

| Roads Service Division | Number of Traffic Signal Installations with Facilities for the Visually Impaired | Percentage in Terms of Total Traffic Signal Installations in Division |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Northern | 94 | 77.7% |
| Western | 73 | 98.6% |
| Southern | 135 | 85.4% |
| Eastern | 512 | 95.7% |

Traffic Lights

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for the number of traffic lights in each of (a) Northern Division; (b) Western Division; (c) Southern Division and (d) Eastern Division, with a facility to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross; and (ii) the percentage these figures represent in terms of the overall traffic lights in each division. (AQW 6940/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6939/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 46 traffic signal and pelican crossing installations in Derry with facilities to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross. They are sited at the following locations:

- Drumahoe Pelican Crossing;
- Woodburn / Dungiven Road Junction;
- Bond's Hill / Limavady Road / Glendermott Road;
- Clooney Terrace;
- Bond's Hill Pelican;
- Duke Street / Craigavon Bridge;
- Foyle Road / Lower Deck;
- John Street Pelican;
- Abercorn Road / Bishop Street / Barrack Street;
- Water Street / Harbour Square;
- Water Street / Orchard Street / Foyle Street;
- Orchard Street Pelican;
- Ferryquay Street Pelican Crossing;
- Guildhall Square;
- Creggan X Signals;
- Northland Rd at Asylum Rd Pelican;
- Duncreggan Road / Northland Road Junction;
- Strand Road / Rock Road Junction;
- Buncrana Road / Racecourse Road Junction;
- Culmore Road / Greenhaw Road Junction;
- Culmore Road / Garden City Junction;
- Limavady Road / Nelson Drive Junction;
- Northland Road Pelican at Magee College;

- Glenshane Road / Belt Road Junction (Altnagelvin);
- Meadowbank Avenue / Strand Road / Sainsbury's Access;
- Madam's Bank Road Pelican;
- Buncrana Road Pelican;
- Carlisle Road Pelican;
- Guildhall Pelican;
- Racecourse Road Pelican;
- Abercorn Road Pelican;
- Glengalliagh Road at St Brigid's;
- Glengalliagh Road at Northside Toucan;
- Crescent Link at Knightsbridge Toucan;
- Creggan Road at Kylemore Park Pelican;
- Creggan Road at Grangemore Pelican;
- Culmore Road Pelican at Magnet Bar;
- Crescent Link at Retail Park Toucan;
- Strand Road Pelican Crossing;
- Lonemoor Road at Blighs Lane Pelican;
- Rock Road Pelican;
- Rosemount Pelican;
- Crescent Link at Kilfennan Toucan;
- Queens Quay Pelican;
- Claudy Main Street Pelican; and
- Skeoge Link Toucan.

With regard to AQW 6940/08, the number of traffic signal and pelican crossing installations in each Roads Service Division, with facilities to alert vision impaired pedestrians that it is safe to cross and the percentage they represent in terms of overall traffic signal provision in each Division, is as follows:

| Roads Service Division | Number of Traffic Signal Installations with Facilities for the Visually Impaired | Percentage in Terms of Total Traffic Signal Installations in Division |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Northern | 94 | 77.7% |
| Western | 73 | 98.6% |
| Southern | 135 | 85.4% |
| Eastern | 512 | 95.7% |

Larne Railway Lines

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the number of passenger journeys on the Larne rail line, broken down by station of origin. (AQW 6970/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The total number of rail passenger journeys on the Larne line for each of the last 3 years was:

| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Passenger Journey Numbers ('000s) | 1,478 | 1,720 | 1,905 |

The following table provides information on the number of passengers, purchasing single and return tickets by station of origin on the Larne line, for the last three years:

| Station Name | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
| Belfast Yorkgate | 26,069 | 39,355 | 44,120 |
| Whiteabbey | 41,113 | 81,274 | 100,941 |
| Jordanstown | 51,118 | 90,218 | 100,822 |
| Greenisland | 29,714 | 72,469 | 89,310 |
| Trooperslane | 1,763 | 6,989 | 7,858 |
| Clipperstown | 14,593 | 54,887 | 67,913 |
| Carrickfergus | 95,157 | 282,132 | 332,126 |
| Downshire | 154,895 | 67,618 | 83,730 |
| Whitehead | 86,095 | 133,487 | 153,117 |
| Ballycarry | 7,139 | 19,132 | 17,956 |
| Magheramorne | 745 | 2,339 | 2,475 |
| Glynn | 630 | 3,322 | 3,881 |
| Larne | 52,270 | 89,776 | 107,865 |
| Larne Harbour | 732 | 1,897 | 4,785 |
| Total | 562,033 | 944,895 | 1,116,899 |

The figures do not include significant numbers of pre-paid ticket types, i.e. schools, commuters, or any other type of ticket which does not go through the railway ticketing system, i.e. Freedom of Northern Ireland, Day Tickets, Family Tickets.

The figures include cross-border tickets sold from Larne line stations to cross-border stations.

The figures only include tickets sold from the Larne line stations, i.e. if a return ticket is bought from Central Station to Carrickfergus, for example, it will not be shown, as the station of origin was Central Station.

There is distortion in the 2005/06 figures due to the Larne Line re-lay programme when bus substitution was in operation. Downshire results were particularly affected to the detriment of Carrickfergus as Downshire was used as a key hub for the bus substitution.

Resurfacing of the B7

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to repair and resurface the stretch of the B7 between the village of Mayobridge and the Newry and Mourne district council's landfill site at Aughnagon. (AQW 6979/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, at present, there are no plans to re-surface this section of the B7 Chapel Hill Road, Mayobridge.

However, in accordance with the Roads Maintenance Standards for Safety, the Roads Service will continue to inspect the Chapel Hill Road during routine inspection cycles and any defects found will be repaired within established time scales.

Parking on Pavements

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development what responsibility he has for tackling the problem of motor vehicles parking on pavements. (AQW 6997/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that within current road traffic legislation, there is no general prohibition on parking on footways. However, if marked parking restrictions are present on the adjacent carriageway, the restrictions will generally also apply to the footway.

These restrictions are enforceable by the Roads Service through its contractor, NCP Services Ltd. However, if footway parking is creating a problem of obstruction in areas where there are no marked parking restrictions on the carriageway, then that is a matter that should be referred to and dealt with by the PSNI.

Residents' Parking Scheme in Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 6509/08, what are the estimated costs of consultants involved in the process of bringing about residents' parking schemes in Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and Markets (West). (AQW 6999/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 6999/08, the estimated consultancy costs for the three named schemes are approximately £25,500.

As regards AQW 7001/08, my Department's Roads Service has, in response to numerous and on-going requests from residents and their elected

representatives, established a policy to allow the introduction of residents' parking schemes to address the problems associated with all-day commuter car parking in the worst-affected residential areas.

I would hope that the residents in at least some of the first five areas already consulted about scheme designs for their areas, will recognise the benefits that these schemes can bring to them so that we may make progress. However, I do not intend to carry on with scheme development and implementation in individual areas where local communities do not support them. My officials in the Roads Service are actively working on preliminary scheme designs for a number of other areas where a need has been identified – and indeed have a list of other areas awaiting survey and assessment. Should residents in any of the first five areas reject the proposals, it would be with regret, but the Roads Service would have to move on to these other areas.

The only practical way to deal with all-day commuter parking in residential areas is through residents' parking schemes. There is no workable alternative. I would be happy to proceed with schemes in all five of the areas consulted on to date, as long as they have the support of the local communities. Without that support, my Department's resources will regrettably be deployed elsewhere.

Ulsterbus Services on Bangor Routes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers used Ulsterbus Services on Bangor routes (not including the Bangor-Belfast route), in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7026/08)

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 on Ulsterbus services on Bangor routes (not including the Belfast to Bangor route) for the last five years is as follows:-

| Route | April 2003 – March 2004 | April 2004 – March 2005 | April 2005 – March 2006 | April 2006 – March 2007 | April 2007 – March 2008 |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Town Services | 732,195 | 693,252 | 712,201 | 705,648 | 703,357 |
| 3. Bangor - Donaghadee | 137,450 | 139,561 | 139,707 | 134,019 | 123,444 |
| 6. Bangor - Newtownards | 360,578 | 349,102 | 352,459 | 354,924 | 353,612 |
| 301. Bangor – Hollywood Exchange | 16,013 | 5,588 | 6,406 | 6,650 | 7,096 |

| Route | April 2003 – March 2004 | April 2004 – March 2005 | April 2005 – March 2006 | April 2006 – March 2007 | April 2007 – March 2008 |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 301B Bangor – Dundonald Hospital | 8,275 | 9,221 | 10,904 | 10,295 | 11,100 |
| 301D – Bangor – Craigtlet | - | - | 725 | 785 | 682 |
| B11/B12 Bangor – Hollywood Town Service | 8,293 | 20,210 | 18,213 | 17,969 | 14,978 |
| BE1 Easibus Route 1 | 15,574 | 16,195 | 14,253 | 13,217 | 14,032 |
| BE2 Easibus Route 2 | 8,807 | 9,959 | 10,503 | 11,456 | 13,266 |
| BE3 Easibus Route 3 | 18,532 | 19,019 | 18,389 | 19,275 | 20,494 |
| BE4 Easibus Route 4 | 9,693 | 9,382 | 9,361 | 9,011 | 9,144 |

Please note:-

The above figures include Town Service journeys to Bangor schools but not Education & Library Board pupils with passes.

Service 3 and 6 are jointly operated by Bangor and Newtownards depots.

Belfast to Bangor Ulsterbus Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers used the Ulsterbus service between Bangor and Belfast, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7028/08)

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 on the Ulsterbus service between Bangor and Belfast for the last five years is as follows:-

| Route | April 2003 – March 2004 | April 2004 – March 2005 | April 2005 – March 2006 | April 2006 – March 2007 | April 2007 – March 2008 |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 203 Donaghadee – Belfast express via Bangor | 29,769 | 32,852 | 40,722 | 39,892 | 34,349 |
| B1/B2/502 Bangor - Belfast | 547,776 | 515,001 | 470,794 | 441,690 | 414,963 |

Please note that figures for service 203 contain some Donaghadee to Bangor only passengers.

Residents' Parking Schemes in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to extend residents parking schemes to North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7118/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: 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 not intended to commence any further schemes.

However, in relation to the North Down parliamentary constituency, 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 Department's 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.

At present, there are no specific plans to develop residents' parking schemes elsewhere in the North Down area. However, if there is a specific location that you wish to be considered for a residents parking scheme, officials from my Department's Roads Service would be happy to include it within a list of areas awaiting preliminary surveys.

Ballyhenry Park-and-Ride Scheme

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Ballyhenry Park and Ride scheme. (AQW 7130/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As the Member will be aware from my reply to his previous question on this issue (AQW 3753/08), my Department has submitted a planning application for a 92 space Park & Ride facility at Ballyhenry Road. I understand that Planning Service presented this planning application to Newtownabbey Borough Council on 6 May 2008 and that the Council requested a decision be deferred pending a response from me to concerns

that had been expressed by the Mayor on behalf of the Council.

I can confirm that a response issued on 19 May 2008, advising the Council that my Department remains of the opinion that there is a strong case for the provision of a Park-and-Ride facility at Ballyhenry.

Safety on the Hillhead Road

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to deal with the worsening fissures on the Hillhead Road, Newry and adjoining residential properties, to ensure the safety of those who live there.

(AQW 7147/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Further to my answer to the Member's previous Assembly Question (AQW 3859/08), officials from my Department's Roads Service have had a number of discussions with local residents affected by the road closure at Hillhead Road.

As you are aware, the upper section of the roadway has been closed to the general public and the condition of the road is being closely monitored. I understand that there have been concerns, expressed in the past few days, that the condition of this section of road may be worsening. I have asked my officials to take advice on this and to discuss it further with residents.

I can also advise that I wrote to the owners of the Drumalane Quarry, on 29 April 2008, asking them to outline urgently how they intend to re-instate full traffic flow on the Hillhead Road and to deal with access to all the properties. I am awaiting their response to this request.

Disabled Access on Buses

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what priority is given by Translink to people with disabilities and mobility impairments to access spaces made available for wheelchairs on Translink bus services, particularly when these spaces are already occupied by other people or luggage.

(AQW 7170/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has been working closely with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), in order to maximise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and mobility impairments, and in particular, the importance of access to priority seating and wheelchair space. This work includes revising Translink signage to advise passengers clearly of the requirement to vacate easy access space to give preference to wheelchair users.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans for a public enquiry into the restrictions placed on George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 7198/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have no statutory locus in relation to the restrictions imposed under the Planning Agreement between the Department of the Environment and George Best Belfast City Airport. Therefore, I have no plans for such a public inquiry.

Contracts for Major Road Schemes

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many major road schemes were carried out by his Department; and (ii) to list the firms awarded contracts for these schemes in (a) 2004-05; (b) 2005-06; (c) 2006-07; and (d) 2007-08.

(AQW 7249/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In total 20 major roads schemes were carried out by my Department's Roads Service in the years specified. Details of these schemes are provided in the table below, which includes the start and completion dates, as well the name of the awarded contractor.

| Scheme Name | Start Date | Completion Date | Awarded Contractor |
|---|------------|-----------------|--|
| A8 Belfast to Larne Road – Doagh to Hillhead Road | 24/02/2003 | 27/07/2004 | John Graham (Dromore) Ltd. |
| M1 Blacks Road to Stockmans Lane | 11/08/2003 | 10/08/2004 | F P McCann |
| Foyle Bridge, Londonderry - Strengthening | 22/09/2003 | 31/12/2004 | Farrens (Construction) Ltd. |
| A1 Loughbrickland to Beech Hill | 15/03/2004 | 21/10/2006 | Whitemountain Quarries Ltd. |
| A8 Belfast to Larne Road, Ballynure | 05/04/2004 | 15/03/2005 | John Graham (Dromore) Ltd. |
| A1 Underpass at Hillsborough Road Junction, Dromore | 19/07/2004 | 28/06/2005 | John Graham (Dromore) Ltd. |
| A5 Omagh throughpass – Stage 3 | 26/07/2004 | 13/10/2006 | Deane Public Works and Gerald Love Contracts |

| Scheme Name | Start Date | Completion Date | Awarded Contractor |
|---|------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Bann River Bridge, Portadown - Strengthening | 10/01/2005 | 28/02/2006 | Farrens (Construction) Ltd. |
| A1 Newry to Dundalk Link Road (NI Section) | 01/02/2005 | 02/08/2007 | SIAC-Ferrovial Joint Venture |
| M1/Westlink improvements | 27/02/2006 | ongoing | Highway Management (City) Ltd. |
| M2 Crosskennan – slip roads at Antrim Hospital | 12/06/2006 | 25/07/2007 | Highway Management (City) Ltd. |
| M2 Widening (Sandyknowes to Greencastle) | 01/03/2007 | ongoing | Highway Management (City) Ltd. |
| Skeoge Link, Londonderry | 23/04/2007 | 20/03/2008 | Whitemountain Quarries Ltd. |
| A514 Crescent Link, Londonderry | 23/04/2007 | 10/01/2008 | F P McCann Ltd. |
| A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue | 19/12/2007 | ongoing | Amey Lagan Roads |
| A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley | 13/02/2008 | ongoing | Amey Lagan Roads |
| A4/A5 Improvements (A4 Annaghilla and Tullyvar) | 13/02/2008 | ongoing | Amey Lagan Roads |
| A1 Junction Improvements | 01/03/2008 | ongoing | Amey Lagan Roads |
| A4 Henry Street / Sligo Road | 03/03/2008 | ongoing | Lagan Construction |
| A20 Newtownards Southern Distributor | 31/03/2008 | ongoing | Gibson Bros. |

Schedule of Blasting on the A1

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the schedule of blasting on the A1 up until 1 July 2008. (AQW 7253/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Contractor undertaking this work has provided Roads Service with the schedule below, detailing blasting operations at Cloghogue between May and the end of June 2008.

ROADS SERVICE DESIGN BUILD FINANCE OPERATE PACKAGE 2 : SCHEME 1 - BEECH HILL TO CLOGHOGUE SCHEDULE OF PLANNED ROCK BLASTING AT CLOGHOGUE - MAY AND JUNE 2008

| Day | Date | Comment |
|-----------|--------------|--|
| Wednesday | 21 May 2008 | Road expected to be closed for up to 20 minutes between 11.00am and 3.00pm - delays expected |
| Friday | 23 May 2008 | |
| Monday | 26 May 2008 | |
| Wednesday | 28 May 2008 | Road expected to be closed for up to 20 minutes between 11.00am and 3.00pm - delays expected |
| Friday | 30 May 2008 | |
| Monday | 02 June 2008 | |
| Wednesday | 04 June 2008 | |
| Friday | 06 June 2008 | |
| Monday | 09 June 2008 | |
| Wednesday | 11 June 2008 | |
| Friday | 13 June 2008 | |
| Monday | 16 June 2008 | |
| Wednesday | 18 June 2008 | |
| Friday | 20 June 2008 | |
| Monday | 23 June 2008 | |
| Wednesday | 25 June 2008 | |
| Friday | 27 June 2008 | |
| Monday | 30 June 2008 | |

Note - Rock blasting remote from traffic on the A1 Newry Bypass, i.e. in the Derrybeg Lane area, may also take place on any day from Monday-Friday inclusive.

Ballycastle to Rathlin Island Ferry Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the tender for the Ballycastle to Rathlin ferry service.

(AQW 7272/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The tender process has been completed. A six-year contract to provide an improved ferry service was awarded to Rathlin Island Ferry Limited on 18 April. With the agreement of the Department, the new operator has arranged with the existing operator, Rathlin Ferries Limited, to take over the service from 1 July 2008.

Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total amount of the

severance package offered to the Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Water, on the announcement of her resignation on 20 May 2008. (AQW 7278/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

The total amount of the severance package was £266,217.65. (This figure was made up of entitlements of one year's salary, six months' pay in lieu of notice and six months' employer's pension contribution in lieu of notice under the terms of the NICS Compensation Scheme.)

Residents' Parking Permits

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development if the proposed cost of £40 for a residents' parking permit in Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets (West) will be fixed for a specific period of time or subject to ongoing review. (AQW 7284/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service reviews the charges for its on-street and off-street parking facilities on an annual basis and submits any recommendations for changes to me, for consideration. It is intended that the charges for Residents' Parking Schemes will be considered in future reviews.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Social 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 6941/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):

The consultancy services information for 2005/06 and 2006/07 expands upon consultancy expenditure details provided to the Public Accounts Committee in October 2007. It relates to the Department for Social Development including Agencies.

| Year | Number of contracts DSD | Brief description of contract | Value of contract | Consultancy Firm |
|---------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 2004/05 | NIL | | | |

| Year | Number of contracts DSD | Brief description of contract | Value of contract | Consultancy Firm |
|---------|-------------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------------|
| 2005/06 | 3 | Appointment of an independent member of an Assessment Panel for Foyle Street, Derry, development | £3160 | Geoff Wright Aims Ltd |
| | | Urban Regeneration – potential Study – Impact of development/ regeneration projects within Belfast City Centre and capacity for future development. | £50,000 | GVA Grimley |
| | | To prepare additional Economic Appraisals for 3 Community Empowerment partnerships | £7922 | Williamson Consulting |
| 2006/07 | 3 | Strategic Management Consultancy for Northern Ireland Tenants Action project | £500 | Redsocks Consulting Ltd |
| | | Anti-Poverty Unit – Strategic Business Review | £140,000 | Deloitte MCS Limited |
| | | Evaluation of work - North Belfast Community Action Unit | £20,251 | Richard Mackenzie |
| 2007/08 | 1 | Development of a self evaluation model, incorporating information technology for the Community Investment Programme | £70,500 | CMB Ltd |

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development how many working days were lost by her Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6985/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is contained in the table and covers the 24 months from April 2006 to March 2008. This information has been provided using data from the NICS Human Resource Management System (HRMS).

| Month | Days Lost Due to Stress Related Illness |
|----------------|---|
| April 2006 | 579 |
| May 2006 | 1,190 |
| June 2006 | 1,643 |
| July 2006 | 1,827 |
| August 2006 | 2,309 |
| September 2006 | 2,285 |
| October 2006 | 2,540 |
| November 2006 | 2,385 |
| December 2006 | 1,840 |
| January 2007 | 1,980 |
| February 2007 | 1,822 |
| March 2007 | 1,711 |
| April 2007 | 1,548 |
| May 2007 | 1,957 |
| June 2007 | 1,894 |
| July 2007 | 1,837 |
| August 2007 | 2,181 |
| September 2007 | 2,144 |
| October 2007 | 2,419 |
| November 2007 | 2,583 |
| December 2007 | 2,429 |
| January 2008 | 2,464 |
| February 2008 | 2,081 |
| March 2008 | 1,503 |

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 3 years, her Department's funding of Citizens Advice Bureaux, broken down by district council area. (AQW 7004/08)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD funding allocated to Citizens Advice Bureaux including the Regional Office and Local Bureaux for 2005/2006, 2006/2007, 2007/2008 totals £6,408,619. It has been broken down into Council Area and has been detailed in an excel spreadsheet with data table notes in the Assembly Library.

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development how much she spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008. (AQW 7013/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There was a total of £303,061.18 spent on publicity and advertising by the Department for Social Development in 2007-2008.

Bonfires in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the reasons why £10,000 has been withdrawn for cleaning up after bonfires in the Ards area, particularly in Donaghadee. (AQW 7019/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has not yet received a formal application for funding for the bonfire scheme from Ards Borough Council.

Housing Associations in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new homes are planned to be built by housing associations in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7020/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not available by constituency. However, I can say that in 2008/09, housing associations plan to start 200 dwellings in the North Down Borough Council area. I have placed a copy of the full five year Social Housing Development Programme in the Assembly Library.

Women's Centres Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what processes were used by the Women's Centres Regional Partnership to select Women's Centres; and how open was any competition used in the process. (AQW 7069/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Women's Centres Regional Partnership was not involved in the selection of women's centres. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership was only established in 2006 the women's centres supported by my Department had been identified by the Review Group in September 2005.

Women's Centres Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what processes were used to select directors for the Women's Centres Regional Partnership. (AQW 7070/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department received a funding proposal in early 2006, from four organisations, to deliver support to women's centres as described in the 2005 Review of Women's Organisations Delivering Support and Services to Disadvantaged Communities. The Directors of the Women's Centres Regional Partnership are drawn from these four organisations.

Women's Centres Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development why women's policy groups, women's specialist groups and women's education groups were excluded from the Women's Centres Regional Partnership. (AQW 7071/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Women's Centres Regional Partnership was established to provide support and advice to 14 women's centres identified in the 2005 Review of Women's Organisations Delivering Support and Services to Disadvantaged Communities. In early 2006 my Department received a funding proposal from four organisations to deliver support to women's centres as described in the 2005 Review of Women's Organisations Delivering Support and Services to Disadvantaged Communities.

The Review Group did not consider it appropriate for my Department to provide funding for policy groups, specialist groups or education groups where the lead policy responsibility lies with another department.

Women's Centres Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to review the governance arrangements for the Women's Centres Regional Partnership. (AQW 7072/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The governance arrangements for the Women's Centres Regional Partnership will be reviewed later this year.

Multiple Occupations in Houses and Apartments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to deal with the problems associated with apartments and homes in multiple occupation given their impact on permanent home dwellers on the north coast. (AQO 3579/08)

The Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for the legislation relating to the management of Houses In Multiple Occupation, the Department of the Environment, Planning Service also has a role. The Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 requires all new proposals for Houses In Multiple Occupation to have planning permission.

The Department of the Environment has been considering introducing a Houses In Multiple Occupation Subject Plan for Coleraine similar to that introduced for Belfast which caps the development of Houses In Multiple Occupation in an area. However due to legal challenges on Environmental reports for the Northern Area Plan, it is currently not possible to progress the proposal.

Rathgill Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Rathgill Housing Estate, Bangor to improve housing over the next three years. (AQW 7099/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's proposed capital works programme in Rathgill Estate is as follows:

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 2008/09 | | | |
| Rathgill Zones 4&5 Environmental Improvement | 85 | Feb 2009 | £136,400 |
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Rathgill Zone 5 Multi Element Improvement | 161 | April 2009 | £526,142 |
| 2010/11 | | | |
| Rathgill Zone 6 Environmental Improvement | | April 2010 | £300,000 |
| Total | | | £962,542 |

In addition normal response and planned maintenance work will be carried out as required.

Breezemount Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Breezemount Housing Estate, Bangor to improve housing over the next three years. (AQW 7100/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has no current plans to carry out capital works to its property in Breezemount Estate over this period as major works totalling some £1.5 million have just been completed. Normal routine and planned maintenance work will continue as required.

Kilcooley Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Kilcooley Housing Estate, Bangor to improve housing over the next three years. (AQW 7101/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the Housing Executive's proposed capital work programme in Kilcooley Estate for the period requested.

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2008/09 | | | |
| Kilcooley Zone 3 Heat Replacement | 91 | 01/04/08 | £331,546 |
| Kilcooley Heat Zone 4 Heat Replacement | 35 | 08/03/09 | £154,000 |
| | | | £485,546 |
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Kilcooley Heat Zone 6 Heat Replacement | 61 | 01/04/09 | £268,400 |
| Kilcooley Zone 5(Flats) Multi Element Improvement | 18 | 01/10/09 | £540,000 |
| Kilcooley 1b Multi Element Improvement | 20 | 01/11/09 | £958,000 |
| Kilcooley Zone 2 External Cyclical Maintenance | 95 | 01/04/09 | Not yet available |
| | | | £1,766,400 |
| Total | | | £2,251,946 |

In addition normal response and planned maintenance work will be carried out as required.

New Housing for Markets Area Residents

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many residents in the Markets

area have been offered housing or transfer to the new build on the site of the old Cricket Ground on the Lower Ormeau Rd; (ii) how many of those have accepted; and (iii) how many have refused. (AQW 7128/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Of the 79 properties in Phase 1 of the Clanmil Housing Association scheme at the North Cricket Ground site, 11 offers were made to people in the Markets area. Seven were accepted and 4 were refused.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if the decision to cease funding for Neighbourhood Renewal posts in Derry/Londonderry was a local decision taken by the North West Development Office or a regional decision. (AQW 7134/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Individual decisions about Neighbourhood Renewal funding in Derry are taken by the North West Development Office in consultation with the relevant Neighbourhood Partnerships and statutory bodies.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if the Post Project Evaluation influenced the decision to cease funding for Neighbourhood Renewal posts in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 7135/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In order to determine future funding after 31 March 2008, it was necessary to undertake an evaluation of each project. Decisions were informed by a review of each project including the Post Project Evaluation along with engagement with the Neighbourhood Partnerships and other Government Departments.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development why some groups in Derry/Londonderry who are not deemed eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding have been told that they would be given at least one year's funding so that alternative sources of revenue could be found. (AQW 7136/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department agreed to continue to fund groups delivering Neighbourhood Renewal services and activities which fall under another Department's statutory responsibility for up to one year whilst

officials seek clarification with the relevant statutory body on long-term funding.

The Department is not funding any project or groups in Derry/Londonderry which are deemed ineligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to clarify what service her Department will fund for family support, early years, youth and community education services following the decision to cease funding for Neighbourhood Renewal posts in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 7137/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department will be offering up to three year contracts to those groups directly delivering on Neighbourhood Renewal priorities. The services mentioned fall under the statutory responsibility of other Government Departments.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to clarify where the underspend in the allocated Neighbourhood Renewal budget will be allocated following the decision to cease funding for Neighbourhood Renewal posts in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 7138/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There is no intention to underspend in Derry. All Neighbourhood Renewal funding for the North West will be directed at the priorities identified in the relevant Neighbourhood Action Plans. Departmental officials are in discussions with the Neighbourhood Partnerships and other Government Departments to develop services that will make a difference to those living in the most disadvantaged communities.

Special Transitional Allowance

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions she has held with her counterpart in the United Kingdom Government to address the issue of widows and widowers being denied access to benefits, including the Special Transitional Allowance, previously available to them as part of a married couple. (AQW 7186/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Under the previous Supplementary Benefit scheme, a person's benefit may have included an additional amount of £10 or more to meet the cost of essential private domestic help needed because of, for example, old

age or ill health. When the Income Support scheme replaced Supplementary Benefit in April 1988, a Special Transitional Addition was awarded to protect the person's rate of benefit when they moved from Supplementary Benefit to the Income Support scheme.

A Special Transitional Addition was not awarded to a person claiming Income Support following the death of a partner who had been the Supplementary Benefit recipient. The provisions for Special Transitional Additions correspond to those in Great Britain.

With the exception of the Special Transitional Addition, widows and widowers are not denied access to benefit.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Social Development what financial support her Department has provided to the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in West Armagh over the last five years. (AQW 7190/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Over the last five financial years my Department has provided funding of £656,330.94 to support projects in Armagh Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

Homeless Figures

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are estimated to be homeless. (AQW 7218/08)

The Minister for Social Development: At the end of April 2008 a total of 9,863 applicants on the Housing Executive's waiting list were unintentionally homeless and in priority need for re-housing.

Housing Benefit

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development to state the qualifying period for someone to receive Housing Benefit when they are in receipt of Incapacity Benefit. (AQW 7235/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There is no qualifying period for someone to receive Housing Benefit.

Good Morning North West Project

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development if she will reconsider her decision to withdraw all support from Good Morning North West given the impact that it will have on the pensioners

who avail of its services; and to ask the Minister if she accepts the deep concern in the Foyle constituency about the loss of vital services in areas of multiple deprivation. (AQW 7237/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Following extensive local consultation with the statutory health authorities, Departmental officials have decided not to continue to fund the Good Morning North West project in the long term. The Department has been funding this health project for three years and I have agreed to continue to provide funding of approximately £60,000 until 31 August 2008 to allow the organisation to make alternative funding arrangements. Furthermore, I am providing around £54,000 to the project promoters, Galliagh Community Development Group for their future work. Therefore, it is inaccurate to suggest that the Department has withdrawn all support for the project. Neighbourhood Renewal is the Executive's main vehicle for tackling deprivation and disadvantage and is not solely the responsibility of the Department for Social Development.

Street Drinking

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to introduce tougher legislation to tackle street drinking. (AQW 7265/08)

The Minister for Social Development: New powers relating to the public consumption of alcohol have been included in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 which completed its Parliamentary stages on 7 May 2008. The measures in the Order, which will replace the drinking in public bye-laws, are intended to ensure that problematic drinking can be tackled on the spot in a focused and targeted way. Councils will continue to designate areas where disorder or public nuisance is associated with public drinking. The new provisions will come into effect when councils designate areas under the Order.

Strategic Business Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how the Strategic Business Review will be implemented in light of the Review of the Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs. (AQW 7273/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Strategic Business Review (SBR) Project has developed a number of service delivery options, for economic assessment in an Outline Business Case (OBC), in order to identify a preferred option. In developing the options, the Project has taken account

of the Executive's guiding principles on the Location of Public Sector jobs, met with the Bain Review Team and is awaiting the Review report. The preferred option has not yet been approved by DFP and may be subject to change due to a number of other factors including the Bain Review and outcome of public consultation.

Unemployment in the Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are unemployed and receiving benefits in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. (AQW 7295/08)

The Minister for Social Development: This information is not available as relevant details are only held at individual ward level.

Fuel Prices

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what recommendations she will make to the Executive to ensure that people on benefits and low income families are given the financial support they need, given the recent rises in fuel costs, and the cost of living in general. (AQW 7351/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In response to the ever increasing cost of fuel, I have focused work across Government and the wider energy sector in a Task Force on fuel poverty to produce proposals by the end of the summer. These will be aimed at helping those in greatest need during the winter. It is my intention to secure Executive support for a package of appropriate measures. Furthermore, I shall soon be launching a new benefit take-up campaign designed to ensure that the most vulnerable receive their full entitlement to benefit.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 06 June 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

China and Tibet

Mr McKay asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm if it has used its diplomatic connections with China to voice its condemnation of the Chinese Government's oppressive treatment of the people of Tibet.
(AQW 5378/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Rev Dr Ian Paisley and Mr M McGuinness): We have no formal diplomatic channels with the Chinese government.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide, for each of the last 4 years, (i) how many contracts for consultancy services it 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 6862/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Information on (i) the number of contracts for consultancy services awarded by OFMDFM, 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 in each of the last four years has been placed in the Assembly library. The period covered includes the financial years, 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08.

| | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| (i) How many contracts for consultancy services have been awarded which did not have to go out to public tender | 9 | 9 | 19 | 7 |

Continued on page 62

| | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (ii) A brief description and value of each contract | <p>1. Review of Equality Commission NI to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and to examine the delivery of services and functions conferred on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland - £11,000</p> <p>2. Organisational Development: team development event to promote corporacy across Executive Information Service and to address issues highlighted in staff and customer surveys - £2450¹</p> <p>3. A review of the existing OFMDFM Information Systems (IS) Strategy and OFMDFM eBusiness Strategy to produce a combined IS & eBusiness Strategy for OFMDFM for the period 2005-08 - £35,000</p> <p>4. KN Health Check - The Knowledge Network Health Check is a mandatory security audit of the KN system to ensure that appropriate security levels are maintained - £7,200</p> <p>5. Software consultancy to assist in the development of application and server software for the Knowledge Network system - £25,000</p> <p>6. Review of Physical Security in the Stormont Estate: Stormont Estate Evacuation Plan - £875</p> <p>7. Review of Physical Security in the Stormont Estate: Stormont Estate Evacuation Plan - £7700</p> <p>8. Consultancy fees in relation to the appointment process for the Commissioner for Children and Young People £2,309.20</p> <p>9. Supplementary work on earlier study of Cross Border Obstacles to Employment Mobility. Value - £10,382</p> | <p>1. Single tender action for the appointment of Independent Board Members for several NICS departments. Registration Fee - £2,000 Placement Fee - £4,000 per each appointment made paid on appointment by the appointing department</p> <p>2. To produce Regulatory Impact Assessments on two sets of anti-discrimination Regulations - £4,200</p> <p>3. Software consultancy to assist in the development of application and server software for the Knowledge Network system - £1,800</p> <p>4. Development Phase in respect of Participation Network - £10,000.</p> <p>5. Facilitation of Minister for Children Roundtable event with Key Children's Organisations in Parliament Buildings - £635.</p> <p>6. A consultation regarding the mechanisms already in place for children and young people - £5,850.</p> <p>7. A comparative analysis of public expenditure on children in Northern Ireland - £8,511.</p> <p>8. Play Policy Working Group - £10,508.20</p> <p>9. Provision of training and project related GIS/Data consultancy together with work in relation to Play Policy - £2,250.</p> | <p>1. Knowledge Network (KN) Health Check - The KN Health Check is a mandatory security audit of the KN system to ensure that appropriate security levels are maintained -£8,800</p> <p>2. Software consultancy to assist in the development of application and server software for the KN system - £6,900</p> <p>3. Provision of training and project related GIS/Data consultancy together with work in relation to strategic Play Provision - £5,378.</p> <p>4. Play Policy Working Group - £15,419.33.</p> <p>5. Consultancy fees for Commissioner Appointment process - £2,092</p> <p>6. Consultancy fees for Commissioner Appointment process - £3,180</p> <p>7. Consultancy fees for Commissioner Appointment process - £3,204.20</p> <p>8. Independent assessor fees for Commissioner appointment process - £2,962.20</p> <p>9. Consultancy fees for Commissioner appointment process - £3,000</p> <p>10. Play Policy Working Group - £8,091.45</p> <p>11. Fees for writing the text for the children's version of the ten year strategy for Children and Young People - £2,400</p> <p>12. Recruitment process for Commissioner for Children and Young People - £33,200.</p> <p>13. Consultancy fees for Commissioner for Children and Young People Appointment Process - £2,196.60.</p> <p>14. Consultancy fees for Commissioner for Children and Young People's appointment process - £3,547.60</p> <p>15. Development of Participation Network - £52,000</p> <p>16. Fees for drafting, approval and amendments of children's version of the UNCRC report and consultancy work with NGO sector - £18,000.</p> <p>17. A comparative analysis of public expenditure on children in Northern Ireland - £10,000.</p> <p>18. Consultation with parents on Play Policy - £1,250</p> <p>19. Consultant fees for UNCRC report - £13,753.39.</p> | <p>1. Development of a Draft Communications Strategy for the Sustainable Development Strategy - £77,280</p> <p>2. KN Health Check - The KN Health Check is a mandatory security audit of the KN system to ensure that appropriate security levels are maintained - £10,000</p> <p>3. Software consultancy to assist in the development of application and server software for the Knowledge Network system - £2,400</p> <p>4. Facilitator's version text for OFMDFM comic, preparation and recording of 'Super Six' comic and launch - £4,183.70.</p> <p>5. Mapping information preparation for Play Policy consultation document - £3,375.</p> <p>6. Recruitment process for Commissioner for Children and Young People - £208.70</p> <p>7. Young people's version of the Strategy - £13,039.31.</p> |

| | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| (iii) To whom these contracts have been awarded | 1. BMG Associates Ltd 2. HMC Communications 3. Tim Thorne ² 4. Sopra, Newell and Budge (tendered through CPD) 5. Bluewave/BT (through a contract service with CPD) 6. Richard Buchanan Consulting Limited. 7. Police Rehabilitation & Retraining Trust. 8. RG Consultants 9. Price Waterhouse Coopers | 1. Whitehall and Industry Group 2. Economic, Planning and Environmental Consultants Limited 3. Bluewave/BT (through a contract service with CPD) 4. NI Youth Forum 5. Second Nature 6. Paula Keenan 7. Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland 8. PlayBoard / NIPPA 9. PSC Ltd | 1. Sopra, Newell and Budge (tendered through CPD) 2. Bluewave/BT (through a contract service with CPD) 3. PSC Ltd 4. PlayBoard 5. Patrick Higgins 6. Cathy Bell 7. Rodney Green 8. Gwen Savage 9. Kevin McKenna 10. NIPPA 11. Liz Weir 12. Veredus (Capita Resourcing Ltd) 13. Lynne Peyton 14. Gerry Gilpin 15. NI Youth Forum 16. Paula Keenan 17. The Institute for Fiscal Studies 18. Parents Advice Centre 19. Deena Hayden | 1. Central Office of Information (COI) ³ 2. Deloitte (tendered through CPD) 3. Bluewave/ BT (through a contract service with CPD) 4. Liz Weir 5. PSC Ltd 6. Veredus 7. National Children's Bureau |

Economic Investment Conference

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role did Ian Paisley Jnr MLA play during the recent Economic Investment Conference. (AQW 6991/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Ian Paisley Jnr MLA had no formal involvement in the recent US NI Investment Conference. He did attend a number of the organised events to offer his support for the Conference alongside Executive Ministers and other MLAs.

| Dates | Destination | Method and cost of transportation | Type and cost of accommodation |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| 2 – 7 December 2007 | Washington and New York | Aeroplane / Train Ministers £2,797.72 Officials £5,764.38 £13,825.80 | Hotel Ministers £2,797.72 Officials £5,764.38 |

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many visits the First Minister and deputy First Minister have made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7298/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since 8 May 2007 the First Minister and deputy First Minister have made 4 such visits. The method and cost of transportation, and the type and cost of accommodation for Ministers and officials is set out in the table below. (Where appropriate, costs have been converted into sterling at rates effective 2 June 2008.)

| | | Aeroplane / Eurostar Ministers £1,049.40 Officials £2,725.65 | Hotel Ministers £289.28 Officials £578.56 |
|-----------------------|-----------|--|---|
| 9 – 10 January 2008 | Brussels | | |
| 20 – 21 February 2008 | Edinburgh | Aeroplane Ministers £108.95 Officials £445.95 | Hotel Ministers £280 Officials £395 |
| 10 – 11 April 2008 | New York | Aeroplane Ministers £6,230.50 Officials £7,123.40 | Hotel Ministers £436.76 Officials £1,067.61 |

Emerald Fund Investments

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to make a statement to the Assembly on the potential Emerald Fund investments. (AQW 7340/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

There are no plans for a statement on potential private investments by the Emerald Fund. Emerald Development Managers LLC will manage the Fund and seek investment opportunities.

Draft Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what factors are delaying the publication of the draft Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. (AQW 7341/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are now at an advanced stage of development of the detailed proposals for a 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future,' which was signalled in the Programme for Government.

The new programme will tackle issues affecting both the established communities as well as new arrivals. It will build on some of the excellent work which is already being done, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals.

We have repeatedly stated our commitment to working towards building a society at ease with itself – a society that is integrated, cohesive and where everyone who lives here is regarded as of equal status and is treated as such – the new programme will work towards this.

OFMDFM officials briefed the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the current position regarding development of the proposed Programme in early April. The consultation document will be put to the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister shortly.

Planning Applications

Mr McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to clarify the position on the admissibility of unverifiable objections with bogus names and addresses in Planning Appeals Commission cases. (AQW 7374/08)

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:

"In cases where the Planning Appeals Commission is aware that an objection contains either a bogus name or address the evidence from that objection will not be admissible by the Planning Appeals Commission. The Planning Appeals Commission can however consider an objection which does not have a named contact but has a verifiable address.

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."

Cohesion Sharing and Exclusion Strategy

Ms J McCann asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps it is taking to ensure that the new Cohesion Sharing and Inclusion strategy will not just focus on racial attacks, but challenge and combat all forms of racial inequality. (AQW 7433/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

As we have made very clear on many occasions, we oppose and are committed to tackling racism, sectarianism and intolerance in any of their manifestations.

We are committed to tackling racism in all its forms – and the racial inequalities that racism gives rise to.

We are finalising detailed proposals for the 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future'. This programme will provide for, amongst other things, the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy which was endorsed by the motion made by the Assembly on 3 July 2007.

We consider that the six shared aims set out in the Racial Equality Strategy (Elimination of Racial Inequality, Equal Protection, Equality of Service Provision, Participation, Dialogue and Capacity Building) are robust and comprehensive. Moreover, the aims have been endorsed by representatives of minority ethnic people.

We remain open, of course, to suggestions as to how we might strengthen these six shared aims.

We will re-visit the six shared aims following the launch of the 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future' in the light of the results of the consultation on the Programme.

This will be done in close consultation with minority ethnic groups, the wider community and the OFMDFM Committee. We are committed to the partnership process which developed the six shared aims originally.

Sustainable Development Indicators

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to publish the Sustainable Development Indicators for each Department; and what guidance it has put in place in relation to a Sustainable Development Statutory Duty as exists in the Republic of Ireland and in the rest of the UK. (AQW 7512/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have considered the draft Indicators, and in light of our recent decision to develop a new Sustainable Development Strategy, we have decided to postpone the immediate publication of these. We are aware of the importance of accurately assessing progress, however there is a clear need for us to ensure that published Indicators are capable of expressing progress against any new targets that may emanate from a review of the Strategy and its associated Implementation Plan. We are also considering draft guidance in relation to the Statutory Duty.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Working Farms in the North Down Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many working farms there are in the North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7166/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): The annual Agricultural and Horticultural Survey recorded 134 farms in the North Down parliamentary constituency in June 2007.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by her Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment. (AQW 7224/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) 144 laptops have been purchased by DARD since devolution.
 - The total cost of purchase for laptops was £112,872.
- (ii) 161 mobile phones have been purchased by DARD since devolution.
 - The total cost of purchase for mobile phones was £7,992.46.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many community and voluntary groups her Department is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7313/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My department is currently funding capital projects promoted by three such groups in the Portavogie, Annalong and Kilkeel areas.

Funding of £295,000 has been allocated to the Portavogie & District Community Development Group for Portavogie Business Units, and funding of £250,000 has been allocated to Annalong Community Development Association in respect of the Annalong Coastal Path. In addition, Kilkeel Development Association is undertaking 3 distinct capital works on the Nautilus Centre Car Park and Environmental Improvement Scheme, the Nautilus Centre Maritime & Tourism Project and the Binnian Developments (Phase II) which have received allocations of £86,000, £243,000 and £185,000 respectively.

In addition through the Rural Development Programme, funding is currently being provided to over 70 community and voluntary groups, taking forward a wide range of projects. The total amount of funding is £14,245,598.41, which includes just over £4 million of Peace II (extension) funding.

This overall figure includes an element of core funding to the 12 Rural Support Networks, the Rural Community Network RCN, NI Rural Womens Network NIRWN, and the Rural Development Council who deliver a large number of projects on our behalf.

Clea Lakes in Killyleagh

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to confirm that the controllers of Clea Lakes, Killyleagh, are content to pass control to the Rivers Agency; and whether the Rivers Agency, on

taking control, will give priority to addressing the low water levels. (AQW 7336/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: DARD Rivers Agency has received written confirmation that the current controllers of the water levels of Clea Lakes are prepared to relinquish their water rights specific and pertaining to the Clea Lakes.

Once formal transfer has been completed, and subject to Drainage Council approval control of water levels by Rivers Agency should provide for more consistent water management for drainage purposes. However the Agency cannot be responsible for low water levels during periods of extreme drought.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Since devolution I have made 11 visits outside of the North in my capacity as Minister. Details are set out in the table below. Costs for trips made by official car are not held by the Department.

When travelling by air I have travelled economy class on all but one occasion. 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. However, 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.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many visits she has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7344/08)

| Date | Visit | Transportation | | Accommodation | |
|----------|--|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------|
| | | Method | Cost | Type | Cost |
| 21/05/07 | Washington Folklife Festival | *Minister – Flights, Train, Car | £3,858.91 | *Minister - Hotel | £1479.79 |
| | | 1 Official – Flights | £1,210.85 | 1 Official Hotel | £190.33 |
| 14/06/07 | Brussels Meeting with ONIEB and Cabinet Members | *Minister - Flights, Car | £1,508.69 | *Minister - Hotel | £311.92 |
| | | 3 Officials – Flights | £1,488.10 | 3 Officials – Hotel | £481.10 |
| 18/06/07 | London Meeting with Retailers & Devolved Ministers | *Minister– Flight, Train, Tube | £1,192.30 | | |
| | | 1 Officials – Flight, Train, Tube | £314.95 | | |
| 05/10/07 | Edinburgh UK Fisheries Ministerial Meeting | *Minister– Flights | £1,011.89 | | |
| | | 2 Officials – Flights | £628.67 | | |
| 14/10/07 | Dusseldorf ANUGA Food Fair & Brussels Meeting with Commissioner Borg and Fisheries Council | *Minster Party- Flight, Car, Train | £1,701.08 | *Minister - Hotel | £446.20 |
| | | 2 Officials – Flights | £924.16 | 2 Officials – Hotel | £427.68 |
| 13/12/07 | Brussels Meeting with Commissioner Borg | *Minister - Flights | £1,088.07 | *Minister - Hotel | £287.49 |
| | | 1 Official – Flights | £962.10 | | |

| Date | Visit | Transportation | | Accommodation | |
|----------|--|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|
| | | Method | Cost | Type | Cost |
| 17/12/07 | Brussels Agriculture & Fisheries Council | *Minister - Flight, Train | £1,610.20 | *Minister - Hotel | £716.91 |
| | | 2 Official-Flight, Taxis | £819.27 | 1 Official – Hotel | £364.00 |
| 10/01/08 | Brussels Accompanying FM and dFM | *Minister - Flights, Car | £4,819.34 | *Minister - Hotel | £246.86 |
| 05/02/08 | London Devolved Administration Ministerial Meeting | *Minister - Flight, Train | £1,062.30 | *Minister - Hotel | £666.24 |
| | | 2 Officials – Flight | £640.32 | | |
| 14/03/08 | Brussels Meeting with Commissioner Boel | *Minister - Flight, Car | £1,653.37 | *Minister - Hotel | £275.46 |
| | | 1 Official – Flight | £334.72 | 1 Official – Hotel | £93.83 |
| 01/04/08 | Brussels Meeting with Commissioner Borg and MEPs | *Minister - Flight | £2,274.60 | *Minister - Hotel | £384.24 |
| | | 1 Official – Flight, Taxi | £811.27 | 1 Official – Hotel | £129.04 |

* Costs for “Minister” also include Special Adviser and Private Secretary.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on her Department’s work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7362/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I do not believe that the NI divide has had a significant bearing on the operating efficiency of this Department, though we have operated several measures to tackle the social and economic consequences of this divide in rural areas. No specific policy development has been based on this report.

There are no regulatory requirements in relation to the storage or transport of chicken litter, and it can be spread on land. However the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 prohibit on-farm burial or landspreading of carcasses of birds that have died during production. These carcasses are regarded as the likely source of the toxin.

My Department provides advice to farmers in the Biosecurity Code and on the DARD website, and in a leaflet which was sent to all farmers, that they should prevent access by animals to contaminated feedstuffs and bedding. We advise against spreading litter on pasture, and recommend that, if litter must be spread, it is deep-ploughed into arable ground.

Rural Women

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consultation her Department has had with other Departments to ensure that adequate resources and funding opportunities are available to meet the needs of rural women, as outlined in her discussions with the Executive on the proposed White Paper. (AQW 7432/08)

Storage and Transport of Chicken Litter

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has any remit in specifying how chicken litter is (i) stored; (ii) transported; and (iii) spread, given the rising number of cases of botulism in cattle. (AQW 7405/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: On average, there were 91 suspect cases of botulism in cattle each year since 2002. Numbers in recent years are below average, and approximately 16% of suspect cases are confirmed as botulism following laboratory analysis.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Executive has agreed to work with me on the development of a Rural White Paper. This means a commitment to look at ways in which government departments can enhance their contribution to rural areas, including looking at how resources or funding opportunities can be

identified to meet the needs of rural women. I intend to reinvigorate the current interdepartmental Rural Proofing Steering Group into an Interdepartmental Group on Rural Policy, which I would chair. This group would be made up of senior policy makers from all departments and would provide the main vehicle for development and agreement of proposals for a Rural White Paper. My Department currently co-funds the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network with DSD. My officials will be liaising with DSD to examine opportunities to continue to support rural women as part of ongoing Community Development work.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the details of all grants available through his Department. (AQW 7322/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Poots): The bulk of grant funding for which DCAL is responsible is distributed through the Department's NDPBs. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Sport NI, will receive total Departmental funding of £25.3m and £28.9m respectively in the 2008/09 financial year. Both bodies determine specific budgets from which grants will be paid to applicants who meet the required conditions and criteria.

Northern Ireland Screen can pay grants from its overall budget of £1.4m and is also responsible for

allocation of grants from the £3m Irish Language Broadcasting Fund.

The Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge also distribute grants, from their respective budgets of £2.5m and £3.5m, to support projects in the indigenous languages field. A sum of £450,000 is distributed through Local Councils to provide funding for Community Festivals.

Applications for grants to Colmcille are being considered on a case by case basis although at present no formal funding round has been launched.

In addition to these grants paid through NDPBs, the DCAL Events Unit has allocated £350,000 to the Events Growth Fund and £550,000 to the Major Events Fund in the 2008/09 financial year.

The Department also retains a budget of £6,000 for its Lough Neagh Boat Grants scheme.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many visits he has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7343/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have made 18 visits outside of Northern Ireland since devolution. The breakdown of the information that you have requested is attached.

| Minister | | | | | Officials | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Visit | Transportation | Cost Of Transportation | Accommodation | Cost Of Accommodation | Number | Cost (Travel & Accommodation) |
| Belgium | Air, Rail and Taxi | 696.05 | Hotel (1 night) | 54.00 | 1 | 694.81 |
| London | Air and Rail | 347.45 | Hotel (1 night) | 259.00 | 1 | 606.45 |
| Washington | Air, Rail and Car | 3995.45 | Hotel (5 nights) | 1147.00 | 4 | 8004.32 |
| Dublin | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | - | - |
| France | Air and Rail | 645.75 | Hotel (1 night) | 120 | - | - |
| New York | Air | 1672.65 | Hotel (2 nights) | 783.00 | 2 | 4904.75 |
| Cavan | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 9 | 681.80 |
| Dublin | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 2 | - |
| Dublin | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 5 | 245.46 |
| London | Air and taxi | 359.15 | No overnight stay | 0 | 1 | 339.15 |
| Dundalk | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 2 | - |
| Dublin | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 2 | 40.80 |
| Texas, Tennessee | Air | 4765.15 | Hotel (5 nights) | 470.00 | 2 | 10483.30 |

| Minister | | | | | Officials | |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Visit | Transportation | Cost Of Transportation | Accommodation | Cost Of Accommodation | Number | Cost (Travel & Accommodation) |
| LA and Sacramento | Air | 5502.60 | Hotel (5 nights) | 693.00 | 2 | 12381.20 |
| Edinburgh | Air | 270.45 | No overnight stay | 0 | 4 | 1081.80 |
| Cardiff | Air | 352.55 | Hotel (1 night) | 120 | 2 | 945.10 |
| Dublin | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 2 | - |
| Monaghan | Ministerial car | * | No overnight stay | 0 | 2 | 48.00 |

* Ministerial car costs are not charged to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by his Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment.

(AQW 7420/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since the date of Devolution on 8 May 2007 the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has purchased three Laptops at a total cost of £2136.

Two Mobile Phones have been purchased by the Department since 8 May 2007 at a cost of £78.

Development of the Gaeltacht Quarter

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consultation he has had with the community and voluntary sector in West Belfast, in relation to the development of the Gaeltacht Quarter.

(AQW 7434/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Over the last five years, Departmental officials, along with others from DSD and DETI, have been involved with the community and voluntary sector in West Belfast, in relation to the development of the Gaeltacht Quarter. During that time a Shadow Board was established, an Economic Appraisal was prepared, the Dutton Report was published and the Gaeltacht Quarter Development Company (An Cheathru Ghaeltachta Teo) assisted by a Steering Group has been established.

Multi-Purpose Community Centre in Glenravel

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explain the reasons for the delay in a decision being made on the application for a multi-purpose community centre in Glenravel that was

submitted by the Glenravel Community Development Association in February 2008. (AQW 7601/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The application from the Glenravel Community Development Association was originally assessed under the Lottery funding stream by Sport NI however, following the outcome of the CSR process and a review of the Sport Capital Expenditure Programme the matter was transferred for consideration under exchequer funding along with several other major projects. A decision on those projects is imminent.

Multi-Purpose Community Centre in Glenravel

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when his Department will make a decision on the application for a multi-purpose community centre that was submitted by the Glenravel Community Development Association in February 2008.

(AQW 7602/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The application from the Glenravel Community Development Association was originally assessed under the Lottery funding stream by Sport NI however, following the outcome of the CSR process and a review of the Sport Capital Expenditure Programme the matter was transferred for consideration under exchequer funding along with several other major projects. A decision on those projects is imminent.

EDUCATION

Taskforce on Protestant Working-Class Communities

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail all the projects she has funded as a result of the “Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities”

and the United Kingdom Government's response paper. (AQW 5652/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Tá sonraí faoi na tionscadail a mhaoiníonn mo Roinnse san Aghuisín iniata.

The projects funded by my Department are detailed in the attached Annex.

Annex

Measure 1.2/1.4 Supporting Special Educational Needs in Schools and Developing Management Standards – allocation 2006-08 £1,100k. Aims to support SEN interventions in the schools by classroom teachers and to develop leadership skills.

Measure 1.5 Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) – Special Educational Needs support Pilot – allocation 2006-08 £60k (now mainstreamed by BELB). Providing specialist training in autism, dyslexia and behavioural issues.

Measure 1.6 Integrated Children's Services – allocation 2006-08 £814k (now mainstreamed by DE). This programme supports the delivery of integrated services to children in order to enhance early years provision and support other children's developmental and learning activities.

Measure 1.7 Healthy Schools Initiative – allocation 2006-08 £400k. Pilot of new approaches to promoting health and well-being in children including the development of active schools and food in schools programmes, complemented by community based skills development.

Measure 2.11 Sports Development in Community and Schools – allocation 2006-08 £150k. A new community sports project incorporating and building on a schools sport programme, led by a Community Sports Development Officer.

Measure 1.8 Full Service School Demonstration Project – allocation 2006-08 £660k (now mainstreamed by DE). Two post primary schools selected and established as a full service school demonstration project.

Measure 1.12 Alternative Education Project – allocation 2006/08 £200k (now mainstreamed by BELB). An extension of the Pathways Project which provides a programme of personal development and structured learning to young people who are excluded from or who are experiencing difficulty in mainstream education.

Measure 3.1 Strengthening Governance – allocation 2006-08 £100k – Funding has provided training of suitable individuals from targeted areas to become school governors, to improve the strength and

quality of leadership within the school and provide support to school principals and staff in relation to long term planning.

Measure 3.3 Detached Youth Work Teams – allocation 2006-08 £500k – An innovative way of reaching disaffected youth in order to engage them in meaningful activities and divert them from becoming involved in anti-social behaviour.

Measure 3.6 Role Models and Mentoring – allocation 2006-08 £70k – To raise the expectations of pupils and encourage them to aim higher in their educational qualifications, increase their self-confidence and assist them in addressing issues affecting them.

Measure 5.1 Summer Intervention Programme – allocation 2006-08 £200k (now mainstreamed by DE). Groups within the Belfast area working with young people across the city will benefit from the Summer Intervention Programme. Early distribution of funds targeted at disadvantaged areas aim to reduce the migration towards flashpoints.

Newbuild Project for Down Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when she was made aware of the proposals by the South Eastern Education and Library Board in relation to a new build project for Down Academy; and (ii) the reasons why her officials have refused to attend a site meeting at the current site as part of the process towards submission of a valid economic appraisal. (AQW 6346/08)

The Minister of Education: In September 2004, following a request from the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) and a site visit from the Department's professional advisors, Down Academy was recognised as having serious accommodation inadequacies.

The SEELB produced an economic appraisal which recommended that Down Academy be rebuilt on the site of Down High School, following the relocation of Down High to a greenfield site. Planning permission was not however forthcoming for the greenfield site and the economic appraisal was not, therefore, approved.

In May 2007, the Board published a Review of Controlled Provision in the Mid and South Down Area in order to provide a strategic framework in which to progress a prioritised programme of capital schemes. The review recognised that the projected long-term enrolment for Down Academy was likely to be in the region of 242-251 and the Board did not make a recommendation on the future of the school.

Ní heol dom achainí ar chruinniú láithreáin a bheith déanta ná gur dhiúltaigh an Roinn ná an Bord freastal ar chruinniú dá leithéid.

I am not aware of a request for a site meeting nor that officials from either the department or the Board have refused to attend such a meeting.

St Mary's University College

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education whether she has reached a decision on the initial teacher education intakes for St Mary's University college for the academic year 2008-09. (AQW 6396/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní dhearnadh cinneadh deireanach go fóill faoi líon na n-ionad oiliúna múinteoireachta do na hinstiúidí don bhliain acadúil 2008/09

The number of teacher training places for the institutions for the 2008/09 academic year has not yet been finally determined.

Extended Schools Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to confirm that funding under the Extended Schools scheme is to be cut from the beginning of the next school year. (AQW 6408/08)

The Minister of Education: I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of

the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from

other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I am very disappointed that to date there has been an inadequate response.

Agus tacaíocht an Tionóil san áireamh nuair a bhí an moladh leis an chlár tábhachtach seo a thabhairt ar ais á phlé ar 20 Bealtaine, leanfaidh mé d'iarraidh acmhainní breise gach deis dá bhfaighidh mé i rith na bliana.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Extended Schools Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to outline how she will fund school programmes that were previously supported by the Extended Schools scheme, if these programmes fall outside the newly imposed eligibility criteria. (AQW 6411/08)

The Minister of Education: Schools in the North of Ireland have been offering extended school activities for many years through a variety of methods – voluntary effort then LMS budget, grants from external sources or parental contributions. The finance available under the Extended Schools Programme enables the most disadvantaged schools to offer activities.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that

key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding

at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents and will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme. I am very disappointed that to date there has been an inadequate response.

Tá súil agam go dtig leis na scoileanna siúd, nach bhfuil i dteideal maoinithe do Scoileanna Sínte faoi láthair, leanúint ar aghaidh agus leibhéal áirithe gníomhaíochta a sholáthar ar mhaithe le leas a gcuid daltaí go díreach mar atá déanta ag go leor scoileanna eile le roinnt mhaith blianta.

I hope that those schools, not now eligible for Extended Schools funding can continue to offer some level of extended schools activity for the benefit of their pupils in the same way as many other schools have done for many years.

Extended Schools Scheme

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to bridge the funding gap for the Extended Schools programme. (AQW 6495/08)

The Minister of Education: I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was

unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I am very disappointed that to date there has been an inadequate response.

Agus tacaíocht an Tionóil san áireamh nuair a bhí an moladh leis an chlár tábhachtach seo a thabhairt ar ais á phlé ar 20 Bealtaine, leanfaidh mé d'iarraidh acmhainní breise gach deis dá bhfaighidh mé i rith na bliana.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

After-School Clubs

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education if she funds any after-school clubs. (AQW 6510/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá gníomhaíochtaí iarscoile á dtairiscint ag formhór mór na scoileanna deontaschúnta i dtuaisceart na hÉireann le blianta fada.

The vast majority of grant-aided schools in the north of Ireland have been offering after school activities for many years.

Arrangements differ from school to school but may involve voluntary effort, using resources from the school's delegated budget, parental contributions or indeed a combination of these.

In addition the Extended Schools programme provides further funding to the most socially disadvantaged schools and 386 schools are being funded in this way in 2008/9.

Educational Adviser from the Republic of Ireland

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the rationale behind having an educational adviser from the Republic of Ireland sitting on the Northern Ireland central group; (ii) the powers of this adviser; and (iii) the benefits of having an adviser with a background in a different educational system sitting on the central group. (AQW 6848/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá roinnt réamhoibre déanta ar phleanáil bunaithe ar limistéar i bPoblacht

na hÉireann agus táthar ag súil go rachaidh an taithí sin chun tairbhe an ghrúpa lárnaigh.

There has been some preliminary work on area based planning in the south of Ireland and it is hoped that the central group will benefit from that experience. The role of the nominee from the Department of Education and Science is to bring expertise developed in that work to benefit the deliberations of the central group in relation to the area based look at post primary provision in the north of Ireland.

Teacher Training Places

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of teacher training places that need to be provided in (i) Queen's University Belfast; (ii) Stranmillis University college; and (ii) St. Mary's University college, in each of the next three years. (AQO 3514/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní dhearnadh cinneadh deireanach go fóill faoi líon na n-ionad oiliúna múinteoireachta do na hinstitiúidí don bhliain acadúil 2008/09

The number of teacher training places for the institutions for the 2008/09 academic year has not yet been finally determined. It is practice to determine these places each year rather than for three years due to the nature and number of factors that have to be taken into account and the changing education environment.

Surplus and Deficit in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education for the current average surplus or deficit of (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools. (AQW 6957/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa bhliain airgeadais 2006/2007, ba é an meánbharrachas do bhunscoileanna ná £18,152 agus an meánbharrachas do mheánscoileanna ná £97,780.

In the 2006/2007 financial year, the average surplus of primary schools was £18,152 and for secondary schools the average surplus was £97,780.

Autism

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Welsh Assembly's decision to appoint Autism Cymru as its implementation agent for the National Strategy for Wales and to initiate primary legislation for autism spectrum disorder in Wales, if she will initiate urgent dialogue with Welsh colleagues

to ensure the development of legislation as well as strategic co-operation. (AQW 7017/08)

The Minister of Education: Officials from the Department of Education (DE) have already entered into discussion with officials and inspectors from the education sector in Wales. In March 2008 DE hosted an Autism Stocktake event in Belfast to learn more about autistic spectrum disorder developments in Wales, Scotland and the south of Ireland.

Leanann RO d'oibriú le comhghleacaithe i ndlínsí eile le tabhairt faoi riachtanais pháistí a bhfuil uathachas orthu go straitéiseach.

DE continues to work with colleagues in other jurisdictions to strategically address the needs of children with autism.

Extended Schools Funding

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what funding is available per school in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area for extended schools in 2007-2008, and what those schools are expected to receive in the 2008-2009 academic year. (AQW 7049/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area that have qualified for extended schools funding in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and details the level of funding in each financial year.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a

year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September

2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Tá £5.826m de mhaoiniú le fáil don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09 do Scoileanna Sínte; is laghdú 40% é sin i gcomparáid le maoiniú na bliana 2007/08. Tiocfaidh an laghdú sin in éifeacht ó 1 Aibreán 2008.

SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD – EXTENDED SCHOOLS

| Annex 1 | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| School Reference Number | School Name | Eligible Funding 2007/08 | Eligible Funding 2008/09 |
| 4010743 | Largymore PS | £16,450 | £ 5,719 |
| 4010885 | Tonagh PS | £17,125 | £ 11,984 |
| 4011632 | Cregagh PS | £21,419 | £ 13,034 |
| 4013013 | Belvoir Park PS | £24,950 | £ 17,150 |
| 4013023 | Bloomfield Road PS | New | £ 16,870 |
| 4013038 | Tullycarnet PS | £15,554 | £ 9,128 |
| 4013309 | Derriaghy PS | £8,300 | £ 6,608 |
| 4013334 | Knockmore PS | £17,725 | £ 6,223 |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley PS | £15,850 | £ 10,934 |
| 4016083 | West Winds PS | £17,200 | £ 11,606 |
| 4016144 | Old Warren PS | £15,025 | £ 10,514 |
| 4031384 | Convent Of Mercy PS | £24,725 | £ 7,018 |
| 4031644 | St Patrick's Boys' PS | £29,469 | £ 17,626 |
| 4033306 | St Aloysius PS | £23,700 | £ 8,243 |
| 4036081 | St Luke's PS | £25,070 | £ 14,770 |
| 4036134 | St Mark's PS | £35,294 | £ 21,070 |
| 4036182 | St Colmcille's PS | £24,208 | £ 14,560 |
| 4036285 | The Good Shepherd PS | £31,223 | £ 18,508 |
| 4036480 | St Kieran's PS | £33,264 | £ 19,327 |
| 4036591 | Our Lady Queen Of Peace PS | £30,159 | £ 18,697 |
| 4036618 | Christ The Redeemer PS | £35,972 | £ 22,386 |
| 4046600 | Scoil Na Fuisgeoige | £17,883 | £ 11,186 |
| 4136286 | Good Shepherd Nursery School | £9,545 | £ 7,168 |
| 4136368 | St Luke's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,168 |
| 4136481 | St Kieran's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,112 |
| 4136606 | St Therese Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,112 |
| 4210030 | Lisnasharragh High School (3mths, Closing) | £19,975 | £ 2,016 |

| Annex 1 | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| School Reference Number | School Name | Eligible Funding 2007/08 | Eligible Funding 2008/09 |
| 4210051 | Lisnagarvey High School | £29,958 | £ 16,800 |
| 4210194 | Dunmurry High School | £30,073 | £ 17,710 |
| 4210262 | Dundonald High School | £31,481 | £ 18,172 |
| 4230223 | St Colm's High School | £37,674 | £ 24,038 |
| 4310008 | Beechlawn Special School | £25,530 | £ 15,190 |
| 4310019 | Ardmore House Special School | £4,000 | £ 4,872 |
| 4316022 | Brookfield Special School | £15,468 | £ 10,514 |
| 4316273 | Longstone Special School | £18,325 | £ 6,517 |

Note: Schools in blue are those in the “buffer zone”

The buffer zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

| Annex 2 | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting 2008/09 | Funding Allocation 2007/08 | Funding Allocation 2008/09 |
| 4010762 | Brownlee PS | £17,050 | £ 2,200 |
| 4010807 | Lisburn Central PS | £20,900 | £ 2,525 |
| 4011373 | Kirkistown PS | £15,036 | £ 2,082 |
| 4011462 | Castle Gardens PS | £26,600 | £ 3,223 |
| 4011488 | Victoria Ps (Ballyhalbert) | £18,055 | £ 2,340 |
| 4011507 | Portavogie PS | £21,074 | £ 2,711 |
| 4011587 | Dundonald PS | £36,053 | £ 4,591 |
| 4011588 | Comber PS | £26,575 | £ 3,238 |
| 4011634 | Killyleagh PS | £14,835 | £ 1,932 |
| 4011646 | Victoria PS | £31,310 | £ 3,995 |
| 4011657 | Lisnasharragh PS | £21,850 | £ 2,513 |
| 4011681 | Millisle PS | £17,538 | £ 2,297 |
| 4013308 | Fort Hill PS | £22,000 | £ 2,744 |
| 4016004 | Londonderry PS | £29,699 | £ 3,658 |
| 4016235 | Downpatrick PS | £23,633 | £ 2,968 |
| 4016503 | Brooklands PS | £36,490 | £ 4,525 |
| 4030897 | St Joseph's PS | £24,200 | £ 3,050 |
| 4031671 | St Patrick's PS | £7,700 | £ 1,210 |
| 4033008 | St Anne's PS | £6,400 | £ 1,090 |
| 4033017 | St Finian's PS | £17,193 | £ 2,211 |
| 4033036 | St Mary's PS | £17,193 | £ 2,211 |
| 4036036 | St Malachy's PS | ££14,350 | £ 1,915 |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's PS | £26,400 | £ 3,094 |
| 4036530 | St Mary's PS | £24,898 | £ 2,983 |

| Annex 2 | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting 2008/09 | Funding Allocation 2007/08 | Funding Allocation 2008/09 |
| 4050618 | Hilden Integrated PS | £9,315 | £ 1,277 |
| 4051601 | Portaferry Integrated PS | £12,995 | £ 1,794 |
| 4110035 | Newtownards Nursery School | £8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116018 | Barbour Nursery School | £8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116176 | Downpatrick Nursery School | £6,440 | £ 1,162 |
| 4116216 | King's Road Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4116240 | Castlereagh Nursery School | ££8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116307 | Glenbrook Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136211 | St Colmcille's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136212 | St Patrick's Convent Nursery | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136317 | Holy Trinity Nursery School | £9,660 | £ 1,461 |
| 4230165 | St Patrick's High School | £29,383 | £ 3,680 |
| 4230224 | De La Salle Secondary School | £31,510 | £ 3,771 |
| 4310013 | Killard House Special School | £20,470 | £ 2,625 |
| 4316516 | Knockevin Special School | £11,960 | £ 1,748 |

Extended Schools Funding

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education which schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board will no longer qualify for extended schools funding in 2008-2009. (AQW 7050/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area that have qualified for extended schools funding in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and details the level of funding in each financial year.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets.

That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Tá £5.826m de mhaoiniú le fáil don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09 do Scoileanna Sínte; is laghdú 40% é sin i gcomparáid le maoiniú na bliana 2007/08. Tiocfaidh an laghdú sin in éifeacht ó 1 Aibreán 2008.

SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD – EXTENDED SCHOOLS

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Note: Schools in blue are those in the “buffer zone”

The buffer zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

| Annex 2 | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting 2008/09 | Funding Allocation 2007/08 | Funding Allocation 2008/09 |
| 4010762 | Brownlee PS | £17,050 | £ 2,200 |
| 4010807 | Lisburn Central PS | £20,900 | £ 2,525 |
| 4011373 | Kirkistown PS | £15,036 | £ 2,082 |
| 4011462 | Castle Gardens PS | £26,600 | £ 3,223 |
| 4011488 | Victoria Ps (Ballyhalbert) | £18,055 | £ 2,340 |
| 4011507 | Portavogie PS | £21,074 | £ 2,711 |
| 4011587 | Dundonald PS | £36,053 | £ 4,591 |
| 4011588 | Comber PS | £26,575 | £ 3,238 |
| 4011634 | Killyleagh PS | £14,835 | £ 1,932 |
| 4011646 | Victoria PS | £31,310 | £ 3,995 |
| 4011657 | Lisnasharragh PS | £21,850 | £ 2,513 |
| 4011681 | Millisle PS | £17,538 | £ 2,297 |
| 4013308 | Fort Hill PS | £22,000 | £ 2,744 |
| 4016004 | Londonderry PS | £29,699 | £ 3,658 |
| 4016235 | Downpatrick PS | £23,633 | £ 2,968 |
| 4016503 | Brooklands PS | £36,490 | £ 4,525 |
| 4030897 | St Joseph's PS | £24,200 | £ 3,050 |
| 4031671 | St Patrick's PS | £7,700 | £ 1,210 |
| 4033008 | St Anne's PS | £6,400 | £ 1,090 |
| 4033017 | St Finian's PS | £17,193 | £ 2,211 |
| 4033036 | St Mary's PS | £17,193 | £ 2,211 |
| 4036036 | St Malachy's PS | ££14,350 | £ 1,915 |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's PS | £26,400 | £ 3,094 |
| 4036530 | St Mary's PS | £24,898 | £ 2,983 |
| 4050618 | Hilden Integrated PS | £9,315 | £ 1,277 |
| 4051601 | Portaferry Integrated PS | £12,995 | £ 1,794 |
| 4110035 | Newtownards Nursery School | £8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116018 | Barbour Nursery School | £8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116176 | Downpatrick Nursery School | £6,440 | £ 1,162 |
| 4116216 | King's Road Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4116240 | Castlereagh Nursery School | ££8,200 | £ 1,270 |
| 4116307 | Glenbrook Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136211 | St Colmcille's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136212 | St Patrick's Convent Nursery | £9,430 | £ 1,461 |
| 4136317 | Holy Trinity Nursery School | £9,660 | £ 1,461 |
| 4230165 | St Patrick's High School | £29,383 | £ 3,680 |
| 4230224 | De La Salle Secondary School | £31,510 | £ 3,771 |
| 4310013 | Killard House Special School | £20,470 | £ 2,625 |
| 4316516 | Knockevin Special School | £11,960 | £ 1,748 |

Extended Schools Funding

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education which schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board qualified for extended schools funding in 2007-2008. (AQW 7051/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area that have qualified for extended schools funding in 2007/08 and 2008/09 and details the level of funding in each financial year.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which

had been provided direct to schools under the CYPfP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPfP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Tá £5.826m de mhaoiniú le fáil don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09 do Scoileanna Sínte; is laghdú 40% é sin i gcomparáid le maoiniú na bliana 2007/08. Tiocfaidh an laghdú sin in éifeacht ó 1 Aibreán 2008.

SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD – EXTENDED SCHOOLS

| Annex 1 | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| School Reference Number | School Name | Eligible Funding 2007/08 | Eligible Funding 2008/09 |
| 4010743 | Largymore PS | £16,450 | £ 5,719 |
| 4010885 | Tonagh PS | £17,125 | £ 11,984 |
| 4011632 | Cregagh PS | £21,419 | £ 13,034 |
| 4013013 | Belvoir Park PS | £24,950 | £ 17,150 |
| 4013023 | Bloomfield Road PS | New | £ 16,870 |
| 4013038 | Tullycarnet PS | £15,554 | £ 9,128 |
| 4013309 | Derriaghy PS | £8,300 | £ 6,608 |
| 4013334 | Knockmore PS | £17,725 | £ 6,223 |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley PS | £15,850 | £ 10,934 |
| 4016083 | West Winds PS | £17,200 | £ 11,606 |
| 4016144 | Old Warren PS | £15,025 | £ 10,514 |
| 4031384 | Convent Of Mercy PS | £24,725 | £ 7,018 |
| 4031644 | St Patrick's Boys' PS | £29,469 | £ 17,626 |
| 4033306 | St Aloysius PS | £23,700 | £ 8,243 |
| 4036081 | St Luke's PS | £25,070 | £ 14,770 |

| Annex 1 | | | |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| School Reference Number | School Name | Eligible Funding 2007/08 | Eligible Funding 2008/09 |
| 4036134 | St Mark's PS | £35,294 | £ 21,070 |
| 4036182 | St Colmcille's PS | £24,208 | £ 14,560 |
| 4036285 | The Good Shepherd PS | £31,223 | £ 18,508 |
| 4036480 | St Kieran's PS | £33,264 | £ 19,327 |
| 4036591 | Our Lady Queen Of Peace PS | £30,159 | £ 18,697 |
| 4036618 | Christ The Redeemer PS | £35,972 | £ 22,386 |
| 4046600 | Scoil Na Fuisioige | £17,883 | £ 11,186 |
| 4136286 | Good Shepherd Nursery School | £9,545 | £ 7,168 |
| 4136368 | St Luke's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,168 |
| 4136481 | St Kieran's Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,112 |
| 4136606 | St Therese Nursery School | £9,430 | £ 7,112 |
| 4210030 | Lisnasharragh High School (3mths, Closing) | £19,975 | £ 2,016 |
| 4210051 | Lisnagarvey High School | £29,958 | £ 16,800 |
| 4210194 | Dunmurry High School | £30,073 | £ 17,710 |
| 4210262 | Dundonald High School | £31,481 | £ 18,172 |
| 4230223 | St Colm's High School | £37,674 | £ 24,038 |
| 4310008 | Beechlawn Special School | £25,530 | £ 15,190 |
| 4310019 | Ardmore House Special School | £4,000 | £ 4,872 |
| 4316022 | Brookfield Special School | £15,468 | £ 10,514 |
| 4316273 | Longstone Special School | £18,325 | £ 6,517 |

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| 4031671 | St patrick's PS | £7,700 | £ 1,210 |
| 4033008 | St anne's PS | £6,400 | £ 1,090 |
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| 4033036 | St mary's PS | £17,193 | £ 2,211 |
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| 4136317 | Holy trinity nursery school | £9,660 | £ 1,461 |
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| 4230224 | De la salle secondary school | £31,510 | £ 3,771 |
| 4310013 | Killard house special school | £20,470 | £ 2,625 |
| 4316516 | Knockevin special school | £11,960 | £ 1,748 |

Truancy Levels in Schools

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education to provide figures on truancy levels in schools; and how many parents have had sanctions imposed on them by the courts due to their children being habitual truants, in each of the last 5 years (AQW 7060/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect the requested information. Information about referrals, because of concerns about attendance, by schools to the Education Welfare Service is collected from each of the Education and Library Boards on an annual basis. Referrals can be for a

variety of reasons, including truancy. In the 2006/07 school year, there were 5,083 pupils referred to the Education Welfare Service.

When a referral is received, the Education Welfare Service will go through a protracted process of trying to engage children and their families in developing coping strategies and mechanisms that will enable them to ensure children are educated appropriately. They also work closely with a range of other agencies to ensure the complex needs that families may have, are addressed in the best way possible. Parent Only Prosecutions are used as a last resort where parents fail to engage with the service and continue to ignore

their child's educational and welfare needs; however this is only one of many avenues explored.

Ta sé tugtha le tuigbheáil domh ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne gurb é seo a leanas líon na dtuismitheoirí ar chuir na cúirteanna smachtbhannaí orthu i ngach bliain de na 5 bliana seo caite:

I understand from the Education and Library Boards that the number of parents who have had sanctions imposed on them by the courts in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

| School Year | No of parents |
|-------------|---------------|
| 2002/03 | 51 |
| 2003/04 | 48 |
| 2004/05 | 42 |
| 2005/06 | 72 |
| 2006/07 | 78 |

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 6366/08, whether Irish medium schools are required to send a copy of the minutes of their Board of Governors' meetings to the Education and Library Board or to any other body. (AQW 7061/08)

The Minister of Education: Caithfidh Gaelscoileanna an riachtanas céanna a chomhlíonadh maidir leis an cheist seo taobh istigh den achar chéanna ama le scoileanna eile rialaithe agus scoileanna eile deonacha faoi chothabháil.

Yes, Irish Medium schools must fulfil the same requirement in relation to this issue within the same timescale as other controlled and voluntary maintained schools.

Mobile Phones in Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to ban mobile phones from schools. (AQW 7062/08)

The Minister of Education: Baineann sé le Bord Gobharnóirí gach scoile glacadh le polasaí maidir le húsáid fhón póca ag páistí agus ag daoine óga ar áitreabh scoile.

It is a matter for the Board of Governors of each school to adopt a policy regarding the use of mobile phones by children and young people on school premises.

Football Pitches on the Bloomfield Road in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline any plans for the football pitches on the Bloomfield Road, Bangor that are owned by the Department. (AQW 7089/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt (BOLOD) in iúl domh gur le BOLOD an talamh seo agus go bhfuil sé ar léas ag Comhairle Baile Thuaisceart an Dúin mar pháirceanna imeartha. Níl aon athrú úsáide beartaithe don talamh seo ag an am seo.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that this land is owned by SEELB and leased to the North Down Borough Council as playing pitches. At this time there are no plans for any change of use of this land.

Transport Assistance for Children with Special Educational Needs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5889/08 and AQW 5890/08, (i) why the SELB did not know at the beginning of term it would be able to carry out the service; (ii) why the SELB cannot identify costs if a service is being operated from within its existing complement of vehicles and drivers; (iii) if a comparative costing was not completed why did the SELB decide to use the vehicle on this particular service; and (iv) what criteria was used to make the decision to end the contract if it was not based on savings. (AQW 7094/08)

The Minister of Education: Maidir leis na fiosrúcháin a rinneadh tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt:

In relation to the queries asked the Southern Education and Library Board has advised that:

- (i) It provides transport assistance to nearly 29,000 pupils, of whom 1,400 are categorised as having Special Educational Needs. The start of each school term brings fluctuations in numbers travelling across all routes which always requires some level of reorganisation of transport services to ensure effective provision. Additionally, the requirement to abolish the use of the 3-for-2 seating concession meant that throughout September 2007 the Board significantly reorganised its transport provision including the removal of concessionary transport on a number of routes.

- (ii) The Board vehicle being used was not new to the fleet and the driver is an existing member of staff. The Board's operating costs for this driver and vehicle have not changed through the reorganisation of the service.
- (iii) The reorganisation of the Board's services created spare capacity within the Board's own fleet which, for reasons of efficiency, needed to be fully utilised. Bearing in mind the differing contractual obligations the Board had with private operators, officers undertook to identify areas of the service where this capacity could be utilised.
- (iv) During October/November 2007 officers identified that, through the reorganisation of transport to Ceara Special School, the run operated by Eurocoach could be replaced by spare capacity in the Board's fleet. This would result in immediate savings of £4,800 in the financial year 2007/08 with a further full year saving of £24,000 for the financial year 2008/09.

Youth Workers in North Down

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education how many youth workers are provided by the South Eastern Education and Library Board in the Conlig, Breezemount and Rathgill areas of North Down.
(AQW 7111/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the South Eastern Education and Library Board for youth provision in the Conlig, Breezemount and Rathgill areas of North Down. The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board provided the following information.

There are no full-time or part-time youth workers employed by the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) in the Conlig, Breezemount and Rathgill areas at present. The following steps are currently being taken by the SEELB to provide youth workers in the area:

- Negotiations are ongoing with North Down Borough Council for the development of a new Youth and Community Centre in Breezemount.
- A full-time youth outreach worker post is currently being recruited for the area.
- 6 Part time Youth Worker posts are currently being recruited for the area.
- The appointment of a Senior Youth Worker for Conlig, Breezemount, Rathgill and Kilcooley will be made before the end of May 2008.
- Táthar ag súil go mbeidh gach post ar tagraíodh dó thuas líonta faoi Mheán Fómhair 2008.

- It is anticipated that by September 2008 all posts referred to above will have been filled.

Funding for Children

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, further to AQW 6181/08 and the omission of detailed figures for 2008-2009, what funding, by individual project, has been allocated for 2008-2009 for those projects that had been previously funded through The Children and Young People's Fund or The Children's Fund in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.[R] (AQW 7133/08)

The Minister of Education: Of those projects previously funded through the Children and Young Peoples Fund and the Children's Fund the following are receiving funding in 2008-2009:-

| DE PROJECTS | 2008/09 Funding £k |
|---|--------------------------|
| Pre-School Education Expansion Programme | 822 |
| Pre-School Education Expansion Programme – 2007/08 in-year addition | 576 |
| School based Counselling Support | 1,849 |
| School based Counselling Support – Primary School Expansion | 100 |
| Direct Addition to Special Schools | 339 |
| Early Years - Sure Start - Programme for two year olds - Day Care - Pre-School (Early Years Organisation) | 7,509 |
| Youth Initiatives | 1,294 |
| Collaboration Between School Staff and Social Services and Helpline | 134 |
| Children's Centres | 125 |
| Extended Schools | 5,826 |
| Run Out of Existing Projects | 250 |
| Totals | 18,824 |

| DHSSPS PROJECTS | 2008/09 Funding £k |
|---|--------------------------|
| Supporting and Equipping Foster Carers | 1040 |
| Support Young People Not Ready for Independence | 750 |
| Rapid Response Child Protection Teams | 1050 |
| Child Contact Centres | 500 |
| Empowering Children and Young People in Care | 660 |
| Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services | 1000 |

| DHSSPS PROJECTS | 2008/09 Funding £k |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| After School Provision | 195 |
| English as an additional language | 75 |
| Multi-disciplinary support teams | 4000 |
| Transition into Adulthood | 900 |
| Mental Health /Learning Disability Services – Crises Response Teams | 1000 |
| Support in the community for children from Muckamore Abbey Hospital | 600 |
| Life Skills Training | 100 |
| Family and Parenting | 2292 |
| Speech and Language Therapy Provision | 1000 |
| Young Carers | 500 |
| Wheelchair Provision | 500 |
| Totals | 16,162 |

| DCAL PROJECTS | 2008/09 Funding £k |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Creative Learning Centres | 500 |
| Totals | 500 |

| DSD PROJECTS | 2008/09 Funding £k |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Women's Centres | 850 |
| Totals | 850 |

CHILDREN'S FUND AVAILABLE FUNDING 2008/09

| Organisation | Project Title | 2008-09 Available Funding |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| ACET - Agencies in Consortium for Education & Training | ACET - Transitions | £35,496.00 |
| Adoption U.K | Adoptive Parents Support Modules | £40,061.00 |
| Armagh Travellers Support Group | Children & Families Project | £38,674.00 |
| Artability | After School Projects for Children With Disabilities | £61,359.00 |
| Arthritis Care | Positive Futures for Children & Young People With Arthritis | £28,968.00 |
| Aware Defeat Depression | Mood Matters | £23,908.00 |
| Ballymena Women's Aid | Domestic Violence Interagency & Community Development Worker | £37,671.00 |
| Ballymurphy Women's Centre | Yahoo Project | £44,969.00 |
| Barnardo's | Family Group,Conference Scheme | £261,709.00 |
| Barnardo's | Parents & Children Together | £68,973.00 |
| Barnardo's | Young Parents Advice Information Bureau | £35,983.00 |
| Barnardo's | Carrick Child & Parent Project | £57,635.00 |
| Barnardo's | Parent Support Project | £48,608.00 |
| Barnardo's | Home from Home Project | £169,880.00 |
| Barnardo's | Young Carers Scheme | £121,812.00 |
| Barnardo's | Pyramid Plus (Northern Area) | £121,433.00 |
| Barnardo's | Domestic Violence Outreach Scheme | £38,505.00 |
| Belfast Door/Challenge for Youth | Talk Of The Town | £91,752.00 |
| Brook Belfast | Clinic Service Provision | £31,094.00 |

| Organisation | Project Title | 2008-09 Available Funding |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Camowen Partnership Ltd | Smart Kids After School Project | £71,347.00 |
| Coleraine(Causeway) Womens Aid | Domestic Violence & Children - A Prevention and Intervention Project | £71,087.00 |
| Contact a Family | Information Officer | £41,793.00 |
| Contact Youth Counselling Services | Youth Counselling Service in the Northern Board Area | £59,397.00 |
| Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid | Childrens Project | £42,688.00 |
| Craigavon Travellers Support Committee | Early Years Initiative | £79,995.00 |
| Family Planning Association | Sexual Health Programme for Young Homeless | £31,042.00 |
| Fermanagh Women's Aid | Refuge and community based aftercare children's services | £50,500.00 |
| Gasyard Development Trust | Gasyard Family Centre | £58,412.00 |
| Home-Start, Ards Peninsula & Comber | Supporting Young Families | £43,805.00 |
| Home-Start, Armagh & Dungannon | Home-Start Outreach | £22,589.00 |
| Home-Start, Down District | Home-Start Down Project | £85,159.00 |
| Home-Start, Newry & Mourne | Kilkeel Scheme | £36,080.00 |
| Include Youth | Building For The Future (New Leaf) | £53,186.00 |
| Larne Community Care Centre | Childcare Development Worker | £34,232.00 |
| Lenadoon Community Forum | Fresh Start | £83,220.00 |
| Mencap | Shout Out | £43,072.00 |
| Mid-Ulster Child Contact Centre | Child Contact Centre | £20,973.00 |
| Nexus Institute | Outreach Trauma Counsellor | £70,453.00 |
| Nexus Institute | Personal & Social Education Programme | £31,405.00 |
| Cancer Fund for Children | Family Dynamics Project | £44,550.00 |
| Death Youth Association | Mentor Service | £47,792.00 |
| Music Therapy Trust | ARIOSO | £147,867.00 |
| North Down & Ards Women's Centre | Children & Domestic Violence | £12,810.00 |
| North West Community Support Partnership | Waterside Family Resource Centre | £332,621.00 |
| NSPCC | Chance for Change | £136,657.00 |
| PAPA | Support for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder | £69,050.00 |
| Parent's Advice Centre | Positive Parenting in Areas of Social Need | £58,733.00 |
| Springwell Centre | Family Support | £17,731.00 |
| Stars | Early Years Initiative | £61,098.00 |
| Threshold | Applied Psychotherapy for Children & Young People | £47,952.00 |
| Upper Springfield Development Trust | Action on Disability Project | £61,549.00 |
| VOYPIC | Shaping the Changes | £61,784.00 |
| Wave Trauma | Wave Youth | £134,613.00 |
| Westville Family Resource Centre | Lifestart, Enniskillen | £20,473.00 |
| YMCA, Lisburn | Small Talk Single Programme | £14,633.00 |
| YMCA, North Down - Bangor | Parents & Kids Together | £38,028.00 |
| Barnardo's | Newry Adolescent Partnership | £41,394.00 |

| Organisation | Project Title | 2008-09 Available Funding |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Corrymeela Community | Children & Youth in Need | £42,498.00 |
| Extern West | Sperrin Janus Project | £141,703.00 |
| Harmony Community Trust | Glebe House Respite Project | £71,765.00 |
| NIACRO | Child Diversion Project | £252,469.00 |
| NIACRO | Mentoring Scheme | £149,939.00 |
| NIACRO | Preventing risk of developing an offending career | £102,220.00 |
| Ocean Youth Trust | Development Through Sail Training | £36,719.00 |
| Ulster Quaker Service Committee | Quaker Cottage Teen Programme. | £45,657.00 |
| Arts Providers Partnership | Teen Age | £28,290.00 |
| Belfast Travellers Support Group (An Munia Tober) | Gayla Expression | £44,358.00 |
| Down Community Arts | Art For All | £109,560.00 |
| An Tearmann | Project Co-Ordinator | £41,262.00 |
| Artillery Steering Group | New Lodge Area Project | £54,517.00 |
| Belfast Community Circus School | Circus in the City | £31,086.00 |
| Bridge Community Association | Woodstock Area Project | £48,347.00 |
| Council for Homeless NI | The Whole Shebang NI Homelessness Project | £38,322.00 |
| Derry Travellers Support Group | Traveller Childcare Project | £18,679.00 |
| Derry Women's Centre | Moving Up Mothers (MUM) | £48,590.00 |
| Drumgor Detached Youth | Tackling real issues & assessing learning | £35,627.00 |
| Early Years | Toybox | £197,955.00 |
| Falls Women's Centre | Special Needs Children's Project | £35,844.00 |
| Link Family and Community Centre | Link Youth Project | £22,046.00 |
| Marrowbone Community Association | Marrowbone Youth Club | £35,164.00 |
| Newry & Mourne Travellers Partnership | Travellers Partnership | £23,283.00 |
| Old Warren Community Association | Putting the Children First | £34,836.00 |
| Taughmonagh Community Forum | Vision Five | £38,311.00 |
| Tiny Tots | Pre-school Playgroup | £15,372.00 |
| Triangle Housing Association | Triangle Supported Employment Service | £69,163.00 |
| Upper Andersonstown Community Forum | Tullymore Children & Young Peoples Project | £61,682.00 |
| Vine Centre | Vine Family Playgroup | £19,410.00 |
| Youth Action | Moving on - an opportunity for young mothers | £84,912.00 |
| | Total | £5,717,846.00 |

Leithdháileadh maoiniú agus déanfaidh gach Roinn monatóireacht air de réir moltaí reatha airgeadais agus iniúchta.

Funding has been allocated and will be monitored by each Department in keeping with current finance and audit recommendations.

Pupil Funding in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education when equality of pupil funding in the primary and post-primary sectors will be achieved. (AQW 7171/08)

The Minister of Education: De réir socrúithe na Foirmle Comh-mhaoinithe um Bainistíocht Áitiúil Scoileanna, faigheann scoileanna, arb ionann riachtanais agus saintréithe dóibh, an maoiniú céanna, ar neamhchead dá suíomh ná den chineál bainistíochta atá acu.

Under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula arrangements, schools with similar needs or characteristics receive similar funding, regardless of their location or management type.

The differential in funding for primary and post-primary schools reflects in large part the additional costs associated with delivery of the post-primary curriculum. Whilst providing the same level of funding per pupil for primary to that for post-primary pupils is therefore not appropriate, I have already signalled that I will be seeking to reduce the scale of the current differential in a way that would allow additional funding to go into primary schools without presenting difficulties for their post-primary counterparts.

Pupil Funding in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education why there continues to be a difference in the educational funding per pupil in the primary and post-primary sectors. (AQW 7172/08)

The Minister of Education: The differential in funding for primary and secondary schools reflects the greater cost demands which arise for post-primary schools in the delivery of the curriculum.

The provision of a wider range of subjects by post-primary schools results in additional cost in areas such as teaching, materials and equipment, specialist facilities and examination fees. Practical classes must be conducted within specified maximum class sizes and in addition, post-16 classes tend to be small generally. Different weightings are therefore applied for funding purposes to primary and post-primary pupils and this creates the differential in the average per-pupil for a primary school compared to a post-primary school.

Aithníim an tábhacht atá le tacaíocht chuí lena chinntiú go gcuirtear an tús is fearr le scoilbhlianta ár bpáistí.

I recognise the importance of adequate support to ensure that our children get the best start to their school years. Action has been taken to increase the level of funding directed to primary learning, and I am committed to continuing to increase the proportion of available funding to primary, within finite resources, in a way which does not create undue impacts on the other phases of education.

Early Retirement for Primary School Teachers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education (i) how many primary school teachers have been granted early retirement over the last five years; and (b) how many of these teachers are now employed in the primary school sector to cover vacancies and absences.

(AQW 7191/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Number of Primary School Teachers who were granted early retirement in the last five years.

| | 01/09/02-31/08/03 | 01/09/03-31/08/04 | 01/09/04-31/08/05 | 01/09/05-31/08/06 | 01/09/06-31/08/07 |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ED | 26 | 20 | 21 | 25 | 22 |
| R | 125 | 133 | 227 | 205 | 135 |
| Total | 151 | 153 | 248 | 230 | 157 |

The number of teachers now employed in the primary school sector to cover vacancies and absences is 440. This total of 440 is made up as follows - 20 retired on the grounds of Efficient Discharge and 420 retired on the grounds of Redundancy.

Sure Start Scheme

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of widening the catchment areas that currently offer services provided by the Sure Start scheme in the South Antrim constituency.

(AQW 7194/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é beartas reatha na Roinne Oideachais cumhdach Sure Start 20% de na ceantair bharda is mó díothacht i dtuaisceart na hÉireann, de réir mar a rangáítear iad faoi Scór Tomhasta Ildíothachta TÉ, a choinneáil.

The current policy of the Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20% most

deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the Multiple Deprivation Measure Score.

Ulster-Scots Medium Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to open Ulster-Scots medium schools. (AQW 7217/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon mholtaí faighte ag an Roinn a bhaineann le rún Scoil Ultaise a oscailt.

The Department has not received any proposals relating to an intention to open an Ulster-Scots medium school.

Entrepreneurship Classes in Primary Schools

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools have entrepreneurship as a subject in the school curriculum. (AQW 7230/08)

The Minister of Education: Employability, including entrepreneurship, is a key theme underpinning the revised curriculum, currently being introduced on a phased basis for all schools. While entrepreneurship lessons are not formally timetabled at primary level, the aim of employability at this stage is to enable young people to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and personal qualities related to enterprise and entrepreneurship. As the entrepreneurs of the future, this will give them a strong foundation for lifelong learning and work.

Glac mo Roinnse fosta freagracht orthu féin ar na mallaibh as Fiontraíocht don Óige, a reachtálann clár do bhunscoileanna, ag díriú ar fhorbairt scileanna agus tuigbheála ar ‘shaol na hoibre’ agus ar fhiontraíocht áitiúil.

My Department has also recently assumed responsibility for Young Enterprise, which runs a programme for primary schools, focussing on developing skills and an understanding of the ‘world of work’ and local enterprise. Young Enterprise provided programmes in a total of 181 primary schools during the 2006/07 school year.

Deaf Teacher Training and Support

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what support and training is given to teachers when preparing profoundly deaf children for assessment for secondary level education. (AQW 7245/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mbord oideachais agus

leabharlainne in iúl domh go bhfuil réimse tacaíochta agus oiliúna ar fáil do mhúinteoirí atá ag ullmhú páistí bodhara do mheasúnú i gcomhair oideachais darna leibhéil. Seo a leanas samplaí de seo:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards that a range of support and training is available to teachers when preparing deaf children for assessment for secondary level education. Some examples of this are:-

- Qualified Teachers of the Deaf (TOD) attend and contribute to the transfer review which has the focus of planning the child's transfer to post primary school;
- TOD give advice regarding the modification of assessment/teaching materials as required at transfer stage and during the pupil's post primary school years;
- TOD also advise educational psychologists on the administration of their assessment tools in year 7. These assessment tools contribute to the discussion of the most appropriate post primary placement for the profoundly deaf child;
- TOD provide written reports to teachers regarding the hearing loss and its educational implications for the individual child in post primary. This report outlines language/communication difficulties and suggests appropriate strategies to enable pupils to access the curriculum;
- TOD also give advice regarding the learning/assessment environment for profoundly deaf pupils; and
- Training is provided to school staff (teachers and classroom assistants) to enable inclusion of the profoundly deaf child. This training is offered within school and at outcentres;

Primary and Post-Primary School Funding

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking in relation to the difference in the per capita funding between the primary and post-primary sector. (AQW 7277/08)

The Minister of Education: Aithníom an tábhacht atá le tacaíocht chuí lena chinntiú go gcuirtear an tús is fearr le scoilbhlianta ár bpáistí agus gheall mé roimhe seo go ngníomhóinn leis an leibhéal difreálaigh idir daltaí bunscoile agus daltaí iarbunscoile a laghdú.

I recognise the importance of adequate support to ensure that our children get the best start to their school years and have previously committed to taking action to reduce the level of differential between primary and post-primary pupils. However, within the total resources available for pupils at all levels, this

must be managed to avoid impacting unduly on the budget shares for pupils in other phases.

Under the LMS common funding formula arrangements for 2008-09, I have increased the primary pupil Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU), which is the main funding factor in the formula, from 1.02 to 1.04 with a view to increasing progressively the relative funding levels distributed to primary schools over the next two years of the budget period.

Within the overall £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. This means that in 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. An additional £32 million over the next three years, including £7 million in the 2008-09 financial year, will be made available to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum and a further £12 million over the next three years will be available specifically to help primary school teaching principals.

Key Stage 1 and 2 Results

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 academic years, the Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results recorded for each

INTERFACE SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMME

(I) NORTH BELFAST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

RECURRENT FUNDS

| School | 2001/02 £ | 2002/03 £ | 2003/04 £ | 2004/05 £ | 2005/06 £ | 2006/07 £ | 2007/08 £ |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Ballygolan | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Ballysillan | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | 25,000 | 25,000 |
| Ben Mhadagain Prep | 5,000 | 5,000 | | | | | |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Carr's Glen | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Cavehill | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Cedar Lodge | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Cliftonville | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Currie | 5,000 | 20,000 | 27,850 | 37,742 | 49,500 | 42,708 | 42,000 |
| Edenbrooke | 5,000 | 20,000 | 75,000 | 57,882 | 72,824 | 60,800 | 65,000 |

primary school in the (i) North Belfast and (ii) West Belfast constituencies. (AQW 7289/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Transfer Test Results

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 academic years, the 11+ transfer test results recorded for each primary school in the (i) North Belfast and (ii) West Belfast constituencies. (AQW 7291/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Interface Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education how much Interface Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 7 years. (AQW 7293/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

| | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| School | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Edmund Rice | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Glenwood | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Grove | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Hazelwood | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Holy Cross Boys | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | 18,000 | 28,000 | 40,000 |
| Holy Cross Girls | 75,000 | 185,000 | 127,010 | 91,618 | 108,602 | 64,000 | 65,000 |
| Holy Family | 5,000 | 20,000 | 125,000 | 106,083 | 90,417 | 77,500 | 40,000 |

| | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| School | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Ligoniel | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | 10,000 | 25,000 | 25,000 | 25,000 |
| Lowwood | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Mercy | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | 43,000 | 35,000 | 35,000 | |
| Our Lady of Lourdes | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Our Lady's Deanby Gds | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Sacred Heart | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | 30,000 | 30,000 |
| Seaview | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| St Mary's Star of the Sea | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| St Patrick's North Queen St | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| St Therese of Lisieux | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| St Vincent de Paul | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | 30,000 | 30,000 |
| Star of the Sea Girls | 5,000 | 20,000 | 5,000 | | | | |
| Wheatfield | 46,000 | 306,000 | 84,350 | 88,900 | 105,250 | 64,000 | 70,000 |

CAPITAL FUNDS

| | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| School | £ | £ | £ |
| Currie | | 37,000 | |
| Holy Cross Girls | 120,000 | | |
| Wheatfield | | | 45,000 |

(II) WEST BELFAST PRIMARY SCHOOLS RECURRENT FUNDS

| | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| School | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Malvern | 5,000 | 20,000 | 45,000 | 46,154 | 42,154 | 26,840 | 32,000 |
| Springfield | | | | | | 15,000 | 15,000 |
| St Aidan's | | | | | | 15,000 | 35,000 |
| St Bernadette's | | | | | | 15,000 | 15,000 |
| Suffolk | | | | | | 13,000 | 13,000 |

Children's Services

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what steps she is taking to ensure that frontline children's services are secured within her Department. (AQW 7303/08)

The Minister of Education: Ba é an cuspóir a bhí agam sna díospóireachtaí a bhain leis an Athbhreithniú Chuimsitheach ar Chaiteachas seirbhísí oideachais atá ann a chinntiú agus a bheith mar bhonn agus thaca acu.

Securing and underpinning existing education services was my objective in the discussions around the Comprehensive Spending Review. DHSSPS is currently funding Playboard and as such is responsible for ensuring future funds are secured.

Transfer Test Results

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for the transfer test results recorded for each primary school in the North Down parliamentary constituency in each of the last five years. (AQW 7326/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Key Stage 1 and 2 Results

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for the key stage 1 and key stage 2 results recorded for each primary school in the North Down parliamentary constituency in each of the last five years. (AQW 7327/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireadh an t-eolas a iarradh i leabharlann an Tionóil.

The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

English as a Second Language

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what the budget allocation is for teaching English as a Second Language in primary and secondary schools in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7329/08)

The Minister of Education: I ndaonáireamh scoile Dheireadh Fómhair 2007, aimsíodh 5,665 san iomlán a raibh an Béarla mar Theanga Bhreise (BTB) acu.

In the October 2007 school census, a total of 5,665 were identified as having English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Through the Common Funding Formula, an additional EAL funding factor is provided in a school's annual budget for each pupil it has recorded as having EAL. In 2008/09, this additional funding is £983 per EAL pupil, which gives a total of £5.5 million going directly into schools.

The breakdown of this funding factor for the support of those pupils who have EAL in primary and post-primary schools in the North Down constituency in 2008/09 is as follows:

| | |
|---------------|---------|
| Primary: | £95,351 |
| Post-Primary: | £45,218 |

In addition to the Common Funding Formula, my Department is funding the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) with just over £1million in 2008/09. This regional service, provided by the Education and Library Boards aims to strengthen and improve support for all EAL pupils, their parents and teaching staff, primarily working through schools. A number of services such as interpreting, translating and a multi-lingual website for parents have been set up by IDS.

In January 2008, Diversity Coordinators were recruited by the new service and posted in cluster groups of schools to give additional support and guidance to teaching staff. There is one Diversity Coordinator posted in the North Down area, as well as one Assistant Advisory Officer. This initiative facilitates capacity building by working with all schools on whole school and classroom issues, which includes language support.

In addition to this, I launched a north/south Diversity toolkit for primary school teachers in December 2007. An extensive training programme for all teachers within primary schools has been undertaken in relation to this toolkit. The development of further toolkits for nursery, post-primary and special schools is planned for the future.

Enriched Curriculum Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education what Enriched Curriculum Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7334/08)

The Minister of Education: Bhí deireadh leis an Treoirchuraclam Saibhrithe i Mí Lúnasa 2007 nuair a tugadh isteach Bonnchéim nua an churaclaim athmheasta reachtúil ó Mheán Fómhair 2007.

The Enriched Curriculum Pilot came to an end in August 2007, with the introduction of the new

Foundation Stage of the revised statutory curriculum from September 2007. Schools taking part in the pilot were allocated funds to supplement the amounts available through the Making A Good Start Primary 1 (MAGS 1) initiative and MAGS2 for the provision of classroom assistance and classroom materials. In each of the last 3 financial years, pilot schools in North Belfast and West Belfast received the following allocations:

**ENRICHED CURRICULUM FUNDING –
PRIMARY SCHOOLS NORTH BELFAST**

| School Name | 2005/06 £ | 2006/07 £ | 2007/08 (part year) £ |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Edenbrooke PS | 7,390 | 10,372 | 3,868 |
| Ballysillan PS | 12,303 | 12,659 | 5,050 |
| Glenwood PS | 24,226 | 16,349 | 6,823 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 24,731 | 18,250 | 5,306 |
| Holy Family PS | 21,059 | 20,020 | 5,465 |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 9,717 | 7,652 | 2,733 |
| Total | 99,426 | 85,302 | 29,245 |

**ENRICHED CURRICULUM FUNDING -
PRIMARY SCHOOLS WEST BELFAST**

| School Name | 2005/06 £ | 2006/07 £ | 2007/08 (part year) £ |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Springfield PS | 3,922 | 8,754 | 5,050 |
| Vere Foster PS | 12,303 | 12,649 | 5,050 |
| Blackmountain PS | 8,300 | 12,659 | 5,050 |
| Harmony PS | 7,390 | 10,372 | 3,868 |
| St Bernadette's PS | 11,900 | 7,652 | 3,915 |
| St Mary's PS | 12,303 | 12,649 | 5,341 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | 38,980 | 45,598 | 17,884 |
| St Paul's PS | 17,044 | 18,023 | 7,784 |
| St Mark's PS | 44,055 | 28,860 | 6,753 |
| St Kieran's PS | 14,364 | 17,395 | 9,176 |
| Total | 170,561 | 174,611 | 69,871 |

In 2007/08, an additional £3million pounds was also provided across all primary schools for classroom resources to support the introduction of the Foundation Stage curriculum. Schools in North Belfast and West Belfast were allocated the following sums:

**FOUNDATION STAGE RESOURCES -
PRIMARY SCHOOLS NORTH BELFAST**

| School Name | 2007/08 £ |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Currie PS | 2,550 |
| Seaview PS | 2,550 |
| Carr's Glen PS | 5,100 |
| Grove PS | 2,550 |
| Ballygolan PS | 2,550 |
| Edenbrooke PS | 2,550 |
| Ligoniel PS | 2,550 |
| Cavehill PS | 5,100 |
| Ballysillan PS | 2,550 |
| Cliftonville PS | 2,550 |
| Glenwood PS | 5,100 |
| Wheatfield PS | 2,550 |
| Lowwood PS | 5,100 |
| Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | 2,550 |
| Holy Cross Boys' PS | 5,100 |
| Our Lady Of Lourdes PS | 10,200 |
| Our Lady's Girls' PS | 5,100 |
| Edmund Rice (Cb) PS | 5,100 |
| Holy Cross Girls' PS | 2,550 |
| Mercy PS | 2,550 |
| St Vincent De Paul PS | 2,550 |
| St Mary's Star Of The Sea PS | 2,550 |
| St Therese Of Lisieux PS | 7,650 |
| Star Of The Sea Girls' PS | 5,100 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 2,550 |
| Holy Family PS | 7,650 |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 2,550 |
| Hazelwood Ips | 5,100 |
| Ben Madigan Prep | 2,550 |
| Whitehouse PS | 5,100 |
| Abbots Cross PS | 5,100 |
| Rathcoole PS | 2,550 |
| Total | 127,500 |

**FOUNDATION STAGE RESOURCES -
PRIMARY SCHOOLS WEST BELFAST**

| School Name | 2007/08 £ |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Forthriver PS | 2,550 |
| Springfield PS | 2,550 |
| Springhill PS | 5,100 |
| Vere Foster PS | 2,550 |
| Suffolk PS | 2,550 |
| Blackmountain PS | 2,550 |
| Malvern PS | 2,550 |
| St Aidan's PS | 2,550 |
| St Bernadette's PS | 2,550 |
| St John The Baptist Girls' PS | 2,550 |
| St John The Baptist Boys' PS | 5,100 |
| St Mary's PS | 2,550 |
| St Kevin's PS | 7,650 |
| Holy Child PS | 7,650 |
| St Teresa's PS | 5,100 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | 7,650 |
| St Peter's PS | 5,100 |
| St Joseph's PS | 5,100 |
| Holy Trinity PS | 7,650 |
| St Paul's PS | 2,550 |
| St Clare's PS | 5,100 |
| Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | 5,100 |
| Gaelscoil Na Bhfal | 2,550 |
| Bunscoil An Tseibhe Dhuibh | 2,550 |
| Gaelscoil An Damba | 2,550 |
| Gaelscoil Na Mona | 2,550 |
| Gaelscoil An Lonnain | 2,550 |
| St Luke's PS | 2,550 |
| St Mark's PS | 5,100 |
| The Good Shepherd PS | 5,100 |
| St Kieran's PS | 5,100 |
| Our Lady Queen Of Peace PS | 5,100 |
| Scoil Na Fuisseoige | 2,550 |
| Harmony PS | 2,550 |
| Total | 135,150 |

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7369/08)

The Minister of Education: The information requested is not readily available from the date of devolution on 8 May 2007 and has been provided for the complete 2007/08 financial year. The information given for 2008/09 covers the period from 1 April 2008 to 27 May 08.

Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Total Expenditure on Travel and Subsistence in the Department of Education since April 2007 was as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 2007/08 | £438,215.92 |
| 2008/09 to date | £ 46,251.92 |

School Transport and Rising Fuel Prices

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education if there are any allowances being made for increases in tendered prices for transport contracts with Education and Library Boards to allow for the increase in fuel costs since the applications were submitted. (AQW 7376/08)

The Minister of Education: Is ceist do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne aonair fostú oibreoirí príobháideacha, agus faoi láthair tá éagsúlacht idir na socruithe atá i bhfeidhm ag gach Bord.

The hiring of private operators is a matter for the individual Education and Library Boards, and the arrangements currently applied by each Board vary.

The Belfast, South-Eastern and Western Education and Library Boards have indicated that they will be renewing all tenders for the 2008/09 academic year. Contractors will be able to bid for new tenders and can include an appropriate increase for fuel.

The North-Eastern Education and Library Board has confirmed that tenders which are not being renewed in 2008/09 will be subject to a 3% increase in the 2008/09 academic year.

The Southern Education and Library Board has advised that its taxi tenders are due for renewal in 2008/09. Contractors will be able to bid for new tenders and can include an appropriate increase for fuel. With regard to large passenger vehicles (buses), the Southern Board has advised that its tenders will be

subject to the relevant percentage index shown in the RPI National statistics.

Cerebral Palsy Figures

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many (i) nursery school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school, children have cerebral palsy, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7464/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Nursery, primary 1 and post-primary pupils who have cerebral palsy2 broken down by ELB 2007/08

| ELB | School type | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| | Post primary | Primary | Nursery schools |
| BELB | 16 | 16 | 0 |
| WELB | 32 | 44 | * |
| NEELB | 17 | 31 | 0 |
| SEELB | 13 | 27 | * |
| SELB | 23 | 26 | * |
| Total | 101 | 144 | * |

Source: NI school census 2007/08

Note:

1 Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

2 Children at Stages 1 and 2 of the Special Education Needs Code of practice may be recorded at a more general level of need.

‘*’ denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

Stress-Related Illness

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education the number of teachers who were absent due to stress, for each of the last five years. (AQW 7507/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

| Financial Year | Number of Teachers | Number of Days |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 2003-04 | 437 | 15,676 |
| 2004-05 | 394 | 15,449 |
| 2005-06 | 502 | 20,481 |
| 2006-07 | 471 | 17,453 |

| Financial Year | Number of Teachers | Number of Days |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 2007-08 | 473 | 18,698 |

Stress-Related Illness

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education the number of days lost by teachers due to stress-related illness in each of the last five years. (AQW 7509/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

| Financial Year | Number of Teachers | Number of Days |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 2003-04 | 437 | 15,676 |
| 2004-05 | 394 | 15,449 |
| 2005-06 | 502 | 20,481 |
| 2006-07 | 471 | 17,453 |
| 2007-08 | 473 | 18,698 |

Sick Days Taken by Teachers

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many sick days were taken by primary school teachers in each of the last 5 years, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board; and (ii) Maintained and Controlled sectors. (AQW 7510/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

SICK DAYS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

| Board Area | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Belfast | 10,641 | 8,539 | 10,851 | 10,496 | 10,221 |
| Western | 12,946 | 10,693 | 13,821 | 13,912 | 13,886 |
| North Eastern | 15,123 | 13,031 | 16,325 | 14,732 | 13,880 |
| South Eastern | 13,133 | 11,887 | 14,195 | 12,335 | 11,478 |
| Southern | 18,691 | 17,384 | 21,499 | 20,941 | 18,929 |
| Total | 70,534 | 61,534 | 76,691 | 72,416 | 68,394 |

SICK DAYS BY CONTROLLED AND MAINTAINED SECTORS

| Board Area | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Controlled | 30,594 | 25,516 | 32,133 | 29,696 | 30,473 |
| Maintained | 38,101 | 34,707 | 42,922 | 40,523 | 36,053 |

Sick Days Taken by Teachers

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many sick days were taken by post-primary school teachers in (i) the controlled sector; (ii) the voluntary grammar sector; (iii) the maintained sector; (iv) the integrated sector; and (v) the Irish-medium

| Board Area | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| GMI | 1,839 | 1,311 | 1,636 | 2,197 | 1,868 |
| Total | 70,534 | 61,534 | 76,691 | 72,416 | 68,394 |

sector, for each of the last 5 years, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7511/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

| Sector | Area | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|--------------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Controlled | Belfast | 3,679 | 2,884 | 3,606 | 3,303 | 2,718 |
| | Western | 3,375 | 2,981 | 4,324 | 3,235 | 2,610 |
| | North Eastern | 8,755 | 6,610 | 9,036 | 9,401 | 8,228 |
| | South Eastern | 6,963 | 6,783 | 8,322 | 7,525 | 7,031 |
| | Southern | 6,084 | 6,670 | 7,477 | 5,592 | 5,575 |
| | Total | 28,856 | 25,928 | 32,765 | 29,056 | 26,162 |
| Maintained | Belfast | 6,185 | 5,069 | 6,116 | 6,182 | 4,660 |
| | Western | 7,688 | 6,778 | 7,596 | 7,185 | 6,212 |
| | North Eastern | 4,333 | 3,821 | 5,330 | 4,294 | 4,456 |
| | South Eastern | 2,611 | 2,072 | 3,320 | 3,213 | 2,617 |
| | Southern | 9,215 | 9,562 | 10,716 | 9,800 | 8,878 |
| | Total | 30,032 | 27,302 | 33,078 | 30,674 | 26,823 |
| GMI | Belfast | 871 | 780 | 874 | 919 | 1,143 |
| | Western | 998 | 1,011 | 1,134 | 1,269 | 1,013 |
| | North Eastern | 957 | 685 | 892 | 1,478 | 1,095 |
| | South Eastern | 946 | 1,301 | 1,061 | 1,373 | 1,241 |
| | Southern | 311 | 256 | 671 | 982 | 466 |
| | Total | 4,083 | 4,033 | 4,632 | 6,021 | 4,958 |
| Irish-Medium | Belfast | 225 | 161 | 194 | 215 | 164 |

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING**Departmental Staff with Disabilities**

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff in his Department have a disability. (AQW 7318/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The information held by the Department only records data provided, on a voluntary basis, by staff. 103 staff in the Department are recorded as having a disability.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on his Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7364/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The only section of the Deloitte and Touche report pertaining to the work of my Department is that around Teacher Education. My Department, in partnership with the Department of Education, has

undertaken a comprehensive review of Teacher Education. That review has not yet been finalised and it is too early, therefore, to have reached any conclusions on the impact of the Northern Ireland divide and any potential for efficiencies in this area.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many community and voluntary groups his Department is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7396/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department does not core fund voluntary and community groups. The delivery of the Department's programmes and services is primarily by means of service contracts with delivery partners selected by means of Public Procurement. Voluntary and Community sector organisations are involved in some cases as delivery partners in their own right or as members of consortia. In line with agreed policy, details of the monies paid by DEL to voluntary and community organisations are published on the Voluntary and Community Funding Database managed by the Department of Social Development.

Higher Education Institutions and Entry Qualifications

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his work with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to create better awareness of the equivalence of entry qualifications, within the higher education system, for those who wish to access courses on any part of the island. (AQW 7452/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department's professionally qualified Careers Advisers provide an all age, impartial careers information, advice and guidance service to clients throughout Northern Ireland.

In general, Higher Education Institution prospectuses in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland list entry requirements for both GCE 'A' Level and Irish Leaving Certificate. Where necessary, Careers Advisers liaise with relevant stakeholders in relation to equivalency of qualifications and signpost the client accordingly.

Return to Work Credit Scheme

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to comment on the In Work Credit Scheme, which was announced last year to help lone parents back to work but has yet to be rolled out.

(AQW 7647/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The "In Work Credit Scheme" is known in Northern Ireland as the "Return to Work Credit Scheme". It is currently being piloted in 4 areas in Northern Ireland. The Scheme pays £40 a week for up to 52 weeks to lone parents returning to work who have been claiming benefits for 52 weeks or more and are earning less than £15,000 a year.

My Department, together with the Department for Social Development, is considering a package of new measures designed to help lone parents return to work. Extension of the Return to Work Credit Scheme to the whole of Northern Ireland is part of that package. Decisions will be taken soon and any new arrangements agreed will be introduced in the Autumn.

Subgroup Report on Migrant Workers

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the subgroup report on migrant workers from the Race and Equality Forum will be published. (AQO 3874/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The draft Strategy and Action Plan of the Racial Equality Forum's Migrant Workers Thematic Sub-Group have been submitted to the NI Executive for consideration. Once the Executive has had the opportunity to consider, and given its endorsement, the documents will be made available

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Publicity and Advertising

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how much he spent on publicity and advertising in 2007-2008. (AQW 6313/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Dodds): The amount spent on publicity and campaign advertising by DETI in 2007/2008 is as follows:

| DETI | Total amount spent on publicity 2007/08 | Total amount spent on advertising 2007/08 |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008 | £311,450 | £709,835 |

DETI

Publicity - £311,449.74. This relates to the expenditure on publicity and associated costs such as photography, promotional material and marketing projects as follows:

| DETI Business Area | Total |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Press Office | £4,258.14 |
| Consumer Affairs | £39,002.00 |
| Telecomms Policy | £222,738.60 |
| PCS | £0.00 |
| Minerals / GSNI | £335.00 |
| Finance and EU | £0.00 |
| Economics | £0.00 |
| BRD | £0.00 |
| TALE (excl Minerals) | £0.00 |
| SPD | £0.00 |
| Energy | £45,116.00 |
| Total | £311,449.74 |

Campaign Advertising - £709,835. This relates to the total costs associated with the EREF Integrated Communication Strategy, which includes the advertising of the Reconnect programme as follows:

| DETI Business Area | Total |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Energy | £709,835.00 |
| Total | £709,835.00 |

DETI NDPBS

| NDPB | Total amount spent on publicity & advertising 2007/08 |
|------------------|---|
| Invest NI | £3,240,000 |
| NI Tourist Board | £1,132,159 |
| HSENI | £281,535 |
| Consumer Council | £40,000 |

Economic Investment Conference

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the cost of hosting the

Economic Investment Conference, including the costs met by the delegates themselves; and for his assessment whether it represented value for money.

(AQW 7096/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Final costs for hosting the US NI Investment Conference are being collated, quantified and discussed with our suppliers. Based on confirmed invoices and estimates the final net cost will be in the region of £743,000. This amount has been reduced from £818,000 to reflect sponsorship raised from the private sector.

Ninety companies were represented at the conference, with 144 delegates in attendance. In addition, there were 65 attendees from Mayor Bloomberg's party, the New York Comptrollers' group (both City and State) and the Prime Minister's and Taoiseach's teams. I believe that the Conference provided an excellent opportunity to showcase the Northern Ireland business opportunity to senior representatives of such a high number of key US companies. The Conference also involved facilitating over 300 business, political, academic and community representatives, from all parts of Northern Ireland, to network and engage directly with the delegates.

The assessment of value for money cannot be undertaken until the benefits in terms of consequent inward investment projects are known. This may take two to three years to come to fruition. Invest NI has a co-ordinated and strategic follow-up plan in place to ensure that all Delegates are contacted over the coming months to further explore how they might benefit from considering Northern Ireland as an investment location

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many visits he has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials.

(AQW 7300/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between 8 May 2007 and 30 May 2008, I made 10 visits outside Northern Ireland to undertake departmental business:

(1) USA: 24 – 29 June 2007

This trip involved visits to Boston, Washington and New York to lead a trade mission, to attend events relating to tourism and meetings with regard to the organisation of the May 2008 US/NI Investment Conference. Flights and train travel costs, for myself

and 5 officials, amounted to £15,426.05. Hotel costs, for myself and 5 officials, amounted to £4,312.53.

(2) Paris: 18/19 June 2007

This trip involved aerospace-related meetings at the Paris Airshow. Flights and train travel costs, for myself and 2 officials, amounted to £466.99. Hotel costs, for myself and 2 officials amounted to £334.47.

(3) Edinburgh: 9 October 2007

This trip incorporated a meeting with the Scottish Tourism Minister. Flight costs, for myself and 2 officials, amounted to £351.90. There was no overnight stay.

(4) Dublin: 8 November 2007

This trip incorporated an NSMC Tourism Sectoral meeting with the Irish Republic's Tourism Minister. My travel costs were not determined as I travelled with my officials by Ministerial car and there was no overnight stay.

(5) USA/Canada: 12 - 17 November 2007

This trip involved visits to Washington, New York, Boston and Toronto to attend meetings with regard to organising the May 2008 US/NI Investment Conference. Flight and train travel costs, for myself and 4 officials, amounted to £25,933.40. Hotel costs, for myself and 4 officials, amounted to £4,560.48.

(6) USA: 2 - 5 December 2007

This trip involved a visit to New York to attend meetings with regard to organising the May 2008 US/NI Investment Conference. Flight costs, for myself and 2 officials, amounted to £16,784.80. Hotel costs, for myself and 2 officials, amounted to £1,747.23.

(7) Brussels: 23/24 January 2008

This trip involved an aerospace event and meetings at the NI Executive Office in Brussels. Flight and train travel costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £2,883.90. Hotel costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £1,014.

(8) India: 2 - 7 February 2008

This trip involved the opening of the Invest NI Office in Mumbai and meetings with potential and existing investors. Flight costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £19,483.52. Hotel costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £4,067.82.

(9) Dublin: 14 February 2008

This trip incorporated a BIC Plenary meeting. My travel costs were not determined as I travelled with my officials by Ministerial car and there was no overnight stay.

(10) USA: 12 - 14 March 2008

This trip involved visits to New York and Washington to attend meetings and events with regard to organising the May 2008 US/NI Investment Conference. Flight and train travel costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £14,537.51. Hotel costs, for myself and 3 officials, amounted to £2,106.44.

Coolkeeragh Power Station

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6579/08, if he is aware that prior to the construction of the new Coolkeeragh Power Station in Derry/Londonderry, work was undertaken on behalf of his Department by Enterprise Northern Ireland with local engineering companies to assist them to form a cluster that would enable them to successfully bid for work on the power station; why a similar approach is not being taken in relation to the construction of the new hospitals in the South and South West; and if he will he consider such an approach at this stage. (AQW 7309/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Coolkeeragh Supplier Model, was established in 2003 to investigate ways to maximise local content on the construction of the Coolkeeragh power station. The supplier model received the support of local politicians and a number of other stakeholders, including Invest NI and the main contractor.

North West Marketing was appointed by Invest NI to project manage the supplier model, which was initiated after the appointment of the main contractors.

The Strategic Investment Board is currently evaluating three final bids for the proposed hospitals in Enniskillen and Omagh. The successful outcome of the bids is expected at some point this summer.

Invest NI is liaising with stakeholder groups and economic development partners, including the Strategic Investment Board and local Councils, to provide intelligence on a number of capital build programmes, including the new hospitals in the South and South West.

Invest NI is considering a supply chain initiative, which could be implemented after main contractors for the new hospitals have been appointed.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many community and voluntary groups his Department is currently funding;

the amount of funding given to each project; and where each of these projects are based. (AQW 7315/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Details of all community and voluntary groups currently funded by the Department, including the amount of funding given to each project and the location of each project, are listed in the table below.

DETI

| Community/ Voluntary Groups currently funded | Amount of Funding currently allocated | Location of Project |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Laganview Enterprise Centre | £299,481 | Lisburn |
| Churchtown Community Assoc. | £278,579 | Castlederg |
| Torrent Valley Initiative | £116,000 | Dungannon |
| Blackwatertown Development Assoc. | £66,505 | Blackwatertown |
| South Tyrone Empowerment Programme | £127,124 | Dungannon |
| Workspace Draperstown | £300,000 | Draperstown |
| Workwest | £496,959 | Belfast |
| Ballee & Harryville Community Facilities | £400,000 | Ballymena |
| Pomeroy Development Assoc. | £489,740 | Pomeroy |
| Oona Valley Community Assoc. | £184,000 | Eglisli, Dungannon |
| Sion Mills Preservation Building Trust | £234,000 | Sion Mills |
| The Playhouse | £284,933 | Londonderry |
| Coach House Regeneration Ltd | £497,845 | Darkley, Armagh |
| Conway Mill Preservation Trust | £393,040 | Belfast |
| North West Playhouse Resource Centre | £284,933 | Londonderry |
| Banbridge District Enterprises Limited | £280,618 | Banbridge |
| Armagh Business Centre | £495,000 | Armagh |
| Glenwood Business Centre | £178,000 | Belfast |
| Ballymena North Partnership | £299,700 | Ballymena |

| Community/ Voluntary Groups currently funded | Amount of Funding currently allocated | Location of Project |
|---|---|---|
| Seskinore Rural Community Group | €28,000 (*approximately £22,000) | Seskinore, Co. Tyrone |
| Strangford Lough Wildfowling Association | €300,000 (*approximately £237,000) | Newtownards, Co. Down. |
| Community Networks Services Ltd | €250,000 under INTERREG IIIA Programme 2000-2006 (*approximately £197,000) | North West Ireland Cross-Border Region |
| Citizens Advice Regional Donegall Pass Belfast BT7 1BS | £400,000 per annum (for the three years starting 1 April 2008) | At various Citizens Advice and non Citizens Advice affiliated offices throughout Northern Ireland. |
| Social Economy Network (NI) Ltd. | £600,000.00 (over a 4 year period up to 2011) | York Road, Belfast |
| West Belfast and Greater Shankill Partnership Boards (shared Development Officer – salary costs plus contribution towards utility expenses) | £45,500 (2008/09) Funding provided through the Integrated Development Fund. | Falls Road (West Belfast Partnership Board) and Shankill Road (Greater Shankill Partnership Board) |

* Using current exchange rates.

The projects listed below are being supported under Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme. As part of this Programme they are given access to advice and mentoring support to help develop their commercial capability.

INVEST NI

Note 1 - Direct grant assistance is not part of the package and the total budget for the delivery of advice/mentoring is £97,500 over a two year period.

| Community/ Voluntary Groups currently funded | Amount of Funding currently allocated | Location of Project |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Cullybackey Improvement Association | See Note 1 | Ballymena |
| Shop Mobility | See Note 1 | Ballymena |
| Larne Community Care Centre | See Note 1 | Larne |
| Bushmills Townscape Heritage Initiative | See Note 1 | Moyle |

| Community/ Voluntary Groups currently funded | Amount of Funding currently allocated | Location of Project |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Ballykeel Environmental Action Team (B.E.A.T.) NI Limited | See Note 1 | Ballymena |
| Family Caring Centre | See Note 1 | Antrim |
| Solidarity Equality Education Diversity Support (SEEDS) | See Note 1 | Londonderry |
| Churches in Co-Operation | See Note 1 | Londonderry |
| Slieve Gallion Pre School | See Note 1 | Magherafelt |
| Naiscoil Mhachaire -Irish Medium Pre School Maghera | See Note 1 | Limavady |
| Coleraine and District Motor Club NW2 | See Note 1 | Coleraine |
| Greenlough Play Group | See Note 1 | Ballymena |
| Dyslexia and Dyspraxia Support Group | See Note 1 | Magherafelt |
| Carntogher Community Association | See Note 1 | Magherafelt |
| Draperstown After Schools Club | See Note 1 | Magherafelt |
| St Lurach's Women's Community Group | See Note 1 | Magherafelt |
| Magery Rural Enterprise | See Note 1 | Craigavon |
| Castlewellan Cross Community Play Group | See Note 1 | Down |
| Easilift Community Transport | See Note 1 | Strabane |
| Cancer Choices | See Note 1 | Dungannon |
| The Friends of Lissan Trust | See Note 1 | Cookstown |
| Caledon Regeneration | See Note 1 | Dungannon |
| Rural Link Community Transport | See Note 1 | Omagh |
| Omagh Early Years Centre | See Note 1 | Omagh |
| Omagh Forum for Rural Associations | See Note 1 | Dungannon |

| Community/ Voluntary Groups currently funded | Amount of Funding currently allocated | Location of Project |
|---|--|---------------------|
| Mummers Foundation | See Note 1 | Omagh |
| Bardic Educational Arts & Media Limited (BEAM) | See Note 1 | Fermanagh |
| East Belfast Mission | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Beat | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| St Vincent De Paul | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| The Early Years Organisation NIPPA | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| North Belfast Employment Centre | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Ardmonagh (Care) | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Redburn Community Play Group | See Note 1 | Down |
| Contact Youth Counselling | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Connect, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Simon Community NI | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| North City | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Footprints Women's Centre | See Note 1 | Lisburn |
| Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) | See Note 1 | Belfast |
| Peninsula Community Transport | See Note 1 | Ards |

Cruise Line Tourists in Strangford and North Down

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what his Department is doing to encourage cruise line tourists to visit museums and attractions in the Strangford and North Down areas. (AQW 7319/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In 2007, 27 cruise ships visited Belfast bringing 41,729 passengers. In 2008, 36 ships are expected. Representatives from Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB), who are part funded by NITB, have been to the United States and Germany this year to present and discuss tour itineraries for both Belfast and all of Northern Ireland with the

cruise companies. BVCB also met with local ground handlers to discuss the same. Armagh and Down Regional Tourism Partnership has also met with tour operators to discuss possible itineraries and highlight attractions and facilities in their region. North Down and Strangford were both promoted during these meetings and BVCB has indicated that, due to their proximity to Belfast and the range of attractions and facilities available, both areas feature heavily on cruise tour agendas.

For those passengers that choose not to pre-book, BVCB through the Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC) operate a welcome and information desk at the docks during cruise visits and also offer a shuttle bus service to the BWC which opens in line with cruise ship docking times. At BWC visitors can get information on both Belfast and all of Northern Ireland including North Down and Strangford.

BVCB and Port of Belfast are members of Cruise Ireland, a marketing co-operative which was formed in 1994 to promote the island of Ireland as a premier cruise destination.

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the details of all grants available through his Department. (AQW 7323/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

DETI

| Title of Grant | Short Summary |
|---|---|
| Local Economic Development (through the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland 2007-2013) | Available to local authorities across Northern Ireland for local economic development activities that will support innovation, research & development, and entrepreneurship. |
| Support for Enterprise and Tourism to public sector lead partners via the Special EU Programmes Body under the Interreg IV Programme. | DETI is the Northern Ireland Accountable Department for Priority 1 of the Programme which is managed by, and funding is available from, the Special EU Programmes Body. The Programme offers support to public sector equivalent bodies delivering projects which will result in better territorial cohesion. Priority 1 of the Programme is aimed at assisting Co-operation for a more prosperous cross border region. Funding under this Priority will be available to Public sector lead partners for Enterprise and Tourism projects. |

NI TOURIST BOARD

| Title of Grant | Short Summary |
|----------------------------|--|
| Tourism Development Scheme | A capital grants scheme providing rates of up to 30% (private sector) or 50% (public and community/voluntary/charitable sectors) of eligible project costs |

INVEST NI

| Title of Grant | Short Summary |
|---|---|
| Selective Financial Assistance | Capital and Revenue Grants to support investment and / or job creation |
| Tourism Development Scheme | Capital Grant to support tourism accommodation Projects |
| Growth Accelerator Programme | Revenue Grant to support growth in markets outside Northern Ireland |
| Property Assistance | Capital grant to support premises development |
| Business Improvement Agent | Revenue grant to support specialist business development position |
| Business Improvement through Training Programme | Revenue grant towards agreed training plan |
| Interim Manager & Non Exec Director | Grant Support to strengthen a company's management team |
| Technical Assistance Grant | Grant support to assist companies with people, process and technology issues |
| Compete Programme | R&D Grant support |
| Product / Process Development (PPD) | R&D Grant support |
| Proof of Concept | R&D Grant support |
| Centres of Excellence (Capital) | R&D Grant support |
| Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology (SMART) | R&D Grant support |
| Start Programme | R&D Grant support |
| Management Information Systems / eBusiness | Grant support to invest in IT and Internet solutions |
| Higher Education and Innovation Programme | Two components – First assists NI universities to reach out to businesses through QUB Chief Executive Club and UU Knowledge Club. Second, funded by Invest NI, involves capturing, exploiting and providing the personnel to make the best use of intellectual property |

| Title of Grant | Short Summary |
|---|--|
| Research and Technological Development Networking Programme | Financial assistance towards cost of travel associated with accessing technologies, seeing them in action, or towards meeting experts in the field |

Gross Value Added and Gross Domestic Product

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what targets are being set for (i) gross value added; and (ii) gross domestic product, convergence between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 7338/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Specific targets have not been set in relation to either Gross Value Added (GVA) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) convergence between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Northern Ireland has experienced reasonably strong economic growth in the UK context - GVA growth was 5.6% in 2006 and second only to London. However, despite this growth, Northern Ireland's relative level of economic prosperity has remained at 80% of the UK average, and the region's comparatively lower productivity (as measured by GVA per filled job) has been identified as the major factor behind this. Consequently, the Programme for Government has identified a goal which aims 'to halve the private sector productivity gap with the UK excluding the Greater South East (GSE) by 2015'.

The UK regions – excluding the GSE – were considered to provide an appropriate comparator for Northern Ireland's performance. This is because they have access to broadly the same policy instruments as Northern Ireland. The GSE has been excluded due to its markedly different economic structure, with its concentration of high value-added financial and business services. The Irish Republic was not considered an appropriate benchmark in light of the different policy / fiscal environments.

Gross Value Added and Gross Domestic Product

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what targets are being set for (i) gross value added; and (ii) gross domestic product, convergence between Northern Ireland and the European Union average. (AQW 7339/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Specific targets have not been set in

relation to either Gross Value Added (GVA) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) convergence between Northern Ireland and the European Union average.

Northern Ireland has experienced reasonably strong economic growth in the UK context - GVA growth was 5.6% in 2006 and second only to London. However, despite this growth, Northern Ireland's relative level of economic prosperity has remained at 80% of the UK average, and the region's comparatively lower productivity (as measured by GVA per filled job) has been identified as the major factor behind this. Consequently, the Programme for Government has identified a goal which aims 'to halve the private sector productivity gap with the UK excluding the Greater South East (GSE) by 2015'.

The UK regions – excluding the GSE – were considered to provide an appropriate comparator for Northern Ireland's performance. This is because they have access to broadly the same policy instruments as Northern Ireland. The GSE has been excluded due to its markedly different economic structure, with its concentration of high value-added financial and business services. The European Union average was not considered an appropriate benchmark in light of the different policy / fiscal environments.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on his Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7365/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: While the Deloitte and Touche report includes estimates of costs arising from the need to provide certain public services separately to meet the needs of the two main communities, the key services highlighted do not fall within the remit of DETI and its NDPBs. My Department is, however, committed to meeting the targets for efficiency savings agreed by the Executive in the Programme for Government.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much his Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7370/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Expenditure on travel expenses between 8 May 2007 and 30 April 2008 by the Core

Department and each of its NDPBs is set in the following table:

| Name | £ |
|--|------------------|
| DETI Core | 254,582 |
| Invest Northern Ireland | 971,905 |
| Northern Ireland Tourist Board | 142,103 |
| Northern Ireland Health & Safety Executive | 115,806 |
| Consumer Council | 47,758 |
| Total | 1,532,154 |

Invest NI Office Space in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what office space Invest NI is currently leasing in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 7415/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI leases 316 sq m (3404 sq ft) on the 5th floor of the Timber Quay building at Strand Road. It also holds a lease on a 975 sq m (10,500 sq ft) business unit at Campsie Business Park.

The lease on the business unit dates from 1992 and was inherited by Invest NI from the Department of Economic Development through the Industrial Development Board. The unit has remained empty despite being actively marketed by IDB / Invest NI both internally to Client Companies and on the open market through an estate agent.

Invest NI Office Space in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space being leased by Invest NI in Derry/Londonderry is currently occupied by Invest NI client companies; and if so at which locations. (AQW 7416/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: None of the office space leased by Invest NI is occupied by its client companies. The office space leased by Invest NI on the 5th floor of the Timber Quay building is currently occupied by Invest NI's North West Regional Office.

The business unit at Campsie, which Invest NI inherited from the Department of Economic Development through the Industrial Development Board, is currently vacant despite being actively marketed by IDB / Invest NI both internally to Client Companies and on the open market.

Invest NI Office Space in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space leased by Invest NI in Derry/Londonderry is vacant; if so, for how long and at which locations; and to detail (i) the length of each contract; and (ii) for how long each contract has been in place. (AQW 7417/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI holds the lease on one vacant unit which is located at Campsie Business Park. The lease on the unit was inherited by Invest NI from the Department of Economic Development through the Industrial Development Board. The unit has remained empty despite being actively marketed by IDB / Invest NI both internally to Client Companies and on the open market.

Invest NI holds a 25 year lease on this unit which commenced on 10th August 1992.

Invest NI Office Space in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been paid to date on contracts for vacant office space held by Invest NI in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 7418/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Since April 2002, Invest NI has paid £249,595 rent on the vacant business unit at Campsie Business Park. The unit has remained empty despite being actively marketed by IDB / Invest NI both internally to Client Companies and on the open market through an estate agent.

The rent on the unit prior to April 2002 was paid by the Industrial Development Board. Whilst Invest NI does not hold the financial records of the Industrial Development Board, under the terms of the lease the rent due to be paid for the period covering 1992 – 2002 is approximately £250,000

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by her Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment. (AQW 7223/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Foster):

Since the date of devolution my Department has purchased 172 laptops.

My Department has issued 69 mobile telephones at no initial up front cost as the service providers supply the handsets free of charge, however, 247 Blackberry devices have also been purchased. Although the primary reason for purchasing these devices is for their mobile email facilities, they can also be used as mobile phones.

The table below summarises the number and cost of the laptops and blackberry devices purchased.

| Equipment Type | Number of Units Purchased | Amount £ |
|-------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Laptops | 172 | 129,926 |
| Blackberrys | 247 | 14,674 |
| Total cost | - | 144,600 |

Planning Applications for Pigeon Lofts

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for pigeon lofts have (i) received approval from; and (ii) been rejected by, the Planning Service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 7288/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In 2006/2007, 5 applications for pigeon lofts were determined – 2 were approved and 3 were refused.

The figures relating to previous years are not available as these could only be obtained through a manual search of all the Divisional Planning Office files which could not be done in the time available and would incur disproportionate costs.

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for the details of all grants available through her Department.

(AQW 7321/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Grants available from my Department are listed in the schedule below:

| Business Area | Grant available | Description |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Road Safety Services | Road Safety Council (NI) | Grant to the Road Safety Council (NI) to cover full time administration and local committee costs. |

| Business Area | Grant available | Description |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Local Government Services | General grant – resources element | Grant to provide additional finance to those district councils whose rateable value per head of population falls below a standard determined annually by the Department. |
| Local Government Services | General grant – de-rating element | Grant to district councils for loss of rate income due to the statutory de-rating of certain properties. |
| Local Government Services | Transitional Relief Scheme Grant | Grant to compensate district councils for loss of resources grant allocation due to the new capital valuation system. |
| Local Government Services | Construction Products Grant | Grant to district councils to cover the additional costs incurred by environmental health officers in enforcing the requirements of the Construction Products Regulations 1991 (1991/1620). |
| Local Government Services | Emergency Planning Grant | Grant to district councils in relation to their emergency planning duties. |
| Planning and Environmental Policy | Strategic Waste Infrastructure Grant | The Strategic Waste Infrastructure Fund (SWIF) is available to the three Waste Management Groups (arc21, the Southern Waste Management Partnership & the North West Region) to assist local government with the significant costs of delivering the new infrastructure required to meet the landfill diversion targets in the EU Landfill Directive (1999/31/EC). |

| Business Area | Grant available | Description |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Planning and Environmental Policy | Local Air Quality Grant | Grant to district councils to enable them to monitor air quality in their districts. This would include monitoring equipment and data maintenance contracts. |
| Planning and Environmental Policy | Clean Air Grant | Grant to district councils as a contribution towards the costs of providing financial assistance to owners/occupiers to convert to smokeless appliances in areas which have been declared as smoke control areas. |
| Planning and Environmental Policy | Noise Act Grant | Grant to district councils for the adoption of the provisions of the Noise Act 1996 relating to night time noise offences. |
| Planning Service | Community Places Grant | Grant to provide planning and related technical assistance to communities in Northern Ireland. |
| Planning Service | Townscape Heritage Initiative Grant | Grant to third parties towards expenditure in connection with the promotion, preservation or enhancement of the character of appearance of a Conservation Area. |
| Environment and Heritage Service | Listed Building Grant Scheme | Grant to third parties for the repair of listed buildings. |

| Business Area | Grant available | Description |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Environment and Heritage Service | Natural Heritage Grant Scheme | Grant to third parties to encourage the conservation and enhancement of key elements of the environment and its wildlife. |
| Environment and Heritage Service | Anti-Litter Grant | Grant to third parties engaged in anti-litter activities. |

Pollution Incidents in the Glenavy River

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment if staff from the Environment and Heritage Service were recently deployed to investigate another pollution incident in the Glenavy River, and if so, to make a statement on the incident. (AQW 7337/08)

The Minister of the Environment: On 6 April 2008, an Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) Inspector investigated a report of water pollution to the Glenavy River. During his investigations, the Inspector discovered that the pollution resulted from overflow, due to equipment failure at the Northern Ireland Water (NIW) Sewage Pumping Station on Pigeontown Road, Glenavy. The pump overflow caused a discharge of sewage to the river which was in heavy flow at the time of the incident. This incident has been classified as 'low severity' and, in line with EHS enforcement protocols, an advisory letter has been issued to NIW informing them of the actions they should take to remedy the situation and thus prevent a recurrence.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many visits she has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7345/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The table below summarises the information requested.

| Visits | Method Of Travel | Cost Of Travel £ | Type Of Accommodation | Cost Of Accommodation £ | Accompanying Officials * |
|------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 18/06/2007 | Air / Rail | 1,321.80 | None | - | Deputy Secretary, Local Government and Planning & Environmental Policy |
| 04/11/2007 | Air / Rail/Car Hire | 2,298.02 | Hotel | 582.45 | Chief Executive of EHS & Director of Natural Heritage (EHS) |
| 09/11/07 | Departmental car # | - | None | - | |

| Visits | Method Of Travel | Cost Of Travel £ | Type Of Accommodation | Cost Of Accommodation £ | Accompanying Officials * |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 12/12/2007 | Departmental car # | - | None | - | |
| 12/12/2007 | Private car # | 80.00 | None | - | Director of Road Safety Division |
| 13/12/2007 | Air / Rail | 1,672.25 | None | - | EHS Director of Natural Heritage & Strategic Projects and Design Manager (Planning Service) |
| 06/02/2008 | Air / Rail | 835.35 | None | - | |
| 07/02/2008 | Departmental car # | - | None | - | |
| 05/03/2008 | Air / Rail | 2,138.70 | Hotel | 578.20 | Chief Executive of Planning Service, Deputy Director of Corporate Services (Planning Service) & Director of Local Government Policy Division |
| Total | | 8,266.12 | | 1,160.65 | |

Note: In Addition To The Accompanying Officials, All The Visits Include The Minister, Her Special Adviser And Personal Secretary.
Travel To Roi

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on her Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings.
(AQW 7366/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Deloitte report discusses the potential costs of community division in the areas of policing and security, community relations and victims, education, health, housing, transport and infrastructure and the community and voluntary sector. The environment, and therefore the main functions for which my Department has responsibility, was not identified in the report as an area which has been subject to additional costs as a result of division in Northern Ireland. Officials from my Department were not involved in the Reference Group and no input was provided by DOE to the final report.

Therefore, I can confirm that the findings of the Deloitte report have no direct impact in terms of cost implications and the potential for efficiency savings for the functions covered by my Department.

Greenbelt Foundation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 707/08, what is the legal status of maintenance agreements entered into with the Greenbelt Foundation by residents of housing developments, as the company is not registered; and how will her Department view this company in relation to future agreements.
(AQW 7371/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The status of maintenance agreements entered into by residents of housing developments with the Greenbelt Foundation or any other management company is a matter entirely between the company in question and the residents.

In relation to future planning applications where developers wish to make use of the Greenbelt Foundation to manage and maintain areas of open space, these will continue to be assessed on their merits against relevant policy relating to the provision of open space in new residential developments. Developers are required to satisfy the Department that suitable arrangements will be put in place for the future management and maintenance, in perpetuity, of any areas of open space that are to be provided.

Natural Gas

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she can take to encourage local Councils to convert elements of their estate to the use of natural gas.
(AQW 7373/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Given my responsibilities for climate change policy, I take every opportunity in my regular meetings with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) to encourage them to act sustainably. I am encouraged that NILGA representatives and other council interests are progressing a project focusing on energy use as a means to demonstrate commitment to the climate change agenda. This includes the use of alternative, more efficient, fuel sources in the full range of their estate, for example their buildings and vehicles.

Planning Applications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to clarify the position on the admissibility of unverifiable objections with bogus names and addresses in Planning applications. (AQW 7375/08)

The Minister of the Environment: When processing a planning application Planning Service requires applicants to provide their name and contact addresses. However, as the majority of planning approvals relate to the land in question and not a specific applicant, Planning Service does not seek to confirm the accuracy of the names and addresses submitted. To attempt to do so would be a disproportionate use of resources and introduce considerable delay in the processing of planning applications. For the same reasons Planning Service does not seek to verify the names and addresses of objectors.

Planning Applications

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what action her Department has taken to regularise the planning status of 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena. (AQW 7387/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I would confirm that the Department is currently investigating a breach of planning control at 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena. We are anticipating a retrospective planning application in the near future, which will be processed in the normal manner.

Quality of Beaches

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action her Department is taking to ensure the quality of beaches. (AQW 7390/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) continues to work closely with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to address a number of issues which will contribute to the protection and improvement of bathing water quality.

EHS carries out monitoring and compliance assessment against the EC Bathing Water Directive standards at 23 identified beaches across Northern Ireland. This information is used in the determination of discharge standards which are set by EHS for coastal waste water treatment works and sewerage systems in order to protect the bathing waters.

The stricter requirements of the revised Bathing Water Directive have been the subject of a recent consultation and are currently being used to determine future treatment standards.

The Nitrates Action Programme regulations which became operational on 1 January last year are also expected to contribute to the protection of bathing water quality.

Ballyholme Beach

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps her Department is taking to improve the environmental quality of Ballyholme beach in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7391/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) continues to work closely with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to address a number of issues which will contribute to the protection and improvement of bathing water quality. My answer to AQW 7390/08 gives more detail on this.

The new North Down waste water treatment works, serving the Bangor, Millisle, Groomsport and Donaghadee areas, was brought into operation in the autumn last year and now provides secondary treatment. In addition, this treatment works will provide ultra violet disinfection throughout future bathing seasons. The sewerage network will be upgraded as part of Northern Ireland Water's future drainage area studies.

This will lead to a significant improvement in the quality of discharges to the marine environment in the vicinity of Ballyholme beach.

Pollution of Beaches

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what liaison her Department has had with Northern Ireland Water in relation to the prevention of pollution of beaches. (AQW 7394/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) continues to meet regularly with Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to detail the requirements of new and existing Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTWs).

EHS requires NIW to model all new WWTWs, discharging to the marine environment, to demonstrate compliance with the microbiological standards set in the Bathing Water Directive.

EHS and NIW meet bi-monthly to discuss the Northern Ireland Drainage Area Plan where EHS sets standards for all potential discharges from Northern Ireland's sewer network. All intermittent discharges at bathing waters include a spill frequency which is set in order to afford protection to the receiving water.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how much her Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7423/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has spent £1,890,624 on travel expenses since devolution.

Collecting Food Waste from Households

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to make a statement on the pilot study aimed at collecting food waste from households in Belfast; and to confirm if this food waste will be incinerated by Ulster Farm By-Products in Glenavy. (AQW 7431/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The pilot study is a matter for Belfast City Council, and not an issue over which my Department has regulatory authority. My officials have yet to receive any applications for the permitting of this activity at Ulster Farm By-Products.

Preservation of the Stormont Estate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment if any preservation orders or graded listings apply to: (i) buildings; (ii) monuments; and (iii) trees, within the Stormont Estate and the environs of Parliament Buildings; and if not, what steps she is taking to ensure this takes place. (AQW 7436/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The following structures have been identified and protected within the Stormont Estate and the environs of Parliament Buildings as follows:-

- (i) Listed buildings (ie buildings of 'special architectural or historic interest' as defined by Article 42 of the Planning Order 1991):
 - HB26/13/013 - Parliament Buildings
 - HB26/13/014 - Stormont Castle
 - HB26/13/015 - Conservatory Stormont Castle
 - HB26/13/016 - Police Station Stormont Castle
 - HB26/13/017 - Speaker's House
 - HB26/13/018 - Viscount Craigavon's Tomb
 - HB26/13/019 - Lord Carson Memorial Statue
 - HB26/13/020 - Gate Lodge, Gates And Screen (Upper Newtownards Road entrance)
 - HB26/13/021 - Gate Lodge, (Massey Avenue Entrance)

- (ii) Monuments (ie scheduled historic monuments as defined by the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order 1995)

Two historic monuments have previously been identified within the estate, though recent fieldwork to the east of Dundonald would suggest that there are also likely to be surviving buried archaeological remains in this area. The two monuments have been included in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (NISMR) as an enclosure and a mound. Both monuments are likely to be the remains of a monument known as a rath or ringfort, a type of high-status semi-defensive earthwork monument that often contained a farmstead in the period between c.700-c.1000AD.

Neither of these monuments have been statutorily protected under the provisions of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995, but this is not to say that they are unimportant or can be simply removed. In all cases where a development proposal is made, the desirability of preserving an archaeological site and its setting, whether scheduled (i.e. statutorily protected) or otherwise, is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Any proposed land-use change that would affect these monuments would be closely considered in line with existing published planning policies contained in Planning Policy Statement 6, Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage.

Also, much of the Stormont Estate has been identified for inclusion on the Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes of Special Historical Interest in Northern Ireland. The area designated includes the landscape and gardens associated with Stormont Castle, built in 1850, together with the whole landscape designed by Bean and Armytage-Moore in the 1920s and 30s as the setting for Parliament Buildings.

The inclusion of these lands on the Register enables the Department to consider the impacts of future development in the context of published policy, specifically Planning Policy Statement 6, Policy BH6. Although no additional statutory controls follow from the inclusion of a site on this Register, the effect of a proposed development on the estate, or its setting, is a material consideration in the determination of planning and/or listed building consent applications and appeals.

- (iii) Tree Preservation Orders

There are no Tree Preservation Orders in place on the Estate.

Future Actions

- Such protections are periodically reviewed as a result of requests from the public, or elected

representatives, or as part of a systematic review such as the 'Second Survey of buildings of architectural or historic interest'.

- Within the next five years the listings on the site are likely to be reviewed as a result of the Second Survey.
- There are no current plans to review the designation of monuments on the site or tree preservation orders.

Quarrying at Spring Road in Drumnakilly

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the steps her Department is taking to address the impact of ongoing quarrying at Spring Road, Drumnakilly, on (i) the environment; and (ii) the community. (AQW 7592/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Planning Service acknowledges that quarrying has continued at Spring Road, Drumnakilly without the appropriate planning consents despite ongoing enforcement action by Planning Service.

A Stop Notice and Enforcement Notice were served on the site on 2 March 2007. The Stop Notice had immediate effect and the Enforcement Notice came into effect on 2 April 2007. No appeal was received by the Planning Appeals Commission and the Enforcement Notice took effect on this date. Following numerous visits by officers of the Department it was evident that the Notices were not being complied with and Planning Service proceeded to summons action.

Instructions to summons were issued by the Department on 9 May 2007 and the matter was first listed for hearing before the Magistrate sitting in Omagh on 10 August 2007 but was adjourned six times and is now listed for a two day trial on 17 and 18 September 2008.

Following continued complaints from MLAs and local residents, and the continued delay in court proceedings, Planning Service began discussions with counsel on proceeding with injunctive proceedings to stop extraction at this location. This matter is still being considered.

Planning Service has pursued and continues to pursue all enforcement options available.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Land Registry Office

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to address delays in the Land Registry Office. (AQW 6923/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr P Robinson): The Land Registry is taking various measures to address delays. These include :

- establishment of transactional based teams
- establishment of a specialised team to address the oldest and most complex cases
- employment of a casework assistance team from the private sector
- implementation of e-registration procedures to simplify and accelerate the registration process
- customer training to reduce application errors
- landweb direct to enable remote searching by customers
- provision of practice guidance notes on the LRNI website.
- PEDU enquiry to cover Land Registry delivery issues.

Executive Property

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list by Department all properties currently owned by the Executive that are (i) listed; and (ii) not listed, with Land Registers of Northern Ireland. (AQW 6968/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In responding to this AQW it is assumed that "listed" refers to land and property registered in the Land Register, and "not listed" refers to land and property recorded in the Registry of Deeds. Taking each in turn:

Land and Property ("listed") registered in the Land Register

The Land Register does not hold a list of the street names/addresses of properties owned by departments but can provide a list of the number of "parcels" of land and property. The total number of folios by department is as follows:

| Department | Total number of folios |
|------------|------------------------|
| DOE | 5,957 |
| DRD | 2,372 |
| DSD | 320 |
| DARD | 778 |
| DCAL | 4 |
| DFP | 24 |
| DHSS | 53 |
| DEL | 0 |
| DETI | 15 |
| OFMDFM | 13 |

| Department | Total number of folios |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| DENI | 0 |
| Total all Depts | 9,536 |

Land and Property (“listed”) recorded in the Registry of Deeds

Where land and property is unregistered (i.e. registered in the Registry of Deeds) only a memorial of the last document of title is lodged (which is a very short précis of the deed itself). This memorial contains a description of the parcel of land or property. It is not possible to interrogate this database as with registered land because it will throw up details, not just of current ownership, but of everything that a department has owned since the inception of the Registry of Deeds in 1708.

Stress-Related Illness

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many working days were lost by his Department due to stress-related illnesses in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 6982/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is provided in the table attached.

| Month | Total working days lost | Month | Total working days lost |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| May 06 | 206 | June 06 | 180 |
| July 06 | 53 | August 06 | 146 |
| September 06 | 161 | October 06 | 177 |
| November 06 | 261 | December 06 | 168 |
| January 07 | 197 | February 07 | 191 |
| March 07 | 196 | April 07 | 193 |
| May 07 | 225 | June 07 | 240 |
| July 07 | 232 | August 07 | 279 |
| September 07 | 252 | October 07 | 228 |
| November 07 | 225 | December 07 | 202 |
| January 08 | 243 | February 08 | 247 |
| March 08 | 266 | April 08 | 218 |

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the number of applications

received for the Lone Pensioner Allowance from each district council area. (AQW 6996/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 9 May 2008, Land & Property Services had received a total of 11,052 applications for Lone Pensioner Allowance.

Information about the number of applications made for Lone Pensioner Allowance in each district council will be available around the end of May.

Commonwealth and Leasehold Reform Act 2002

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel will he consider introducing for Northern Ireland, provision similar to the Right to Manage section of the Commonwealth and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, rather than the whole Act, in order to deal with Management Companies not being properly handed over to leaseholders of apartments. (AQW 7095/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department keeps under review the need for new legislation across a broad range of areas of civil law. Whether new provisions giving leaseholders in multi-unit developments the right to manage are necessary will be considered along with other aspects of leasehold reform as and when resources permit. However, as I indicated in answer to AQW 5362/08, my Department currently has no plans to legislate in this field.

11-to-18-Year-Olds in the Crumlin Area

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of young people between the ages of 11 and 18 in the Crumlin area; and (ii) his Department’s projection of the growth of this sector over the next 10 years. (AQW 7193/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the 2001 Census, there were 500 young people aged between 11 and 18 resident in the Crumlin settlement.

Subsequent mid-year population estimates are calculated for Northern Ireland and Local Government Districts. The attached table gives the number of young persons aged between 11-18 resident in Northern Ireland and Antrim LGD, from the 2001 Census, the 2006 mid-year population estimate and the latest population projections for 2015.

TABLE POPULATION ESTIMATE AND PROJECTIONS FOR PERSONS AGED 11-18 YEARS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND ANTRIM LGD, 2006-2015

| Year | Population aged 11-18 - Northern Ireland | Population aged 11-18 - Antrim LGD |
|------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 2001 Census | 212,400 | 5,700 |
| 2006 Estimate | 204,400 | 5,800 |
| 2015 Projection | 184,700 | 6,400 |
| Change between 2006 and 2015 | -9.7% | 11.7% |

Rates on Void Properties

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is his estimate of the increase in revenue that would be obtained by putting rates on void properties. (AQW 7201/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the non-domestic sector rates have been levied on empty properties since April 2004. Rate revenue collected in respect of these properties amounted to just over £12m in the 2007/08 rating year.

As part of the Executive's Review of the domestic rating system it was agreed that empty homes should be rated at 100% liability. Actual revenue levels will depend on what exclusions and exemption periods (if any) are to be applied, following further consultation, and also on the quality of the vacant stock – for example, some properties may be uninhabitable and therefore would not be rateable.

Emerging findings suggest that the rating of empty homes (without significant exemptions or exclusions) may raise in the region of £10 million per annum. Such an outcome, however, is dependent on Land and Property Services being adequately resourced and prepared to implement what amounts to a radical departure from the existing system, which only bills dwellings that are occupied.

Rates Discounts

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration is being given to extending rates discounts for those ratepayers paying by monthly direct debit. (AQW 7202/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of the Executive's review of the domestic rating system consideration was given to revising the current early payment discount of 4%. Of those that commented during consultation the majority were opposed to any change. It should also be remembered

that any extension of the current discount would have to be recouped through other ratepayers paying more. Given the lack of support for change the decision was taken to retain the discount in its current form.

Peace III

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the reasons for maintaining the current local authority clusters for the delivery of Peace III, given the confirmation of the new groupings of District Councils within the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 7203/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Work on the development of local authority clusters and their Action Plans began in July 2007. Local authorities had agreed clusters by early 2008 and submitted their Action Plans in March, several months later than the original deadline. However, this part of the PEACE III Programme is now back on schedule. All eight plans have been formally assessed against the PEACE III selection criteria and all are expected to begin implementation before the summer.

It would be impractical to reconfigure the clusters at this late stage. To do so would require developing a new set of Action Plans and submitting these for formal assessment. This would put back implementation from the envisaged June/July 2008 to, at best, late 2008. This delay would impact negatively on the local communities seeking to benefit from this part of the programme and would hinder the achievement of EU spending targets.

The current local authority clusters and their Action Plans will be relevant up to 2010 only. From 2011 onwards, PEACE III delivery will reflect the new local authority structures following the 2011 implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Following agreement between SEUPB and SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), the original clusters and their plans will be reviewed in 2009-2010.

Equal Pay in the Civil Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make a statement on the potential budget implications of equal pay claims in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. (AQW 7260/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive is determined to resolve the longstanding equal pay issue in respect of AA and AO grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Although more work is required to establish precisely the level of funding that will be needed to

address this problem, it is clear that the costs will be considerable. This process will raise a range of significant issues on which I will engage with the Treasury as one strand of a strategy to seek to mitigate the potentially significant implications with respect to the funding of local public services.

Rate Relief for Pensioners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many pensioners receive rate relief, broken down by parliamentary constituency, and for each case to estimate the percentage of eligible pensioners that are receiving this relief.
(AQW 7286/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Eligibility for Rate Relief is considered for all applications for Housing Benefit that do not result in a full award of benefit. There are currently 3,815 pensioners (60 years old and above) in receipt of Rate Relief.

It is not possible to break this down by parliamentary constituency as this information is not part of the assessment process. Estimates of the percentage of eligible pensioners receiving Rate Relief are not maintained.

Review of Public-Sector Jobs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the report on the Review of Policy on the Location of Public Sector Jobs is due to be completed.
(AQW 7290/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Professor Bain, Chair of the Review, has indicated that he will be reporting during the summer 2008. I expect his findings to be reported initially to the Minister for Finance and Personnel and the Committee probably after the summer recess. The report would then be submitted to the Executive for consideration in the early autumn.

Central Procurement Directorate

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to ensure that the Central Procurement Directorate give Small and Medium Enterprises and Social Economy Projects equality of opportunity to apply and be considered for any public procurement tenders or contracts.
(AQW 7348/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Central Procurement Directorate is responsible for

the implementation and development of the NI public procurement policy, one of the key objectives of which, is to encourage and maximise the opportunity for both small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and social economy enterprises (SEEs) to compete for public sector business opportunities.

The Central Procurement Directorate recognises that there are perceived and real barriers to both SMEs and SEEs in competing for public sector business opportunities on an equal basis with other suppliers. These barriers mainly involve the identification of business opportunities, the complexity and cost of bidding processes and the trend in public procurement towards larger contracts.

However, the Central Procurement Directorate has put in place measures to remove these barriers. Some of these include:

- Advertising all procurement opportunities above £30K on its website;
- The implementation of a new user friendly electronic tendering system to reduce the costs and permit easier access to tender documentation and submission of tender offers;
- Ensuring that tender documentation is concise and jargon free and includes details on the criteria to be used to assess tender offers; and
- Ensuring that procurement strategies are developed with due consideration of the impact on the supply base with regard to SMEs and SEEs.

CPD has developed a procurement strategy to be used by its clients to deliver the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI). The introduction of the ISNI database, setting out project details from inception to completion, will provide SMEs with the economic opportunity to seek business as prospective supply chain contributors. CPD has agreed a set of proposals on integrating sustainable development considerations in contracts with the Construction Industry Group NI. One of the proposals is to encourage successful contractors to establish local supply chains.

In addition to this the Directorate has published guides which provide advice and direction to SMEs and the Social Economy Sector on competing for public sector business opportunities and as part of the outreach policy, the Directorate continually participates in workshops and working groups aimed at educating local SMEs and SEEs organisations on public procurement processes and to improve their ability to compete for public sector contracts.

Civil Service Medical Retirement

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many civil servants have been medically retired in each of the last 5 years and the cost incurred. (AQW 7352/08)

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Medical Retirees | 207 | 279 | 239 | 223 | 189 |
| Lump Sum | £4,674,927 | £6,104,281 | £5,236,797 | £5,293,111 | £5,059,680 |
| Annual Pension | £1,825,062 | £2,318,086 | £1,962,035 | £1,895,950 | £1,623,524 |
| Totals | £6,499,989 | £8,422,367 | £7,198,832 | £7,189,061 | £6,683,204 |

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below details the number of staff medically retired by employing departments, including Agencies and their NDPBs in Northern Ireland in each of the last financial years and the costs incurred.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7368/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel has spent £1.3m on travel expenses since devolution.

UK average – the second lowest of the UK regions (after the North East).

Workplace 2010

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will be conducting a review of his Department's plans for Workplace 2010, given the findings in the recent evaluation report on Clare House. (AQW 7435/08)

2011 Census

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the first results from the 2011 census are likely to be available. (AQW 7407/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is currently planned that the first results from the 2011 Census will be available in September 2012. These will provide a new estimate of the total number of people living in Northern Ireland, along with estimates for local administrative areas.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Clare House is an ambitious and challenging pilot requiring people to work in a very different way. The recent evaluation report noted a number of both positive and negative aspects of the pilot. The report provides very valuable lessons and is one of a number of factors that will help to shape and inform the final Workplace 2010 contract. The lessons learned are being incorporated into an action plan which will ensure that the issues relating to the wider Workplace 2010 contract will be addressed.

Disposable Household Income

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the growth in disposable household income in Northern Ireland compares with other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 7409/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In Northern Ireland, over period 1996 to 2006, gross disposable household income per head increased by 60.2 per cent. This compares with UK average growth of 61.0 per cent, 59.5 per cent for Wales and 59.7 per cent for Scotland over the same period. The UK region with the fastest growth rate in disposable household income per head over this period was London at 65.0 per cent.

In 2006 Northern Ireland gross disposable household income per head was 13 per cent below the

I am convinced that Workplace 2010 is right for the NICS to realise its reform and modernisation agenda but the evaluation reinforces the fact that the culture change associated with the transition is a very significant issue and one which has to be addressed directly and positively in moving forward.

I can assure you that these issues are being addressed and that the final Workplace 2010 proposals will be subject to the approval of the Executive prior to contract signature.

Breakdown of Gender and Race in the Civil Service

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for each grade in the Civil Service, a breakdown of staff by (i) gender; and (ii) religious background. (AQW 7457/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached tables show the profile of the Northern Ireland Civil Service at 1 January 2008. As details of the religious background of staff are not held, information has been provided on community background. (The community background of individuals refers to whether they have been treated as belonging to the Protestant or Roman Catholic community in Northern Ireland as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.) The tables include non-industrial and industrial staff in the 11 NI Departments and Executive Agencies and those on secondment to other bodies including the Northern Ireland Office, Police Service of Northern Ireland and Invest NI. In view of the large number of grades within the Civil Service, the tables show general service and analogous grades.

NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE – GENDER PROFILE

| Grade | | Gender | | Total |
|----------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|
| | | Female | Male | |
| | | No. | No. | |
| Non-Industrial | G5+ | 68 | 180 | 248 |
| | G6 | 154 | 249 | 403 |
| | G7 | 374 | 698 | 1,072 |
| | DP | 944 | 1,405 | 2,349 |
| | SO | 1,293 | 1,816 | 3,109 |
| | EOI | 1,822 | 2,051 | 3,873 |
| | EOII | 2,822 | 1,642 | 4,464 |
| | AO | 5,599 | 2,831 | 8,430 |
| | AA | 1,729 | 1,188 | 2,917 |
| Industrial | Supervisor | 0 | 162 | 162 |
| | Craft | 0 | 170 | 170 |
| | Non-Craft | 58 | 1,000 | 1,058 |
| Total | | 14,863 | 13,392 | 28,255 |

NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS – GENDER PROFILE

| Grade Level | Gender | Total staff | Departments | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|------|----|------|-----|-----|--------|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| | | | DARD | DCAL | DE | DETI | DFP | DEL | DHSSPS | DOE | DRD | DSD | OFMDFM |
| G7+ | F | 494 | 88 | 14 | 58 | 17 | 112 | 27 | 44 | 45 | 17 | 42 | 30 |
| | M | 983 | 185 | 22 | 56 | 47 | 214 | 29 | 103 | 121 | 88 | 73 | 45 |
| DP | F | 795 | 81 | 22 | 41 | 40 | 162 | 43 | 73 | 148 | 37 | 103 | 45 |
| | M | 1,266 | 164 | 29 | 43 | 75 | 323 | 62 | 94 | 168 | 187 | 87 | 34 |
| SO | F | 1,156 | 170 | 30 | 42 | 46 | 199 | 82 | 76 | 213 | 67 | 189 | 42 |
| | M | 1,680 | 319 | 43 | 35 | 48 | 268 | 86 | 106 | 292 | 277 | 167 | 39 |

NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVICE – COMMUNITY BACKGROUND PROFILE

| Grade | | Community Background | | | Total |
|----------------|------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| | | Protestant | Roman Catholic | Non Determined | |
| | | No. | No. | No. | |
| Non-Industrial | G5+ | 139 | 93 | 16 | 248 |
| | G6 | 221 | 168 | 14 | 403 |
| | G7 | 561 | 430 | 81 | 1,072 |
| | DP | 1,304 | 974 | 71 | 2,349 |
| | SO | 1,716 | 1,306 | 87 | 3,109 |
| | EOI | 2,014 | 1,769 | 90 | 3,873 |
| | EOII | 2,136 | 2,257 | 71 | 4,464 |
| | AO | 4,026 | 4,285 | 119 | 8,430 |
| | AA | 1,609 | 1,238 | 70 | 2,917 |
| Industrial | Supervisor | 102 | 50 | 10 | 162 |
| | Craft | 119 | 40 | 11 | 170 |
| | Non-Craft | 585 | 426 | 47 | 1,058 |
| Total | | 14,532 | 13,036 | 687 | 28,255 |

Departmental Staff

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many (i) females; and (ii) males, are employed in each Department, broken down by grade. (AQW 7483/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table shows the gender profile of staff in the 11 Northern Ireland Departments and their Executive Agencies at 1 January 2008 and includes both non-industrial and industrial staff. In view of the large number of grades within the Civil Service, the tables show general service and analogous grades.

| Grade Level | Gender | Total staff | Departments | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|---------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| | | | DARD | DCAL | DE | DETI | DFP | DEL | DHSSPS | DOE | DRD | DSD | OFMDFM |
| EOI/EOII | F | 4,156 | 305 | 62 | 126 | 132 | 374 | 654 | 145 | 363 | 206 | 1724 | 65 |
| | M | 3,455 | 629 | 118 | 64 | 74 | 376 | 220 | 103 | 326 | 457 | 1057 | 31 |
| AO | F | 4,797 | 365 | 43 | 110 | 105 | 533 | 397 | 82 | 489 | 245 | 2384 | 44 |
| | M | 2,622 | 138 | 22 | 46 | 42 | 281 | 157 | 34 | 400 | 124 | 1353 | 25 |
| AA | F | 1,169 | 198 | 8 | 43 | 39 | 118 | 61 | 46 | 149 | 121 | 366 | 20 |
| | M | 1,022 | 82 | 20 | 25 | 42 | 118 | 40 | 36 | 83 | 265 | 302 | 9 |
| Industrial Supervisory | F | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | M | 137 | 83 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 48 | 0 | 0 |
| Industrial Craft | F | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | M | 117 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 31 | 46 | 0 | 0 |
| Industrial Non Craft | F | 37 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| | M | 931 | 316 | 16 | 0 | 2 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 41 | 535 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 24,817 | 3,186 | 455 | 689 | 709 | 3,109 | 1,858 | 942 | 2,872 | 2,721 | 7847 | 429 |

Public Expenditure on Children

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, following the publication of the Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children, if he has any plans to increase his budget for children and young people.

(AQW 7506/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive's expenditure plans for Northern Ireland departments, covering the period 2008-09 to 2010-11, were approved by the Assembly in January 2008 as part of the Budget 2008-11 process. The Budget was informed by the supporting evidence available at that time including the May 2007 report by the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland (ERINI) *An Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children in Northern Ireland - PART ONE - Spending on Children's Services*.

Over the next three years, the Executive as a whole will regularly review departmental expenditure plans in line with the level of resources available, the emerging pressures identified, as well as any additional information that comes to light, including objective, evidence based research on public policy matters.

There is also a responsibility on individual Ministers to reallocate the funding for specific services and business areas within their departments, in response to changing circumstances.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Investment in Fire Stations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the planned investment for fire stations located in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; and (iii) Ballymena, for (a) 2008-09; (b) 2009-10; and (c) 2010-11.

(AQW 7002/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Ballymoney Fire Station will receive £3,500 in 2008/09, £2,000 in 2009/10 and £2,500 in 2010/11; Ballycastle will receive £3,000 in 2008/09, £8,500 in 2009/10 and £18,000 in 2010/11; and Ballymena Fire Station will receive £62,750 in 2008/09, £2,500 in 2009/10 and £1,000 in 2010/11.

Investment in Fire Stations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the investment in fire stations located in (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballycastle; and (iii) Ballymena, for each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 7003/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ballymena Station has very recently been allocated a new Fire appliance at a cost of £180,000; Ballymoney station has been allocated a fire appliance less than 18 months old and Ballycastle one less than 30 months old. Each of these appliances cost

around £155,000 when new. During 2007, six retained firefighters were recruited for Ballymoney Station and two for Ballycastle Station.

General Practitioner Figures

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many General Practitioners per 1000 head of population there are, broken down by parliamentary constituency; and (ii) to compare the overall Northern Ireland ratio with the figure for the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 7174/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of general practitioners (GPs) per 10,000 resident population for each Northern Ireland parliamentary constituency is given in Table 1. However, it must be noted that since the introduction of the General Medical Services contract in April 2004, it has not been a requirement for general practices to declare all GPs working in the practice, although most do. The average list size per GP within each constituency has also been provided in Table 1 to show the numbers of patients actually served by each GP and to help illustrate that many patients will not be registered in the constituency in which they live. It follows, therefore, that those constituencies which happen to have most GPs per resident population do not necessarily have the smallest registered list sizes and vice versa.

Table 2 shows that as at October 2006 Northern Ireland had more GPs per 10,000 population (6.4) than in Wales (6.3), but less than in England (6.5) and Scotland (8.1).

TABLE 1

| Parliamentary Constituency | General Practitioner Head count per 10,000 population 1 | Average Registered list size per General Practitioner 1 2 3 |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Belfast East | 8.9 | 1,396 |
| Belfast North | 11.1 | 1,560 |
| Belfast South | 7.8 | 1,424 |
| Belfast West | 6.6 | 1,691 |
| East Antrim | 4.7 | 1,623 |
| East Londonderry | 6.0 | 1,703 |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | 7.2 | 1,663 |
| Foyle | 7.1 | 1,562 |
| Lagan Valley | 5.6 | 1,570 |
| Mid Ulster | 5.0 | 1,811 |
| Newry & Armagh | 6.6 | 1,735 |

| Parliamentary Constituency | General Practitioner Head count per 10,000 population 1 | Average Registered list size per General Practitioner 1 2 3 |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| North Antrim | 7.3 | 1,474 |
| North Down | 5.6 | 1,687 |
| South Antrim | 5.1 | 1,739 |
| South Down | 5.3 | 1,666 |
| Strangford | 6.1 | 1,499 |
| Upper Bann | 6.4 | 1,751 |
| West Tyrone | 5.8 | 1,840 |
| Northern Ireland | 6.6 | 1,620 |

Source: Performers' List & National Health Applications and Infrastructure Services system (NHAIS) - Central Services Agency;

2006 Mid-year estimate of population - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) (latest available).

Notes:

1. The head count of general practitioners is at 1st April 2008. This includes Restricted Principals, Unrestricted principals, salaried GPs and assistants. Head count of general practitioners has been used as whole time equivalent is no longer recorded.
2. The general practice registered list size is as at April 2008.
3. Average list sizes refer only to unrestricted and salaried GPs as restricted GPs and assistants do not have registered patients.

TABLE 2

| Oct 2006 ¹ | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|--------------------|
| Northern Ireland ² | 6.4 | 1,631 ⁴ |
| England ² | 6.5 | 1,610 |
| Wales ² | 6.3 | 1,643 |
| Scotland ³ | 8.1 | 1,304 |

Source: Central Services Agency, NHS Information Centre, and Information Services Division Scotland.

1. Latest available data for GB is October 2006, and so for comparability Northern Ireland data is also quoted as at October 2006.
2. Includes restricted, unrestricted, salaried and assistant GPs.
3. Includes restricted, unrestricted, salaried, assistant, associate and other GMS and PMS GPs.
4. Average list sizes for Northern Ireland refer only to unrestricted and salaried GPs as restricted GPs and assistants do not have registered patients.

Cremation Fees

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if it is the practice to charge a fee for the release of a body for cremation; and if so whether he plans to end the practice.

(AQW 7185/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: When a body is to be cremated there are a series of medical forms to be completed, by different, independent doctors, to provide reassurance that the death does not require further investigation. The completion of these forms does not form part of a doctor's contract but is carried out in a private capacity and the fees charged by doctors for this service are set by the British Medical Association.

Northern Ireland operates under its own cremation legislation, the Cremation (Belfast) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1961 which are under the control of DOE; these regulations specify the forms which must be submitted in order for a cremation to proceed. Work is underway to update these regulations but this is currently on hold pending the results of a review of death certification underway in GB.

Home Start Scheme

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the funding of Home Start projects in areas where there are no Sure Start projects. (AQW 7205/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally.

Home Start Scheme

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the future of funding for Home Start schemes within the North Down constituency. (AQW 7206/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not fund locally-based Home Start activity within the North Down constituency, and has no plans to do so.

Home-Help and Domiciliary 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: The information is not held centrally in the format requested.

General Practitioner Figures

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many practising General Practitioners there are in (i) North Down parliamentary constituency; and (ii) Northern Ireland. (AQW 7216/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 51 general practitioners in the North Down parliamentary constituency – 49 unrestricted principals or equivalents, and 2 salaried GPs.
- (ii) At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 1,141 general practitioners in Northern Ireland – 7 restricted principals, 1,125 unrestricted principals or equivalents, and 9 salaried GPs.

Source: Medlist database

Note: It has been necessary to provide headcount figures of GPs rather than the more accurate Whole-Time Equivalent (WTE), as WTE is no longer recorded on the Medlist database.

Most general practitioners will be recorded on this database however it is no longer a requirement for practices to declare every general practitioner working in a specific practice.

Only restricted and unrestricted principals or equivalents, and salaried GP's are included on the Medlist database. Other types of general practitioner, such as locums, assistants, and associates are not included.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by his Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment. (AQW 7220/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following equipment has been bought by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety since 8th May 2007:

| Equipment | Number Bought | Purchase Cost | Rental Cost |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Laptop computers | 92 | £57,513 | Nil |
| Mobile phones | 14 | Nil | £4 per month for each phone |

| Equipment | Number Bought | Purchase Cost | Rental Cost |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Blackberry devices | 89 | £5,340 | £22 per month for each device |

Day-Care Provision

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give comparative costs for day-care provision, per place per day, between statutory provision and contracted community/voluntary provision, for adults with physical disabilities (excluding transport costs to and from the facilities), in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7247/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The data requested is not collected centrally and comparative figures are not available.

Applications to Join the Pharmaceutical List

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the time taken by the National Appeal Panel to process an appeal to an application to join the Pharmaceutical List. (AQW 7251/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During the last 3 calendar years the time taken to process an appeal from receipt of appeal to an application to join the Pharmaceutical list was as follows;

| Year | No of appeals received | Processing time in months of appeals heard | Appeal Withdrawn | Dismissed by Chairman | Reconvened |
|------|------------------------|--|------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 2005 | 8 | 9,14,12,16,16 | 1 | 2 | |
| 2006 | 7 | 14, 13, 15, 20, 14, 12 | 1 | 0 | |
| 2007 | 13 | No dates set | 0 | 1 | 2 |

The term 'process an appeal' has been interpreted as length of time from the date of receipt to the actual date of the hearing for an appeal.

Applications to Join the Pharmaceutical List

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications to

join the Pharmaceutical List were received, in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last 3 years; and how many of these applications resulted in appeal. (AQW 7252/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I should clarify that Applications to join the Pharmaceutical list are approved by the Health and Social Services Boards and not the Trusts.

The table below details the number of applications received in each Board in each of the last three calendar years.

| Year | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|-------|------|------|------|
| WHSSB | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| NHSSB | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| SHSSB | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| EHSSB | 3 | 1 | 1 |

The number of appeals received by the National Appeal Panel in the last 3 years

Is as follows;

| Year | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|------------------|------|------|------|
| Appeals Received | 8 | 7 | 13 |

It should be noted that appeals may result from applications received in previous years.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether in the next drafting of guidance on abortion in Northern Ireland, there will be a presumption that, in accordance with the law, the unborn child is protected within the Criminal Law, and any interpretation of the law will accommodate this by treating the unborn child as a person and a patient. (AQW 7254/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently revising the draft Guidelines on the Termination of Pregnancy. The January 2007 draft Guidelines have been extensively revised and interested parties will have the opportunity to comment on the final version before it is published later this year.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a medical professional or health worker, who refuses to take part in an abortion procedure, will be considered to be in

breach of their employment contract; and if they will be subject to disciplinary proceedings as a result of this refusal. (AQW 7255/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Medical professionals and health workers are employees of the Health and Social Care Trusts. Whether any medical professional or health worker refusing to take part in an abortion procedure will be considered to be in breach of their employment, or subject to disciplinary proceedings would be a matter for their employer to decide.

Where possible, I feel that every effort should be taken to accommodate staff with a conscientious objection.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify what the legal authority is behind paragraph 2.5 (ii) - (vi) of the draft guidelines on abortion. (AQW 7256/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland, the law relating to the termination of pregnancy is contained in sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, and in section 25(1) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 as those provisions have been interpreted to date by the courts. The legislation has been interpreted and explained by the Northern Ireland Courts in a series of cases decided in the High Court in the 1990s and, more recently, in a decision of the Court of Appeal in 2004. Similar legislation applied in England, Wales and Scotland before 1967 and was interpreted in the leading English case of *R-v- Bourne* (1939). The Bourne decision, although an English case, remains highly relevant to Northern Ireland, and has been consistently applied in Northern Ireland cases.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the rationale for paragraph 2.13 of the draft guidance on abortion, particularly the matter of over-riding the refusal of consent by a young person to an abortion. (AQW 7257/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently revising the draft Guidelines on the Termination of Pregnancy. The January 2007 draft Guidelines have been extensively revised and interested parties will have the opportunity to comment on the final version before it is published later this year.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that all illegal abortion is stopped. (AQW 7258/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland, the only grounds for a termination of pregnancy are where the continuance of the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, or would adversely affect her physical or mental health. The adverse effect on her physical or mental health must be 'real and serious', and must also be 'permanent or long term'.

The Department anticipates that the forthcoming Guidelines on the Termination of Pregnancy, arrived at after much consultation, will clearly state the grounds under which a legal abortion may be carried out. In September 2005 the then Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Cambell, wrote to all health workers who may be involved in the termination of pregnancy setting out the legal criteria under which a termination of pregnancy may be carried out. In March 2008 the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, wrote again re-iterating the legal position.

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: The following information has been supplied by the individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

| Health and Social Care Trusts | Number of absences related to Clostridium difficile |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Western | 0 |
| South Eastern | 1 |
| Northern | 1 |
| NI Ambulance Service | 0 |

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust were unable to provide the information, due to the way in which sickness absence is recorded within the respective Trusts.

Clostridium Difficile

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people currently

in hospital have *Clostridium difficile*, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7266/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The position on 22 May 2008 was as follows.

| Trust | No of people with <i>Clostridium difficile</i> |
|-------------------------|--|
| Belfast HSC Trust | 10 |
| Northern HSC Trust | 22 |
| Southern HSC Trust | 7 |
| South Eastern HSC Trust | 8 |
| Western HSC Trust | 9 |

Redundancies and Efficiency Proposals

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the number of front line staff that will lose their jobs as a result of proposed efficiency savings, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7268/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number and mix of staff affected by CSR efficiency proposals is still being clarified. The necessary reductions in the number of jobs in HSC organisations will be achieved largely by normal turnover so that we minimise the need for people to lose their jobs even through voluntary redundancy or voluntary early retirement, and avoid if at all possible compulsory redundancy.

Our health and social care service must change if we are to deliver the improvements that are necessary to make it a world class service. Many of these decisions are about changing the way services are currently delivered but there will only be change if it is change for the better. In addition, CSR investments are being made at the same time - this will help Trusts to manage the impact of any changes through redeployment of staff into more modern service settings.

What I can clearly confirm is that as part of the CSR, 1,700 administration posts will go to fulfil existing RPA commitments, indeed a number have already gone.

Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many meetings of the Ministerial Group on domestic violence have taken place since it was established. (AQW 7269/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The first meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence took place on 21 May 2008. It is my intention that the Group will meet every six months.

Abortion

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the guidance included in Annex C of the draft abortion guidelines will be included in any new guidance issued. (AQW 7310/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently revising the draft Guidelines on the Termination of Pregnancy. The January 2007 draft Guidelines have been extensively revised and interested parties will have the opportunity to comment on the final version before it is published later this year.

Home Care Workers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many home helps and home care workers have been employed in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years. (AQW 7330/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available in the form requested.

Use of Natural Gas in Hospitals

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what hospitals have already converted to the use of natural gas and which are currently considering such a move. (AQW 7353/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following Hospital sites have already converted to the use of natural gas with a number being dual fuel, i.e. oil and natural gas or bio-mass and natural gas.

- Antrim Hospital
- Holywell Hospital
- Shaftesbury Square Day Hospital
- Robinson Hospital.
- Moyle Hospital
- Braidvalley
- Forster Green Hospital
- Altnagelvin Hospital
- Causeway Hospital

- Whiteabbey Hospital
- Laganvalley Hospital
- Mater Hospital
- Knockbracken Healthcare Park
- Musgrave Park Hospital
- Ulster Hospital
- Belfast Hospital
- Royal Group Of Hospitals

The following 6 hospital sites are at varying stages of converting and or are in discussions with the gas supply company:

- Daisyhill Hosp.
- Gransha Hospital
- Craigavon Hospital
- St Lukes Hospital
- South Tyrone Hospital
- Longstone Hospital

Use of Natural Gas in Hospitals

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to encourage hospitals to convert to the use of natural gas. (AQW 7354/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Hospitals have been pro-active in converting to the use of dual fuel, i.e. oil and natural gas or bio-mass and natural gas, when natural gas has been made available in their respective areas.

Health and Social Care Trusts will be further encouraged through the forthcoming publication of the Health Estates, Sustainable Development Design Brief, to show evidence of having considered the option of installing low carbon technology on all new build if appropriate to the design. This includes natural gas operated plant and equipment.

Free Parking at Hospitals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the cost of free parking at hospitals will be to the Health Service. (AQW 7356/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC Trusts estimate that the cost of free car parking will be some £340,000.

Free Parking at Hospitals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if patients will be able to access free parking at hospitals that have privately-operated car parks. (AQW 7357/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patients and visitors at privately-operated hospital car parks will be able to access free parking as they currently do under the existing arrangements.

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the details of all grants available through his Department. (AQW 7358/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department makes available the following Grants/Grants in Aid:

- To meet the cost of Health and Social care organisations and Non Departmental Public Bodies (Health Boards, Health and Social Care Trusts, Central Services Agency, Medical and Dental Training Agency, Guardian Ad Litem Agency, Social Care Council, Practice and Education Council, Health Promotion Agency, Regulation Quality Improvement Authority, Blood Transfusion, Regional Medical Physics);
- To meet the cost of the Family Health Service (payments to GPs, Pharmacists and Ophthalmic practitioners);
- To meet the costs of training allied health professionals, medical and dental and social work students (university fees and student bursaries);
- Core and Project funding for Voluntary and Community Organisations in the Health sector (including Children and Young People, groups previously funded through the Children's Fund, Physical and Sensory Disability, Learning Disability, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drugs, Elderly and Community Care, Family Policy, Investing for Health, Health Protection, Sexual Violence, Domestic Violence and Secondary Care);
- INTERREG - an EU funding initiative aimed at breaking down the barriers that national frontiers can present to the integrated development of services in border areas.
- Health and Social Care Research funding through the Regional Research and Development Office.

Osteoporosis Sufferers

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people currently suffer from osteoporosis. (AQW 7400/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people currently suffering from osteoporosis is not available.

Osteoporosis Sufferers

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative treatment is available under the Health Service for sufferers of osteoporosis who do not respond to Alendronate. (AQW 7401/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 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. All the guidance on osteoporosis will be considered under these arrangements when NICE publishes its final guidance.

In the interim, clinicians, in consultation with the patient, should use the best available evidence, including previous NICE guidance on this topic, to determine which treatment option is appropriate for the individual patient.

Myasthenia Gravis

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with myasthenia gravis in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health Board area. (AQW 7402/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who have been diagnosed with myasthenia gravis in each of the last five years, broken down by Health Board area is not available.

Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to clarify the circumstances that led to 2 consultant surgeons leaving Altnagelvin Hospital; what provisions are in place to replace them; and if services will be affected. (AQW 7437/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the personal circumstances or employment affairs of individual members of staff. Under the terms of their contract of employment, Trust staff are free to resign from their position at any time. Notice periods are normally required. Staff are not required to provide reasons for their resignation.

The Western Trust has initiated arrangements for the recruitment of two consultant surgeons. The Trust, in consultation with other Trusts, is developing a transition plan to ensure that services to patients served by Altnagelvin are sustained until new staff are in post.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been (i) diagnosed with; and (ii) treated for, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in Antrim Area Hospital, over the last 5 years; and what treatment is available to ease this condition. (AQW 7467/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who have been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in Antrim Area Hospital over the last five years is unavailable.

The Hospital Inpatient System shows that 2,052 individuals (approximated using date of birth and postcode) were admitted to Antrim Area Hospital and were treated for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease over the last five years.

A range of treatment is available and will depend on the patient's specific symptoms and their severity. This treatment may include; encouraging patients to stop smoking; use of bronchodilator inhalers, drug therapies, nebulisers and oxygen therapy, as recommended by their GP/healthcare professional.

Most patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) will be managed in primary care; however patients may be admitted to hospital because of deterioration in their COPD or for a condition unrelated to their COPD.

Dalriada Doctor-On-Call Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the future plans and future location for the Dalriada doctor on call service, in the East Derry/Londonderry constituency. (AQW 7501/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently all Out of Hours (OOH)

services in Northern Ireland are subject to a review looking at their efficiency and effectiveness. There are no plans to make any changes in the location of Dalriada Urgent Care services in the immediate future. Any longer term changes on relocation of out of hours services will be developed from the regional review of those services and recommendations made through that review.

Care Home Residents

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if care home residents, eligible for full financial assistance from a relevant Health and Social Care Trust, will have that assistance increased in line with care home tariff increases for the forthcoming year. (AQW 7508/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care Trusts are required by legislation to charge people for their care in residential and nursing homes. In line with the requirements of the Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993, a resident's capital and income is assessed to determine how much they can afford to contribute to the cost of their care. Residents never pay more than this assessed contribution and, where this falls short of the overall tariff for their placement, the HSC provides financial assistance to cover the shortfall. The level of overall tariff and, consequently, HSC financial support is a matter for negotiation between the HSC and the individual home owner.

Loch Cuan House in Newtownards.

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when will the residents be moved out of Loch Cuan House, Newtownards. (AQW 7537/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has indicated that an Equality Impact Assessment and full public consultation are necessary before any final decision on the future of Loch Cuan House is taken. Consequently, there are, at present, no formal plans or associated timescale to move residents out of Loch Cuan House.

Mrs Maureen McGinley

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take following his meeting with the family of the late Maureen McGinley. (AQO 3793/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I met the McGinley family, accompanied by Pat Doherty MLA, on 25 February 2008 and as agreed at that meeting I wrote to Mr Doherty on 6 March clarifying the position regarding the examination of events that followed Mrs McGinley's death.

May I say that I recognise the difficulties Mrs McGinley's family have experienced, not only in losing their mother but in trying to get a full explanation for the fractures identified at post mortem. It is my view that the events surrounding Mrs McGinley's death have been subjected to very comprehensive examination both internally by the Western Health and Social Care Trust and independently by the Coroner's Service.

I am advised that the Coroner's Service made no recommendations to the Trust regarding the procedures in place at Altnagelvin for the handling of the deceased and I have noted that the Trust's investigation found that the handling and transfer of the body was performed in accordance with hospital protocol. I am satisfied that the Trust has acted appropriately and I am, therefore, of the view that a further review of the circumstances of the case is unlikely to shed any further light on how this incident occurred.

Drugs Rehabilitation Facility in Downshire Hospital in Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm whether ward 15 alcohol and drugs rehabilitation facility in Downshire hospital, Downpatrick, will be exempt from cuts to services. (AQO 3787/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has no plans to cut Services in Ward 15, the Addictions Unit. It is the Trust's intention to engage with ex-patients and commissioners to develop comprehensive addiction services for the future.

The longer-term aim is to reduce reliance on inpatient facilities by developing community and other local support services for people with drugs or alcohol addictions. This stepped care approach is consistent with the Bamford vision for mental health services.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in hospitals have contracted clostridium difficile in each of the last six months. (AQO 3699/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Regional surveillance for C.difficile in the over 65s has been in place since 2005 and is collated for Northern Ireland by Trust through the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) NI. For the six-month period up to the end of March 2008 the numbers of episodes of C.difficile in hospital in-patients aged 65 and over are as follows.

| Month | Episodes |
|---------------|----------|
| October 2007 | 115 |
| November 2007 | 94 |
| December 2007 | 88 |
| January 2008 | 100 |
| February 2008 | 86 |
| March 2008 | 102 |

Ambulance Call Times

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that ambulance call times are recorded accurately. (AQO 3739/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has advised that information on ambulance response times is generated electronically from time-stamped data created when ambulance crews transmit a status message to the command and control system. The forthcoming introduction of a new automatic vehicle location and satellite navigation systems together with mobile data transmission will increase the accuracy of this information and the robustness of the data.

Role of Sport in Health Promotion

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the importance and role of sport in health promotion. (AQO 3811/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Sport plays a key role in contributing towards health promotion. Increasing levels of participation in sport and physical activity can help combat growing rates of obesity among children and adults, contribute to longer life and protect against conditions such as diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis, as well as certain types of cancer.

The importance of Sport and physical activity is recognised in the overarching public health Investing for Health Strategy and the Fit Futures Strategy. I

would welcome any increase in participation in sport that will raise the numbers of people taking part in physical activity, because it can create a positive impact on health and general wellbeing, including mental wellbeing – an important determinant of health.

Breast Cancer Screening

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes in procedure have taken place in Antrim Hospital for screening for breast cancer. (AQO 3738/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Breast screening in the Northern Trust is undertaken by a multidisciplinary team whose methods comply fully with National Breast Screening guidelines. Since the incident that occurred in October 2005, a number of changes have taken place. These include;

- Appointment of two breast screening radiologists.
- The refurbishment of the Breast Screening Unit, with the purchase of new Mammography, Ultrasound and Biopsy equipment.
- The recent purchase and staffing of a second mobile screening unit.
- Full Breast Radiology participation in Breast Cancer multidisciplinary team meetings which are now completely IT supported.
- Ongoing recruitment of radiography and radiology staff to further support screening and symptomatic services.

The Northern Trust has complied fully with the RQIA review. An external quality assurance assessment of the unit was carried out by East Midlands Breast Screening Service in October 2006.

Dentist Services

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service dentists in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area are available to take on new Health Service patients. (AQO 3698/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 1st May 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 123 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area².

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.

Working Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the inter-departmental working group on mental health and learning disability. (AQO 3740/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Inter Departmental Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability is one of the cross-Departmental structures which my Department has established to ensure that the issues within the implementation of the Bamford Review which require inter-Departmental co-operation are taken forward in a co-ordinated and coherent manner.

The initial work of the Group concerned contributing to the drafting of the Executive's formal response to this Review and it has not been necessary for the Group to meet again, following its first meeting in October 2007. Meetings will resume when the Executive's formal response to the Review has been finalised and published later this year.

Dentist Services

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of Health Service dentists per head of population. (AQO 3732/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Central Services Agency figures show that there are 4.59 practising principal dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment per 10,000 head of population² in Northern Ireland.

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. Dentist numbers are as at 21st May 2008. Population is based on the most recent population estimates at June 2006.

North-South Ministerial Council May 2008

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the North South Ministerial Council meeting held in Belfast on 28 May 2008. (AQO 3758/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I look forward to making a Statement to the Assembly on this meeting later this month.

New Health and Care Centres

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the range of services that will be provided in new Health Care centres planned for Carrickmore, Castlederg and Fintona within the Western Health and Social Services Board area; and to provide a timetable for the opening of these centres. (AQO 3810/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Care Centres planned for Carrickmore, Castlederg and Fintona will be implemented through the Primary Community Care Infrastructure (PCCI) Programme. The Budget allocation for my Department has meant that most of the capital allocation over the next three years is taken up with projects which are already contractually committed. The PCCI programme has a planned budget of £40m over the Budget period 2008 – 2011 this will enable procurement to commence in the first five PCCI projects in the current financial year.

It should be noted that the review of capital priorities, which was recently announced, will examine current proposals for infrastructure developments in the medium to long term and it is therefore not possible to set a timetable for these projects at this time. The range of services currently planned for the Health & Care Centres include a number of service based, outreach and mobile sessional services for Primary Care, Community Care, Diagnostics, ICATS and Outpatient Services.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Metro Service in Newtownabbey

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have commenced journeys in Newtownabbey since the launch of the Metro service, broken down by destination and month. (AQW 7173/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Translink has advised that, as individual passenger destinations are not recorded, the information is not available in the format requested. The attached table outlines the number of Metro Passengers boarding in the Newtownabbey Extended Zone on Corridors 1, 2, 13 and 14 since the introduction of Metro on 7 February 2005 until 30 March 2008, broken down by month and route. Route details are also provided on the following page.

Translink has advised that a total of 5,859,009 passengers commenced their journeys from the Newtownabbey area for the period 07 February 2005 to 30 March 2008.

| | 1A | 1B | 1C | 1D | 1E | 1F | 1G | 1H | 2A | 2B | 2C | 2D | 2E | 2F | 13 | 13A | 13B | 13C | 14 | 14A | 14B | 14C | Total | | |
|------------|------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|------|------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|--------|
| 2005 | FEB | 6934 | 4205 | 1386 | 7057 | 5406 | 430 | 448 | 619 | 7020 | 5080 | 0 | 7396 | 7364 | 4422 | 11104 | 899 | 14 | 111 | 12364 | 1748 | 2634 | 270 | 88916 | |
| | MAR | 10025 | 6808 | 2362 | 11249 | 8309 | 178 | 483 | 892 | 10588 | 6960 | 0 | 11460 | 11077 | 6347 | 15142 | 1172 | 27 | 135 | 17308 | 1866 | 3478 | 306 | 126172 | |
| | APR | 10982 | 7597 | 1960 | 11358 | 8429 | 284 | 481 | 694 | 11407 | 7801 | 0 | 12447 | 11806 | 7476 | 16451 | 1349 | 48 | 203 | 19095 | 1857 | 3718 | 384 | 135827 | |
| | MAY | 10963 | 7544 | 3312 | 11879 | 8631 | 348 | 527 | 544 | 11488 | 7873 | 0 | 13783 | 13109 | 7341 | 16745 | 1397 | 31 | 220 | 18785 | 2092 | 3595 | 401 | 140608 | |
| | JUNE | 12132 | 8606 | 2473 | 12980 | 9964 | 308 | 552 | 778 | 12372 | 8743 | 12 | 14476 | 12696 | 7990 | 17818 | 1452 | 25 | 255 | 20492 | 2003 | 3863 | 500 | 150490 | |
| | JULY | 12106 | 8640 | 3001 | 12122 | 11433 | 0 | 233 | 670 | 11497 | 8334 | 0 | 15084 | 12830 | 7742 | 15523 | 709 | 25 | 144 | 18569 | 1482 | 2152 | 308 | 142604 | |
| | AUG | 13961 | 10347 | 2810 | 14198 | 14408 | 11 | 245 | 816 | 11921 | 9691 | 0 | 17341 | 13227 | 8767 | 19367 | 1071 | 38 | 234 | 22618 | 1748 | 2587 | 389 | 165795 | |
| | SEPT | 12682 | 10277 | 2597 | 13672 | 13233 | 0 | 702 | 633 | 11567 | 9141 | 0 | 15353 | 13559 | 7969 | 18405 | 2197 | 23 | 278 | 21099 | 1848 | 4287 | 400 | 159922 | |
| | OCT | 13233 | 10408 | 3200 | 14924 | 13459 | 0 | 699 | 583 | 11571 | 9048 | 3 | 17016 | 14664 | 9319 | 18842 | 1831 | 77 | 257 | 22220 | 1862 | 4130 | 355 | 167701 | |
| | NOV | 13751 | 10378 | 2957 | 14849 | 14614 | 0 | 783 | 913 | 12476 | 9816 | 0 | 18645 | 15938 | 9127 | 19358 | 1792 | 44 | 254 | 22627 | 2043 | 4585 | 406 | 175356 | |
| | DEC | 15590 | 11577 | 3059 | 14584 | 14519 | 47 | 643 | 1310 | 12707 | 11229 | 48 | 19464 | 16716 | 9383 | 19566 | 1432 | 42 | 230 | 23424 | 1583 | 3404 | 302 | 180859 | |
| 2005 Total | | 132359 | 96387 | 29117 | 138872 | 122405 | 1606 | 5796 | 8452 | 124614 | 93716 | 63 | 162465 | 142986 | 85883 | 2E+05 | 15301 | 394 | 2321 | 2E+05 | 20132 | 38433 | 4021 | 1632245 | |
| | 2006 | JAN | 12842 | 9856 | 2502 | 13235 | 12782 | 0 | 759 | 578 | 11736 | 9933 | 0 | 16872 | 14079 | 7880 | 18123 | 1768 | 30 | 240 | 20905 | 1927 | 4308 | 233 | 162594 |
| | | FEB | 12816 | 10344 | 2718 | 14200 | 12783 | 0 | 682 | 452 | 11412 | 9641 | 0 | 17186 | 13730 | 7907 | 17970 | 1657 | 50 | 215 | 20667 | 1891 | 4420 | 392 | 161133 |
| | | MAR | 14022 | 10383 | 2995 | 14318 | 13921 | 0 | 779 | 639 | 12023 | 10259 | 17 | 17518 | 14793 | 8409 | 19234 | 1799 | 41 | 195 | 21531 | 1917 | 4834 | 452 | 170079 |
| | APR | 12580 | 9179 | 2221 | 12220 | 12436 | 0 | 538 | 482 | 10524 | 8808 | 0 | 14600 | 11944 | 6753 | 16230 | 1140 | 50 | 141 | 19091 | 1560 | 3125 | 271 | 143893 | |
| | MAY | 12923 | 9721 | 2108 | 12603 | 13589 | 0 | 661 | 691 | 11202 | 8998 | 0 | 15402 | 12730 | 7439 | 18047 | 1622 | 18 | 163 | 20199 | 2002 | 4116 | 342 | 154576 | |
| | JUNE | 12791 | 10072 | 2057 | 12879 | 14927 | 0 | 947 | 911 | 10556 | 8605 | 0 | 15483 | 12347 | 7496 | 19413 | 1568 | 60 | 159 | 21613 | 1740 | 4098 | 329 | 158051 | |
| | JULY | 10873 | 8829 | 2498 | 11373 | 13483 | 0 | 281 | 821 | 10218 | 7160 | 0 | 14705 | 11393 | 6947 | 16771 | 893 | 9 | 110 | 19092 | 1556 | 1956 | 248 | 139216 | |
| | AUG | 12436 | 10695 | 2072 | 13108 | 15745 | 0 | 313 | 935 | 11799 | 7900 | 0 | 16181 | 12237 | 8026 | 20517 | 1040 | 11 | 185 | 23293 | 1795 | 2321 | 393 | 161002 | |
| | SEPT | 12557 | 10013 | 2070 | 12952 | 15333 | 2 | 657 | 894 | 11044 | 8325 | 0 | 14657 | 13125 | 7320 | 19340 | 2137 | 23 | 122 | 21516 | 1852 | 4105 | 308 | 158352 | |
| | OCT | 12469 | 9610 | 2197 | 13723 | 16368 | 0 | 658 | 926 | 11642 | 8664 | 0 | 15769 | 14136 | 8033 | 20169 | 1764 | 29 | 170 | 22357 | 2110 | 4208 | 423 | 165425 | |
| | NOV | 12280 | 9728 | 2115 | 12720 | 15326 | 0 | 720 | 1155 | 10754 | 8602 | 0 | 16158 | 12838 | 7714 | 20481 | 1867 | 37 | 162 | 22626 | 2047 | 4129 | 334 | 161793 | |

| | 1A | 1B | 1C | 1D | 1E | 1F | 1G | 1H | 2A | 2B | 2C | 2D | 2E | 2F | 13 | 13A | 13B | 13C | 14 | 14A | 14B | 14C | Total |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| | 12033 | 9605 | 2515 | 13081 | 14607 | 0 | 591 | 1572 | 11002 | 8713 | 30 | 16049 | 12616 | 7261 | 19245 | 1328 | 21 | 188 | 22611 | 1658 | 3201 | 275 | 158202 |
| 2006 Total | 150622 | 118035 | 28068 | 156412 | 171300 | 2 | 7586 | 10056 | 133912 | 105608 | 47 | 190580 | 155968 | 91185 | 225540 | 18583 | 379 | 2050 | 255501 | 22055 | 44821 | 4000 | 1892310 |
| 2007 | JAN | 11603 | 9055 | 1900 | 12321 | 36 | 745 | 820 | 10411 | 7465 | 0 | 13868 | 11641 | 7225 | 19207 | 1502 | 81 | 222 | 21015 | 1992 | 3810 | 337 | 150487 |
| | FEB | 11785 | 8878 | 1777 | 11903 | 0 | 782 | 574 | 9743 | 8233 | 0 | 13386 | 11955 | 6856 | 17154 | 1598 | 26 | 192 | 20039 | 1796 | 3851 | 338 | 144321 |
| | MAR | 13765 | 10122 | 1727 | 13467 | 0 | 900 | 612 | 11117 | 8622 | 0 | 15927 | 13069 | 8070 | 20078 | 1797 | 34 | 226 | 22339 | 1939 | 4430 | 323 | 164795 |
| | APR | 12480 | 9260 | 2120 | 12298 | 0 | 652 | 607 | 10597 | 7911 | 9 | 15242 | 12092 | 6846 | 17335 | 1313 | 19 | 158 | 19349 | 1705 | 3507 | 268 | 148273 |
| | MAY | 13504 | 9628 | 1950 | 13383 | 0 | 778 | 753 | 11179 | 8625 | 0 | 16325 | 12931 | 7330 | 19701 | 1547 | 46 | 217 | 21309 | 2031 | 4324 | 296 | 161561 |
| | JUNE | 13508 | 9824 | 1994 | 12693 | 0 | 879 | 1153 | 10395 | 7898 | 0 | 15993 | 12384 | 7490 | 18456 | 1470 | 61 | 166 | 20924 | 1939 | 4034 | 275 | 157603 |
| | JULY | 11441 | 9546 | 2330 | 11784 | 0 | 342 | 1282 | 10149 | 7194 | 0 | 15870 | 11025 | 7130 | 16479 | 853 | 17 | 106 | 18955 | 1689 | 2651 | 245 | 145036 |
| | AUG | 13695 | 11078 | 2127 | 14097 | 0 | 477 | 1392 | 11464 | 8522 | 1 | 17126 | 11456 | 8110 | 20131 | 1004 | 19 | 165 | 22246 | 2024 | 2803 | 384 | 167194 |
| | SEPT | 13974 | 9976 | 2418 | 13237 | 0 | 645 | 1181 | 11109 | 8587 | 0 | 15249 | 13226 | 7307 | 18611 | 2025 | 40 | 207 | 20502 | 2105 | 4078 | 388 | 160501 |
| | OCT | 14902 | 11322 | 2187 | 14856 | 0 | 740 | 1316 | 11656 | 9628 | 0 | 17129 | 13562 | 8105 | 20346 | 2052 | 44 | 289 | 23743 | 2583 | 4973 | 532 | 175902 |
| | NOV | 13987 | 10982 | 2207 | 13972 | 5 | 826 | 1489 | 11417 | 9796 | 0 | 16080 | 13617 | 8255 | 19082 | 1710 | 24 | 319 | 22805 | 2103 | 4364 | 505 | 167367 |
| | DEC | 12638 | 10156 | 3057 | 13022 | 0 | 757 | 1532 | 11286 | 8752 | 0 | 15740 | 12726 | 7056 | 17636 | 1170 | 20 | 206 | 21533 | 1802 | 3557 | 325 | 157028 |
| 2007 Total | 157282 | 119827 | 25794 | 157033 | 183459 | 41 | 8523 | 12711 | 130523 | 101233 | 10 | 187935 | 149684 | 89780 | 224216 | 18041 | 431 | 2473 | 254759 | 23708 | 46382 | 4216 | 1898061 |
| 2008 | JAN | 12617 | 9224 | 1845 | 12359 | 128 | 730 | 888 | 9991 | 7938 | 0 | 13557 | 10858 | 6800 | 16253 | 1501 | 41 | 225 | 18693 | 2193 | 4201 | 374 | 145414 |
| | FEB | 13151 | 10102 | 1686 | 13558 | 709 | 703 | 884 | 10377 | 8757 | 0 | 13902 | 12045 | 7028 | 17158 | 1469 | 43 | 245 | 20203 | 1948 | 3762 | 446 | 150439 |
| | MAR | 12715 | 10496 | 2120 | 13341 | 467 | 474 | 832 | 9713 | 8566 | 0 | 14378 | 11349 | 6378 | 15447 | 1007 | 34 | 261 | 17915 | 1706 | 3069 | 380 | 142548 |
| 2008 Total | 38483 | 29822 | 5651 | 39258 | 37153 | 1304 | 1907 | 2604 | 30081 | 25261 | 0 | 41837 | 34252 | 20206 | 48858 | 3977 | 118 | 731 | 56811 | 5847 | 11032 | 1200 | 436393 |
| Grand Total | 478746 | 364071 | 88630 | 491575 | 514317 | 2953 | 23812 | 33823 | 419130 | 325818 | 120 | 582817 | 482890 | 287054 | 686935 | 55902 | 1322 | 7575 | 785672 | 71742 | 140668 | 13437 | 5859009 |

Metro Services in Newtonabbey Extended Zone**Service Number 1A**

- Glenville (Monkstown Avenue)
- Ballyduff Road (Doagh Road)
- Ballyduff (Forthill Drive)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Carnmoney (Burnthill Road)
- Glengormley (Cartmill's)
- Antrim Road (Bellevue)
- Antrim Road (Serpentine Road)
- Antrim Road (Salisbury Avenue)
- Antrim Road (Atlantic Avenue)
- Carlisle Circus (Antrim Road)
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service Number 1B , 1C ,1D,1F,1G

- City Centre (Donegall Square West)
- North Queen Street (Yorkgate)
- Carlisle Circus (Antrim Road) |
- Antrim Road (Eia Street)
- Antrim Road (Salisbury Avenue)
- Antrim Road (Serpentine Road)
- Antrim Road (Bellevue)
- Glengormley (Ulster Bank)
- Antrim Road (Burney's Lane)
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- Northcott (Link Road) |
- Ballyclare Road (Northcott)
- Ballyhenry (Ballyearl Way)
- New Mossley (Manse Way)
- Mossley (Rail Station)

Service Number 1E, 1H,1G

- Ballyhenry (Ballyearl Way)
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- Roughfort (Turning Circle)
- Mallusk (Parkmount)
- Hightown Road (Turning Circle)
- Royal Mail (Enterprise Way) 0610
- Antrim Road (Burney's Lane)
- Glengormley (Cartmill's)
- Antrim Road (Bellevue)
- Antrim Road (Serpentine Road)
- Antrim Road (Salisbury Avenue)
- Antrim Road (Atlantic Avenue)
- Carlisle Circus (Antrim Road)
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service Number 2A and 2B

- Fairview Road (Turning Circle)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Carnmoney (Burnthill Road)
- Ballyclare Road (Northcott)
- Gengormley (Cartmill's)
- Antrim Road (Bellevue) Upper Whitewell (Throne Centre)
- Abbeycentre
- Lower Whitewell (White City)
- Shore Road (Gray's Lane)
- Shore Road (Lidl/Asda)
- Yorkgate Station
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service Number 2D, 2E, 2F

- Monkstown (Devenish Drive)
- Doagh Road (Cherrylands)
- Cloughfern (Whiteabbey Hospital)
- Doagh Road (Green End)
- Rathcoole (Primary School)
- Valley Leisure Centre
- Rathcoole (Diamond)
- Merville Garden Village
- Abbeycentre
- Shore Road (Gray's Lane)
- Shore Road (Lidl/Asda)
- Yorkgate Station
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service 13,13A and 13C

- City Centre (Donegall Square West)
- Hyde Park (Trench Road) |
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- Prince Charles Way (Glebe Road)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Fairview Road (Ballyduff Shops)
- Ballyfore Road (Doagh Road)
- Doagh Road (Cherrylands)
- Glenville (Monkstown Avenue)
- Cloughfern (Station Road) |
- Cloughfern (Whiteabbey Hospital)
- Doagh Road (Green End)
- East Antrim Institute |
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service 13 and 13B

- City Centre (Donegall Square West)
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- Prince Charles Way (Glebe Road)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Fairview Road (Ballyduff Shops)
- Ballyfore Road (Doagh Road)
- Doagh Road (Cherrylands)
- Glenville (Monkstown Avenue)
- Cloughfern (Whiteabbey Hospital)
- Doagh Road (Green End)
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service 14 and 14B

- City Centre (Donegall Square West)
- Doagh Road (Green End)
- Cloughfern (Whiteabbey Hospital)
- Glenville (Monkstown Avenue)
- Doagh Road (Cherrylands)
- Ballyfore Road (Doagh Road)
- Fairview Road (Ballyduff Shops)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Prince Charles Way (Glebe Road)
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Service 14 and 14A

- City Centre (Donegall Square West)
- East Antrim Institute
- Doagh Road (Green End)
- Cloughfern (Whiteabbey Hospital)
- Cloughfern (Station Road)
- Doagh Road (Cherrylands)
- Ballyfore Road (Doagh Road)
- Fairview Road (Ballyduff Shops)
- Fairview Road (Beverley Shops)
- Carnmoney Village (Carnvue)
- Prince Charles Way (Glebe Road)
- Sandyknowes (Ballyhenry Road)
- City Centre (Donegall Place)

Road Projects in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what road projects are planned by the Roads Service for North Down parliamentary constituency; (ii) the cost of each project; and (iii) the time to complete each project. (AQW 7195/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The table below details projects currently planned by my Department's Roads Service.

| Location | Details | Estimated Cost (£K) | Estimated Completion |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Bangor | | | |
| Castle Park Avenue / Castle Park Road | Carriageway resurfacing | 135 | 2008/09 |
| Ballymacconnell Road South | Traffic calming | 15 | 2008/09 |
| Castle Park Road | Traffic calming | 10 | 2008/09 |
| Drumhirk Drive | Traffic calming | 25 | 2008/09 |
| Gray's Hill area | Traffic calming | 35 | 2008/09 |
| Skipperstone Road/ Whitehill Drive | Traffic calming | 30 | 2008/09 |
| West Circular Road at Clandeboye Retail Park | Controlled crossing | 35 | 2008/09 |
| Gransha Road at Bloomfield Road | Controlled crossing | 40 | 2008/09 |
| A2 Belfast Road/ Old Belfast Road | Upgrade signals | 130 | 2008/09 |
| Gransha Road/ Balloo Road | Upgrade signals | 80 | 2008/09 |
| St Malachy's and Clandeboye Primary Schools, Clandeboye Road | School warning signs | 15 | 2008/09 |
| Holywood | | | |
| Seahill Road | Traffic calming | 15 | 2008/09 |
| Donaghadee | | | |
| High Street | Controlled crossing | 30 | 2008/09 |
| Ashfield Drive | Street lighting | 25 | 2008/09 |
| Millisle | | | |
| Abbey Road and Moss Road | Traffic calming | 5 | 2008/09 |
| Abbey Road | Footway link | 10 | 2008/09 |
| Moss Road | Hard standing at bus stop | 1 | 2008/09 |
| Moss Road | Street lighting at car park | 25 | 2008/09 |

The afore listed schemes are programmed for completion during 2008/09. However, their delivery will be subject to the successful conclusion of the

public consultation and legislative processes, where necessary, and the exact start dates will depend on the individual contractors' work programmes.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by his Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment. (AQW 7222/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Since the date of devolution the Department for Regional Development has received a managed service for all its infrastructure and desktop needs, including the provision of personal computers, from DFP's new Shared Service Centre. Consequently the Department has not purchased any laptops.

The Department has issued 74 mobile telephones to staff at no cost as the service providers supply the handsets free of charge.

The Department has purchased 48 Blackberry devices at a cost of £4,135. Although the primary reason for purchasing these devices is for their mobile email facilities they can also be used as mobile phones.

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for the details of all grants available through his Department. (AQW 7324/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The following table sets out the grants currently available through my Department and also the purpose for which the grants are paid.

| Grant available | Purpose of Grant |
|----------------------------|---|
| Public Service Obligation | Compensation to Northern Ireland Railways for meeting its obligation to run a schedule of train passenger services. |
| Concessionary Fares Scheme | Grant reimbursing operators of bus and rail services for providing subsidised travel to the eligible categories of people in the NI Concessionary Fares Scheme. |
| Fuel Duty Rebate | Rebate to bus operators of the duty paid on fuel oil used in the provision of stage carriage services. |

| Grant available | Purpose of Grant |
|--|---|
| NITHC Pensions | Grant to Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company to discharge its obligations for pensions and other compensations to former Belfast Corporation and Ulster Transport Authority employees. |
| NILGOSC Contributions | Grant towards Translink employer pension contributions to Northern Ireland Officers' Superannuation Committee which administers the Local Government pension scheme for Northern Ireland. |
| Capital Bus Grants | Grant towards approved capital expenditure by Translink on new buses and bus infrastructure including bus stations, workshops and garages. |
| Capital Rail Grants | Grant towards approved capital expenditure by Northern Ireland Railways on trains, the railway network and infrastructure. |
| Transport Programme for People with Disabilities | Grant towards the provision of specialised transport services for people with disabilities. |
| Grant available | Purpose of Grant |
| Rural Transport Fund | Revenue grant for the provision of transport services for people in rural areas. |
| Warrenpoint Harbour Deep Water Quay and Roll on Roll off | Capital Grants to Trust Ports towards capital works and infrastructure improvements. |
| Assistance To City of Derry Airport | Capital Grants towards City of Derry Airport for capital works and infrastructure improvements |
| Rathlin Island Ferry Service Capital Grant | Capital grant to improve the ferry service. |
| Rathlin Island Ferry Revenue Subsidy | Revenue grant for the provision of a lifeline ferry service to Rathlin Island. |
| Water Main / Public Sewer Reasonable Cost Allowance | A Reasonable Cost Allowance towards the cost of providing a water main or public sewer to serve an existing property that is not currently connected to the mains water supply or public sewer network. |

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many visits he has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type

and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7346/08)

Details are set out in the table below. Costs for trips made by official car are not held by the Department.

The Minister for Regional Development: I have made 14 visits outside the North since Devolution.

| Date | Visit | Transportation | | Accommodation | |
|----------------|--|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| | | Method | Cost | Type | Cost |
| 23 Aug 2007 | Dundalk – Newry/ Dundalk Joint Committee (Spatial Planning) | Minister – Official Car 3 Officials - Car | Costs not held £88 | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| | | | Total Cost £88 | | |
| 18 Sept 2007 | Dublin – Gateways to an All Island Economy Conference | Minister and 2 Officials (Newry to Dublin) – Official Car 3 Officials – Car Public Transport and Taxis | Costs not held. £127.10 £7.30 | Hotel Minister and 3 Officials | |
| | | | Total cost £134.40 | | Total Cost £270 |
| 28 Sept 2007 | Killiney -Irish Ports Association – Annual Conference | Minister and 2 Officials (Newry to Dublin) – Official Car 3 Officials - Car | Costs not held. £134.30 | Hotel Minister and 3 officials. | Accommodation costs covered by conference organisers – IPA. |
| | | | Total Cost £134.30 | | |
| 3 Oct 2007 | Dublin – National Water Summit | Minister and 2 Officials – Train Public Transport and Taxis | £81 £18.75 | Hotel Minister and 2 Officials | |
| | | | Total Cost £99.75 | | Total Cost £405 |
| 3 - 8 Oct 2007 | United States of America | Minister and 3 Officials – Plane Public Transport and Taxis | £1915.55 £95.39 | Hotel Minister and 3 Officials | |
| | | | Total Cost £2010.94 | | Total Cost £2793.23 |
| 17 Oct 2007 | Dublin – NSMC Meeting on Waterways | Minister – Official Car 2 Officials – Car | Costs not held. £83.70 | Not applicable | Not applicable |
| | | | Total Cost £83.70 | | |
| 1 Nov 2007 | Dundalk – Gateways Conference | Minister – Official Car 1 Official – Car | Costs not held £41.20 | Not applicable | Not applicable |
| | | | Total Cost £41.20 | | |
| 12 Dec 2007 | Dublin – NSMC Transport Sectoral | Minister – Official Car 6 Officials - Car | Costs not held. £298.80 | Not applicable | Not applicable |
| | | | Total Cost £298.80 | | |
| 13 Dec 2007 | London – Institute of Highways and Transportation Annual Luncheon | Minister and 1 Official Plane Public Transport (Heathrow Express) | £724.25 £56 | Not applicable | Not applicable |

| Date | Visit | Transportation | | Accommodation | |
|------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | Method | Cost | Type | Cost |
| | | | Total Cost £780.25 | | |
| 20 - 22 Feb 2008 | Amsterdam – Study Tour - Rapid Transit Systems | Minister and 5 Officials — Plane Public Transport Train | £463.50 £196.70 | Hotel Minister and 5 Officials | |
| | | | Total Cost £660.20 | | Total Cost £1410.72 |
| 6 Mar 2008 | Dublin – Conference ‘The Challenges posed by the All-island Economy for the Public Sector in both parts of the island’ | Minister – Car 1 Official – Public Transport Train Taxi | Costs not held. £30.00 £9.47 | Hotel -1 Official | |
| | | | Total Cost £39.47 | | Total Cost £141.24 |
| 30 Apr 2008 | Edinburgh - Meeting with Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure & Climate Change to discuss transport links between Larne and Stranraer | Minister and 3 Officials Plane Public Transport and Taxis | £955.68 £43.00 | Not applicable | Not applicable |
| | | | Total Cost £998.68 | | |
| 13 May 2008 | Dublin – Transport Ireland Conference | Minister and 2 Officials – Public Transport Train Taxi | £162 £35.74 | Hotel Minister and 2 Officials | |
| | | | Total Cost £197.74 | | Total Cost £429.63 |
| 19 May 2008 | Cardiff - BIC for Junior Minister Kelly | Minister and 2 Officials – Plane | | Hotel Minister and 2 Officials | |
| | | | Total Cost £1057.65 | | Total Cost £360 |

Water Rates Relief

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department’s policy on providing water rates relief to places of worship.
(AQW 7378/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Whilst places of worship are not liable to pay rates, the Independent Water Review Panel in its Strand 2 report concluded that everyone should contribute towards water and sewerage services. Places of worship are classed as non-domestic and it is Northern Ireland Water’s policy to install water meters for billing purposes on all properties that are not used exclusively for domestic purposes, including charities and other non-profit organisations such as churches and schools. This policy has been in place for a number of years and, prior to the recent extension of non-domestic payments, the company was already billing some 1,200 church properties.

The Executive agreed with the Panel’s recommendation that billing for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic properties from 1 April 2008 but agreed to phase in the extension over a two year period. Customers will pay half of the full bill in 2008/09 and the full amount from 2009/10.

Rail Accident Investigation Branch Report—Recommendation 6

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will give urgent attention to recommendation six contained in the Rail Accident Investigation Branch report in relation to the accident at crossing XL202.
(AQW 7385/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to my earlier reply of 9 May 2008 when I give him my assurance that officials would 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. I confirm that this includes recommendation 6.

Departmental Compensation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development how much compensation was paid out by his Department to claimants from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2008, for damage to their cars due to road conditions; and how many applications for compensation were (i) received; (ii) accepted; and (iii) rejected, during this period. (AQW 7425/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: During the 5-year period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2008, £1,002,514.25 compensation was paid to 4,178 successful vehicle damage claimants. During the same period, 7,744 new vehicle damage claims were received. Of those 7,744 new claims received, 3,498 were settled with compensation paid totalling £766,036.30 while 3,563 concluded without compensation being paid. The remaining 683 are still outstanding.

Improving Pedestrian Links at Sydenham Station

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the existing pedestrian links between Sydenham station and George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQO 3707/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is currently progressing a road improvement scheme to upgrade the A2 Sydenham Bypass to a three lane Dual Carriageway, from the end of the M3 slip lanes to the Tillysburn Junction. This major scheme will include the replacement of the existing footbridge at the Sydenham Station with a new structure. As part of the scheme development process, Roads Service has already been in consultation with Translink regarding the possible design options and locations for the new footbridge.

A public information and consultation event for the proposed scheme was held in the Park Avenue Hotel on 14 and 15 May 2008. Those attending were invited to respond to a range of issues, including the nature of their current usage of the footbridge. The information gleaned from this consultation will inform the scheme development process.

The exact position of the proposed footbridge has not been determined yet. However, it will form part

of the detailed proposals for the next round of formal consultation.

In addition to the new footbridge, a new high quality shared footway/cycleway is being proposed to run along the airport side of the new dual carriageway.

Water Charges

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development how many bills will be posted for water charges. (AQO 3766/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As a result of changes to non-domestic water and sewerage contributions from April 2008, I understand that during the year (1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009), Northern Ireland Water is planning to post approximately 157,000 bills to non-domestic customers for water and sewerage charges and trade effluent charges where applicable.

Households are not being billed for water and sewerage services this year.

It is estimated that Northern Ireland Water delivers water and sewerage services to 660,000 households. The Executive agreed in October 2007 that these households would be billed for these services in 2009/10.

Climate Change Bill Targets

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what correspondence he has had with the Minister of the Environment in relation to the Climate Change Bill targets and how his Department will contribute to these targets. (AQO 3812/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Climate Change Bill was discussed by the Executive on 13 September 2007.

I have had no other correspondence with the Minister of the Environment on this matter.

I will work closely with the Minister of the Environment and Executive colleagues to determine any appropriate Climate Change targets for my Department.

Upgrading the Larne Line Station Facilities

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the upgrading of station facilities on the Larne line. (AQO 3700/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Works to upgrade all stations on the Larne line in accordance

with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are being taken forward in conjunction with Translink's New Rail Vision project and are well underway.

The works include re-surfacing of platforms, tactile paving, access ramps, improvements to lighting and new signage.

The programme for the works on the Larne line is due to be complete by the end of the summer.

Glenmonagh Site

Mr Adams asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to take forward the proposal of establishing an interdepartmental group for the Glenmonagh and adjacent site in the West Belfast parliamentary constituency. (AQO 3806/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: When I visited West Belfast on 19 March, I agreed that I would explore your formal proposal of establishing an Inter Departmental Group to oversee the development of the Glenmonagh and adjacent site. My Department has a significant interest in this site, as do others, in terms of water and sewerage, roads and the rapid transit system.

Since then my officials have been speaking with officials in other Departments to maximise input to this process from across Government.

I have written to relevant Ministers and expect a response shortly.

Cycle Routes

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development what strategies he has in place to increase awareness of cycle routes. (AQO 3705/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is proactive in promoting cycling and the development of the cycling infrastructure in the North. A good example is the National Cycle Network (NCN), a network of approximately 700 miles of signed cycle ways across the North. Roads Service provides the direction road signage to indicate the location of the NCN and signage is an integral part of all new cycle path schemes.

In addition, Roads Service has produced, or contributed to, the production of a wide range of cycle route guides and maps to promote the NCN and to promote cycling in general. These publications provide comprehensive information on various elements of the NCN and titles include:

- Belfast by Bike;
- The Lagan and Lough Cycle Way;

- King Fisher Trail;
- Loughshore Trail;
- Belfast to Ballyshannon;
- Cycling in the Borough of Coleraine;
- Ballyshannon to Ballycastle Cycle Route; and
- Sperrins Region Cycle Route Map

Work is currently underway on the production of a promotional document in relation to the Comber Greenway.

Roads Service is also involved in promoting cycling to school through its Travelwise NI Safer Routes to Schools Programme. This initiative aims to tackle the impact of the 'school run' by encouraging more pupils, parents and teachers to walk, cycle, use public transport, or car share the journey to school.

Free Public Transport for Special Needs Children

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to providing free public transport for special needs children, following the introduction of the new curriculum, and the focus on independent living and developing life skills.

(AQO 3751/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Registered blind children are already eligible for free travel on public transport. Following a review of the Concessionary Fares Scheme I bid for the additional resources needed to extend the Scheme to provide free travel to people with disabilities. This would have included children with learning difficulties. The Executive, however, decided to make available the resources to allow free public transport to be extended to persons aged 60 and over during 2008.

Status of N2/A5 Project

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a timescale for completing the upgrade to dual carriageway status of the A5/N2 project. (AQO 3814/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive and Irish Government agreed three milestones for the A5/N2 dualling project:

- identification of the preferred corridor by late 2008;
- identification of a preferred route within that corridor by mid 2009; and
- publication of draft statutory orders in 2010.

Subject to satisfactory progress through the statutory procedures and the availability of funding

at that time, it is anticipated that construction could commence during 2012 with completion by 2015.

Safer Bus Stops

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he will take to upgrade bus stops to ensure the safety of passengers and other road users. (AQO 3729/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has developed three Transport Plans which include transport proposals for all modes of transport, including improvements to facilities at bus stops in towns, cities and rural areas, where necessary.

Within the Plans, it is proposed that main bus stops in town centres and other well-used stops in housing areas, will be upgraded to include high quality shelters and up-to-date service information. Proposals also include the provision of raised kerbs to allow passengers, including those with buggies and wheelchairs, to conveniently and safely board the low floor accessible buses. High visibility bus stop road markings and surfacing in red will be provided to discourage illegal parking and loading. Where these measures prove ineffective, further measures including kerbed 'built-outs', which protrude into the road, will be considered.

The Plans also propose that each rural settlement will have at least two main bus stops equipped to modern standards, including safe crossing facilities where appropriate. Paved areas will be provided at bus stops on rural roads.

These improvements will be designed in accordance with best practice guidance, as outlined in my Department's Bus Stop Design Guide. This guide provides advice on bus stop locations, which are agreed between Roads Service, Translink and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, following prime consideration of road and pedestrian safety, in addition to convenience to the travelling public.

Provision of Services on Motorways

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Regional Development what priority he is giving to the provision of 'services' on motorways. (AQO 3728/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The provision of service areas adjacent to motorways is currently a developer-led matter and, as such, my Department's Roads Service has not allocated any resources towards such provision.

I am advised that outline planning approval was granted in the mid-1990's for the provision of service areas on lands adjacent to the M1 and M2 motorways,

however, to date, there appears to be no concerted effort, on behalf of the developer, to proceed to construction.

Privatisation of Ports

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has considered the recommendation in the Varney Report that ports should be privatised, and to outline his policy in relation to this recommendation. (AQO 3737/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of the recommendations contained in Sir David Varney's Report on Competitiveness.

I outlined my conclusions in relation to the ports policy review on 29 February 2008. These did not include privatisation.

The legislative proposals which I intend to bring forward will provide the trust ports with greater commercial freedom to operate as envisaged by Sir David Varney.

Walking and Cycling to Work

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to encourage businesses to promote walking and cycling to work. (AQO 3706/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have had no direct discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to encourage businesses to promote walking and cycling to work. However, my Department's Roads Service has responsibility for liaising directly with businesses, through its Travelwise campaign, to encourage greater use of sustainable transport. This includes walking and cycling as well as greater use of public transport and car sharing where these provide realistic options for the journey to work.

During 2007/08, meetings were held with 28 businesses to offer support and encourage the development of Workplace Travel Plans. To date 5 businesses have indicated their interest in preparing such plans. Roads Service's programme of promoting Workplace Travel Plans with businesses is ongoing and is open to all employers in the North who wish to take part.

Rapid Transport System

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on, and timescale for, the rapid transport system. (AQO 3802/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I published the feasibility study on 8 April 2008 and am currently seeking views from a number of key interested parties on the report's findings and recommendations. A 'Take Note' debate in the Assembly has been arranged for tomorrow when members will have the opportunity to share their views. I will then consider all the responses which will assist me and Executive colleagues in reaching a final decision on the way forward. My intention is to meet the commitment in the Programme for Government and commence work on the first rapid transit line by 2011.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Renewable Energy Heating Systems

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the rise in the cost of fossil fuels, what plans she has to give Housing Executive tenants the option of installing renewable energy heating systems. (AQW 7047/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): Between August 2006 and March 2008 the Housing Executive installed solar water heating panels in 2,027 dwellings.

The Housing Executive has tested different types of renewable energy systems including;

- Solar Photo Voltaic panels
- Solar ventilation systems
- Solar Photo Voltaic and Thermal roof tiles
- Ground Source Heat Pump
- Wind Turbine
- Wood pellet boilers.

The Housing Executive may consider wider installation of these renewable technologies when they are fully evaluated.

Provided the Housing Executive approves the work, tenants have the option of installing renewable energy heating systems at their own expense.

North Down Borough Maintenance Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive maintenance budget for the North Down borough for each of the years 2006 and 2007; and how much has been allocated for 2008. (AQW 7073/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is as follows:

| Activity Areas | Actual Spend | | Projected Spend 2008/09 £m |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| | 2006/07 £m | 2007/08 £m | |
| Capital Improvement Work | 3.583 | 3.914 | 3.174 |
| Planned Maintenance Work | 1.303 | 0.533 | 1.032 |
| Response Maintenance | 1.590 | 1.367 | 1.373 |
| Grounds maintenance (South East Area) | 1.505 | 1.480 | 1.506 |
| Total | 7.981 | 7.294 | 7.085 |

The figures exclude expenditure on Disabled Adaptations.

Investment in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in deprived unionist areas in the North Down parliamentary constituency to improve housing over the next three years. (AQW 7102/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I refer to my recent answers to you in respect of the Rathgill, Breezemount and Kilcooley estates in Bangor. The reference numbers are AQWs 7099/08, 7100/08 and 7101/08. In addition, the Social Housing Development Programme provides for one new build scheme in Rathgill Zone I, for 36 general needs houses in 2008/09. This project has a total scheme cost in excess of £5m spread over a three year period.

Bloomfield Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Bloomfield Estate, Bangor to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7143/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's planned schemes within the Bloomfield Estate for the period requested are as follows:

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 2007/08 | | | |
| Bloomfield 1 Bed Flats Multi Element Improvement* | 34 | 31 March 2008 | £1,176,640 |
| | | | £1,176,640 |

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Bloomfield External Cyclical Maintenance | 159 | August 2009 | £322,267 |
| | | | £322,267 |
| 2010/11 | | | |
| Bloomfield Kitchens | 120 | April 2010 | £540,000 |
| Bloomfield/ Willowbrook / Conlig Heating | 178 | April 2010 | £787,000 |
| | | | £1,327,000 |
| | | | £2,825,907 |

* This scheme only started on 31 March 2008 so the expenditure will, be incurred in the current financial year.

Routine and response maintenance work will continue as required.

Conlig in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Conlig, Bangor to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7144/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the Housing Executive's programmed planned improvement schemes within Conlig, Bangor for 2007/08. There are no further Housing Executive schemes programmed for the period requested nor have any grants been paid. No Housing Association schemes are planned for the next three years

CONLIG PLANNED IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 2007/08 | | | |
| Crawfordsburn/ G'port/Conlig External Cyclical Maintenance | 225 | 21/01/08 | £262,000 |
| Conlig Kitchen Replacement | 19 | 17/09/07 | £75,000 |
| | | | £337,000 |

Whitehill Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Whitehill Estate, Bangor to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7145/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's programmed planned improvement schemes within Whitehill Estate, Bangor for 2007/08 are set out in the following table. No further schemes are programmed for the period requested.

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2007/08 | | | |
| Whitehill Phase 3 Multi Element Improvement | 64 | 20/08/07 | £1,196,450 |
| Whitehill Phase 4 Multi Element Improvement | 77 | 31/03/08 | £1,237,000 |
| | | | £2,433,450 |

Routine and response maintenance work will continue as required.

Strand Estate in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Strand Estate, Holywood to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7146/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive completed its planned improvement scheme to 33 dwellings within the Strand area of Holywood in 2006/07 at a cost of £1,048,000. There are no further schemes programmed for the period requested. Routine and response maintenance work will continue as required.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has been provided to Citizen Advice Bureaux, broken down by council area, for 2008-2009. (AQW 7152/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Unfortunately it is not possible to provide the information requested at this time, it will not be available until expenditure profiles are returned by the Local Councils for the 2008/2009 year. When my officials are in possession of the financial breakdown of funding from the Councils (in approximately six

weeks time) the information will be posted in the Assembly Library.

Loughview and Redburn Areas in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in the Loughview and Redburn areas, Holywood to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7163/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's current programmed planned improvement schemes within Loughview and Redburn areas, Holywood, for the period requested are as follows:

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 2008/09 | | | |
| Loughview Kitchens Ph3 | 98 | June 2008 | £479,600 |
| | | | £479,600 |
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Holywood Roomheaters | 109 | April 2009 | £421,000 |
| (Scheme Is Across Estates) | | | £421,000 |
| 2010/11 | | | |
| Redburn/L'view/Strand External Cyclical Maintenance | 390 | January 2011 | £624,000 |
| (Scheme Is Across Estates) | | | £624,000 |
| | | | £1,524,600 |

Routine and response maintenance work will continue as required.

Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money is being invested in Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee to improve housing conditions over the next three years. (AQW 7164/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's currently programmed planned improvement schemes within Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, for the period requested are as follows:

| Scheme | Dwellings | Programmed start date | Scheme value |
|---|-----------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Donaghadee Heating | 96 | April 2009 | £422,400 |
| Beechfield Estate External Cyclical Maintenance | 214 | April 2009 | £342,400 |
| Cypress Cres/East St Kitchens | 33 | April 2009 | £148,500 |
| D'dee Millisle Open Fires Heating Scheme | 50 | April 2009 | £220,000 |
| Victoria Bungalows Multi Element Improvement | 10 | April 2009 | £536,300 |
| | | | £1,669,600 |
| 2010/11 | | | |
| Donaghadee /Cottown External Cyclical Maintenance | 336 | April 2011 | £537,600 |
| | | | £537,600 |
| Total | | | £2,207,200 |

Routine and response maintenance work will continue as required.

Social Housing in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to create new social housing in East Belfast parliamentary constituency; and how many social houses are to be built in East Belfast in 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. (AQW 7169/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In addition to the 224 units already under construction, the Social Housing Development Programme for the East Belfast Constituency makes provision for 145 new starts in 2008/09, 87 new starts in 2009/10 and 107 new starts in 2010/11.

Housing associations continue to seek sites in areas of East Belfast where housing need has been identified. The Housing Executive is also pursuing the identification of potential development sites within its own land holdings.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) laptops; and (ii) mobile phones, have been bought by her Department since devolution; and to detail the cost of each category of equipment.

(AQW 7221/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is in the table below.

| Equipment | Number Bought | Cost |
|------------------------|---------------|---------|
| Laptop computers | 29 | £20,955 |
| Mobile phones (1) | - | - |
| Blackberry devices (2) | 86 | £4,912 |

- (1) Mobile phones are procured through NICS contracts and are usually rented rather than bought outright.
- (2) Hand-held Blackberry devices essentially offer calendar and e-mail functions similar to a laptop as well as mobile phone functionality. For this reason, numbers and cost details have been included in the answer.

Low-Income Families

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to protect low income families in relation to the current financial climate.

(AQW 7236/08)

The Minister for Social Development: OFMdFM has lead responsibility for tackling poverty in Northern Ireland. However, my Department administers the payment of a range of social security benefits such as Income Support, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Winter Fuel Payment and Cold Weather Payments. These are a vital tool in protecting those in greatest need from the effects of poverty.

Co-ownership Housing Association

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for the full details of public funding received for Co-ownership schemes; and (ii) if she intends to enter into PFI/PPP arrangements to fill the gap in the Co-ownership scheme.

(AQW 7267/08)

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.

Responsibility for day to day financial management, including the pursuit of external finance, rests with the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association. I have no plans at this stage to pursue Private Finance (PFI) / Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiatives.

Co-ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development when the Co-ownership Housing Association notified her of the intention to suspend the Co-ownership Housing Scheme.

(AQW 7275/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association did not notify me of its intention to suspend the Co-ownership Scheme.

I refer the member to my answer to AQW 6987/08.

Co-ownership Housing Association

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development if all applications for the Co-ownership Housing Scheme, which were received by the Co-ownership Housing Association before the announcement to suspend the scheme, will be granted.

(AQW 7276/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The processing of applications to the co-ownership scheme is a matter for the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association. In its statement made on 18 March 2008 the Co-ownership Association said it did not expect the announcement to stop taking applications to affect the households who are currently in the middle of purchasing a home through the co-ownership scheme.

I am aware that the Association is currently processing applications and is seeking to secure external finance.

Social Housing in Sion Mills

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has been offered land for social housing in the village of Sion Mills within the last 12 months.

(AQW 7279/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Sion Mills PSNI station was initially offered to a housing association for social housing through the surplus public sector lands clearing process. However, this site was subsequently withdrawn.

Social Housing in Strabane

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development what land is available within the Strabane District Council area for social housing. (AQW 7280/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following table details the current undeveloped Housing Executive land holdings in Strabane, and outlines current plans for each site. Sites programmed for transfer to housing associations will be used for social housing. Sites transferring to the surplus land schedule are those not required for social housing. These sites will normally be put on the open market for sale. Sites retained for future use are those pending decision on a definite development proposal.

| Location | Site Area (HA) | Programmed for transfer to Housing Assoc | Transfer to Surplus Land Schedule | Retain for future use | Comments |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Leckpatrick Gdns, Artigarvan | 0.82 | | ✓ | | |
| Eden Park, Castlederg | 0.52 | | ✓ | | |
| The Crescent, Clady | 1.33 | | | ✓ | Housing need identified |
| Patrician Villas | 5.90 | | ✓ | | |
| Glenelly View, Plumbridge | 0.06 | | ✓ | | |
| Listymore Park | 0.92 | | | | |
| Mason Rd/ Blackstone | 0.38 | | | ✓ | Latent demand testing required |
| Urney Road, Clady | 0.10 | | ✓ | | NIHE marker site for transfer |
| Corickmore/ Plumbridge | 0.44 | | | ✓ | |
| 14- 16 Newtown Street | 0.05 | | | ✓ | |
| Townsend Street | 0.18 | | | ✓ | Possible development of site |
| Forthill Park, Newtownstewart | 0.12 | | ✓ | | Transfer to Rural HA 2008/09 |
| | 10.8 | | | | |

Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, are owned (i) privately; and (ii) by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7296/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 53 properties owned privately and 114 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.

Regeneration of Carrickfergus Town Centre

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development when funding will be made available for the masterplan that will instigate the Re-generation scheme for Carrickfergus town centre. (AQW 7307/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has now set aside £75,000 to procure Masterplanning Consultants. Officials are awaiting a formal response from the Carrickfergus Development Company, on the Terms of Reference for the procurement of the consultant team.

Once the Terms of Reference have been agreed the tender process will proceed immediately.

Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if she will acknowledge that there are pockets of social deprivation within the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee. (AQW 7308/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department uses the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005 to measure multiple deprivation. There are 4 Super Output Areas (SOA) in Donaghadee and the most deprived in this area is Donaghadee South 1 where the Beechfield Estate is located. Based on the Multiple Deprivation Measure Donaghadee South 1 SOA has an overall rank of 365 out of 890 SOAs, where 1 is the most deprived and 890 the least deprived. The key programme for tackling multiple deprivation in an area, Neighbourhood Renewal, only targets the 10% most deprived.

Departmental Grants

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for the details of all grants available through her Department. (AQW 7320/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following is a list of the presently available funding

programmes delivered by the Department for Social Development, which offer grants to individuals or to organisations.

- The Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund
- Areas at Risk Pilot Programme
- Urban Development Grant
- Liganside Events Grant
- Liganside Community Activity Grant
- Belfast City Centre Promotions
- The Social Fund Community Care Grants
- Sure Start Maternity Grants

Access to some Grants will be subject to the availability of funding and entitlement conditions.

The Modernisation Fund

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what groups will be funded under the Department's 'Modernisation Fund' and for what programmes; and (ii) what groups applied for, and will not receive, funding under this programme. (AQW 7325/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Modernisation Fund being implemented by my Department is delivered through two separate programmes, namely the Modernisation Fund Revenue Programme and the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme.

Closing to application in January 2006 the Modernisation Fund Revenue Programme received some 163 applications. Following detailed assessment and evaluation 18 applications were successful in securing resources and these are currently being implemented by the project applicants. Details of the successful and unsuccessful applications will be listed in the Assembly Library.

The Modernisation Fund Capital Programme closed to application on 19 October 2007 at which time some 475 applications had been received across the three schemes within the programme.

To date only the initial assessment of applications has been completed and only upon full completion will the identity of all successful applicants be known. Once this process has concluded I will ensure that the listing of successful applicants and unsuccessful applicants and their projects are listed in the Assembly Library and on my Departments web-site. This listing will provide details on applications across all three schemes of the Modernisation Fund Capital Programme.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many visits she has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7347/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have made 13 visits outside Northern Ireland in my capacity as a Minister from 08 May 2007 to 22 May 2008. Details of the method and cost for transportation and the type and cost of accommodation for each trip are outlined in the table below. The costs for travel and accommodation provided include accompanying officials.

| Dates | Method | Destination | Total transport Cost (Flights/Taxis/ Trains) | Total Accommodation Costs |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 26/06– 29/06/2007 | Flights/cars | Washington DC | £11,195.89 | £1,220.22 - Hotel |
| 07/09– 08/09/2007 | Flights/ cars | Cambridge | £485 | Nil |
| 07/11/2007 | Official car | Dublin | Nil | N/A |
| 09/10– 11/10/2007 | Flights/ cars | Brussels | £3,097.17 | £2,153.02- Hotel |
| 10/11/2007 | Official car | Westport | Nil | Nil |
| 27/11- 28/11/2007 | Flights/ cars | London | £1,682.70 | £3,297.06- Hotel |
| 09/01/2008 | Flights/ cars | London | £1,592.80 | £626- Hotel |
| 15/01– 16/01/2008 | Official car | Dublin | Nil | £761.58- Hotel |
| 07/02/2008 | Official car | Dundalk | Nil | N/A |
| 14/02/2008 | Train | Dublin | £191 | N/A |
| 27/02/2008 | Train | Dublin | £377 | N/A |
| 11/03– 18/03/2008 | Flights/ cars | USA | £19,930.65 | £2,828.43- Hotel |
| 25/04/2008 | Flights/ cars | Cork | £393.48 | £180.25- Hotel |

Whitehill Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Whitehill Housing Estate,

Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.
(AQW 7380/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 277 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Whitehill Housing Estate, Bangor.

Breezemount Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Breezemount Housing Estate, Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.
(AQW 7381/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 126 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Breezemount Housing Estate, Bangor.

Kilcooley Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Kilcooley Housing Estate, Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.
(AQW 7382/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 759 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Kilcooley Housing Estate, Bangor.

Rathgill Housing Estate in Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Rathgill Housing Estate, Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.
(AQW 7383/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 277 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Rathgill Housing Estate, Bangor.

Bloomfield Housing Estate in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Bloomfield Housing Estate, Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.
(AQW 7384/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 314 properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Bloomfield Housing Estate, Bangor.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution.
(AQW 7421/08)

The Minister for Social Development: From devolution on 8 May 2007 to the end of May 2008, my Department has incurred travel cost expenditure totalling £2,340,167.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Social Development what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on her Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings.
(AQW 7440/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Deloitte and Touche Report, commissioned by the previous administration, recognises that a comprehensive aggregation of costs (of the cost of the troubles) is not possible.

Whilst having regard therefore to the information in the report, I have not drawn any direct conclusions from it in respect of my Department's work. Having said that, my Department is carrying out a major exercise to deliver efficiency savings as a consequence of this year's budget settlement. This process will focus on, among other things, some of the issues raised in the Deloitte and Touche Report. I am committed to taking forward innovative service initiatives such as my recently announced shared housing developments that can contribute to achieving efficiencies and A Shared Future for all of our people.

Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development if a new application for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding can be made by non-statutory organisations; and if not, to detail the reasons why. (AQW 7443/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have consistently identified the need for the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund to be targeted at the priority needs of Neighbourhood Renewal areas, as set out in the Neighbourhood Action Plans. Applications for funding to support delivery of these priorities may be invited from non statutory providers where they are determined to be the most appropriate providers depending upon local circumstances.

Housing Executive Homes in Conlig Village

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Conlig village are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7448/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 67 dwellings in Conlig Village.

Housing Executive Homes in Groomsport Village

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Groomsport village are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7449/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 61 dwellings in Groomsport Village.

Housing Executive Homes in Strand Avenue in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Strand Avenue, Holywood, are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7450/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 71 dwellings in Strand Avenue, Holywood.

Housing Executive Homes in the Redburn and Loughview Estates in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Redburn/Loughview Estates, Holywood, are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7451/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 70 dwellings in Redburn Estate and 326 dwellings in Loughview Estate, Holywood.

Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm Scheme in Derry/Londonderry

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the planned Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm scheme in Derry/Londonderry; and if the project is on schedule to meet the original completion date of December 2008. (AQW 7456/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The timings, milestones and targets for the Derry City Centre Public Realm Scheme for Waterloo Place/Guildhall Square Public Realm Scheme remain as I advised the House in January of this year. Construction work is due to commence in July/August 2008.

Regulation of Landlords

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the motion passed by the Assembly on 1 October 2007 calling for the mandatory registration of landlords in the private sector, (i) what action she has taken since the motion was passed; (ii) if she intends to bring forward legislation that fulfils the intent of the motion; (iii) for a timescale within which she will introduce this legislation; and (iv) what alternative plans she has to deal with private landlords. (AQW 7469/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My officials are concluding their findings on the schemes currently in operation in Scotland and in the South of Ireland and are due to present a full report to me shortly. It may be that registration is not a panacea for all perceived problems with the private rented sector.

Officials are also conducting an evaluation of the impact of the Private Tenancies Order, which among other things seeks to enhance tenants' rights. I am also developing a strategy for the private rented sector which will include consideration of a registration scheme and any issues flowing from the evaluation of the Private Tenancies Order. Other initiatives to be considered include a tenancy deposit scheme.

When the new strategy for the sector has been developed it may be that legislation is required. If this is the case it will be brought forward in the final session of this Assembly's mandate.

Affordable Housing

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to define affordable housing on the basis of cost. (AQW 7484/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Sir John Semple recommended that affordable housing should be related to the ability to pay and to be affordable, housing costs should not exceed 35% of gross household income. I have accepted this definition.

Housing Executive Houses in Millisle Village

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Millisle village are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7490/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 144 dwellings in Millisle village.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5527/08, how many people were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in (i) January; (ii) February; and (iii) March, of (a) 2006; (b) 2007; and (c) 2008. (AQW 7492/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE – RECIPIENTS

| | January | February | March |
|------|---------|----------|---------|
| 2006 | 168,345 | 168,787 | 168,397 |
| 2007 | 170,432 | 171,258 | 171,106 |
| 2008 | 173,236 | 173,091 | 173,685 |

Cost of Funerals

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what financial help is available towards the cost of funeral payments, for people in receipt of (i) Income Support; (ii) Job Seeker's Allowance; (iii) Disability Living Allowance; and (iv) Incapacity Benefit. (AQW 7573/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Funeral Payments are available under the Social Fund Scheme to help individuals who are on low income, have responsibility for arranging a funeral and have insufficient funds to meet the costs involved. An individual or their partner may be eligible for a Funeral Payment if they are in receipt of Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based), Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit or Pension Credit. The Funeral Payment is intended to meet the costs of a simple, respectful, low cost funeral and is recoverable from any money available from the deceased's estate. Receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Incapacity Benefit alone does not meet the qualifying conditions for a Funeral Payment.

Fuel Prices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment has she made of the impact of increasing fuel prices on charities that provide free transport to people with disabilities; and what plans she has to alleviate this growing burden. (AQW 7598/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I acknowledge the impact of rising fuel prices and as you may be aware I have recently established a Taskforce to look urgently at what measures the Executive can take to address household fuel poverty. However the provision of community transport to people with disabilities is primarily a matter for the Department for Regional Development.

Home Repossession

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if she will bring forward plans to support families who are facing immediate repossession of their homes. (AQW 7607/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As part of my New Housing Agenda, I announced plans to bring forward a Not For Profit Mortgage Rescue Scheme specifically designed to support those families who may be in danger of losing their homes. I gave further information on how I will deliver this during Private Members Business in the Assembly on 2 June.

Heating in Housing Executive Homes

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister for Social Development if the Housing Executive will afford its tenants the option of continuing to burn solid fuel when installing new heating systems. (AQO 3797/08)

The Minister for Social Development: No. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has formulated its heating policy so as to meet the decent homes standard. This requires the use of high efficiency boilers and controllable heating systems. Solid fuel is neither efficient nor controllable and is also considered environmentally unfriendly.

Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development if she is prepared to transfer some responsibility for the Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme to local councils. (AQO 3763/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In support of my vision for strong local government I have

delivered a sizeable package of functions for transfer to local government, this includes responsibility for delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal. In advance of the full transfer of these functions in 2011, I am looking at the feasibility of transferring some or all of these functions earlier, through stronger partnering arrangements between central and local government.

Regulation of Landlords

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans to regulate private landlords in the social housing sector. (AQO 3782/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The private rented sector plays an important role in the housing market. In February of this year, I met with representatives of the Landlords Association and gave an undertaking that my officials would arrange to meet regularly with them. The Private Tenancies Order, which came into effect in April 2007, introduced improved regulation of the sector. My officials have begun an evaluation of the impact of the Order. They are also examining developments in relation to the licensing of landlords in both Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

I want to complete and consider both pieces of work fully before deciding if further regulation is required here.

Fra McCann has also tabled a written question for answer in relation to the motion passed by the Assembly on 1 October 2007 calling for the mandatory registration of landlords in the private sector. My officials are concluding their findings on the schemes currently in operation in Scotland and in the South of Ireland and are due to present a full report to me shortly.

Housing Executive

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development if the Housing Executive will be sympathetic to home owners whose house value has fallen below market value, when vesting houses on the Donegall Road, given that the compensation they receive may not be enough to pay off their existing mortgages. (AQO 3775/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Homeowners affected by vesting are entitled not only to the market value of their property at the date of vesting, but also a Home Loss payment and a Disturbance payment. Homeowners can also appoint an agent to act their behalf and appropriate fees are payable by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what implications the aging population has for her long-term strategy of dealing with fuel poverty. (AQO 3717/08)

The Minister for Social Development: As an Executive, I feel that we have the right policies on energy efficiency and support to address fuel poverty over the longer term. The biggest short-term challenge we face relates to the recent sharp rises in fuel prices. The Task Force on Fuel Poverty, which I have set up, will identify ways in which Government and others can help the most vulnerable over the winter.

Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development how her Department determined the boundary of the Neighbourhood Renewal Area in Coalisland. (AQO 3795/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I can confirm that the Coalisland Neighbourhood Renewal Area is based on five Census Output Areas in Coalisland that are listed in the 10% most deprived areas according to the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure, rather than four, as previously advised to you incorrectly by officials.

Fuel Poverty

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development what measures she is taking to address the rising cost of fuel. (AQO 3725/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The ever increasing cost of fuel which is almost entirely outside Government control makes the job of alleviating fuel poverty even more difficult. I have established a Task Force of representatives from Government departments working with the main stakeholders from the energy sector and voluntary groups to identify ways to help the most vulnerable in society. The Task Force 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 most in need.

Housing Executive

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration her Department has given to the possibility of introducing a rent cap to assist those on Housing Benefit who are unable to meet the rent set by private landlords. (AQO 3801/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There are no plans to introduce a cap on the amount of rent a private landlord can charge for a tenancy not subject to rent control. Protected tenants and properties which do not meet fitness standards on inspection by a District Council are rent controlled. Other properties are subject to the normal market forces of supply and demand.

The purpose of Housing Benefit is to assist persons on low incomes with reasonable housing costs. In deciding the maximum amount of Housing Benefit which can be paid to a tenant, the Housing Executive gathers information on rents being charged in local areas and sets a median value based on this. The amount of rent is determined both by the local rental market and by the size of the accommodation considered necessary for the size of a particular family unit using criteria contained in Housing Benefit Regulations. Accordingly it should be possible for prospective tenants to identify suitable rental properties of an adequate size within the broad rental market area which are within the limits set by the Housing Executive.

Housing in the Private Rental Sector

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to improve the quality of housing available in the private rental sector. (AQO 3716/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There have been significant improvements in fitness levels in the private rented sector. The 2006 House Condition Survey recorded the level of unfitness in the sector at 2.7%. In the 2001 Survey, the figure was 8.7%.

I would expect to see further improvements over time as a result of the Private Tenancies Order 2006 which targets unfitness and disrepair through repair enforcement and rent control.

Housing in Rural Areas

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to ensure that it is possible to provide more social and affordable housing in rural areas. (AQO 3765/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I am a member of the Ministerial sub group, chaired by the Minister of the Environment, addressing the social housing requirements within PPS14. The Housing Executive launched its Rural Homes and People Action Plan in May 2007. It can be accessed via the Housing Executive's website.

Underage Drinking

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she can take to counter underage drinking. (AQO 3792/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Combating underage drinking is a cross-cutting issue which involves many of my Executive colleagues, as well as the Secretary of State. I am committed to maximising the contribution which liquor licensing legislation, which is my responsibility, can make in conjunction with other initiatives to tackling underage alcohol abuse.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to fast track the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQO 3710/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I have been actively targeting the waiting list to ensure that those in greatest need receive assistance first. All those people on the waiting list over 70 years old will have their homes surveyed by 30 June 2008. All successful applicants between the ages 60 and 70 who have no central heating or rely on Economy 7 or solid fuel heating will also have their homes surveyed by the end of June. Whatever measures the surveys recommend to improve the energy efficiency of their homes will then be taken. I am continuing to bid for additional resources so the scheme can assist as many people as possible.

Social Housing Units

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Social Development how many new social housing units are planned to be built during the 2008 calendar year. (AQO 3776/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Development Programme operates on a financial year basis. My target for the year is 1,500 starts but, having exceeded my target for the financial year 2007/2008, I hope to better that and achieve 1600 this financial year, 2008/09. This will, of course, be dependent on sufficient funding being made available.

Co-Ownership Housing Association

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she has taken to increase the available grant funding for the Co-ownership Scheme. (AQO 3712/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association (NICHHA) started this year with a grant of £15 million. They will use the £15 million grant along with external finance to achieve the Programme for Government target of assisting 500 applicants this year.

A bid for additional resources for the Co-ownership scheme will be submitted in the June monitoring round.

Lisanelly Army Site

Dr Deeny asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has given a commitment to purchase the Lisanelly Army site on behalf of schools. (AQO 3774/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The regeneration of Lisanelly Barracks, including a possible educational campus, is currently being explored by DSD officials working with the Department of Education, SIB, Omagh District Council, other interested parties and recently commissioned consultants. A key consideration is working out the quantum of land required for the campus and thus the land left for other purposes. However, in the absence of either gifting by the British Government, or a more flexible attitude by MOD on price, affordability for the Executive is a major concern.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 13 June 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Departmental Phone Calls

Mr O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the answer to AQW 4100/08, to outline the exact nature of (i) the discussion with; (ii) the guidance given to; and (iii) the response from, a junior Minister during his exchange with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, after the Department for Social Development reported telephone calls from the junior Minister's office to an adviser to the Minister for Social Development. (AQW 7064/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): As we indicated in the answer to AQW 4100/08, this was a private discussion in relation to Ministerial protocols. The matter was dealt with satisfactorily at that time.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide will be reflected within the forthcoming draft strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. (AQW 7442/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The report by Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide was an independent piece of research conducted and finalised under the previous administration.

We are totally committed to moving society forward and making a real difference to the lives of all our people. Our vision is for a future based on tolerance, equality, mutual respect and respect for the rule of law.

We are now at an advanced stage of development of the detailed proposals for a 'Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a shared and better future' which we signalled in the Programme for Government.

Our officials briefed the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the current stage of development of the Programme in early April.

This Programme will tackle issues affecting both the established communities as well as new arrivals. It will build on some of the excellent work which is already being done, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges which local communities are facing. Action to tackle sectarianism, racism and intolerance will be at the core of these proposals.

We believe that by tackling the causes of division in our society, sectarianism and racism, that a reduction of consequential costs will follow.

Additional funding of almost £7.5m over the next 3 years from 2008/2011 have been provided; total investment will therefore be approximately £29m to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, the Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7497/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has had no 0845 or 0870 numbers operated by, or on behalf of, the Department in the last 3 years.

OFMDFM has no agencies.

Spending on Children

Mr Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action is being taken to reduce the gap in spending on children between Northern Ireland and other areas of the United Kingdom. (AQW 7531/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In pre-budget discussions, Junior Ministers urged Executive colleagues to ensure children and young people remained a priority across departments and to bid for resources to facilitate this.

An additional £26 million was allocated in the Budget 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.

A further £13 million was also made available for DE for children and youth services and OFMDFM secured £2.3 million in years 2 and 3 for play and exemplar projects.

There may also be opportunities throughout the budgetary period for departments to bid for additional money for children and young people through the in-year monitoring process.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Ministerial Sub-group on Children and Young People plans to meet with the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

(AQW 7534/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Commissioner for Children and Young People has been invited to meet with the Ministerial Sub Committee in September 2008.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the Assembly debate on alcohol misuse, if the Ministerial Sub-group on Children and Young People has had discussions on this issue; and what Ministers have raised this issue with them.

(AQW 7535/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Minister for Social Development raised this issue at the Ministerial Sub-Committee meeting on 10 April 2008. It was recognised by Ministers at the meeting that issues around underage drinking are something which all departments need to consider.

At that meeting, the Ministerial Sub-Committee identified as one of its key priorities the provision for vulnerable young people. This priority covers a number of issues including that of underage drinking. A sub-group, led by DHSSPS officials and including officials from all relevant departments, is currently being established to take this forward. It was agreed that this group would consider the points from the Assembly debate on 1 April when they meet to progress work on this priority.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the 50+ infrastructure projects/programmes, with a capital value of some £5 billion; what the status is of each project; and what the proposed start and completion dates are for each project.

(AQW 7843/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Strategic Investment Board is currently working with departments to compile a detailed database to facilitate the monitoring of progress in delivering the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018. This database will include information on the timetable and status of each project.

It is expected that this work will be completed in the next few weeks and we will write to you with the information you have requested once it is available to us.

Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network

Mr McElduff asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will provide emergency financial support to the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network to allow it to play its part within a wider strategy towards a poverty free society. (AQO 3889/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: While the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister does not have provision within the current budget to provide core funding to organisations such as the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network, officials from our Department have recently met with the organisation and advised as to other possible funding streams that may be available to it at this time.

Border People Website

Mr McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the borderpeople website has been promoted.

(AQO 3858/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The "border people" website provides easily accessible public service information for people who wish to move across the border in either direction to live, work and study. It was launched by the former First Minister, the deputy First Minister and Minister Dermot Ahern at the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Institutional format last October.

- A marketing campaign to promote the website is now underway including: two recent public awareness events, one in Londonderry and one in Dublin;
- newspaper advertisements and editorials;

- publicity on local radio; and
- a poster, billboard and leaflet campaign targeting citizens advice centres, job and benefit offices, libraries, post offices, medical and dental clinics, key employers and other public places.

Shared Future Report and the Racial Equality Strategy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the programmes that were funded by the Shared Future Report and the Racial Equality Strategy in the 2007-08 financial year; and (ii) the outputs of these programmes.

(AQO 3843/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

During the financial year 2007-08, the Department provided two separate but linked streams of funding in support of good relations (both community and race relations) and racial equality.

Our Community Relations Unit provided grant-in-aid to the Community Relations Council of £3.289 million for good relations activities and research.

In addition, funding of £1.977 million was awarded to District Councils to implement good relations action plans. The proposals for funding contained within these action plans are based on actions which have been identified through good relations audits undertaken by each District Council. Local needs and local actions are prioritised to reflect the key issues within the respective area and outputs are measured accordingly.

Under its funding scheme for minority ethnic communities, the Department (through its Racial Equality Unit) also provided more than £500,000 to 14 different organisations. This fund supported work towards the promotion of good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds.

The work that is supported by this funding has played a key part in the historic low levels of violence and tension that we have witnessed in recent years.

We have put in place "Good Relations indicators" to monitor the impact of this funding and the work that it supports. In the longer term, we will develop locally based good relations indicators. These will monitor good relations at the local level to evaluate the impact of the initiatives delivered in local neighbourhoods.

The updated Good Relations indicators which we published on 30 April 2008 show a welcome relative decrease in sectarianism but an increase in recorded racist incidents.

The Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, which we intend to bring to the Committee shortly,

will provide a robust and effective framework to tackle these scourges.

Under this Programme we will provide additional funding of £7.5 million over the 3 years from 2008 to 2011 to build on ongoing successes. Our total investment will be £29million to meet the PSA target of a shared and better future for all.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the impact that delays in determinations by the Planning Appeals Commission will have on the Executive's ability to deliver on its priorities. (AQO 3901/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We recognise that delays in determinations by the Planning Appeals Commission may have consequences for the Executive's ability to deliver on its priorities. We accept that although the initial impact will be felt on an individual case by case basis, the cumulative effect may have implications for the Executive's strategic priorities. Given the many and varied factors which will contribute to the successful achievement of the Executive's priorities, it is difficult to quantify the specific impact of these delays.

In light of the strategic importance of an effective planning appeals system, we have committed to ensuring that the Planning Appeals Commission has the resources to enable it to address the current backlog of planning appeals cases. We have made significant additional financial resources available to enable the Chief Commissioner to address the backlog of appeals cases.

Programme for Government

Mr Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures have been put in place to ensure the delivery of targets set out for each Department in the Programme for Government. (AQO 3900/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Programme for Government is framed under five priority areas which set out a range of key goals and commitments for the Executive collectively to deliver. These are in turn supported by a detailed framework of 23 cross-cutting Public Service Agreements (PSAs) which confirm the key actions and targets departments will take forward over the next three years in support of the Executive's priorities.

The Executive recognises that many of the outcomes and targets set out in the PSA framework will only be achieved where departments work closely

together and co-ordinate their approach. In light of this, departments have worked together over recent months to develop detailed Delivery Agreements for each PSA. These Delivery Agreements, to be published on departmental websites, set out in more detail how departments intend to ensure delivery of the targets and actions set out in the PSA framework and will provide the basis upon which the Executive will monitor and report on progress at departmental level.

Economic Investment Conference

Mr Campbell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has any plans to evaluate the success of the recent Economic Investment Conference. (AQO 3819/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The recent Economic Investment Conference was an enormous success. The Conference was attended by the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Special Envoy Ambassador Dobriansky and Ambassadors Tuttle and Foley, and 90 companies represented by over 140 business leaders.

At the Conference, NYSE Euronext and Cybersource announced new inward investments which have the potential to create over 120 new quality jobs. These, along with major investments announced by Bombardier and Independent News and Media added to the success. We are extremely encouraged by the positive reflections in the media on the immediate impact of the conference. Initial feedback from delegates is also very encouraging. We will be working hard over the coming months to capitalise on the success of the event.

Assessment of value for money can be undertaken once benefits in terms of inward investment projects are known, and this may take two to three years to come to fruition. However, Invest NI has a co-ordinated strategic follow-up plan in place to ensure that all delegates are contacted over the coming months to explore how they might benefit from considering Northern Ireland as an investment location. The follow up will consume both considerable time and resources involving Senior Management from Invest Northern Ireland and possibly some involvement also at Ministerial level.

The conference follow up program is comprehensive and is developed as an integral part of the planning for the conference. It is likely to run at least until the end of the year. The goal is to ensure that the positive effects of the conference are maximized to translate into tangible investment in the medium to longer term.

Young People Leaving Care

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy, what policies are in place to provide support and assistance to young people leaving care. (AQO 3855/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

In line with the requirements under section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1988 we will shortly be presenting proposals to the Executive Committee for the adoption of an overarching strategy to tackle Poverty and Social exclusion here.

The adopted strategy will seek to ensure that the needs of at risk groups, such as young people leaving care, continue to be addressed by way of Departments redirecting their efforts and resources towards those in greatest object need.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has sought to develop policies to address the issues faced by young people leaving care. Policy approaches and corresponding service interventions are two-fold – early intervention aimed at providing best life chances to young people in care by improving the quality and range of intervention and support available whilst in care; and Strengthening the direct services and support available to young people as they make their journey from care and into adult life.

The Department (DHSSPS) has introduced a range of policies aimed at addressing the whole care continuum with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes and the life chances of young people through supporting better interventions earlier in young people's career, providing improved in care experiences and ensuring strengthened pathways through care and into after care.

In September 2005 the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 was commenced. It sought to improve the life chances of looked after young people as they make the transition to independent living. As part of the Act, all HSS Trusts had to provide a personal advisor and pathway plan for all eligible young people. At any one point in time there are 700 young people aged 16+ who have left care and who are entitled to continued support under the terms of the Act.

In keeping with the goal of a regional approach to the implementation of the Leaving Care Act, a series of theme based regional working groups, comprising of representatives from Trusts, DEL, NIHE, University/Academia and voluntary agencies were formulated and addressed and delivered on specific themes and protocols. These included

- the creation of a Good Practice Framework for Joint working between Trusts and NIHE to meet the

accommodation and support needs of young people leaving care and homeless young people;

- a Good Practice guide addressing the career planning needs of young people leaving care agreed between the Careers Service NI and the Health and Social Care Trusts; and
- Guidance on transition planning for young people leaving care with a Disability is currently being finalised.

Although DHSSPS policy is based on the premise that young people ultimately have a choice, the overall policy is to reduce the numbers leaving care to live independently at age 16/17. A number of initiatives have already been put in place to facilitate this and ultimately improve the outcomes of Children and young people in care. These include

- Fostering Achievement Scheme – This Scheme was launched in September 2006. The scheme assists carers with funding to access equipment such as computers, a range of educational and personal development activities, and advice and training to enable carers to be effective first educators of the children in their care. Over 950 children in foster care have benefited from the scheme to date.
- Fostering Scheme - £6m investment in foster care to achieve an increase of 300 from the baseline set at 31st March 2006 in the number of foster carers by March 2010. It includes initiatives to develop a regional approach to recruiting and training foster carers, more support workers for foster care placements and plans to significantly increase the numbers of young people fostered with extended family/family friends. By March 2008 179 additional foster carers has been achieved.
- Former Carer Scheme – this scheme provides financial support to carers who continue to support/accommodate young people 18-21. There are currently 150 young people participating in this scheme.
- Advocacy and Peer-mentoring – this regional scheme was set up in January 2007 to empower young people in care to engage actively in the process of ensuring the system works best in their interests. It is available to all looked after children and young people up to 25 years, in a wide range of settings, who are or who have been looked after by social services. The advocacy service provides independent and confidential information, advice, advocacy, representation, and support.

THE Department (DHSSPS) are enhancing their overall prospects and life chances, and at the same time reducing the current and future burden on our health, social care and court services. It is clear that our young care leavers need support for longer to achieve the transition to independence and adulthood.

This is especially true for those who have experienced trauma and upset in their lives. By providing support and a secure family environment we will enhance the outcomes for young people, reduce their isolation and vulnerability and help them mature into adulthood with confidence and a reduced reliance on social services.

DHSSPS is currently in the process of introducing additional measures to further improve the transition process to adulthood which include

- providing more fee paid foster carers;
- improving the participation of young people in their care planning process;
- restructuring services based on transition teams – 16 years+; and
- progressing plans to introduce a pilot transition focussed type of residential care.

Over the next two years DHSSPS will be putting in place improved arrangements for young people involving:-

- preparation for adulthood;
- employment; and
- improved education support.

Executive Decisions

Mr G Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the number of occasions that the Executive has been unable to reach a decision by unanimous vote. (AQO 3905/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since the return of devolution in May 2007, votes have been triggered at meetings of the Executive Committee on seven occasions.

Executive Decisions

Mr Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive unanimously approved (i) the Programme for Government; (ii) the Budget; and (iii) the Investment Strategy. (AQO 3922/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: At its meeting of 21 January 2008, the Executive unanimously approved (i) the Programme for Government; (ii) the Budget; and (iii) the Investment Strategy.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if its accounting officer has

made an assessment on whether the Maze/Long Kesh site has demonstrated value for money. (AQO 3904/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The outline business case sets out options for the development of Maze/Long Kesh. The drivers for the regeneration of the former prison were wide, and related to social and economic regeneration and the symbolic transformation of the site. As a result the benefits recorded in the business case are largely non-monetary. For these reasons, and because the business case was not judged by economists to provide value for money on monetary benefits alone, the accounting officers of both OFMDFM and DCAL concluded, in agreement with DFP officials, that Ministers should consider the non-monetary benefits and make the decision whether or not to proceed to the next stage.

Community Relations Core and Project Funding Awards

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it monitors which communities are under-represented in community relations core and project funding awards. (AQO 3902/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

We are committed to ensuring that we build a shared and better future for all our people.

It bears repeating that we regard racism, sectarianism and intolerance as blights which we must overcome wherever they appear. Decisions concerning core funding are based on published eligibility criteria, evaluations of the purpose for which funding is sought and the effectiveness of organisations involved. Funding is provided to all 26 District Councils to address issues at the local level to enable projects which have been identified and prioritised by them, to meet the needs of the local communities as assessed in their good relations audits.

Proposals for a Programme of Cohesion and Integration which we will bring forward shortly will be subject to the rigorous equality proofing standards including an Equality Impact Assessment. These proposals will include an increase in funding for District Councils' action plans.

ANNEX A

NUMBER OF SALMON NETTING LICENCES ISSUED IN THE FOYLE AREA 1998-2007

| Class of Licence | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Drift Nets: Sea Only | 20 | 19 | 18 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 13 | 15 | 19 | -- |
| Drift Nets: Lough & Sea | 79 | 79 | 76 | 76 | 78 | 77 | 69 | 71 | 81 | -- |
| Drift Nets: Lough Only | 11 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 7 | 18 |

Programme for Government

Mr I McCrea asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Programme for Government makes any specific reference to the abolition of academic selection. (AQO 3827/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Programme for Government is a high level strategic document that sets out the Executive's priorities it does not detail the full range of programmes and policies which departments will take forward over the next three years.

The Programme for Government does not make any specific reference to academic selection. It does, however, stress the Executive's commitment to educating and developing our young people to the highest possible standards, addressing significant inequalities in educational outcomes, taking forward key reform programmes in education, and investing in our schools infrastructure.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Salmon Netting Licences

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for the number and location of salmon netting licences over the last ten years. (AQW 7419/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): The Loughs Agency has provided the information attached at Annex A, which details the number of salmon netting licences issued in the Foyle Area from 1998 - 2007. They have advised that there are no figures available for 2008 at this stage.

Annex B details the number of salmon netting licences issued by the Fisheries Conservancy Board from 1998 – 2008. This information has been provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

| Class of Licence | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Draft Nets: River Foyle | 48 | 42 | 46 | 42 | 43 | 50 | 51 | 57 | 49 | 10 |
| River Roe | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Fixed Engines | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1 | -- | -- | -- |

ANNEX B**NUMBER OF SALMON NETTING LICENCES ISSUED FOR THE NORTH ANTRIM AREA BY THE FISHERIES CONSERVANCY BOARD 1998 - 2008:**

| Year | Bag Nets | Fixed Tidal Draft Nets | Drift nets for taking salmon at sea | Total |
|------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1998 | 12 | 3 | 7 | 22 |
| 1999 | 11 | 3 | 5 | 19 |
| 2000 | 10 | 4 | 7 | 21 |
| 2001 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 16 |
| 2002 | 4 | 0 | 6 | 10 |
| 2003 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 6 |
| 2004 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| 2005 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| 2006 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| 2007 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| 2008 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution.

(AQW 7424/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Expenditure on travel for the Department (ie including Agencies) from the date of devolution (8th May 2007) to the 30th April 2008 amounted to £3,046,322.

TRAVEL EXPENDITURE INCLUDES:

| | |
|--|------------|
| Mileage | £2,480,826 |
| Transport | £196,015 |
| (includes bus and rail fares, car parking and air fares within Britain and the North of Ireland) | |
| Excess Fares | £307,123 |
| Foreign Travel | £62,358 |
| (includes all foreign travel costs – air fares, rail fares etc) | |

Fuel Costs for Fishermen

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the impact on farmers and fishermen of high costs of fuel, feed and fertilisers; and what action she is taking to address these issues.

(AQW 7470/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Rising fuel, feed and fertilizer prices are having a serious impact on all households in the North at present. The effect on farmers and fishermen in particular is significant. The increases are being driven by the steady rise in crude oil prices, which are outside the direct control of government. However, I am doing all that I can within my remit.

In relation to the current grain shortage and the particular challenges it poses for the intensive sector, I wrote to every supermarket in the North 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. This hopefully provides an opportunity for increased returns to work back through the supply chain to the farm-gate price.

I support the action taken by the EU to address the grain shortage by fixing the set-aside rate at zero to release more land into cereal production. While the current market conditions continue, the growing of cereals should remain attractive and this should help to stabilise the grain market.

My Department continues to support the intensive production sector in every way it can. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) provides a comprehensive range of education and training programmes for producers and processors, and has designed a series of contextualised energy efficiency training programmes, the first of which was delivered in March/April of this year. Feedback from the 103 course participants was very positive and a further course is planned for the Autumn. The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) supports the sector through research and development work, which provides an important science and expertise base to support industry development.

In relation to fertiliser prices, I am supporting investment by farmers to manage the storage and use

of livestock slurry – not just to avoid water pollution, but also to realise the benefits of this natural alternative to increasingly expensive chemical fertiliser.

Fuel prices represent the single biggest operating cost for fishing. High fuel prices are not a temporary factor and will require a long term strategic plan to address the difficulties experienced by the industry. In the meantime I believe the measures that I announced on 28 April, to assist with the costs of vessel monitoring, flexible allocation of days at sea, and easing certain vessel licensing arrangements, as well as a willingness to provide funding for fuel saving technology will be useful.

You will be aware that I announced the establishment of a new Fisheries Forum and I would like to see the Forum achieve broad agreement on a strategic plan by the time the European Fisheries Fund opens for applications. I would expect that any strategic plan will need to include measures to promote fuel efficiency. Subject to early approval of the Operational Plan by the Commission, I expect the EFF to be open for applications by the end of October this year.

Departmental Telephone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, her Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7521/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department has currently one 0845 number in operation under the DARD Registration Line pilot. The number is 0845 3044 544 and allows farmers in the Fermanagh area to register births and deaths of animals via the telephone. To date there has been no profit from the line.

Cycling on Forest Service Land

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department's policy is on cycling on Forest Service land; and what steps her Department has taken to promote cycling. (AQW 7548/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Forestry Strategy "A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth" published in 2006, outlines my Department's policy for the development of recreational use of forests, including cycling. The strategy commits us to identify partnership opportunities with both private and public sector organisations to improve the quality and range of recreation provision available within in our forests.

Forest Service has operational family cycle trails at Castlearchdale, Gosford, and Castlewellan and has facilitated various bike events at many of its forests.

My officials in Forest Service continue to work with a number of stakeholders including, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Environment and Heritage Service, District Councils and Countryside and Activities Network and representatives from mountain bike clubs, to explore opportunities for the future development of cycling in forests.

Departmental Correspondence with Linergy

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any correspondence that has taken place between her Department and Linergy in relation to (i) the current arrangements for the disposal of animal waste; and (ii) the proposals for the development of an anaerobic digester and thermal treatment plant for the disposal of animal waste, at Granville, Dungannon; and what grant aid her Department has offered for these projects. (AQW 7754/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: During 2007, DARD's Animal Health and Welfare Branch entered into a series of formal written correspondence with Linergy regarding the successful approval of a Rendering Plant under the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003.

In 2005, my Department entered into formal written correspondence with Linergy, regarding an application to the Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity (PBSP) to support an anaerobic digester plant at the Granville site. Unfortunately this application was rejected.

In May 2006, the Department's Policy Development Branch wrote to Mr Moore, Managing Director of Linergy, appraising him of the Department's progress in the development of their renewable energy policy. Subsequently, Mr Moore received a copy of the DARD Renewable Energy Action Plan.

Over recent years, a number of meetings have been held with senior Department officials and representatives of Linergy in relation to the proposed anaerobic digester and thermal processor at the Granville site.

Single Farm Payment Appeals

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Single Farm Payment appeals were lodged with the Department in the last three years; and how many of these appeals were successful. (AQW 7813/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: From the introduction of Single Farm Payment in 2005 to date, 1584 requests for a Stage 1 review and 412 requests for Stage 2 reviews have been lodged with the Department.

The information on these cases is as follows:

STAGE 1 – 2005 TO DATE

| Requests lodged | With-drawn/ received after deadline | Processed | Upheld in full | Upheld in part | Rejected |
|-----------------|--|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| 1584 | 119 | 1514 | 194 | 64 | 1133 |

STAGE 2 – 2005 TO DATE

| Requests lodged | With-drawn/ received after deadline | Cases heard by Panel | Upheld in full by Panel | Upheld in part by Panel | Rejected by Panel |
|-----------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| 412 | 34 | 267* | 49 | 14 | 184 |

* Of the 267 cases heard by the Panel, I or my predecessors have accepted 219 and rejected 28 of the Panel recommendations. 2 cases where the Panel rejected the applications have been upheld in part.

Bio-Fuels

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what incentives are being given to farmers to diversify into bio-fuels instead of grain production. (AQW 7826/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Currently the growth of crops for energy is promoted by DARD under the EU Aid for Energy Crops Scheme. Aid in the region of 45 Euro's per hectare per annum is payable for all crops which may be used in the production of energy, including liquid bio-fuels. There have been a small number of applicants in relation to growing of crops specifically for production of bio-diesel. However, the farm-gate price for cereals will make the growing of these crops a greater attraction to the arable sector than the growing of energy crops.

DARD has no other plans to introduce additional measures to support the growth of crops for use as liquid bio-fuels in the immediate future.

- DARD fund a number of programmes to support the production of renewable energy these include : Financial support under the Woodland Grant Scheme, through the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 (NIRDP Axis 1), is provided for the establishment of Short Rotation Coppice (SRC) Willow.

- Under the Programme to Build Sustainable Prosperity (PBSP), the Energy from Biomass Infrastructure Development Scheme (EBIDS) has currently allocated funding for the drying, storage and harvesting of SRC Willow.
- Axis 1 and 3 of the NIRDP also include a number of measures which may be aimed at supporting renewable energy projects and energy efficient technologies.

My Department remains committed, through the DARD Renewable Action Plan to promoting the opportunities afforded by the development of renewable energy in the agri-food sector, forestry sector and wider rural economy in balanced and sustainable way.

Local Produce in Supermarkets

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has had discussions with supermarkets based in Northern Ireland in relation to local produce and prices paid to suppliers. (AQO 3821/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Since June last year, I have met with most of the major supermarket chains and I am continuing to do so. On each occasion, my priority has been to encourage the retailers to support the sustainability of all local supply chains, including the red meat sector, and to take account of rising input costs faced by producers and processors. I have also encouraged them to increase the amount of produce sourced from the North for their stores, both locally and in Britain.

In September 2007 I issued a letter to the local supermarkets, seeking their views on the increase in the price of feed and expressing my concern about the potential knock-on effects on producer margins. As pricing is a reserved matter I cannot interfere with normal market forces. However, I will continue to work with all agri-food industry interests including supermarkets, producers and processors to seek to achieve a better deal for farmers.

Most supermarkets in the North source significant quantities of our beef. While I welcome the announcement made by Sainsbury's Supermarket to sell only locally sourced beef here, it should be noted that other retailers such as the Musgrave Group have been exclusively sourcing local beef for some time. It is my desire that the policies of Sainsbury and Musgrave's will be followed by similar action on the part of their competitors.

Two of the strands identified in taking forward the strategy developed by the Red Meat Task Force

were ‘engaging with core customers’ and ‘building strong supply chain relationships’. I believe that the Sainsbury’s announcement reflects the value of fully engaging with core customers and has achieved a positive outcome for our local farmers and processors.

I am committed to helping farmers develop strong and profitable relationships with their supply-chain partners and my Department has been proactively facilitating such communication through initiatives like the supply-chain awareness programme.

International Year of the Potato

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department did not put in place a special 2008 potato programme in the International Year of the Potato. (AQO 3921/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In 2008, my Department plans to hold a special harvest-time event to tie in with the Year of the Potato. We will promote DARD services to the potato industry and invite the private sector to participate in the celebration of how versatile the potato is as a food item.

My Department also already has a substantial programme of support to the potato industry in place which covers the areas being promoted by the “Year of the Potato”. These include: the “Chip Initiative”, which aims at maximising the use of locally grown potato varieties in the fresh chip market. CAFRE also provides assistance to the potato sector through a variety of programmes, including: 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.

Tuberculosis Testing Programme

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the reasons for the changes made to the tuberculosis testing programme; and why livestock owners wishing to have restrictions on their animals removed will have to arrange, and pay for, a private test. (AQO 3823/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In the North, TB herd testing is carried out annually in accordance with EU legislation, and my Department has a system in place to ensure that when the annual TB test is overdue, herds are restricted until the herd test has been carried out. However, my Department has identified a gap in the system in respect of the testing of individual animals that may have missed an annual herd tests because, for example, they have moved between herds. At present, animals that have missed a herd test can move freely between farms, which is an issue because untested animals may represent a higher risk and may have more potential to spread disease.

To close this gap in TB testing in the North, my Department is making a technical adjustment to the testing programme to take effect from 5 July 2008. The adjustment will mean that from 5 July any individual animals that have not been tested for TB in the previous 15 months will be restricted from leaving the farm, except directly to immediate slaughter in the North, until they have been tested. Only the individual animal that has not been tested will be restricted, not the herd as a whole. These restrictions, will contain potential risk and reduce the risk of disease spread to other herds. The restrictions will be lifted from animals once a clear TB test has been completed.

There is no requirement on livestock owners to arrange and pay for a private test in order to have restrictions removed. The test can be completed as part of the next scheduled herd test, or alternatively, livestock owners who wish to have the restriction on an animal removed sooner may prefer to have the animal tested privately at their own expense.

Electronic Identification for Cattle and Sheep

Mrs O’Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department’s response to the introduction of electronic identification for cattle and sheep. (AQO 3916/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I warmly welcome the Industry led initiative for the electronic tagging of cattle. My officials sit on the Industry Working Group to provide technical advice and support. I have also assisted the industry by ensuring that the APHIS computer database is enhanced to help facilitate electronic identification for their cattle. The Working Group has made a case to my Department seeking financial assistance to support the move to electronic tagging of cattle later this year. We are currently considering the Industry Business Case.

Unlike electronic tagging of cattle which has no legislative basis, the need to electronically tag sheep

by 31 December 2009 is enshrined in EU law. The requirement for individual traceability was agreed back in 2003, largely as a result of traceability problems associated with the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak.

I raised the introduction of electronic tagging of sheep with my Ministerial colleagues in Dublin and Britain. All recognise both the need to secure effective traceability and the unique position of the North in protecting our valuable slaughter sheep trade to the South by maintaining broadly similar identification and movement systems. I have also discussed the matter with Commissioner Fischer Boel and others within the Commission. I am aware of recent developments in the European Parliament where the EU Agriculture Committee has called upon the Commission to rethink compulsory electronic tagging of sheep. I await the Commission's response.

Rural Post Offices

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's efforts to secure retention of rural post offices. (AQO 3911/08)

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 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 last month. 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.

Fuel Costs for Fishermen

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with fishing organisations and bodies, since her statement to the Assembly, in relation to fuel costs for fishermen. (AQO 3862/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have had no discussions with the fishing industry since my statement to the Assembly on 28 April but my officials met with fishing industry representatives on 12 May to further discuss the issues arising from my statement and the support which is available to the industry. During my statement, I announced that I will be establishing a Fisheries Forum in which key stakeholders and the Department would work together to address the long-term needs of the fishing fleet, dealing particularly with the issue of how the €36 million available under the European Fisheries Fund can be used to tackle the problem of high fuel costs. I have agreed the remit and membership of this Forum and I expect its first meeting to take place in the near future. My Department has written to a wide range of stakeholders that have an interest in the fishing industry to invite their participation in the work of the Forum. I look forward to working with the Forum to ensure a profitable and sustainable future for our fishing industry.

Aquaculture and Marine Tourism in the Foyle and Carlingford Areas

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the opportunities for aquaculture and marine tourism in the Foyle and Carlingford areas. (AQO 3908/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Part II of the Foyle and Carlingford Fisheries (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 will provide the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC) with powers to license and develop aquaculture within the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. The transfer of these powers to the FCILC will allow aquaculture operations within Lough Foyle to be licensed, through the Loughs Agency, for the first time: an important step in ensuring a transparently good standard of practice in relation to husbandry, hygiene, fish welfare, disease control and environmental impact. During the recent NSMC meeting in Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral format, the Loughs Agency presented its plans for aquaculture in these areas. I believe there is significant potential for developing this sector, which is already very valuable in both the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

At its meeting in Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral format on 21 November 2007, the NSMC approved the implementation of the Loughs Agency's Marine Tourism Development Strategy for the period 2008 to 2013. The Strategy is estimated to cost of £13.64m / €20.35m, and an application for financial support has been made to the EU programme for Cross Border Territorial Co-operation. Funds are being sought also from other programmes including the International Fund and my Department's Rural Development Programme. This Strategy will work through partnerships with local and regional authorities and private bodies, providing support for projects, developing access infrastructure, project development, skills training, marketing and communications activities. When implemented, this strategy should bring significant investment and regeneration of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. In line with the Strategy, the Loughs Agency is also supporting a number of small-scale projects aimed at improving marine tourism and recreational fishing.

Funding Allocations for Council Clusters

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the funding allocations for the 'council clusters' based on deprivation. (AQO 3920/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My officials have now carried out the final calculations to allocate the first fifty million pounds of the rural development programme. The allocations have been calculated taking into account the highest areas of rural deprivation and the rural populations of each of the clusters.

The allocations are as follows:-

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| For the North East | £6,211,991 |
| For the North West | £11,259,048 |
| For Mid-Ulster | £12,721,715 |
| For the Craigavon Cluster | £9,570,714 |
| For the Down Cluster | £6,592,695 |
| For the Antrim Cluster | £1,793,712 |
| For the Lisburn Cluster | £1,850,124 |

Members should note that this is only the initial allocations. Once all the local rural strategies have been received, checked and competitively assessed the remaining fifty million will be allocated. Realistically this will be more of an even spread and clusters can expect to receive a further six to seven million pounds.

Country of Origin Labelling on Food Products

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress she has made in having the country of origin labelled on food products. (AQO 3822/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Primary responsibility for food labelling rests with the Food Standards Agency. However, my Department is responsible for the EU-wide Beef Labelling Regulations which require all operators in the supply chain down to retail level, but excluding food service, to label their beef with specified traceability and origin information. This includes the country, or countries, in which the animal was born, reared and slaughtered. These regulations are enforced by DARD inspectors in meat plants and by local authority Environmental Health Officers in retail outlets.

With regard to origin labelling of beef in the food service sector, I have not ruled out the introduction of legislation but I want to consider all of the options first. My Department is therefore working with industry representatives to develop a voluntary labelling pilot scheme involving origin labelling of beef in a number of local restaurants. The object of the pilot will be to identify potential problems and to optimise product specifications and labelling terms which are acceptable to industry and meaningful to consumers. The South has already introduced legislation in this area and officials are monitoring developments to see what lessons can be learned as it is becoming clear that there are practical difficulties surrounding enforcement. Extensive market research has also been carried out recently to determine consumer attitudes and preferences to origin labelling and local beef. The conclusions of this work along with feedback from the pilot scheme will provide an evidence base on which to take decisions on the best way forward for origin labelling of beef in the food service sector in the North.

Lisbon Treaty

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an assessment of the impact on agriculture of the Lisbon Treaty and the possible deal at the World Trade Organisation negotiations. (AQO 3919/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by all EU Member States will permit it to come into effect from 1 January 2009. The main consequence for agriculture will be that co-decision making powers

are granted to the European Parliament in relation to future reforms (after 1 January 2009) to the Common Agricultural Policy (as well as the Common Fisheries Policy). This could mean that the decision making process will take longer, but it is not possible at this stage to say how the European Parliament might influence the direction of future EU agricultural policy.

The WTO agricultural negotiations are ongoing. We need to know the full details of any final agreement before a full impact assessment can be made. However, my Department commissioned research that looked at the possible impact of earlier WTO proposals. From this research, we know that the magnitude of tariff cuts and the use of 'sensitive products' status will be key issues in determining the effects of a WTO deal on agriculture in the North. It is clear that there is a need to achieve a balanced outcome to the negotiations which will not have a disproportionate detrimental impact on agriculture and yield few tangible gains elsewhere. I have met with the Commissioner, Marian Fischer Boel, and have written to Hilary Benn MP, to express these concerns. It remains unclear if a WTO agreement will be reached in the near future and precisely what it might comprise.

Supermarkets Sourcing Local Beef

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what efforts she has made to encourage other supermarkets to follow Sainsbury's example and source all their beef locally. (AQO 3836/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since June last year, I have met with most of the major supermarket chains and I am continuing to do so. On each occasion, my priority has been to encourage the retailers to support the sustainability of all local supply chains, including the red meat sector, and to take account of rising input costs faced by producers and processors. I have also encouraged them to increase the amount of produce sourced from the North for their stores, both locally and in Britain.

In September 2007 I issued a letter to the local supermarkets, seeking their views on the increase in the price of feed and expressing my concern about the potential knock-on effects on producer margins. As pricing is a reserved matter I cannot interfere with normal market forces. However, I will continue to work with all agri-food industry interests including supermarkets, producers and processors to seek to achieve a better deal for farmers.

Most supermarkets in the North source significant quantities of our beef. While I welcome the

announcement made by Sainsbury's Supermarket to sell only locally sourced beef here, it should be noted that other retailers such as the Musgrave Group have been exclusively sourcing local beef for some time. It is my desire that the policies of Sainsbury and Musgrave's will be followed by similar action on the part of their competitors.

Two of the strands identified in taking forward the strategy developed by the Red Meat Task Force were 'engaging with core customers' and 'building strong supply chain relationships'. I believe that the Sainsbury's announcement reflects the value of fully engaging with core customers and has achieved a positive outcome for our local farmers and processors.

I am committed to helping farmers develop strong and profitable relationships with their supply-chain partners and my Department has been proactively facilitating such communication through initiatives like the supply-chain awareness programme.

Responsibility and Cost Sharing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to take forward the issue of responsibility and cost sharing. (AQO 3918/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I see the responsibility and cost sharing initiative which my Department is currently developing with industry as having the potential to transform the way in which future animal health and welfare policy is developed and implemented in the North of Ireland. Responsibility sharing will give those affected by animal health and welfare policies a very real say in how these policies are developed and implemented. This can only lead to better informed policy making and a greater buy-in from the industry.

Tough decisions will have to be made when sharing responsibility for animal health and welfare. With the threat of new diseases such as Bluetongue entering the North, we will have to look at how animal health and welfare is funded in the future and how costs can best be shared between Government and Industry.

Over the past 5 - 6 months my officials have been working with key stakeholders to see how responsibility and cost sharing could best be taken forward in the North. A public consultation will issue shortly. The consultation will seek views on how responsibility sharing could be introduced in the North and explore a long term strategy for cost sharing. The consultation will also make some specific proposals to share the costs of some Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Scrapie controls. I have kept these BSE and Scrapie proposals to a minimum; they are not as extensive as proposals in Britain.

Following this consultation I will consider the views expressed by stakeholders before making any decisions on the way forward. However, I am keen to have new responsibility structures in place sooner rather than later, to enable industry to have a real say in how the long term cost sharing strategy is developed.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Ulster Museum Exhibits

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps have been taken to exhibit items, normally on display in the Ulster Museum, while it is closed for refurbishment. (AQO 3828/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell): The Ulster Museum has given priority to the delivery of an ambitious outreach strategy making their collections accessible and maintaining and raising awareness of them during closure. It has done so in partnership with other museums, galleries, libraries, schools, colleges, universities and community groups and by providing increased 'virtual' access to its collections, services and staff.

Dog Racing

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his Department's assessment of the economic benefits of dog racing; and what plans he has to include dog racing on the list of activities officially recognised as sports. (AQO 3853/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As dog racing is not a recognised sport my Department has not assessed the economic benefits of dog racing. I have no plans to include dog racing on the list of activities officially recognised as sports. It would be for the British Greyhound Racing Board to apply for recognition.

Funding for Sport

Mrs Hanna asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions he has had with his Scottish counterpart in relation to their strategy for funding sport and the health benefits of sport. (AQO 3899/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I met with the Scottish Minister for Communities and Sport, Stewart Maxwell MSP on 1st May 2008. At this meeting we discussed the development

of "Sport Matters" the new 10 year Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland, which has highlighted the importance of sport in health promotion. In light of this my Department in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), is considering a number of targets that are intended to increase participation rates in sport in Northern Ireland. The proposed rates are consistent with the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officers in the UK in relation to healthy physical activity.

Our discussions also touched upon funding for sport, including the impact that diversion of lottery funds has had on good causes, including sport, and the importance of there being no further moves in this direction.

On 15th January 2008, the Secretary of State, James Purnell announced that there will be no further diversion from Lottery good causes to fund the 2012 Olympic Games. At the meeting of the UK Sports Cabinet, comprising the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Sports Ministers, held in Belfast on 14th May, I again had the opportunity to highlight how critical it is that this commitment is adhered to.

Shared Sports Stadium

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what his Department is doing to provide shared sports stadiums throughout Northern Ireland. (AQO 3869/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The primary example of a stadium which would operate on a shared basis is the proposal for a Multi-Sports Stadium. The preferred option of a shared 38,500-seater stadium at Maze/Long Kesh site has the full support of the governing bodies for football, rugby and Gaelic games. I anticipate that the NI Executive will consider the case for a Multi Sport Stadium in the context of the wider development of the Maze/Long Kesh site in the near future.

Last October I also published for consultation a draft "Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2007-2017." This draft Strategy proposes targets to provide multi-sport sports facilities that would be available on a shared basis across Northern Ireland. This includes the specific provision of shared spaces for sport that encourage community integration.

Rathlin Island

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline his proposals for enhancing

cultural activities for the residents of Rathlin Island.
(AQO 3898/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DRD has set up a cross-departmental group which proposes a co-ordinated public sector approach to the needs of Rathlin Island.

DCAL welcomed the opportunity to attend a meeting of the cross-departmental group, examining the issues involved in developing a central island policy for Rathlin. The department will continue to support the work of the cross-departmental group as appropriate.

Promotion of the Irish Language

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when his Department will publish a strategy to promote and enhance the Irish Language.
(AQO 3880/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: An Interdepartmental Group is developing a strategy for Northern Ireland's Indigenous Minority Languages, which includes Irish and Ulster-Scots.

I intend to bring a paper on this matter to the Executive later this year. Publication of a strategy will be dependent upon the views of the Executive, the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, the Assembly and the public.

Young People Attending Arts Performances

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what strategies are in place to increase the number of young people attending an arts performance at least once a year.
(AQO 3839/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Arts Council through its five year corporate plan, Creative Connections, is encouraging more young people to experience the arts. The Arts Council currently supports youth arts organisations such as Cahoots, Replay Productions and Big Telly Theatre Company to develop programmes and performances specifically aimed at children and young people. Another example is the Young at Art International Children's Festival (which I recently attended) and this festival attracts around 10,000 people annually.

In addition the Arts Council leads on the Creative Youth Partnerships programme which is aimed at promoting creativity among children and young people in schools and in non-formal settings. The Arts Council has a specific target in its business plan to increase participation in the programme by 2%

over current levels. Furthermore in response to the revised curriculum schools are also seeking increased opportunities for pupils to attend performances in drama, dance and music.

A major survey carried out in 2007 (Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland 2007) indicated that 93% of young people in the 16-24 age group attended an arts or cultural event in the previous year. This was a 3% increase over a similar survey carried out in 2004. Another recent survey of all Arts Council's Regularly Funded Organisations revealed that 31% of programmes were designed specifically for children and young people and this was a significant increase compared with the previous survey.

New Libraries

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made on the building of new libraries.
(AQO 3835/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The libraries capital budget has increased from £1m in 2000 to £6.1m in 2008/09. A major programme to modernise library facilities across Northern Ireland has been undertaken with new libraries opening in Strabane, Ballymena, Lisburn, Finaghy, Cookstown and Grove in Belfast. The refurbished and extended Bangor Library is nearing completion and is scheduled to open in October.

I expect that work will start this year on improved library facilities in Antrim, Dungiven, Carrickfergus and Newtown Stewart.

The public library service has an increased capital budget over the next three years of £31.6m. This will enable continued significant modernisation of the library estate.

Shared Sports Stadium

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what provision is going to be made for shared sports stadiums.
(AQO 3867/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The primary example of a stadium which would operate on a shared basis is the proposal for a Multi-Sports Stadium. The preferred option of a shared 38,500-seater stadium at Maze/Long Kesh site has the full support of the governing bodies for football, rugby and Gaelic games. I anticipate that the NI Executive will consider the case for a Multi Sport Stadium in the context of the wider development of the Maze/Long Kesh site in the near future.

Last October I also published for consultation a draft “Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2007-2017.” This draft Strategy proposes targets to provide multi-sport sports facilities that would be available on a shared basis across Northern Ireland. This includes the specific provision of shared spaces for sport that encourage community integration.

Shared Sports Stadium

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the opportunity costs of both the Maze and Belfast foreshore sites short-listed in the outline business case for the multi sports stadium. (AQO 3857/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Multi-Sports Stadium examines a range of development options including two new-build options of a two-sport 30,000 spectator stadium at the North Foreshore, Belfast and a three-sport 38,500 spectator stadium at the Maze/ Long Kesh site. The opportunity cost of the Maze site contained in the OBC is £9.9 million and for the North Foreshore it is £46.9 million.

EDUCATION

Taskforce on Protestant Working-Class Communities

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education to confirm whether she intends to continue to fund programmes recommended by the Taskforce on Protestant Working-Class Communities. (AQW 5699/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Renewing Communities was the British government’s response to the issues raised by the Taskforce on Protestant Working Class Communities and the Department for Social Development had responsibility for co-ordinating the various measures taken forward by individual departments. The programme included a range of education based pilot projects aimed at selected disadvantaged areas of Belfast.

Some of the projects have now been mainstreamed and are being funded from core education budgets. I have been able to identify a small amount of funding to allow other projects to be supported in 2008/09. Details are set out in the table below.

Additionally, the Belfast and Western Education Library Boards are undertaking targeted programmes aimed at supporting teachers and young people in

the two cities in addressing particular challenges relating to underachievement in areas of highest social disadvantage.

Tá súil agam go dtógfaidh an Bord, mar chuid dá chuid oibre, ar an bhfoghlaim ó thionscadail phiólótacha agus go gcuirfear i bhfeidhm í, de réir mar is iomchuí, agus a chuid iarrachtaí sonraithe á mbogadh chun cinn aige d’fhonn leibhéil ghnóthachta a ardú

I will expect the Board, as part of its work, to build on the learning from the pilot projects and apply it, as appropriate, as it moves forward its targeted efforts to raise levels of achievement.

| Project Title | Description | Funding arrangements |
|---|---|---|
| Supporting SEN in schools & developing management standards | A measure to offer support to schools under pressure by providing teachers with necessary Professional Qualification | Funded to 30 June 2008 - £130k |
| Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) – Special Educational Needs Support Pilot | To provide specialist training in autism, dyslexia and behavioural issues | Has been mainstreamed by BELB from April 2008 |
| Integrated Children’s Services | To support the delivery of integrated services to children in order to enhance early years provision and support other children’s development and learning activities | Has been mainstreamed by DE from 1 April 2008 |
| Healthy Schools Initiative | To promote the health and well-being in children including the development of active schools and food in schools programmes | Funded to 30 June 2008 - £80k |
| Full Service School Demonstration Project | To establish a Full Service School programme demonstrating how community access, full health and social services provision and childcare can come together. | Has been mainstreamed by DE from 1 April 2008 |

| Project Title | Description | Funding arrangements |
|---|--|---|
| Alternative Education Provision – Extension of Pathways Project | An extension of the Pathways Project, which supports young people who are excluded from or who are experiencing difficulty in mainstream education | Has been mainstreamed by BELB |
| Detached Youth Work Teams | Efforts to engaging disaffected youth in meaningful activities and divert them from becoming involved in anti-social behaviour | Funded to 30 June 2008 - £100k |
| Role Models and Mentoring | To bring successful local people into schools and youth clubs to encourage young people to aim high and to expand their view of what is possible | Funded to 30 June 2008 - £30k |
| Summer Intervention Programmes | Groups working with young people across the city will benefit from this programme which has been aimed at reducing migration towards flashpoints | Has been mainstreamed by DE from April 2008 |

Where former pilot programmes are now being mainstreamed they will be subject to appropriate equality screening and Section 75 duties.

Financial Cost of Division

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the figures on the cost of education detailed in the Deloitte report ‘Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide’, under (i) quantified costs; (ii) identified costs not quantified; and (iii) teacher training costs identified but not quantified; and to detail her plans to reduce these figures. (AQW 5745/08)

The Minister of Education: I understand that this report was a piece of independent research which was commissioned by the previous administration and as such it represents the views of Deloitte Touche.

My department’s policy supports parents’ right to choose the school they consider best meets their child’s needs including denominational and non-denominational schools. Our aim is to facilitate parental choice whilst ensuring that we make best use of the resources available to education.

Since my appointment as Minister for Education I have taken forward a significant programme of reform aimed at delivering widespread improvements within education, including the creation of the Education and Skills Authority and those aimed at improving the planning and procurement of education provision.

Is iad na gníomhaíochtaí seo, a dhírítear ar ardú caighdeán oideachasúil agus ar éascú rogha na dtuismitheoirí ar an mhodh is éifeachtaí, a sholáthróidh fíor-choigiltis a thig a shaoradh do sheirbhísí túslíne, chun sochair na bpáistí agus na ndaoine óga uilig.

It is these actions, which are aimed at raising educational standards and facilitating parental choice in the most efficient manner, that will deliver real savings which can be released to front line services for the benefit all children and young people.

Breakfast Clubs in Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools that operate breakfast clubs for their pupils to encourage healthier eating. (AQW 6588/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on specific extended school activities offered by individual schools. Reports provided by schools funded under the extended schools programme indicate that in the 2006/07 school year 192 schools operated breakfast clubs and 235 offered after-school activities. Details for 2007/08 are not yet available.

Leithdháileadh maoiniú faoin chlár scoileanna leathnaithe ar na scoileanna a leanas i dtoghlaigh parlaiminte Thuaisceart an Dúin: The following schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency have been allocated funding under the extended schools programme:

| Schools | 06/07 funding | 07/08 funding | 08/09 funding |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|
| Millisle PS | £17,451 | £17,538 | £2,297 (no longer eligible for full funding) |
| Bloomfield PS, Bangor | NIL | NIL | £16,867 (new school) |
| Kilcooley PS, Bangor | £15,550 | £15,850 | £10,934 (fully funded) |
| St Anne’s PS, Donaghadee | £6,800 | £6,400 | £1,090 (no longer eligible for full funding) |

Extended Schools Funding

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of Extended Schools funding that

has been allocated to each primary school in the Mid-Ulster constituency since the scheme began, broken down by electoral ward. (AQW 6617/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in Annex A:-

Annex A - lists the schools in the Mid Ulster constituency broken down by Electoral Ward that have qualified for extended schools funding in 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 and details the level of funding in each financial year. Figures for 2008/09 are based on all schools clustering which attracts a 40% incentive allocation.

I very much regret the fact that the level of funding provided for education this year, and the decision to discontinue the separate funding stream for the Children and Young People projects, has meant that I have not been able to maintain Extended Schools funding at 2007-08 levels.

As is the case in any budget process there are never sufficient resources to address all of the issues we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I have had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPFP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPFP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I would have liked to have maintained funding at

previous levels but with the resources available I was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;
- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary and Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE MID ULSTER CONSTITUENCY - 2007/08

| DENI Ref | School Name | Eligible/Not Eligible | Ward | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 3012233 | Tobermore PS | Not Eligible | Tobermore | | | |
| 3012234 | Ampertaine PS | Not Eligible | Upperlands | | | |
| 3012255 | Drumard PS | Not Eligible | Upperlands | | | |
| 3012267 | Magherafelt Controlled PS | No Longer Eligible | Town Parks East | 30,475 | 30,245 | 3,702 |
| 3012282 | Culnady PS | Not Eligible | Upperlands | | | |
| 3012290 | Bellaghy PS | Not Eligible | Bellaghy | | | |
| 3012291 | Maghera PS | Not Eligible | Gulladuff | | | |
| 3013703 | Kilross PS | Not Eligible | Tobermore | | | |
| 3013704 | Castledawson PS | Not Eligible | Castledawson | | | |
| 3016283 | Knockloughrim PS | Not Eligible | Knockcloghrim | | | |

| DENI Ref | School Name | Eligible/Not Eligible | Ward | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|----------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 3032011 | Altayiskey PS | Not Eligible | Draperstown | | | |
| 3032018 | St Brigid's PS Tirkane | Not Eligible | Swatragh | | | |
| 3032109 | New Row PS | Not Eligible | Castledawson | | | |
| 3032185 | St Trea's PS | Not Eligible | Ballymaguigan | | | |
| 3032197 | Knocknagin PS | Not Eligible | Lecumpher | | | |
| 3032205 | St Columba's PS (Cullion) | Not Eligible | Lecumpher | | | |
| 3032218 | Crossroads PS | Not Eligible | Upperlands | | | |
| 3032246 | Ballynease PS | Not Eligible | Bellaghy | | | |
| 3032257 | Anahorish PS | Not Eligible | Ballymaguigan | | | |
| 3032268 | St Columba's PS | Not Eligible | Draperstown | | | |
| 3032271 | St Eoghan's PS | Not Eligible | Lower Glenshane | | | |
| 3032273 | St Mary's PS | Not Eligible | Draperstown | | | |
| 3032274 | St John's PS | Not Eligible | Swatragh | | | |
| 3032275 | Greenlough PS (St Mary's) | Not Eligible | Valley (Magherafelt) | | | |
| 3032281 | St Mary's PS | Not Eligible | Bellaghy | | | |
| 3036039 | St Mary's PS (Glenview) | New School | Lower Glenshane | 0 | 0 | 17,584 |
| 3036103 | St Brigid's PS | Not Eligible | Gulladuff | | | |
| 3036292 | St Patrick's PS (Glen) | Not Eligible | Lower Glenshane | | | |
| 3036562 | Holy Family PS | No Longer Eligible | Glebe (Magherafelt) | 34,949 | 35,018 | 4,451 |
| 3042162 | Desertmartin PS | Not Eligible | Tobermore | | | |
| 3046678 | Gaelscoil Na Spéiríní | Not Eligible | Lower Glenshane | | | |
| 3066613 | Spires Integrated PS | Not Eligible | Town Parks East | | | |
| 5012280 | Moneymore PS | Not Eligible | Moneymore | | | |
| 5012615 | Ballytrea PS | Eligible | Stewartstown | 14,605 | 14,720 | 9,884 |
| 5012632 | Donaghmore PS | New School | Donaghmore (Dungannon) | 0 | 0 | 7,112 |
| 5012643 | Stewartstown PS | New School | Stewartstown | 0 | 0 | 6,160 |
| 5012649 | Coagh PS | No Longer Eligible | Coagh | 11,385 | 10,695 | 1,449 |
| 5012719 | Newmills PS | Not Eligible | Coalisland West and Newmills | | | |
| 5012726 | Cookstown PS | Not Eligible | Newbuildings | | | |
| 5013702 | Woods PS | Not Eligible | The Loop | | | |
| 5016141 | Churchtown PS | Not Eligible | Lissan | | | |
| 5016200 | Queen Elizabeth II (Pomeroy) PS | Eligible | Pomeroy | 6,800 | 5,900 | 5,936 |
| 5016221 | Orritor PS | Not Eligible | Oaklands | | | |
| 5016224 | Donaghey PS | Not Eligible | Sandholes | | | |
| 5032208 | Ballylifford PS | Not Eligible | The Loop | | | |
| 5032262 | Lissan (I) PS | Not Eligible | Lissan | | | |
| 5032585 | Edendork PS | Not Eligible | Coalisland West And Newmills | | | |

| DENI Ref | School Name | Eligible/Not Eligible | Ward | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 5032592 | St Mary's PS | Not Eligible | Donaghmore (Dungannon) | | | |
| 5032678 | St Patrick's PS | Not Eligible | Donaghmore (Dungannon) | | | |
| 5032692 | St Mary's PS | Eligible | Stewartstown | 15,813 | 16,158 | 10,304 |
| 5032693 | Crievagh PS | Not Eligible | Lissan | | | |
| 5032698 | St Brigid's PS | Not Eligible | Washing Bay | | | |
| 5032699 | St Mary's PS | Eligible | Dunnamore | 20,815 | 20,384 | 12,614 |
| 5032703 | St Peter's PS | Eligible | Ardboe | 23,230 | 22,195 | 13,328 |
| 5032713 | Derrychrin PS | Eligible | Ardboe | 16,071 | 15,381 | 10,094 |
| 5032714 | Aughmullan PS | Not Eligible | Washing Bay | | | |
| 5032717 | St Patrick's PS | New School | Killycolpy | 0 | 0 | 12,824 |
| 5032729 | St John's PS | Not Eligible | Washing Bay | | | |
| 5036031 | St Patrick's P.S. Loup | Not Eligible | The Loop | | | |
| 5036033 | St Joseph's PS | New School | Altmore | 0 | 0 | 13,118 |
| 5036047 | St Patrick's PS | No Longer Eligible | Washing Bay | 25,070 | 24,610 | 2,990 |
| 5036057 | St Malachy's PS | No Longer Eligible | Money more | 7,705 | 7,935 | 1,254 |
| 5036108 | St Joseph's PS | Eligible | Dunnamore | 11,615 | 11,730 | 8,736 |
| 5036118 | St Mary's PS | Eligible | Pomeroy | 22,626 | 21,505 | 12,824 |
| 5036120 | St Patrick's PS | Not Eligible | Money more | | | |
| 5036136 | Sacred Heart PS, Rock | Not Eligible | Oaklands | | | |
| 5036567 | Holy Trinity PS | Not Eligible | Tullagh | | | |
| 5036590 | Primate Dixon PS | Eligible | Coalisland West And Newmills | 34,420 | 34,397 | 20,944 |
| 5046637 | Gaelscoil Ui Neill | Buffer School | Coalisland North | 13,225 | 13,300 | 5,173 |
| 5066657 | Phoenix Integrated Primary School | Not Eligible | Newbuildings | | | |

Source: NI school census 2007/08

NB The buffer zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria used to allocate funding through the Extended School Programme for 2008-09.

(AQW 6619/08)

The Minister of Education: In considering how best to allocate the massive cut from £10m to £5.8m, the Department had to take account of several key factors including the need to ensure a clear and continuing focus on facilitating those schools that draw very significant numbers of their pupils from areas of social disadvantage to become and remain extended schools.

In ensuring that the reduced resources are targeted on pupils living in those wards most socially deprived the Multiple Deprivation Measure has now been used in preference to just the education domain which was used to determine eligibility in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 programmes. This change ensures support is strongly focused on the most socially disadvantaged.

It has also been decided to change the eligibility criteria for primary and special schools to reflect the fact that we now have more sophisticated data. In each of the 2006/07 and 2007/08 programmes the Department relied on a school's location, funding those schools located in NRAs or in the 30% most disadvantaged wards. This had the obvious weakness

that not all pupils attend their nearest primary or special school and in some cases a school was located just outside the eligible NRA but drew pupils from it. The Department now collects postcode data from primary and special schools which allows us to select these school sectors on the same basis as post-primaries – with reference to the area from which pupils come as opposed to the area in which the school is located. The FSME eligibility still remains at or above 37% for all schools.

Dá réir, bhí na critéir incháilitheachta a leanas i bhfeidhm don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09: Accordingly the following eligibility criteria have applied for the 2008/09 financial year;

- Primary, post-primary and special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with FSME at or above 37%;
- Nursery schools pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%

Extended Schools Budget

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the criterion for the extended schools budget. (AQW 7114/08)

The Minister of Education: In considering how best to allocate the massive cut from £10m to £5.8m, the Department had to take account of several key factors including the need to ensure a clear and continuing focus on facilitating those schools that draw very significant numbers of their pupils from areas of social disadvantage to become and remain extended schools. In ensuring that the reduced resources are targeted on pupils living in those wards most socially deprived the Multiple Deprivation Measure has now been used in preference to just the education domain which was used to determine eligibility in the 2006/07 and 2007/08 programmes. This change ensures support is strongly focused on the most socially disadvantaged.

It has also been decided to change the eligibility criteria for primary and special schools to reflect the fact that we now have more sophisticated data. In each of the 2006/07 and 2007/08 programmes the Department relied on a school's location, funding those schools located in NRAs or in the 30% most disadvantaged wards. This had the obvious weakness that not all pupils attend their nearest primary or special school and in some cases a school was located just outside the eligible NRA but drew pupils from it. The Department now collects postcode data from primary and special schools, which allows us to select these school sectors on the same basis as post-

primaries – with reference to the area from which pupils come as opposed to the area in which the school is located. The FSME eligibility still remains at or above 37% for all schools.

Dá réir, bhí na critéir incháilitheachta a leanas i bhfeidhm don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09: Accordingly the following eligibility criteria have applied for the 2008/09 financial year;

- Primary, post-primary and special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with FSME at or above 37%;
- Nursery schools pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%

Extended Schools Budget

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education how much money is available for the extended schools budget in 2009-10 and 2010-11. (AQW 7115/08)

The Minister of Education: Allocations for the extended schools programme in 2009-10 and 2010-11 have not yet been determined. They will be agreed in the budget for each year on the basis of relevant factors at that time.

As you know I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the current shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chlár thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education which primary and post-primary schools in the East Derry/Londonderry and Foyle constituencies were affected by the recent decision in relation to the extended schools programme. (AQW 7182/08)

The Minister of Education: The attached Annex lists the funding implications for primary and post-primary schools previously and currently eligible, in the East Derry and Foyle constituencies, for extended schools funding in 2008/09.

The resources previously available under the Children and Young People funding Package (CYFPF) has unfortunately been greatly reduced.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the things we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained and inescapable pressures covered. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYFPF was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYFPF funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;
- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary, Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the

endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

ANNEX A

| Ref No | School Name | Parliamentary Constituency | Status of Extended School |
|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 3033709 | St John's PS | East Derry | Exiting |
| 3016252 | Ballysally PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 3016052 | Harpurs Hill PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 3012264 | Millburn PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 3012237 | Killowen PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2066665 | Roevalley Integrated PS | East Derry | Buffer |
| 2036458 | Gortnaghey PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2036187 | St John's PS, Dernaflaw | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2036149 | St Finlough's PS | East Derry | Exiting |
| 2036085 | St Peter's & St Paul's PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2033706 | Faughanvale PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2032287 | Termoncanice PS | East Derry | Exiting |
| 2032263 | St Canice's PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2016426 | Limavady Central PS | East Derry | Exiting |
| 2012276 | Burnfoot PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2012058 | Largy PS | East Derry | Continuing |
| 2066558 | Oakgrove Integrated PS | Foyle | New |
| 2052035 | Groarty Integrated PS | Foyle | New |
| 2046646 | Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036581 | St Patricks PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036574 | Bunscoil Cholmcille | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036555 | St Eugene's PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036475 | Longtower PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036473 | St Eithne's PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036472 | Holy Family PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036465 | Chapel Road PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036461 | St Theresa's PS, Lenamore | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036288 | Good Shepherd PS & NS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036259 | Trench Road PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036227 | St Pauls PS, Slievemore | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036143 | St Oliver Plunkett PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036142 | St Brigid's PS | Foyle | Continuing |

| Ref No | School Name | Parliamentary Constituency | Status of Extended School |
|---------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2036084 | Steelstown Vol Maintained PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036069 | St Anne's PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2036032 | St John's PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2033707 | Mullabuoy PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2032212 | Glendermott PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2030381 | Holy Child PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2030373 | Nazareth House PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2030364 | Rosemount PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2016564 | Fountain PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2016203 | Lisnagelvin PS | Foyle | Exiting |
| 2016124 | Ashlea PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2016071 | Greenhaw PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2012261 | Newbuildings PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2012227 | Drumahoe PS | Foyle | Exiting |
| 2012095 | Ballougry PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2010382 | Ebrington Controlled PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2010380 | Derry Model PS | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230081 | St Mary's College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230131 | St Joseph's Secondary | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230181 | St Peter's High School | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230188 | St Cecilia's College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230225 | St Brigid's College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2230254 | Immaculate Conception College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2260276 | Oakgrove Integrated College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2420052 | Thornhill College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2420054 | St Columb's College | Foyle | Continuing |
| 2420287 | Lumen Christi College | Foyle | New |

Schools in red will exit in June 08

Schools in black will Continue 08/09

Schools in green are now eligible for extended schools funding

School in blue is in the Buffer Zone

NB The Buffer Zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what is the criteria for the appeals mechanism in relation to the recent decision on the Extended Schools Programme. (AQW 7188/08)

The Minister of Education: The Extended Schools was launched in June 2006 as part of the Children and Young People Funding Package with £10m made available in each of the 2006/07 and 2007/08 financial years.

It was envisaged that the programme would be a key vehicle for contributing to the strands across the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People and accordingly our understanding was that when funding was allocated to DE during direct rule that it was to be mainstreamed i.e. a baseline allocation and not a short term programme. However contrary to that understanding the funding for the programme was removed from the DE baseline from 2008-09 onwards and as a consequence I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a substantial reduction from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents. I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

Tá £5.826m de mhaoiniú le fáil don bhliain airgeadais 2008/09 do Scoileanna Sínte; is laghdú 40% é sin i gcomparáid le maoiniú na bliana 2007/08. Tiocfaidh an laghdú sin in éifeacht ó 1 Aibreán 2008.

Extended Schools Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area will no longer qualify for extended schools funding in 2008-2009. (AQW 7196/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area that qualified for extended schools funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

The Extended Schools programme will continue to be funded during the 2008/09 financial year. The

amount previously available under the Children and Young People funding Package (CYPFP) has unfortunately been greatly reduced.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the things we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained and inescapable pressures covered. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPFP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPFP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;
- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary, Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the

endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

ANNEX 1

| School Reference Number | South Eastern Education & Library Board –Schools eligible for Extended School funding – 2006/07 & 2007/08 |
|-------------------------|--|
| 4010743 | Largymore PS |
| 4010885 | Tonagh PS |
| 4011632 | Cregagh PS |
| 4013013 | Belvoir Park PS |
| 4013038 | Tullycarnet PS |
| 4013309 | Derriaghy PS |
| 4013334 | Knockmore PS |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley PS |
| 4016083 | West Winds PS |
| 4016144 | Old Warren PS |
| 4031384 | Convent of Mercy PS |
| 4031644 | St Patrick's Boys' PS |
| 4033306 | St Aloysius PS |
| 4036081 | St Luke's PS |
| 4036134 | St Mark's PS |
| 4036182 | St Colmcille's PS |
| 4036285 | The Good Shepherd PS |
| 4036480 | St Kieran's PS |
| 4036591 | Our Lady Queen of Peace PS |
| 4036618 | Christ The Redeemer PS |
| 4046600 | Scoil Na Fuiseoige |
| 4136286 | Good Shepherd Nursery School |
| 4136368 | St Luke's Nursery School |
| 4136481 | St Kieran's Nursery School |
| 4136606 | St Therese Nursery School |
| 4210030 | Lisnasharragh High School (3mths, Closing) |
| 4210051 | Lisnagarvey High School |
| 4210194 | Dunmurry High School |
| 4210262 | Dundonald High School |
| 4230223 | St Colm's High School |
| 4310008 | Beechlawm Special School |
| 4310019 | Ardmore House Special School |
| 4316022 | Brookfield Special School |
| 4316273 | Longstone Special School |

ANNEX 2

| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting the Extended Schools Programme in 2008/09 |
|-------------------------|---|
| 4010762 | Brownlee PS |
| 4010807 | Lisburn Central PS |
| 4011373 | Kirkistown PS |
| 4011462 | Castle Gardens PS |
| 4011488 | Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert) |
| 4011507 | Portavogie PS |
| 4011587 | Dundonald PS |
| 4011588 | Comber PS |
| 4011634 | Killyleagh PS |
| 4011646 | Victoria PS |
| 4011657 | Lisnasharragh PS |
| 4011681 | Millisle PS |
| 4013308 | Fort Hill PS |
| 4016004 | Londonderry PS |
| 4016235 | Downpatrick PS |
| 4016503 | Brooklands PS |
| 4030897 | St Joseph's PS |
| 4031671 | St Patrick's PS |
| 4033008 | St Anne's PS |
| 4033017 | St Finian's PS |
| 4033036 | St Mary's PS |
| 4036036 | St Malachy's PS |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's PS |
| 4036530 | St Mary's PS |
| 4050618 | Hilden Integrated PS |
| 4051601 | Portaferry Integrated PS |
| 4110035 | Newtownards Nursery School |
| 4116018 | Barbour Nursery School |
| 4116176 | Downpatrick Nursery School |
| 4116216 | King's Road Nursery School |
| 4116240 | Castlereagh Nursery School |
| 4116307 | Glenbrook Nursery School |
| 4136211 | St Colmcille's Nursery School |
| 4136212 | St Patrick's Convent Nursery |
| 4136317 | Holy Trinity Nursery School |
| 4230165 | St Patrick's High School |
| 4230224 | De La Salle Secondary School |
| 4310013 | Killard House Special School |

| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting the Extended Schools Programme in 2008/09 |
|-------------------------|---|
| 4316516 | Knockevin Special School |

Extended Schools Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area qualified for extended schools funding in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. (AQW 7197/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board Area that qualified for extended schools funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

The Extended Schools programme will continue to be funded during the 2008/09 financial year. The amount previously available under the Children and Young People funding Package (CYPFP) has unfortunately been greatly reduced.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the things we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained and inescapable pressures covered. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPFP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPFP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;

- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary, Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

ANNEX 1

| School Reference Number | South Eastern Education & Library Board –Schools eligible for Extended School funding – 2006/07 & 2007/08 |
|-------------------------|--|
| 4010743 | Largymore PS |
| 4010885 | Tonagh PS |
| 4011632 | Cregagh PS |
| 4013013 | Belvoir Park PS |
| 4013038 | Tullycarnet PS |
| 4013309 | Derriaghy PS |
| 4013334 | Knockmore PS |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley PS |
| 4016083 | West Winds PS |
| 4016144 | Old Warren PS |
| 4031384 | Convent Of Mercy PS |
| 4031644 | St Patrick's Boys' PS |
| 4033306 | St Aloysius PS |
| 4036081 | St Luke's PS |
| 4036134 | St Mark's PS |
| 4036182 | St Colmcille's PS |
| 4036285 | The Good Shepherd PS |
| 4036480 | St Kieran's PS |
| 4036591 | Our Lady Queen Of Peace PS |

| School Reference Number | South Eastern Education & Library Board –Schools eligible for Extended School funding – 2006/07 & 2007/08 |
|-------------------------|--|
| 4036618 | Christ The Redeemer PS |
| 4046600 | Scoil Na Fuiseoige |
| 4136286 | Good Shepherd Nursery School |
| 4136368 | St Luke's Nursery School |
| 4136481 | St Kieran's Nursery School |
| 4136606 | St Therese Nursery School |
| 4210030 | Lisnasharragh High School (3mths, Closing) |
| 4210051 | Lisnagarvey High School |
| 4210194 | Dunmurry High School |
| 4210262 | Dundonald High School |
| 4230223 | St Colm's High School |
| 4310008 | Beechlaw Special School |
| 4310019 | Ardmore House Special School |
| 4316022 | Brookfield Special School |
| 4316273 | Longstone Special School |

ANNEX 2

| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting the Extended Schools Programme in 2008/09 |
|-------------------------|---|
| 4010762 | Brownlee PS |
| 4010807 | Lisburn Central PS |
| 4011373 | Kirkistown PS |
| 4011462 | Castle Gardens PS |
| 4011488 | Victoria PS (Ballyhalbert) |
| 4011507 | Portavogie PS |
| 4011587 | Dundonald PS |
| 4011588 | Comber PS |
| 4011634 | Killyleagh PS |
| 4011646 | Victoria PS |
| 4011657 | Lisnasharragh PS |
| 4011681 | Millisle PS |
| 4013308 | Fort Hill PS |
| 4016004 | Londonderry PS |
| 4016235 | Downpatrick PS |
| 4016503 | Brooklands PS |
| 4030897 | St Joseph's PS |
| 4031671 | St Patrick's PS |
| 4033008 | St Anne's PS |
| 4033017 | St Finian's PS |

| School Reference Number | Schools Exiting the Extended Schools Programme in 2008/09 |
|-------------------------|---|
| 4033036 | St Mary's PS |
| 4036036 | St Malachy's PS |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's PS |
| 4036530 | St Mary's PS |
| 4050618 | Hilden Integrated PS |
| 4051601 | Portaferry Integrated PS |
| 4110035 | Newtownards Nursery School |
| 4116018 | Barbour Nursery School |
| 4116176 | Downpatrick Nursery School |
| 4116216 | King's Road Nursery School |
| 4116240 | Castlereagh Nursery School |
| 4116307 | Glenbrook Nursery School |
| 4136211 | St Colmcille's Nursery School |
| 4136212 | St Patrick's Convent Nursery |
| 4136317 | Holy Trinity Nursery School |
| 4230165 | St Patrick's High School |
| 4230224 | De La Salle Secondary School |
| 4310013 | Killard House Special School |
| 4316516 | Knockevin Special School |

Qualified Teachers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 5 years, (i) the number of newly qualified primary school teachers; (ii) the percentage of newly qualified teachers that this represents and (iii) the number of these newly qualified teachers that were offered (a) a permanent full-time position; (b) a permanent part-time position; (c) a temporary full-time position; and (d) a temporary part-time position, within the primary school sector. (AQW 7210/08)

The Minister of Education: The number of (i) newly qualified primary school teachers and (ii) the percentage of newly qualified teachers that this represents from Higher Education Institutions in the north of Ireland for the last five academic years are shown in the table below:

| | | |
|---------|-----|-----|
| 2002/03 | 390 | 50% |
| 2003/04 | 390 | 50% |
| 2004/05 | 410 | 50% |
| 2005/06 | 405 | 50% |
| 2006/07 | 405 | 50% |

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5. The latest available data are for 2006/07.

Ní choinníonn an Roinn an t-eolas atá á iarraidh ag (iii) maidir le “tairiscintí” ar phoist mhúinteoireachta. Is é gnó na n-údarás fostaíochta uilig iad tairiscintí ar phoist fostaíochta.

The Department does not hold the information requested at (iii) regarding “offers” of teaching positions. Offers of employment positions would be a matter for all of the employing authorities.

Public-Private Partnerships for School Buildings

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education what provisions are being made for Private Finance Initiatives/Public Private Partnership contracts for school buildings in order to make these premises available for community use on a basis other than market value. (AQW 7226/08)

The Minister of Education: Áitribh scoile a fuarthas faoi Chomhpháirtíocht Phríobháideach Phoiblí cuirtear ar fáil iad taobh amuigh d’uaireanta scoile do thríú páirtithe ar ráta a shocraítear sa chonradh CPP.

School premises procured under Public Private Partnership are made available outside of school hours to third parties at a rate determined in the PPP contract.

Third party use is subject to agreement of the relevant school authority and the PPP operator. Organisations or groups using school facilities for activities which are not related to the organisation of the school and the delivery of the

curriculum would normally pay the full economic cost for the use of such facilities. However, it may be possible for groups to negotiate a reduced rate for such activities with the operator.

English as a Second Language

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what is the budget allocation for teaching English as a Second Language in primary and secondary schools in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 7227/08)

The Minister of Education: In the October 2007 school census, a total of 7,994 children and young people were recorded as having a first language other than English. Of those children, a total of 5,665 were identified as having English as an Additional Language (EAL), in other words, significant difficulty

with the English language and requiring additional assistance.

My Department is providing various aspects of funding to make sure all EAL pupils receive support.

Through the Common Funding Formula, an additional EAL funding factor is provided in a school's annual budget for each pupil it has recorded as having EAL. In 2008/09, this additional funding is £983 per EAL pupil, which gives a total of £5.5 million going directly into schools. It is up to a school's principal and the board of governors to decide how best to use this funding and in practice, schools are using it in a variety of ways for the benefit of the EAL pupils in their schools.

Mar a leanas atá miondealú an fhachtóra mhaoinithe seo chun tacaíochta na ndaltaí seo a bhfuil EAL acu i mbunscoileanna agus in iar-bhunscoileanna i dtoghlaigh parlaiminte Oirthear Bhéal Feirste 2008/09: The breakdown of this funding factor for the support of those pupils who have EAL in primary and post-primary schools in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency in 2008/09 is as follows:

- Primary: £140,569
- Post-Primary: £132,705

In addition to the Common Funding Formula, my Department is funding the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) with just over £1million in 2008/09. This regional service, which was set up in April 2007, has brought together services across the five Education and Library Boards to strengthen and improve support for all EAL pupils, their parents and teaching staff, primarily working through schools.

A number of new services such as interpreting, translating and a multi-lingual website have been set up through the IDS and are available across the north of Ireland.

In January 2008, Diversity Coordinators, who have expertise in the area of EAL, were recruited by the new service and posted in cluster groups of schools to give additional support and guidance to teaching staff. There is one Diversity Coordinator posted in the East Belfast area, as well as an Assistant Advisory Officer. This initiative facilitates capacity building by working with all schools on whole school and classroom issues, which includes language support.

In addition to this, I launched a north/south Diversity toolkit for primary school teachers in December 2007. An extensive training programme for all teachers within primary schools has been undertaken in relation to this toolkit. The development of further toolkits for nursery, post-primary and special schools is planned for the future.

Primary Schools in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what is the strategic plan for the future provision of the primary school estate in East Belfast parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7229/08)

The Minister of Education: The planning of the school estate is initiated in the first instance by the relevant school authorities. The South Eastern Education and Library Board, as part of its strategic review of the school estate within its responsibility, identified the need for some rationalisation of primary provision along the Castlereagh dual carriageway area, though there are no current proposals. The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) last year published a consultation document in which it examined the position of the primary school estate within its domain. The Board has held a series of consultations about the schools estate with a number of primary schools though no proposals have been confirmed as yet.

- (i) Tá na tograí seo a leanas de chuid BOLB ar siúl: The following BELB projects are in progress: Sydenham Infants and Strand PS's are amalgamating from September 2008 and the new school will be known as Victoria Park Primary School.
- (ii) A replacement school for Orangefield Primary School is currently under construction. The new school is due to open in April 2009.

CCMS has indicated a potential need for a capital scheme for St Joseph's PS though the Department has not yet carried out an assessment to confirm the need for a scheme.

Applications to Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education how many applicants to integrated (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, were (a) successful; and (b) unsuccessful, in each academic year since 1997-98. (AQW 7233/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn ach taifid do na scoilbhlianta 2002/03 – 2007-2008. Tá líon na n-iarratasóirí do (i) bhunscoileanna imeasctha; agus (ii) d'iar-bhunscoileanna imeasctha, (a) ar éirigh leo; agus (b) nár éirigh leo, i ngach bliain acadúil ó 2003/2004, mionsonraithe sna táblaí faoi iamh.

The Department's only holds records for the school years 2002/03 – 2007-2008. The number of applicants to integrated (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, were (a) successful; and (b) unsuccessful, in

each academic year since 2003/04 are detailed in the attached tables.

(i) INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

| | Boards | Total Applications | (a) Successful Applicants | (b) Unsuccessful Applicants |
|---------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2002/03 | BELB | 114 | 114 | 0 |
| | WELB | 115 | 111 | 4 |
| | NEELB | 188 | 162 | 26 |
| | SEELB | 291 | 271 | 20 |
| | SELB | 167 | 153 | 14 |
| | Total | 875 | 811 | 64 |
| 2003/04 | BELB | 115 | 115 | 0 |
| | WELB | 111 | 110 | 1 |
| | NEELB | 248 | 226 | 22 |
| | SEELB | 315 | 297 | 18 |
| | SELB | 176 | 158 | 18 |
| | Total | 965 | 906 | 59 |
| 2004/05 | BELB | 115 | 115 | 0 |
| | WELB | 153 | 131 | 22 |
| | NEELB | 223 | 207 | 16 |
| | SEELB | 313 | 302 | 11 |
| | SELB | 194 | 179 | 15 |
| | Total | 998 | 934 | 64 |
| 2005/06 | BELB | 99 | 99 | 0 |
| | WELB | 131 | 131 | 0 |
| | NEELB | 254 | 233 | 21 |
| | SEELB | 321 | 319 | 2 |
| 2005/06 | SELB | 192 | 187 | 5 |
| | Total | 997 | 969 | 28 |
| 2006/07 | BELB | 109 | 108 | 1 |
| | WELB | 174 | 162 | 12 |
| | NEELB | 256 | 231 | 25 |
| | SEELB | 343 | 324 | 19 |
| | SELB | 191 | 183 | 8 |
| | Total | 1073 | 1008 | 65 |

| | Boards | Total Applications | (a) Successful Applicants | (b) Unsuccessful Applicants |
|---------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2007/08 | BELB | 114 | 114 | 0 |
| | WELB | 159 | 153 | 6 |
| | NEELB | 274 | 245 | 29 |
| | SEELB | 361 | 342 | 19 |
| | SELB | 205 | 190 | 15 |
| | Total | 1113 | 1044 | 69 |

(II) INTEGRATED POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

| | Boards | Total Applications | (a) Successful Applicants | (b) Unsuccessful Applicants |
|---------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 2002/03 | BELB | 353 | 247 | 106 |
| | WELB | 322 | 269 | 53 |
| | NEELB | 543 | 346 | 197 |
| | SEELB | 1033 | 638 | 395 |
| | SELB | 262 | 238 | 24 |
| | Total | 2513 | 1738 | 775 |
| 2003/04 | BELB | 377 | 249 | 128 |
| | WELB | 264 | 255 | 9 |
| | NEELB | 532 | 349 | 183 |
| | SEELB | 931 | 635 | 296 |
| | SELB | 337 | 256 | 81 |
| | Total | 2441 | 1744 | 697 |
| 2004/05 | BELB | 318 | 271 | 47 |
| | WELB | 295 | 275 | 20 |
| | NEELB | 543 | 353 | 190 |
| | SEELB | 802 | 639 | 163 |
| | SELB | 248 | 224 | 24 |
| | Total | 2206 | 1762 | 444 |
| 2005/06 | BELB | 237 | 235 | 2 |
| | WELB | 274 | 259 | 15 |
| 2005/06 | NEELB | 462 | 321 | 141 |
| | SEELB | 668 | 534 | 134 |
| | SELB | 274 | 253 | 21 |
| | Total | 1915 | 1602 | 313 |

| | Boards | Total Applications | (a) Successful Applicants | (b) Unsuccessful Applicants |
|---------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2006/07 | BELB | 318 | 270 | 48 |
| | WELB | 327 | 267 | 60 |
| | NEELB | 546 | 372 | 174 |
| | SEELB | 813 | 623 | 190 |
| | SELB | 304 | 249 | 55 |
| | Total | 2308 | 1781 | 527 |
| 2007/08 | BELB | 242 | 242 | 0 |
| | WELB | 352 | 296 | 56 |
| | NEELB | 565 | 358 | 207 |
| | SEELB | 874 | 629 | 245 |
| | SELB | 240 | 211 | 29 |
| | Total | 2273 | 1736 | 537 |

Home Schooling

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many reports, from Education Welfare Officers to the Curriculum Advisory Support Service in relation to concerns about the adequacy of the education provision to home schooled children, have been made in each of the last five years, and what action was taken by the CASS in response to those reports. (AQW 7261/08)

The Minister of Education: Tuigim, ó na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, gur mar seo a leanas atá líon na dtuairiscí ón tSeirbhís Leasa Oideachais chuig Seirbhís Chomhairleach Taca an Churaclaim maidir le leorgacht sholáthar an oideachais do pháistí a fhaigheann oideachas sa bhaile: I understand, from the Education and Library Boards, that the number of reports from the Education Welfare Service to the Curriculum Advisory Support Service in relation to the adequacy of education provision to home schooled children, is as follows:

| | No of Reports |
|---------|---------------|
| 2003/04 | n/a |
| 2004/05 | 2 |
| 2005/06 | 5 |
| 2006/07 | 3 |
| 2007/08 | 1 |

I am sure you will appreciate that, in the interests of confidentiality, I am not in a position to give you details of individual cases. However, when such reports have been made, Boards assessed the

provision, offered advice, guidance and resources or sought a return to school.

Mobile Classrooms in Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last 3 years, the cost of repairs to mobile classrooms, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7263/08)

The Minister of Education: An t-eolas ar chostas cóiríúcháin ar sheomraí ranga ní dhéanann sé idirdhealú idir costais ranganna soghluaiste agus buana.

The information on costs of repairs to classrooms does not separately identify between the costs of repair to mobile and permanent classrooms.

Home Schooling

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education if she intends to bring forward any proposals to obligate parents to inform the relevant Library Board or her Department of their intention to home educate. (AQW 7264/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon phleananna agam faoi láthair moltaí ar bith a thabhairt chun tosaigh a chuirfeadh d'fhiacha ar thuismitheoirí a insint don Bhord ábhartha Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ná don Roinn go bhfuil rún acu oideachas sa bhaile a thabhairt.

I have no plans at present to bring forward any proposals to obligate parents to inform the relevant Education and Library Board or the Department of their intention to home educate.

Hearing Aid Training for Teachers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what training is provided to teachers on the use of (i) radio hearing aids; and (ii) other hearing aids, when teaching deaf and hard of hearing children. (AQW 7270/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that there is no distinction between the training programme provided to staff who support children using radio hearing aids and those who support children wearing other hearing aids including speech processors for children with cochlear implants. The format of the training is essentially the same with the differences being in the information given relating to the specific type of hearing aid being used by the pupil.

The training programme which is delivered by a qualified Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) and in some instances, where appropriate, jointly with a member of the Cochlear Implant Service to both class teachers and classroom assistants generally includes elements of the following:-

- Information regarding the pupil's hearing loss and the educational implications;
- Information relating to the pupil's specific hearing aid as follows:-
 1. type ie analogue, digital, bone anchored, speech processors for use with cochlear implant, radio hearing aid;
 2. how it works (settings and programming);
 3. the difference it will make to the child/young person's level of hearing ie benefits of wearing the hearing aid;
 4. ways of encouraging the child to wear his/her hearing aid;
 5. teaching strategies to enhance the use of hearing and radio aids;
 6. how to check that the ear mould is fitted correctly (if appropriate) and that the hearing aid is working properly; and
 7. managing, caring for and maintaining the hearing/radio aid. (A checklist is provided to school staff regarding this).
- Information indicating the features of a good listening environment.

Furthermore a range of information/leaflets relating to Hearing Aids is available from the qualified Teacher of the Deaf who carries out checks on the child's hearing aid on an ongoing basis within the school environment using a test box to ensure that the radio aid and hearing aid are balanced.

The Teacher of the Deaf also maintains links with the Audiology Department in the local Hospital regarding the setting of the hearing aids and communicates relevant information to the class teacher/classroom assistant as well as with manufacturers of a range of Hearing Aids from whom they regularly receive training and updates regarding new products on the market.

Do na daltaí sin a fuair córais Soundfield leis an eolas ar an timpeallacht foghlama a mhéadú, tugtar oiliúint maidir lena n-úsáid.

For those pupils who have been provided with Soundfield systems to enhance the learning environment information, training is given regarding the use of these.

Qualified Peripatetic Teachers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many teachers of deaf children are qualified peripatetic teachers, and how many are not.

(AQW 7271/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas seo á choinneáil ag an Roinn in áit lárnach; ach maidir le ceisteanna den chineál seo roimhe, rinneadh teagmháil leis na 5 Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus le Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil (CSCC) a fhostaíonn múinteoirí.

The Department does not hold this information centrally however in relation to similar previous questions contact was made with the 5 Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) who employ teachers.

The Chief Executives of the Southern and Western Education and Library Boards advised that there are 4 and 7 peripatetic teachers respectively who are employed and qualified in Sensory Impaired Services.

The Chief Executives of BELB, NEELB and SEELB the other remaining Education and Library Boards also CCMS have advised that they do not hold information that would allow them to identify any teachers qualified as sign language interpreters.

Primary Schools

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education for her plans for the future of (i) Fane Street Primary School, Belfast; (ii) Donegall Road Primary School, Belfast; and (iii) Blythefield Primary School, Belfast.

(AQW 7283/08)

The Minister of Education: These are controlled schools within the remit of the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).

Tá comhairle tugtha ag BOLB gur tharla plé le gach ceann de na scoileanna seo, ag iarraidh a dtuairimí ar an bhealach chun tosaigh don oideachas sa cheantar seo de Bhéal Feirste. Níor tháinig an Bord go fóill ar aon chinneadh faoin bhealach chun tosaigh.

The BELB has advised that there have been discussions with each of these schools, seeking their views on the way forward for education in this area of Belfast. No decisions have yet been reached by the Board on the way forward.

Breakfast Clubs in Schools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency

receive funding for after-school or breakfast clubs, and how much funding is received in each case. (AQW 7285/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department does not collect information on specific extended school activities offered by individual schools. Reports provided by schools funded under the extended schools programme indicate that in the 2006/07 school year 192 schools operated breakfast clubs and 235 offered after-school activities. Details for 2007/08 are not yet available.

Leithdháileadh maoiniú faoin chlár scoileanna leathnaithe ar na scoileanna a leanas i dtoghlaigh parlaiminte Thuaisceart an Dúin: The following schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency have been allocated funding under the extended schools programme:

| Schools | 06/07 funding | 07/08 funding | 08/09 funding |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|
| Millisle PS | £17,451 | £17,538 | £2,297 (no longer eligible for full funding) |
| Bloomfield PS, Bangor | NIL | NIL | £16,867 (new school) |
| Kilcooley PS, Bangor | £15,550 | £15,850 | £10,934 (fully funded) |
| St Anne's PS, Donaghadee | £6,800 | £6,400 | £1,090 (no longer eligible for full funding) |

Renewed Communities Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education how much Renewed Communities Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7294/08)

The Minister of Education: Liostaíonn an Iarscríbhinn a leanas na bunscoileanna i dTuaisceart agus in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste a fuair maoiniú faoin chlár Athnuachana Pobal ona thionscnamh in 2006/07 go 2007/08; níl figiúirí do scoileanna aonair do 2008/09 fós ar fáil.

The attached Annex lists the primary schools in North and West Belfast that received funding under the Renewing Communities programme from its inception in 2006/07 to 2007/08, figures for individual schools for 2008/09 are not yet available.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education (i) how many visits she has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of

transportation used per trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation used on each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7302/08)

The Minister of Education: Ón chineachadh, thug mé 17 cuairt taobh amuigh de thuaisceart na hÉireann.

Since devolution I have made 17 visits outside the north of Ireland.

- 12 journeys were made using the Ministerial car with no accommodation costs,
- 1 journey was made using the Ministerial car with 5 hotel rooms booked totalling £624.30 (this includes costs for 3 DE officials and Ministers driver)
- 1 journey was made using the Ministerial car with 4 hotel rooms booked totalling £300.00 (this includes costs for 2 DE officials and Ministers driver)

details of the remaining 3 journeys were as follows:

- 5 return flights @ £56.60 per person and 5 hotel rooms @ 120euros per room (this includes costs for 4 DE officials)
- 3 return flights @ £68.20 per person and 3 hotel rooms @ £93.61 per room (this includes costs for 2 DE officials)
- 1 return flight @ £63.50

Sign Language

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many teachers of deaf children have qualifications in sign language, and at what level. (AQW 7305/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas seo á choinneáil ag an Roinn in áit lárnach; ach maidir le ceisteanna den chineál seo roimhe, rinneadh teagmháil leis na 5 Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus le Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil (CSCC) a fhostaíonn múinteoirí.

The Department does not hold this information centrally however in relation to similar previous questions contact was made with the 5 Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) who employ teachers.

The Chief Executives of the Southern and Western Education and Library Boards advised that there are 4 and 7 peripatetic teachers respectively who are employed and qualified in Sensory Impaired Services.

The Chief Executives of BELB, NEELB and SEELB the other remaining Education and Library Boards also CCMS have advised that they do not hold

information that would allow them to identify any teachers qualified as sign language interpreters.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education how many community and voluntary groups her Department is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7314/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education has allocated funding directly to 36 community and voluntary groups to date in the 2008/09 year.

Liostaíonn an tábla thíos na tograí aonair atá ag fáil maoinithe, méid an mhaoinithe agus a suíomh: The table below lists the individual projects in receipt of funding, the amount of funding and their location:

| Project | £ | Location |
|--|---------|-----------------|
| Antrim Business Education Partnership | 680 | Antrim |
| Ballymena Business Education Partnership | 3,474 | Ballymena |
| Banbridge Business Education Partnership | 2,371 | Hillsborough |
| Belfast YMCA | 46,405 | Belfast |
| BESS Business Education Partnership | 7,400 | Belfast |
| Bytes Project – Community Relations | 25,560 | Belfast |
| Bytes Project – Youth | 275,000 | Belfast & Derry |
| Children's Project NI | 70,942 | Belfast |
| Coleraine Business Education Partnership | 15,993 | Coleraine |
| Community Relations in Schools | 135,914 | Belfast |
| Co-operation Ireland | 33,857 | Belfast |
| Corrymeela | 52,648 | Belfast |
| Craigavon Business Education Partnership | 4,750 | Portadown |
| Creggan Education & Research Services | 36,454 | Omagh |
| Down Business Education Partnership | 9,363 | Castlewellan |
| Dungannon & Cookstown Business Education Partnership | 17,872 | Dungannon |
| Forthspring Inter-Community Group | 23,300 | Belfast |
| Harmony Community Trust | 59,209 | Strangford |
| Kids Stop1 | 8,000 | Donaghmore |

| Project | £ | Location |
|--|---------|-----------|
| Kilcranny House | 18,924 | Coleraine |
| Lisburn Business Education Partnership | 9,074 | Dunmurry |
| Millennium Volunteers | 332,000 | Belfast |
| Nerve Centre (The) | 11,612 | Derry |
| NI Children's Enterprise | 26,321 | Belfast |
| NI Children's Holidays Scheme | 52,505 | Belfast |
| NI Council for Integrated Education | 39,673 | Belfast |
| NIPPA - Early Years Organisation | 64,273 | Belfast |
| North Belfast Business Education Partnership | 7,564 | Belfast |
| Omagh, Strabane & Fermanagh Business Education Partnership | 6,375 | Omagh |
| Panarts | 37,238 | Belfast |
| Prince's Trust | 176,000 | Belfast |
| Public Achievement | 32,114 | Belfast |
| REACT | 27,487 | Kilkeel |
| Spirit Of Enniskillen Trust | 117,221 | Belfast |
| Verbal Arts Centre (NI) Ltd. | 74,796 | Derry |
| Youth Link | 69,702 | Belfast |

1 Funded until June 2008

Bookstart Scheme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what financial assistance has been offered or given to the Bookstart scheme by her Department. (AQW 7317/08)

The Minister of Education: Le linn na tréimhse 2002/06 sholáthair an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú iomlán £390k do scéim Bookstart. Tá maoiniú breise á bhreithniú mar chuid den straitéis leasaithe litearthachta.

During the period 2002/06 the Department of Education provided total funding of £390k for the Bookstart scheme. Further funding is being considered as part of the revised literacy strategy.

School Improvement Programme Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education what School Improvement Programme funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7332/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá mionsonraí ar mhaoiniú ón Chlár Feabhsaithe Scoileanna a fuair

scoileanna i dTuaisceart agus in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste i ngach ceann de na 3 bliana a ghabh tharainn leagtha amach in Iarscibhinní A agus B faoi seach

Details of School Improvement Programme funding received by schools in North and West Belfast in each of the last 3 years is set out in Annexes A and B respectively.

**ANNEX A
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTH BELFAST**

| School | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Currie PS | £82450 | 0 | 0 |
| Seaview PS | £2000 | £3600 | 0 |
| Carr's Glen PS | 0 | £6000 | £2760 |
| Grove PS | £45000 | £50000 | £9000 |
| Edenbrooke PS | £42700 | £36000 | £11500 |
| Ballysillan PS | £7927 | 0 | 0 |
| Cliftonville PS | 0 | £6000 | £4055 |
| Lowwood PS | £9000 | 0 | 0 |
| Holy Cross Boys' PS | £26958 | £12600 | £6000 |
| Our Lady of Lourdes PS | £4000 | £9600 | £6000 |
| Our Lady's Girls' PS | £16000 | £12600 | £6000 |
| Edmund Rice (CB) PS | £12000 | 0 | 0 |
| Holy Cross Girls' PS | £14000 | 0 | 0 |
| Mercy PS | £12700 | £17300 | £8162 |
| St Mary's Star of the Sea PS | £4200 | 0 | 0 |
| St Therese of Lisieux PS | £14500 | £11300 | £8162 |
| Star of the Sea Girls' PS | £4500 | £12600 | £6000 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 0 | £12000 | 0 |
| Holy Family PS | £10000 | £11800 | £6599 |
| Rathcoole PS | £56000 | £23000 | £10500 |

**ANNEX B
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN WEST BELFAST**

| School | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Springhill PS | £5000 | £13700 | £8162 |
| Blackmountain PS | £2500 | 0 | 0 |
| Malvern PS | £2000 | £4700 | £4063 |
| Harmony PS | 0 | £11800 | £5428 |
| St Aidan's Christian Brothers PS | £17750 | 0 | 0 |
| St Bernadette's PS | £22250 | £12600 | £6000 |
| St Mary's PS, Divis St | £92000 | £58608 | £12500 |

| School | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| St Kevin's PS | £27000 | £21600 | £10140 |
| St Teresa's PS | £30700 | £12600 | £6000 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | £12700 | £12600 | £6000 |
| St Peter's PS | £24700 | £12000 | £5000 |
| St Joseph's PS, Slate St | £26611 | £12600 | £6000 |
| St Paul's PS | £17750 | 0 | 0 |
| St Mark's PS | £8500 | £2200 | £2300 |
| The Good Shepherd PS | £5000 | £2080 | 0 |
| St Kieran's PS | 0 | £4800 | £2300 |
| Our Lady Queen of Peace PS | £5800 | 0 | 0 |
| Scoil Na Fuisceoir | 0 | £3000 | 0 |

Extended Schools Programme

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education what Extended Schools Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7333/08)

The Minister of Education: The attached Annex lists the primary schools in North and West Belfast and the Extended Schools funding allocated to them in each of the last two years and provisional allocations for 2008/09 based on the assumption that all schools will cluster (ie work in partnership with 2 other schools) and attract a cluster incentive allowance of 40%.

As you are aware I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

ANNEX 1

| School Name | Extended Schools Funding 2006/07 £ | Extended Schools Funding 2007/08 £ | Extended Schools Funding 2008/09 £ |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Ballygolan PS | 19,004 | 14,800 | 10,850 |
| Ballysillan PS | 18,314 | 17,796 | 11,270 |
| Carr's Glen PS | 30,763 | 29,871 | 17,794 |
| Cavehill PS | 0 | 0 | 18,529 |
| Cliftonville PS | 22,971 | 21,074 | 12,782 |
| Currie PS | 16,330 | 16,589 | 10,766 |
| Edenbrooke PS | 22,368 | 22,195 | 13,160 |
| Glenwood PS | 33,465 | 33,753 | 20,587 |
| Grove PS | 15,295 | 15,295 | 9,464 |
| Ligoniel PS | 14,950 | 15,295 | 10,304 |
| Lowwood PS | 23,403 | 24,840 | 14,945 |
| Seaview PS | 29,756 | 29,153 | 8,418 |
| Wheatfield PS | 22,195 | 20,729 | 13,118 |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 18,314 | 15,550 | 10,598 |
| Edmund Rice PS | 30,705 | 30,274 | 17,857 |
| Holy Cross Boys PS | 30,849 | 30,705 | 18,424 |
| Holy Cross Girls PS | 19,349 | 19,435 | 11,858 |
| Holy Family PS | 26,925 | 27,375 | 19,264 |
| Mercy PS | 26,680 | 25,588 | 14,875 |
| Our Lady of Lourdes PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Our Lady's PS | 30,446 | 30,360 | 17,731 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 27,313 | 25,645 | 14,840 |
| St Mary's Star of the Sea PS | 21,419 | 18,100 | 12,446 |
| St Therese of Lisieux PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| St Vincent de Paul PS | 23,489 | 23,690 | 14,420 |
| Star of the Sea PS | 29,986 | 29,814 | 17,430 |
| Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | 9,545 | 9,500 | 8,176 |
| Hazelwood Int PS | 14,695 | 14,685 | 20,720 |
| Blackmountain PS | 16,244 | 16,158 | 10,262 |
| Forth River PS | 22,540 | 23,403 | 14,000 |
| Harmony PS | 23,633 | 23,863 | 14,245 |
| Malvern PS | 15,554 | 16,158 | 10,472 |
| Springfield PS | 13,685 | 11,845 | 7,952 |
| Springhill PS | 29,756 | 28,348 | 16,380 |

| School Name | Extended Schools Funding 2006/07 £ | Extended Schools Funding 2007/08 £ | Extended Schools Funding 2008/09 £ |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Suffolk PS | 0 | 0 | 9,352 |
| Vere Foster PS | 16,848 | 15,123 | 8,736 |
| Bunscoil an tsleibhe Dhuibh | 20,298 | 21,505 | 12,656 |
| Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | 25,600 | 24,775 | 16,573 |
| Gaelscoil na bhfál | 24,553 | 24,323 | 7,193 |
| Holy Child PS | 36,363 | 31,260 | 21,672 |
| St Aidan's PS | 24,380 | 23,805 | 12,992 |
| St Bernadette's PS | 25,128 | 24,265 | 13,412 |
| St John the Baptist Boys PS | 27,600 | 26,525 | 17,941 |
| St John the Baptist Girls PS | 26,300 | 25,725 | 17,045 |
| St Mary's PS | 15,381 | 17,365 | 10,472 |
| St Kevin's PS | 33,580 | 33,321 | 20,664 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | 31,890 | 31,720 | 22,652 |
| St Teresa's PS | 29,175 | 28,750 | 19,432 |
| Holy Trinity PS | 36,306 | 36,754 | 23,030 |
| St Joseph's PS | 27,140 | 26,450 | 15,365 |
| St Paul's PS | 26,335 | 27,140 | 15,820 |
| St Peter's PS | 31,021 | 30,073 | 17,465 |
| Gaelscoil an Lonnáin | 7,590 | 8,510 | 6,664 |
| Gaelscoil na Móna | 8,625 | 11,040 | 8,232 |
| Gaelscoil an Damba | 6,555 | 6,555 | 5,824 |
| St Clare's PS | 34,144 | 34,144 | 20,734 |
| | 1,214,753 | 1,191,014 | 767,863 |

Maintenance Funding in Primary Schools

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education what Maintenance Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7335/08)

The Minister of Education: Mionsonraíonn na táblaí a leanas costas cothabhála gach bunscoil (i) i dTuaisceart Bhéal Feirste; agus (ii) in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste, i ngach ceann de na 3 bliana a ghabh tharainn.

The following tables detail expenditure on maintenance in each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years.

NORTH BELFAST

| School Name | 2005/06 (£) | 2006/07 (£) | 2007/08 (£) |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Abbots Cross PS | 4,658 | 1,464 | 4,122 |
| Ballygolan PS | 18,201 | 20,415 | 10,564 |
| Ballysillan PS | 10,805 | 12,646 | 23,871 |
| Ben Madigan Prep School | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain PS | 8,898 | 3,244 | 3,333 |
| Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | 5,272 | 2,370 | 4,795 |
| Carr's Glen PS | 19,435 | 8,367 | 31,857 |
| Cavehill PS | 6,996 | 9,111 | 20,931 |
| Cliftonville PS | 22,626 | 17,302 | 32,076 |
| Currie PS | 2,611 | 3,015 | 6,140 |
| Edenbrooke PS | 17,976 | 9,096 | 6,251 |
| Edmund Rice (CB) PS | 3,693 | 16,603 | 18,230 |
| Glenwood PS | 19,327 | 13,581 | 12,631 |
| Grove PS | 19,178 | 16,910 | 22,823 |
| Hazelwood IPS | 10,366 | 26,366 | 29,610 |
| Holy Cross Boys' PS | 23,332 | 16,583 | 35,702 |
| Holy Cross Girls' PS | 14,994 | 8,932 | 6,587 |
| Holy Family PS | 41,104 | 37,367 | 37,188 |
| Ligoniel PS | 21,489 | 18,345 | 14,639 |
| Lowwood PS | 5,297 | 8,279 | 7,839 |
| Mercy PS | 15,324 | 13,425 | 12,500 |
| Our Lady of Lourdes PS | 22,542 | 31,880 | 138,656 |
| Our Lady's Girls' PS | 5,640 | 8,114 | 27,532 |
| Rathcoole PS | 2,048 | 3,897 | 3,537 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 8,906 | 20,618 | 85,181 |
| Seaview PS | 30,198 | 13,804 | 19,105 |
| St Mary's Star of the Sea PS | 12,331 | 21,270 | 98,253 |
| St Therese of Lisieux PS | 7,944 | 12,028 | 8,725 |
| St Vincent de Paul PS | 10,883 | 6,125 | 29,574 |
| Star of the Sea Girls' PS | 14,094 | 7,655 | 6,428 |
| Wheatfield PS | 22,204 | 9,321 | 26,941 |
| Whitehouse PS | 34,417 | 8,831 | 7,741 |

WEST BELFAST

| School Name | 2005/06 (£) | 2006/07 (£) | 2007/08 (£) |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Bunscoil an Tsleibhe Dhuibh | 1,498 | 2,190 | 5,930 |
| Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | 7,796 | 3,593 | 106,296 |
| Forthriver PS | 12,890 | 57,685 | 4,410 |
| Gaelscoil an Damba | 849 | 1,691 | 3,381 |
| Gaelscoil an Lonnán | 471 | 3,731 | 1,776 |
| Gaelscoil na Bhfal | 9,618 | 9,910 | 3,939 |
| Gaelscoil na Mona | 978 | 1,418 | 1,628 |
| Harmony PS | 12,988 | 15,137 | 19,170 |
| Holy Child PS | 38,674 | 33,904 | 31,123 |
| Holy Trinity PS | 40,539 | 69,188 | 80,207 |
| Malvern PS | 10,817 | 7,075 | 13,487 |
| Our Lady Queen of Peace PS | 8,738 | 5,526 | 4,107 |
| Scoil na Fuisseoige | 1,954 | 1,525 | 1,788 |
| Springfield PS | 6,436 | 6,090 | 7,400 |
| Springhill PS | 13,289 | 12,114 | 7,500 |
| St Aidan's CB PS | 17,493 | 10,702 | 10,613 |
| St Bernadettes PS | 14,117 | 16,523 | 18,657 |
| St Clare's PS | 2,442 | 12,880 | 25,388 |
| St John the Baptist Boys' PS | 31,801 | 16,451 | 23,390 |
| St John the Baptist Girls' PS | 12,217 | 17,971 | 22,017 |
| St Joseph's PS | 11,121 | 15,692 | 9,814 |
| St Kevin's PS | 7,263 | 7,358 | 11,052 |
| St Kieran's PS | 14,344 | 6,350 | 30,400 |
| St Luke's PS | 10,762 | 14,317 | 43,666 |
| St Mark's PS | 28,918 | 33,406 | 44,279 |
| St Mary's PS | 7,620 | 13,975 | 2,644 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | 32,692 | 26,654 | 139,905 |
| St Paul's PS | 32,601 | 9,169 | 82,934 |
| St Peter's PS | 8,206 | 18,817 | 13,768 |
| St Teresa's PS | 23,244 | 18,902 | 17,675 |
| Suffolk PS | 16,625 | 13,203 | 19,711 |
| The Good Shepherd PS | 13,107 | 24,978 | 33,823 |
| Vere Foster PS | 20,423 | 24,285 | 24,592 |

Teacher Training for Deaf Children

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what special training in teaching hearing-impaired children is provided to teachers in (i) mainstream schools; (ii) special schools that cater for children with hearing difficulties; and (iii) Jordanstown school. (AQW 7355/08)

The Minister of Education: To ensure that teachers of the deaf receive appropriate in-service training, the Department of Education resources the education and library boards to fund a number of places on a course, which is mandatory for those teachers of the deaf who are employed by schools or boards. Candidates for this training must meet certain criteria set by the Department of Education.

I have also been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that training for teachers in mainstream and special schools that cater for children with hearing difficulties is provided by qualified Teachers of the Deaf (TOD) working within the Boards' Sensory Support Services.

Some examples of training for class teachers supporting deaf children within mainstream and special schools that cater for children with hearing difficulties are as follows:-

- in-school training as requested, the focus of which is determined by the needs of the individual school in consultation with the teacher of the deaf;
- Transition training (this may be for all school staff or identified group) to support children transferring from one setting to another e.g. primary to post-primary;
- In-Service Education of Teachers (INSET) training delivered at Board Out-centres and available to all schools; a
- training in the use and maintenance of audiological equipment;
- ongoing informal training in the form of advice and support.

With regard to Jordanstown school I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the North – Eastern Education and Library Board that the following specialist training opportunities are available in addition to the mandatory training for TOD:-

- financial assistance to enable all staff to attend Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) sign language courses at all levels;
- sign language development on a daily basis and during planned in-house staff training days from the sign language assistant employed and financed by Board of Trustees;
- deaf awareness training;

- awareness raising and formalised training on management and use of assistive technology for the deaf e.g. hearing aids, FM systems, cochlear implants, delivered by school's teachers of the deaf, personnel from RVH Cochlear implant centre and audiology clinic;
- in-house INSET on the annual review and transitions process / procedures.
- Team teach training;
- attendance at seminars organised by the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and other specialist organisations;
- liaison with organisations for the deaf;
- access to the specialist Mental Health and Deafness team for the North of Ireland.

Cuireann an scoil ar fáil freisin breathnú / socrúcháin mhúinteoireachta do mhúinteoirí eile a bheadh ag tabhairt faoin cháilíocht TOD agus do dhaoine óga ar mian leo gairm a leanúint ag obair le daoine bodhra agus á dteagasc.

The school also provides observation / teaching placements for other teachers undertaking the TOD qualification and young people who wish to pursue a career in working with / teaching the deaf.

Entrance Examinations for Grammar Schools

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education which grammar schools have not indicated they intend to set their own entrance exams. (AQW 7359/08)

The Minister of Education: Aon scoil ghradaí amháin (as 69) a chuir in iúl don Roinn go bhfuil rún aici a teist iontrála féin a oibriú dá dtarlódh tréimhse dhírialúcháin. Más fíor do thuairiscí sa phreas agus ráitis ó chomhlachtaí eile, d'fhógair scoileanna eile gradaí a spéis i socrú a gcuid scrúduithe féin.

Only one grammar school (from 69) has indicated to the Department that it intends to operate its own entrance test if there should be a period of un-regulation. Other grammar schools, according to press reports and the statements of other bodies, have declared an interest in setting their own examinations.

Curriculum Reserve Funding

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education how much Curriculum Reserve Funding was received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7361/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an Formhaoiniú Curaclaim Cúltaca a fuair gach bunscoil (i) i dTuaisceart

Bhéal Feirste; agus (ii) in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste le linn na tréimhse 3 bliana 2004/05 go 2006/07, leagtha amach sna táblaí thíos: The Curriculum Reserve Support Funding received by each primary school in (i) North Belfast; and (ii) West Belfast during the 3 year period 2004/05 to 2006/07 is set out in the tables below:

NORTH BELFAST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

| Primary School | 2004/05 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2005/06 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2006/07 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Abbots Cross PS | 5,000 | 4,000 | 5,000 |
| Ballygolan PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ballysillan PS | 21000 | 19000 | 1000 |
| Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain | 0 | 9500 | 0 |
| Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain | 0 | 5700 | 0 |
| Carr's Glen PS | 0 | 19000 | 5600 |
| Cavehill PS | 0 | 0 | 1000 |
| Cliftonville PS | 10500 | 0 | 5600 |
| Currie PS | 10500 | 19000 | 0 |
| Edenbrooke PS | 0 | 9500 | 0 |
| Edmund Rice PS | 0 | 19000 | 14000 |
| Glenwood PS | 0 | 0 | 5600 |
| Grove PS | 0 | 9500 | 5600 |
| Hazelwood Integrated PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Holy Cross Boys PS | 21000 | 14250 | 5600 |
| Holy Cross Girls PS | 0 | 9500 | 5600 |
| Holy Family PS | 21000 | 0 | 16800 |
| Ligoniel PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Lowwood PS | 0 | 9500 | 0 |
| Mercy PS | 0 | 19000 | 5600 |
| Our Lady of Lourdes PS | 0 | 9500 | 0 |
| Our Lady's PS | 0 | 0 | 5600 |
| Rathcoole PS | 0 | 8,000 | 0 |
| Sacred Heart PS | 0 | 0 | 22400 |
| Seaview PS | 10500 | 0 | 11200 |
| St Mary's Star of the Sea PS | 10500 | 38000 | 0 |
| St Therese of Lisieux PS | 0 | 28500 | 0 |
| St Vincent de Paul PS | 0 | 9500 | 0 |
| Star of the Sea PS | 0 | 0 | 11200 |

| Primary School | 2004/05 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2005/06 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2006/07 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| Wheatfield PS | 3000 | 1000 | 0 |
| Whitehouse PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 113,000 | 260,950 | 127,400 |

WEST BELFAST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

| Primary School | 2004/05 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2005/06 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2006/07 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Blackmountain PS | 0 | 9,500 | 0 |
| Bunscoil an tsleibhe Dhuibh | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bunscoil Phobal Feirste | 0 | 0 | 7,840 |
| Christ the Redeemer | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Forth River PS | 3,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Gaelscoil an Damba | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gaelscoil an Lonnáin | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gaelscoil na bhfál | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gaelscoil na Móna | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Good Shepherd PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Harmony PS | 0 | 0 | 11,200 |
| Holy Child PS | 21,000 | 0 | 0 |
| Holy Trinity PS | 31,500 | 19,000 | 0 |
| Malvern PS | 5,250 | 0 | 5,600 |
| Our Lady Queen of Peace | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Scoil na Fuisgeoige | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Springfield PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Springhill PS | 3,000 | 19,000 | 5,600 |
| St Aidan's PS | 0 | 19,000 | 11,200 |
| St Bernadette's PS | 8,010 | 0 | 0 |
| St Clare's PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| St John the Baptist Boys PS | 31,500 | 19,000 | 16,800 |
| St John the Baptist Girls PS | 10,500 | 19,000 | 0 |
| St Joseph's PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| St Kevin's PS | 21,000 | 0 | 11,200 |
| St Kieran's PS | 15,000 | 0 | 0 |
| St Luke's PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| Primary School | 2004/05 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2005/06 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ | 2006/07 Curriculum Reserve Funding £ |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| St Mark's PS | 25,000 | 0 | 0 |
| St Mary's PS | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| St Oliver Plunkett PS | 0 | 9,500 | 0 |
| St Paul's PS | 16,020 | 9,500 | 0 |
| St Peter's PS | 0 | 14,250 | 16,800 |
| St Teresa's PS | 10,500 | 19,000 | 11,200 |
| Suffolk PS | 10,500 | 9,500 | 0 |
| Vere Foster PS | 10,500 | 19,000 | 0 |
| Total | 222,280 | 185,250 | 97,440 |

Bain Review

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what are the current enrolment figures for each school in the Upper Bann constituency; and if the recommendations of the Bain Review are to stand, how many of these schools face closure.

(AQW 7372/08)

The Minister of Education: The 2007/08 enrolment for each grant-aided Primary, Post-primary and Special school in the Upper Bann constituency is given in the tables below. The Bain Review enrolment thresholds of 105 and 140 pupils for rural and urban primaries respectively, 500 pupils for Year 8-12 post-primaries and 100 pupils for sixth forms.

Tá molta go ndéanfaí todhchaí scoileanna ar thit a rollú faoi na tairseacha seo a athbhreithniú. Níl aon rún ann go ndruidfí scoileanna ar an ábhar amháin go bhfuil a rollú faoi thairseacha Bain.

It recommended that the future of schools whose enrolments fell below these thresholds should be reviewed. There is no intention to close schools simply because enrolments are below Bain thresholds. Such schools should be considered sensitively on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the particular local circumstances. The overriding consideration is the quality of education provided to children.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY 2007/08

| School Name | Enrolment |
|--------------|-----------|
| Milltown PS | 62 |
| Scarva PS | 65 |
| St Mary's PS | 70 |
| St Mary's PS | 75 |

| School Name | Enrolment |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Birches PS | 77 |
| St Colman's (Bann) PS | 90 |
| Richmount PS | 102 |
| St Patrick's PS | 104 |
| St Patrick's PS | 105 |
| Craigavon PS | 110 |
| St Mary's PS | 124 |
| St John's PS | 128 |
| St Francis' PS, Aghderg | 141 |
| Moyallon PS | 164 |
| St Teresa's PS | 209 |
| Donacloney PS | 218 |
| Maralin Village PS | 221 |
| Waringstown PS | 381 |
| Bleary PS | 83 |
| Dickson PS | 144 |
| Presentation PS | 152 |
| Tullygally PS | 155 |
| Lurgan Model PS | 192 |
| Portadown Integrated PS | 228 |
| Drumgor PS | 245 |
| St Patrick's PS | 246 |
| Bocombra PS | 264 |
| Ballyoran PS | 269 |
| Seagoe PS | 276 |
| Hart Memorial PS | 308 |
| Edenderry PS | 336 |
| Carrick PS | 353 |
| Abercorn PS | 359 |
| St John The Baptist PS | 375 |
| St Brendan's PS | 391 |
| St Mary's PS | 392 |
| Bridge Integrated PS | 407 |
| Edenderry PS | 421 |
| St Anthony's PS | 534 |
| Millington PS | 557 |
| King's Park PS | 590 |
| Tannaghmore PS | 691 |
| St Francis PS | 762 |

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY 2007/08

| School Name | Enrolment |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Drumcree College | 276 |
| Lurgan College | 430 |
| Brownlow Int College | 436 |
| St Patrick's College | 440 |
| Killicomaine Junior High School | 449 |
| St Paul's Junior High School | 483 |
| St Michael's Grammar | 570 |
| St Mary's High School | 577 |
| Banbridge High School | 651 |
| Clounagh Junior High School | 653 |
| Craigavon Senior High School | 661 |
| Lurgan Junior High School | 670 |
| Portadown College | 772 |
| Lismore Comprehensive School | 1,073 |
| Banbridge Academy | 1,312 |
| New-Bridge Integrated College | 516 |

SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY 2007/08

| School Name | Enrolment |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Donard Special School | 43 |
| Ceara Special School | 92 |

Transport Providers for Schools

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5884/08, what evidence transport providers are obliged to supply to Education and Library Boards of their Employer Liability Cover. (AQW 7377/08)

The Minister of Education: Cé go bhfuil dualgas ar na hoibreoirí uilig a fhostaíonn baill nach den teaghlach iad, árachas dliteanas fostóra a bheith acu, tá comhairle tugtha ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne nach gcaithfidh siad fianaise air seo a chur i láthair na mBord.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that, while all operators who employ non-family members are required to have employer liability insurance, they are not required to present evidence of this to the Boards. Instead, operators sign a declaration that states that they consent to a Board's

terms and conditions which includes a clause on employer liability insurance.

Assaults on Schoolteachers

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to introduce a policy to tackle the number of assaults on teachers in schools. (AQW 7411/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá pleananna ag mo Roinn, i gcomhar le réimse lucht leasmhar ina bhfuil ceardchumainn múinteoirí agus údaráis fostaíochta, ceardlann a réachtáil san fhómhar le fadhb dhrochíde choirp agus drochíde eile mhúinteoirí a bhreithniú. Athbhreithneoidh an cheardlann fianaise faoi scála na faidhbe agus faoi leithead agus leorgacht na treorach reatha.

My Department, in conjunction with a range of stakeholders including the teacher unions and employing authorities, plans to hold a workshop in the autumn to consider the problem of physical and other abuse of teachers. The workshop will review evidence about the scale of the problem and the extent and adequacy of existing guidance.

Review of Special Needs and Inclusion

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what was the cost of carrying out the 'Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 7412/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é costas an Athbhreithnithe go nuige seo £323, 142.50.

The cost of the Review to date is £323, 142.50.

This is inclusive of expenses for pre-consultation with parents, children and young people, meetings of the Advisory Groups of a range of stakeholders in the statutory and voluntary sectors and meetings of the Steering Group, as well as the salaries of the small review team of staff working within the Department.

Extra Qualifications of Teachers in Special Schools

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many teachers currently teaching in special schools have additional qualifications in special education; and to detail what these additional qualifications are. (AQW 7463/08)

The Minister of Education: There are 855 teachers employed in Special Schools in the North of

Ireland and all are eligible to teach in accordance the Teachers' (Eligibility) Regulations (NI) 1997.

Costas díreireach an toradh a bheadh ar chleachtadh le mionsonraí ar na cáilíochtaí breise a bheadh ag daoine a sholáthar.

An exercise to provide details on additional qualifications held would result in a disproportionate cost.

Free School Meals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently entitled to free school meals; and the percentage of the school population that this represents, for each primary school in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7541/08)

The Minister of Education: Mar a leanas atá an t-eolas atá á iarraidh: The information requested is as follows: Free school meal entitlement¹ in primary schools² in the North Down constituency area 2007/08

| DENI Ref | School Name | No of pupils entitled to free school meals | Total enrolment | % of pupils entitled to free school meals |
|----------|--------------------|--|-----------------|---|
| 4011265 | Ballyvester PS | * | 67 | * |
| 4011631 | Hollywood PS | 26 | 332 | 7.8 |
| 4011645 | Crawfordsburn PS | 16 | 188 | 8.5 |
| 4011650 | Ballyholme PS | 23 | 600 | 3.8 |
| 4011654 | Donaghadee PS | 35 | 418 | 8.4 |
| 4011670 | Clandeboyne PS | 41 | 188 | 21.8 |
| 4011681 | Millisle PS | 24 | 146 | 16.4 |
| 4011688 | Redburn PS | 19 | 83 | 22.9 |
| 4013023 | Bloomfield Road PS | 113 | 307 | 36.8 |
| 4013032 | Conlig PS | 10 | 43 | 23.3 |
| 4013045 | Grange Park PS | 15 | 364 | 4.1 |
| 4016002 | Kilcooley PS | 84 | 127 | 66.1 |
| 4016067 | Rathmore PS | 25 | 482 | 5.2 |
| 4016111 | Towerview PS | 20 | 385 | 5.2 |

| DENI Ref | School Name | No of pupils entitled to free school meals | Total enrolment | % of pupils entitled to free school meals |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------|---|
| 4016192 | Kilmaine PS | 18 | 654 | 2.8 |
| 4016430 | Ballymagee PS | 23 | 404 | 5.7 |
| 4031628 | St Patrick's PS | 12 | 237 | 5.1 |
| 4033008 | St Anne's PS | * | 34 | * |
| 4036146 | St Comgall's PS | 13 | 286 | 4.5 |
| 4036148 | St Malachy's PS | 62 | 321 | 19.3 |
| 4051680 | Bangor Central PS | 99 | 562 | 17.6 |
| 4053020 | Glencraig PS | * | 228 | * |
| 4610097 | Glenlola Collegiate Prep. Dept. | * | 76 | * |
| 4620015 | Bangor Grammar School Prep. Dept. | 0 | 137 | 0.0 |
| 4620044 | Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept. | 0 | 184 | 0.0 |

Source: NI school census 2007/08

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.

Primary School Figures in Derry/Londonderry

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many pupils were enrolled at each primary school in the city of Derry/Londonderry, in each of the last 5 years, broken down by sector. (AQW 7610/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarraidh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

PUPIL ENROLMENTS AT EACH PRIMARY¹ SCHOOL (PS) IN THE DERRY AREA² – LAST FIVE YEARS.

| School Name | Management Type | pupils in 2003/04 | pupils in 2004/05 | pupils in 2005/06 | pupils in 2006/07 | pupils in 2007/08 |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Ashlea PS | Controlled | 112 | 97 | 98 | 91 | 90 |

| School Name | Management Type | pupils in 2003/04 | pupils in 2004/05 | pupils in 2005/06 | pupils in 2006/07 | pupils in 2007/08 |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Ballougry PS | Controlled | 60 | 68 | 66 | 69 | 71 |
| Culmore PS | Controlled | 79 | 75 | 75 | 72 | 75 |
| Drumahoe PS | Controlled | 261 | 270 | 273 | 264 | 245 |
| Ebrington Controlled PS | Controlled | 459 | 438 | 426 | 422 | 421 |
| Fountain PS | Controlled | 120 | 129 | 111 | 112 | 92 |
| Greenhaw PS | Controlled | 267 | 283 | 272 | 275 | 288 |
| Groarty PS | Controlled | 46 | 47 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Lisnagelvin PS | Controlled | 540 | 524 | 554 | 553 | 532 |
| Derry Model PS | Controlled | 335 | 325 | 317 | 333 | 343 |
| Bunscoil Cholmcille | Catholic Maintained | 189 | 185 | 173 | 163 | 159 |
| Chapel Road PS | Catholic Maintained | 136 | 156 | 157 | 151 | 166 |
| Good Shepherd PS | Catholic Maintained | 435 | 442 | 443 | 451 | 445 |
| Hollybush PS | Catholic Maintained | 341 | 354 | 374 | 425 | 427 |
| Holy Child PS | Catholic Maintained | 316 | 297 | 293 | 287 | 285 |
| Holy Family PS | Catholic Maintained | 513 | 465 | 446 | 448 | 433 |
| Longtower PS | Catholic Maintained | 378 | 332 | 316 | 311 | 296 |
| Nazareth House PS | Catholic Maintained | 351 | 346 | 330 | 331 | 309 |
| Rosemount PS | Catholic Maintained | 318 | 299 | 292 | 284 | 271 |
| St Anne's PS | Catholic Maintained | 590 | 570 | 546 | 533 | 515 |
| St Brigid's PS | Catholic Maintained | 349 | 338 | 335 | 343 | 339 |
| St Eithne's PS | Catholic Maintained | 501 | 552 | 529 | 516 | 501 |
| St Eugene's PS | Catholic Maintained | 274 | 256 | 242 | 227 | 205 |
| St John's PS | Catholic Maintained | 675 | 636 | 622 | 588 | 592 |
| St Patrick's PS | Catholic Maintained | 917 | 878 | 872 | 880 | 861 |
| St Paul's PS, Slievemore | Catholic Maintained | 263 | 233 | 219 | 183 | 178 |
| St Theresa's PS, Lenamore | Catholic Maintained | 466 | 456 | 438 | 426 | 406 |
| Steelstown Vol Maintained PS | Catholic Maintained | 569 | 543 | 543 | 511 | 477 |
| Trench Road PS | Catholic Maintained | 426 | 406 | 377 | 341 | 322 |
| Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir | Other Maintained | 90 | 111 | 116 | 116 | 135 |
| Groarty Integrated PS | Controlled Integrated | n.a. | n.a. | 43 | 39 | 34 |
| Oakgrove Integrated PS | Grant Maintained Integrated | 444 | 451 | 445 | 467 | 451 |

Source: School Census 2007/08

Note 1: Primary includes children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7.

Note 2: Schools listed are those that are located in wards wholly or partly in the city of Derry.

Free School Meals

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently entitled to free school meals in each primary school in the Mid-Ulster constituency; and what percentage of the school population this represents. (AQW 7643/08)

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 ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS² IN THE MID-ULSTER CONSTITUENCY – 2007/08

| School Name | Pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % of total entitled to free meal |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Altayeskey Primary School | 0 | 33 | 0.0 |
| Ampertaine Primary School | 11 | 86 | 12.8 |
| Anahorish Primary School | 7 | 191 | 3.7 |
| Aughamullan Primary School | 17 | 78 | 21.8 |
| Ballylifford Primary School | 6 | 56 | 10.7 |
| Ballynease Primary School | * | 90 | * |
| Ballytrea Primary School | 7 | 102 | 6.9 |
| Bellaghy Primary School | 0 | 32 | 0.0 |
| Bush Primary School | 7 | 166 | 4.2 |
| Castledawson Primary School | 12 | 101 | 11.9 |
| Churchtown Primary School | 6 | 43 | 14.0 |
| Coagh Primary School | 5 | 51 | 9.8 |
| Cookstown Primary School | 66 | 419 | 15.8 |
| Crievagh Primary School | * | 34 | * |
| Crossroads Primary School | 8 | 128 | 6.3 |
| Culnady Primary School | 0 | 46 | 0.0 |
| Derrychrin Primary School | 28 | 107 | 26.2 |
| Desertmartin Primary School | 9 | 36 | 25.0 |

| School Name | Pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % of total entitled to free meal |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Donaghey Primary School | 8 | 105 | 7.6 |
| Donaghmore Primary School | * | 52 | * |
| Drumard Primary School | * | 57 | * |
| Edendork Primary School | 49 | 247 | 19.8 |
| Gaelscoil Na Speirini | * | 23 | * |
| Gaelscoil Ui Neill | 41 | 113 | 36.3 |
| Greenlough Primary School (St Mary's) | 13 | 142 | 9.2 |
| Holy Family Primary School | 68 | 549 | 12.4 |
| Holy Trinity Primary School | 144 | 690 | 20.9 |
| Kilross Primary School | 5 | 67 | 7.5 |
| Knockloughrim Primary School | * | 63 | * |
| Knocknagin Primary School | * | 36 | * |
| Lissan (1) Primary School | * | 92 | * |
| Maghera Primary School | 12 | 90 | 13.3 |
| Magherafelt Controlled Primary School | 70 | 325 | 21.5 |
| Moneymore Primary School | 6 | 181 | 3.3 |
| New Row Primary School | 16 | 165 | 9.7 |
| Newmills Primary School | * | 57 | * |
| Orritor Primary School | 13 | 209 | 6.2 |
| Phoenix Integrated Primary School | 7 | 79 | 8.9 |
| Primate Dixon Primary School | 186 | 471 | 39.5 |
| Queen Elizabeth II (Pomeroy) Primary School | * | 31 | * |
| Sacred Heart Primary School, Rock | 13 | 99 | 13.1 |
| Spires Integrated Primary School | 10 | 201 | 5.0 |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Gulladuff | 10 | 187 | 5.4 |

| School Name | Pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % of total entitled to free meal |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| St Brigid's Primary School, Dungannon | 24 | 135 | 17.8 |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Tirkane | 24 | 133 | 18.1 |
| St Columba's Primary School | 5 | 128 | 3.9 |
| St Columb's Primary School (Cullion) | 0 | 84 | 0.0 |
| St Eoghan's Primary School | 6 | 76 | 7.9 |
| St John's Primary School, Swatragh | 7 | 171 | 4.1 |
| St John's Primary School, Dungannon | 6 | 66 | 9.1 |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Dungannon | 34 | 179 | 19.0 |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Dunnamore | 14 | 81 | 17.3 |
| St Malachy's Primary School | 7 | 34 | 20.6 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown | 24 | 218 | 11.0 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy | 31 | 206 | 15.1 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Donaghmore | 9 | 62 | 14.5 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown | 33 | 112 | 29.5 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Dunnamore | 10 | 167 | 6.0 |
| St Mary's Primary School, Pomeroy | 45 | 172 | 26.2 |
| St Mary's Primary School (Glenview) | 51 | 304 | 16.8 |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Loup | 15 | 120 | 12.5 |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Donaghmore | 28 | 176 | 15.9 |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Killycolpy | 41 | 172 | 23.8 |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon | 59 | 216 | 27.3 |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Moneymore | 19 | 92 | 20.7 |
| St Patrick's Primary School (Glen) | 14 | 160 | 8.8 |
| St Peter's Primary School | 34 | 184 | 18.5 |

| School Name | Pupils entitled to free meal | Total enrolment | % of total entitled to free meal |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| St Trea's Primary School | 7 | 92 | 7.6 |
| Stewartstown Primary School | 13 | 35 | 37.1 |
| Tobermore Primary School | 17 | 83 | 20.5 |
| Woods Primary School | 14 | 117 | 12.0 |

Source: School Census 2007/08

Note 1: Includes children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Note 2: For nursery class pupils, children that have a parent(s) who is(are) in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance or Income support, or who are otherwise entitled to free school meals are included.

‘*’ denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

Cost of Supply Teachers

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how much money was spent on supply teachers in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7694/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

| | 2002-03 £ | 2003-04 £ | 2004-05 £ | 2005-06 £ | 2006/07 £ |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Belfast | 6,842,327 | 7,014,820 | 6,376,348 | 6,669,593 | 7,203,867 |
| North Eastern | 9,165,736 | 9,448,192 | 8,754,272 | 10,005,241 | 8,289,562 |
| South Eastern | 7,822,331 | 8,210,121 | 7,588,690 | 8,470,610 | 10,259,767 |
| Southern | 8,883,186 | 9,406,939 | 9,446,171 | 10,773,341 | 8,515,692 |
| Western | 7,095,673 | 7,526,599 | 7,413,210 | 8,069,669 | 11,019,450 |
| Special | 3,494,167 | 3,645,448 | 3,523,706 | 3,847,924 | 3,955,189 |
| GMI | 1,457,037 | 1,481,713 | 1,632,509 | 1,827,058 | 2,224,154 |
| Total | 44,760,457 | 46,733,832 | 44,734,906 | 49,663,436 | 51,467,681 |

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why there has been a delay in the

implementation of the Learner Access Engagement Programme. (AQW 7446/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): There has been no delay in the implementation of this programme. The Learner Access and Engagement pilot programme is still on target to commence in September 2008, as planned. Following the issue of guidance from the Department on 16th May 2008, Colleges will soon commence their procurement procedures to appoint organisations to provide learning support services, under the programme.

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why instructions on the Learner Access Engagement Programme are still not available to community groups. (AQW 7447/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Learner Access and Engagement pilot programme will commence in September 2008, as planned. The Department issued guidance on the programme to Further Education Colleges on 16th May and I understand that the Colleges are about to commence their procurement procedures to appoint organisations to provide learner support services, under the programme. I also understand that the Colleges have engaged with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) to promote awareness of the programme amongst voluntary and community organisations.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7525/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has a total of 5 telephone numbers operating as student finance customer helplines. The helplines are operated on the Department's behalf by the Student Loans Company (SLC).

No profit has been made on these lines in the last 3 years.

Full details are provided in the following table.

| Prefix & telephone number | Profit 2005-06 | Profit 2006-07 | Profit 2007-08 |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 0845 6017646 EMA NI | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 0845 6000662 NI Student Support | Nil | Nil | Nil |

| Prefix & telephone number | Profit 2005-06 | Profit 2006-07 | Profit 2007-08 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 0870 242211 Mortgage Style | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 0870 6060704 Deferment Queries | Nil | Nil | Nil |
| 0870 2406598 Income Contingent Repayers | Nil | Nil | Nil |

Higher Education Colleges

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if (i) higher education colleges in Northern Ireland incorporate and abide by the same regulations as; and (ii) the advice and support on offer benchmarks favourably with, higher education colleges in the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQW 7526/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland incorporate, and abide by, the same regulations governing the provision of regulated qualifications across the three countries of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The regulators in England (Ofqual), Wales (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA) jointly accredit qualifications available in these three countries. These arrangements ensure that qualifications are understood and recognised by employers and educational institutions across the three countries. This, in turn, ensures quality of provision, as well as enabling learners to progress to higher levels of qualification. The regulators also work closely with the regulator in Scotland (the Scottish Qualifications Authority), particularly in relation to professional and technical (vocational) qualifications.
- (ii) The Further Education sector in Northern Ireland adopts a standard approach to marketing and careers guidance. Typically, most full-time 16-19 students have an element of careers guidance included in their timetable. Students' Services within colleges also operate a careers support service. Individual students, both full-time and part-time, can use this as a "drop in" service, or can receive a full consultation with an appointment. In addition, colleges produce full-time and part-time prospectuses, visit local schools, and hold open days in colleges and other locations across their catchment areas. Colleges also advertise across different media to raise awareness. This is, largely, in line with the types of service in this area that is available in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I can also advise that the Department is developing new proposals, the Individual Learning Programme, to enhance the service available to 16 to 19 year old students, in this important area. Based on initial assessment by college staff, the college will determine and agree with individual learners the most appropriate programme of study to enable their career aspirations to be met in the most effective way. This enhanced approach, which should be available from the start of the 2009/10 academic year, will complement the Department's new Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance strategy.

In addition, the Department is also developing proposals to enable local organisations, under contract to colleges, to support adult learners taking Further Education courses that will help to prepare them for employment. This will commence on a pilot basis in September 2008.

Belfast Metropolitan College

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time courses at the Belfast Metropolitan College campus at Tower Street; and how many (a) full-time; and (b) part-time students are currently attending this campus. (AQW 7614/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Belfast Metropolitan College has informed me that there are 392 full-time students and 990 part-time students currently attending its Tower Street campus.

I have attached, at Annex A, a list of the full-time and part-time courses that are being delivered at the campus during the 2007/08 academic year.

ANNEX A

COURSES DELIVERED AT TOWER STREET CAMPUS – FULL-TIME

- Beauty Therapy
- BTEC First Diploma Animal Care
- BTEC HND Animal Management
- BTEC HND Performing Arts
- BTEC Introduction to Administration Pathfinder
- BTEC Introduction to Administration Routeways
- BTEC Introduction to Retail Routeways
- BTEC National Certificate Beauty Therapy Science
- BTEC National Diploma Animal Management
- BTEC National Diploma Beauty Therapy Science
- BTEC National Diploma in Performing Arts (Acting)
- BTEC National Diploma in Performing Arts (Dance)
- Hairdressing Level 1
- Hairdressing Level 2

- Hairdressing Level 3
- HND Applied Science (Therapies)
- HND Beauty Therapy Sciences
- Make Up Artist Diploma
- NVQ Level 2 Beauty Therapy and Nail Technology
- Pathfinder - A1

COURSES DELIVERED AT TOWER STREET CAMPUS – PART-TIME

- Anatomy/ Physiology
- Applied Treatments
- Hairdressing - Basic Cutting
- Beauty Therapy - Level 3
- BTEC HND Performing Arts
- Certificate In Business & Administration (Organisations & People) - Level 2
- Computerised Accounts: City & Guilds Certificate - Level 1
- Computerised Accounts: Sage - Level 2
- Computerised Accounts: Sage - Level 1
- Desktop Publishing: Microsoft Publisher - Level 1
- E-Image Manipulation Using Photoshop
- Essential Skills – Literacy
- Essential Skills - Numeracy
- Essential Skills ICT Pilot - Pathfinder
- GCSE Spanish
- Gel Nail Extensions 1
- Gel Nail Extensions 2
- Gents Barbering
- Hairdressing - Level 2
- Hairdressing - Level 3
- HNC Advanced Therapeutic Hair Studies
- HNC Applied Science (Therapy)
- HNC Hair & Scalp Therapy
- HND Beauty Therapy
- HND Beauty Therapy Sciences Part-Time
- Italian – Level 1
- Hairdressing - Long Hair Workshop
- Making Most Of Home Computer
- NVQ Beauty Therapy
- NVQ Gents Hairdressing - Barbering Short Course
- NVQ II Gents Hairdressing
- NVQ Beauty Therapy – Level 2
- OCR Word Processing - Level 1
- Painting In Oils
- Pre-GCSE English
- Pre-GCSE Maths
- Professional Diploma Hair & Scalp Therapy

- Sage Payroll - Level 2
- Stringed Instrument Making
- VTCT Safety, Security and Employment Standards
- VTCT Body Massage Certificate A
- VTCT Body Massage Certificate B
- VTCT Body Massage Diploma
- VTCT Diploma Anatomy & Physiology
- VTCT Diploma In Reflexology
- VTCT Diploma Indian Head Massage
- VTCT Diploma In Stone Therapy – Level 3
- Web Page Creation- Dreamwaver
- Woodwork/Turning
- Word Processing Software - Level 2

Memorandum of Understanding with Leeds Metropolitan University

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has informed the North West Regional College of his views in relation to the proposed Memorandum of Understanding with Leeds Metropolitan University. (AQW 7620/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The North West Regional College has advised my Department that there is no proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the College and Leeds Metropolitan University.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Petroleum (Consolidation) Act (NI) 1929

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how it regulates the issuing of licences for petroleum stations under the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act (NI) 1929. (AQW 7559/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): The Petroleum (Consolidation) Act (NI) 1929 gives powers to District Councils, which act independently of my Department, to issue licences for the storage of petrol at filling stations. My Department and its executive NDPB, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), have a role in handling any complaints arising from licensees or applicants for licences who may be aggrieved by a decision taken by a district council.

HSENI is taking forward, in conjunction with DETI, planning for the establishment within HSENI of

a Fuel Oils Liaison Unit that will work with councils as they discharge their petroleum licensing function at filling stations. This initiative will be supported by a Fuel Oils Forum involving representatives from my Department, HSENI, and District Councils.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7560/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, including its *Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), does not operate any 0870 telephone numbers. The following 0845 numbers are in operation:

| Telephone Number | Description |
|------------------|--|
| 0845 600 6262 | Consumer advice telephone service for Northern Ireland |
| 0845 604 8888 | Companies Registry information and document request line |
| 0845 601 60221 | Consumer support helpline |

No Profit has been made on any of these lines in each of the last 3 years.

1 The General Consumer Council NI is in the process of changing to an 0800 number. The completion date for overall transition is 30 September 2008.

* DETI's NDPBs are: Invest NI, NI Tourist Board, Health and Safety Executive for NI and the General Consumer Council NI.

Motorcycle Tourism in North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how he intends to promote motorcycle tourism and areas associated with it, such as Armoy, in the North Antrim constituency. (AQW 7571/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Responsibility for the promotion of motorcycle sports rests with the governing body, the Motor Cycle Union of Ireland (MCUI). Over the past 2 years, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), has been developing, in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), a new 10-year Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation in Northern Ireland. The contribution of sport generally, including motorcycle sports, to tourism has emerged as an important issue in the development of the Strategy. A final Strategy is expected to be launched in the next few weeks.

The Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure launched two funding programmes, Major Events and Events Growth Fund, in March of this year. The aims of these programmes include stimulating tourism through sporting and other events. A further call for applications from event organisers will be issued in the autumn.

Over the past three years, Tourism Ireland (TIL) has increased its promotion of the North West 200 event by hosting journalists from Great Britain, France, Spain, Belgium and Germany. During the 2008 event this included a visit to Armoy and meetings with the promoters of the Armada. It has also included marketing representation through specialist operators.

The culture of motorcycling in Co. Antrim is reflected in TIL's marketing material including its market guides of which over 2 million are printed in 11 languages.

NITB in partnership with the Regional Tourism Partnership and ten local authorities has successfully developed and launched the 'world class' Causeway Coastal Route (CCR). Being Northern Ireland's first strategic tourist route, it was developed in order to improve visitor safety and visitor access to sites and attractions all along the coast and the nine inland scenic loops. Designed to facilitate coaches, cars, cyclists and walkers the CCR is also recognised as an itinerary well suited to motorbikes. The village of Armoy is integrated within the CCR, specifically on the Glenshesk scenic loop.

A website www.bikerroadtrip.com features a number of routes developed by bikers stretching from Dumfries and Galloway in Scotland to the roads of the North West 200, and the twists and turns of Donegal and also provides information on accommodation, events, ferry travel, tour guides and bike clubs. Armoy features on the Joey's Backyard Route.

A further major initiative is underway to provide a full interpretative solution at 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 Coastal Route.

Unemployment in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of

unemployment in the Donaghadee South electoral area. (AQW 7587/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: At May 2008 there were 43 claimant count unemployed persons in Donaghadee South electoral area (37 males and 6 females). This corresponds to 2.4% of persons of working age compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Draft Regional Innovation Strategy

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all respondents to the consultation on the draft Regional Innovation Strategy. (AQW 7615/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Regional Innovation Strategy Action Plan (RISAP) 2008-2011 was launched on 30 April 2008, following a productive period of consultation with all Government departments, the Universities and Further Education (FE) Colleges plus industry and its representative bodies.

This is the third Action Plan under the Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS), which was subject to full public consultation prior to its launch in June 2003. An important element of the consultations around the Action Plan was a workshop held at the beginning of the process at which there were approximately 40 attendees from across the business and academia sectors. The organisations represented were:

- Agrifood & Biosciences Institute (AFBI)
- Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC)
- Arts Council NI
- Belfast City Council
- Belfast Institute of Further & Higher Education (BIFHE)
- BiobusinessNI
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Clarendon Fund
- Defence Diversification Agency
- Diabetica
- Ecomesh systems
- Economic Development Forum (EDF) Innovation Sub-Group
- Eircom UK Ltd
- Economic Research Institution of Northern Ireland (ERINI)
- Food Strategy Implementation Partnership (FSIP)
- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
- Health & Personal Social Services (now HSC) Research

- Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN)
- Institute of Directors (IoD)
- Lecky Design
- Level Seven Creative
- MATRIX
- Mo Team
- Momentum
- Morson Projects
- Moypark
- Nanotech NI
- National Endowment for Science Technology & the Arts (NESTA)
- NI Food & Drinks Association (NIFDA)
- NI Film & Television Commission (NIFTC)
- NI Business & Innovation Centre (NORIBIC)
- NI Science Park (NISP)
- Omagh College
- Pritchitt Foods
- Queen's University Belfast (QUB)
- Ulster Bank
- University of Ulster

Following this workshop a targeted series of bi-lateral consultations were undertaken with key stakeholders. These included the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Northern Ireland Science Park, the Centre for Competitiveness (CforC), the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC), Queen's University and the University of Ulster.

As a result of this consultation process the FSB, IoD, CforC, the Northern Ireland Science Park, QUB, Ulster University, and ANIC, as well as InterTradeIreland, Invest NI, and Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), have joined the NI Government Departments in committing themselves to important actions in the RIS Action.

During its development the action plan also received the endorsement of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee and all other Departmental Committees, the Economic Development Forum and MATRIX, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space being leased by Invest NI in the North Down constituency is currently occupied by Invest NI client companies; and if so at which locations. (AQW 7625/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the North Down parliamentary constituency area. However, as at 31st March 2008, within the constituency, it had 43 acres of land leased to client companies.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what office space Invest NI is currently leasing in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7626/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Invest NI does not lease any office space in the North Down parliamentary constituency area.

Unemployment in Ballyholme and Groomsport Areas in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Ballyholme and Groomsport electoral area of Bangor. (AQW 7637/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: At May 2008 there were 118 claimant count unemployed persons in Ballyholme and Groomsport electoral area (85 males and 33 females). This corresponds to 0.8% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Unemployment in the Abbey Area in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Abbey electoral area of Bangor. (AQW 7638/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: At May 2008 there were 305 claimant count unemployed persons in Abbey electoral area, (236 males and 69 females). This corresponds to 2.7% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Unemployment in the Bangor West Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Bangor West electoral area. (AQW 7639/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: At May 2008 there were 201 claimant

count unemployed persons in Bangor West electoral area (157 males and 44 females). This corresponds to 1.6% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Unemployment in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Donaghadee North electoral area.

(AQW 7640/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: At May 2008 there were 23 claimant count unemployed persons in Donaghadee North electoral area (19 males and 4 females). This corresponds to 1.2% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Unemployment in Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Millisle electoral area.

(AQW 7641/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: At May 2008 there were 29 claimant count unemployed persons in Millisle electoral area, (21 males and 8 females). This corresponds to 1.5% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Unemployment in Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the current level of unemployment in the Holywood electoral area.

(AQW 7684/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: At May 2008 there were 74 claimant count unemployed persons in Holywood electoral area, (53 males and 21 females). This corresponds to 0.8% of persons of working age, compared to the NI average figure of 2.3%.

Extending the Gas Pipeline to the Dungannon Area

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration his Department has given to extending the gas pipeline to the Dungannon area.

(AQW 7749/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Department has no current plans to extend the natural gas network to Dungannon, however any application to extend the network will be considered by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Department in terms of the economic viability of the proposal.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if any of the office space being leased by Invest NI in the North Down constituency is vacant; and for each vacant property to state (i) its location and for how long has it been vacant; and (ii) the length of the current contract, with start and expiry dates.

(AQW 7751/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI does not have any vacant office space in the North Down parliamentary constituency area.

Invest NI Office Space

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been paid since devolution on contracts for vacant office spaces held by Invest NI in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 7752/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Since the restoration of devolution Invest NI does not have any vacant office space in the North Down parliamentary constituency area and therefore not made any payments in respect of such contracts.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what action her Department has taken to reduce the number of retrospective planning applications.

(AQW 7388/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mrs Wilson): My Department is not responsible for the actions of individuals who ignore the statutory requirements of planning legislation and cannot therefore control the number of retrospective planning applications. The onus is clearly on any landowner/developer to ensure they have all the necessary consents in place before

they commence development. Where they do not, they will be liable to enforcement action.

Each Divisional Planning Office and Headquarters Strategic Project Division has dedicated enforcement teams to investigate any alleged breaches of planning control.

My Department's general policy approach to dealing with breaches of planning control is contained within Planning Policy Statement 9 – 'The Enforcement of Planning Control' and having regard to existing enforcement legislation. Changes to legislation were made in 2003 and 2006. As part of the current reform programme, I am continuing to look at ways to improve the enforcement regime and expect to seek views during the Planning Reform public consultation this autumn.

Highway Code

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of the Environment what plans she has to introduce a Highway Code in languages other than English, to facilitate people who do not have English as their first language. (AQW 7486/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Highway Code is essential reading for all road users and it is important that they have access to the booklet, are encouraged to read it and can understand it.

My Department will be publishing a revised Highway Code for Northern Ireland in July and is seeking the resources necessary to enable a copy to be provided free to every home in Northern Ireland and for translations to be published on-line in Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Mandarin.

Houses in Multiple Occupancy in South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment what action she intends to take to tackle the issue of Houses of Multiple Occupancy, following her visit to the Holylands area in South Belfast. (AQW 7499/08)

The Minister of the Environment: During my recent visit to the Holylands area in South Belfast, I heard at first hand some of the issues facing the community, including the adverse impact that HMOs can have on an area.

The issues surrounding HMOs are multi-faceted and cannot be tackled by one Department or Agency. I would therefore wish to endorse the joint working approach of the Inter Agency Group which was set up under the chairmanship of the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council. I believe that such a multi agency approach is necessary and that through the

Inter Agency Group, Planning Service can make a significant contribution to addressing a range of issues in the Holylands area.

As part of its contribution to the Inter Agency Group, Planning Service has undertaken consultation on a Draft HMO Subject Plan for Belfast aimed at addressing many of the issues which were raised during my visit. Work is progressing on the Subject Plan and it is hoped it will be formally adopted later this year. The Subject Plan represents one of the most progressive planning approaches to tackling houses in multiple occupation in the UK.

It has been recognised that the Subject Plan has already gone some way to controlling further HMO development in the Holylands area. Furthermore, the recently published Addendum to Planning Policy Statement 7 (Residential Extensions and Alterations) in March 2008 will also make a positive contribution to the control of extensions in non HMO properties.

I will consider how this policy framework may be further consolidated as follows:

- 1) Apartment development: I have asked my officials to prepare a paper on policy options that focus on development affecting established residential areas which I am expecting to be finalised shortly. This will provide me with an opportunity to consider what further measures may be needed to address this matter or any possible alternatives that may be needed to ensure better planning control over flat developments.
- 2) Backland Character: I am giving consideration as to how planning policy can protect and improve the character of residential backlands, i.e. the areas to the rear of residential property.
- 3) Purpose Built Student Housing: I will raise with my Ministerial colleagues the establishment of an inter-departmental group which will examine the scope for alternative student accommodation and thereby further reduce the current number of HMOs in areas such as the Holylands.
- 4) Inter Agency Group: Planning Service will continue to contribute to the Inter Agency Group under the Chairmanship of the Chief Executive of Belfast City Council with a view to addressing issues associated with HMO development in areas such as the Holylands.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, her Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7524/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Six 0845 numbers are operated on behalf of my Department's Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA). One 0845 and one 0870 number, both of which operate across the UK, are advertised by DVA on behalf of Pearson Vue, who act for DVLA in Swansea. Details of all numbers, including revenue generated in each of the past three years, are given in the table below.

| Number | Function | Operator | Revenue Generated for DVA |
|---------------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 0845 402 4000 | Vehicle and Driver Licensing Enquiry Line | Opal | None 1 |
| 0845 247 2471 | MOT Booking Line | Northgate | None |
| 0845 247 2472 | Driving Test Booking Line | Northgate | None |
| 0845 247 2473 | MOT/Driving Test Booking Enquiry Line | Northgate | None |
| 0845 247 2474 | MOT/Driving Test Booking Textphone Line | Northgate | None |
| 0845 758 1416 | DVA Testing Fees Information Line | Automated messaging service | None |
| 0845 600 6700 | Theory Test Line | Pearson Vue (UK wide) | None |
| 0870 0106 372 | Theory Test Textphone | Pearson Vue (UK wide) | None |

1. This 0845 number was introduced in February 2006 and rebates of £14,817.75 plus VAT were payable for the period February 2006 - February 2007. This revenue is payable to DVLA in Swansea and not to DVA. Totals for the period February 2007 - February 2008 have not yet been supplied or agreed but it is expected that the line will have generated a similar amount of revenue during this period.

MOT Test

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment what is (i) the current backlog of applications; and (ii) the average waiting time for, an MOT test. (AQW 7536/08)

The Minister of the Environment: At 31 May 2008, 61,438 customers have appointments for all categories of vehicle test. This reflects a normal business operating position for this time of year even though the number of vehicle test applications received, up to 31 May 2008, is up by 15% compared to the same period last year. Regulations provide for a vehicle test application to be made up to three months

in advance of when it is due a test, however, they restrict the testing of a vehicle to within one month in advance of its due date.

The Agency's target is to provide 85% of vehicle test appointments within 21 days of application (unless a later date has been requested by the customer). At 31 May the Agency was achieving a rate of 87% and the average waiting time for a vehicle test across Northern Ireland was 18 days.

MOT Certificates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how those responsible for the enforcement of the display of MOT certificates will distinguish between motorists who do not have a certificate and those who obtained an MOT certificate in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 7542/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Vehicle owners who have had their vehicle tested in Great Britain will have been provided with a certificate proving that their vehicle has been tested and has passed its MOT.

PSNI officers have the power under Article 180 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 to request vehicle owners to produce their vehicle test certificate. If the vehicle owner is unable to produce the certificate they will be guilty of an offence.

MOT Certificates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is her Department's position in relation to the display of MOT certificates on Northern Ireland owned cars that have passed an MOT test in other parts of the United Kingdom; and if the owners will be liable to a pay fine. (AQW 7543/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The legislation regarding the display of MOT discs is applicable only to vehicles tested under the Northern Ireland Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations. The Department cannot legislate for vehicles tested in another jurisdiction. Where a vehicle has obtained a valid Test Certificate issued in Great Britain the vehicle owner will not have been provided with an MOT disc and they cannot be prosecuted or fined, for failure to display, when the vehicle is used in Northern Ireland.

Communities Against the Lough Neagh Incinerator

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to explain her decision to refuse a

meeting with representatives of the Communities Against the Lough Neagh Incinerator. (AQW 7549/08)

Mrs A Foster: In declining to meet representatives of the Communities Against the Lough Neagh Incinerator, I did explain that I was unable to accept their invitation as the planning application may come before me at a later stage in the planning process. I have instead offered to the groups a meeting with my officials in Planning Service.

Rose Energy

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many meetings she has had with representatives from Rose Energy; and the reasons for these meetings. (AQW 7550/08)

The Minister of the Environment: I met representatives of Rose Energy once, on 27 November 2007. I attended the meeting, along with officials from my Department, to address any queries that may have arisen out of the presentation given by Rose Energy. Rose Energy had expressed a particular concern about compliance with the EU Nitrates Directive. At the meeting I did encourage Rose Energy to make early contact with Planning Service to discuss their proposals.

MOT Discs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment who is responsible for (i) the enforcement of the display of MOT discs; and (ii) prosecutions for failure to display. (AQW 7553/08)

The Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Primary responsibility for the enforcement of mandatory display of MOT discs will be carried out by PSNI officers; however, enforcement officers of the Department of the Environment's Driver & Vehicle Agency will also have the power to enforce this requirement.
- (ii) Proceedings for failing to display MOT discs can be instigated by the PSNI or the Department of the Environment and will be processed through the Public Prosecution Service.

Temporary Waste Transfer Station in Newtownstewart

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of the Environment why no decision has been made on a planning application (J/2006/0876/F) submitted in 2006 to the Special Studies Section of the Planning Service, for a temporary waste transfer station at 76 Strabane Road, Newtownstewart. (AQW 7557/08)

The Minister of the Environment: This planning application has been submitted by Strabane District Council. While it may appear at first glance to be a straightforward proposal, it has in fact proved to be a complex application to deal with. The proposal involves taking access onto a protected route. Consideration is further complicated by the fact that another waste planning application, yet to be determined, proposes the use of the same access. This cumulative impact gives rise to potentially unacceptable levels of intensification of use of the access to the protected route.

Planning Service had anticipated that there would have been an outcome to this application before the end of March 2008. This proved not to be possible. However I am advised that Planning Service would hope to bring an opinion on the application to Council within the next six weeks.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how much it will cost to set up the new Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and what its annual running costs will be. (AQW 7558/08)

The Minister of the Environment: It is estimated that the cost of setting up the new Northern Ireland Environment Agency will be around £30k.

The new Agency is expected to remain within the 2008/09 budget of £54.2m already allocated to the Environment and Heritage Service.

Graduated Driver Licensing

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment when the consultation on Graduated Driver Licensing will be launched. (AQW 7630/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department is currently finalising its consultation document on proposals for a system of graduated driver licensing, with a view to issuing it to a wide range of NI interests by the end of June 2008.

In addition, the Department issued a letter on 23 May 2008 to NI consultees seeking their comments on the range of questions asked in a recent GB consultation by DfT on proposals to reform the way people learn to drive and the way they are tested.

The responses received to both sets of proposals will be carefully considered before any decisions are reached on the best way forward in NI.

Taxi Index Cost Report

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment when the Taxi Index Cost Report will be started, and the proposed completion date. (AQW 7651/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department intends to start work in early 2009 on a wide-ranging review of taxi fares, part of which will involve the development of a Taxi Cost Index. As this research is still being planned it is not yet possible to state when it will be completed.

Taxi Index Cost Report

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment who will be carrying out the consultation and delivering the final outcome of the Taxi Index Cost Report. (AQW 7652/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Production of a Taxi Index Cost Report will form part of a wide-ranging review of taxi fares. My Department will carry out all consultations on any policy and legislative proposals that emerge from this work.

Taxis Bill

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the specification of the proposed meters which are to be installed in taxis, as outlined in the Taxis Bill. (AQW 7653/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has begun work to determine future requirements for taximeters. While a specification already exists for use by Belfast Public Hire taxis, as yet no updated requirements have been identified. Consultation on a proposed new taximeter specification will take place when it has been developed.

Taxis Bill

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment what consultation is taking place with manufacturers of 'in car' meters, which are to be installed in taxis as outlined in the Taxis Bill. (AQW 7654/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has begun work on the development of a revised specification for taximeters. As part of this process, my officials are consulting with taximeter manufacturers about the functionality and capabilities of their products.

Taxis Bill

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment what training is taking place within her Department to deal with the changes envisaged by the Taxis Bill. (AQW 7655/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department relies on well established systems to identify and deliver training to ensure that all members of staff have the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively. Staff involved in the planning, implementation and delivery of the taxi regulation reform programme will, through this system, receive timely and appropriate training.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Pensioners Rate Relief

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many pensioners receive rates relief; and what is being done to ensure that all who are eligible for rates relief are able to take it up. (AQW 7243/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Robinson): Rate relief is administered by the Land and Property Services (LPS) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). The type of relief and the total number of pensioners receiving them is set out in the table below:

| Relief Type | Number of ratepayers aged over 60 receiving the relief |
|----------------------------|--|
| Housing Benefit | 59,111 |
| Rate Relief | Not available (4,905 awards made) |
| Disabled Persons Allowance | Not available (11,000 awards made) |

Unfortunately it is not possible at present to confirm how many pensioners (60 years old and above) are in receipt of rate relief.

Land and Property Services (LPS) has received more than 13,500 applications for Lone Pensioner Allowance and NIHE 244. This relief is for pensioners aged 70 and above.

- LPS uses a number of approaches to actively promote the take up of the various reliefs: During 2007/2008 the "Who Gets Help and How Campaign" involved advertising the reliefs and how to apply on bus shelters, buses and at a range of

public and community facilities and the issue of a "Who Gets Help and How" booklet to every household that received a rate bill;

- Contributing to and or taking part in television and radio coverage about entitlement to the reliefs;
- Partnering with the voluntary and community sectors to explain the new reliefs to their staff and providing them with posters and leaflets to market the reliefs and application forms to help ratepayers to apply; and
- Reviewing entitlement to relief when ratepayers contact LPS to discuss payment difficulties.

LPS is considering its response to the recommendations from the recent "Take Up" study commissioned by the Department.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people with disabilities are currently employed by his Department. (AQW 7408/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of staff with disabilities currently employed in the Department of Finance and Personnel is 129.

Clare House Private Finance Initiative Scheme

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps does his Department intend to take in light of the Post Occupancy Evaluation Report undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency into the Clare House Private Finance Initiative scheme. (AQW 7555/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Clare House is an ambitious and challenging pilot requiring people to work in a very different way. The recent evaluation report noted a number of both positive and negative aspects of the pilot. The report provides very valuable lessons and is one of a number of factors that will help to shape and inform the final Workplace 2010 contract. The lessons learned are being incorporated into an action plan which will ensure that the issues relating the wider Workplace 2010 contract will be addressed.

I am convinced that Workplace 2010 is right for the NICS to realise its reform and modernisation agenda but the evaluation reinforces the fact that the culture change associated with the transition is a very significant issue and one which have to be addressed directly and positively in moving forward.

I can assure you that these issues are being addressed and that the final Workplace 2010 proposals

will be subject to the approval of the Executive prior to contract signature.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7561/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel operates three 0845 numbers; namely:

08456713133 – Account NI External Service Helpdesk

08453006360 – Land & Property Services Rating Helpline

08453006361 – Land & Property Services Rating Helpline (mini-com)

Two additional 0845 numbers were used by NISRA between 23rd April and 25th June 2007 for preparatory work for the 2011 census; namely: 08456072011 – NISRA census Helpline

08456082011 – NISRA census Helpline (mini-com)

The Department has no 0870 numbers in operation and has not used any 0870 numbers over the past three years.

No profit has accrued to the Department from the use of 0845 telephone numbers

Peace III Funding

Mr Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money has been made available by the European Union for Peace III funding. (AQW 7585/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The European Union have allocated €224,845,648 to the 2007-13 PEACE III Programme. Including Member State match funding, the total PEACE III budget is €332,891,807. This is a shared allocation between Northern Ireland and the Border Region of the Republic of Ireland.

Peace II Extension

Mr Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the underspend was of Peace II extension money. (AQW 7586/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The PEACE II Programme is still operating. More than 1,500 PEACE II projects remain open and many of

these can continue spending until their agreed end date of September 2008. Only when these have closed will it be possible to determine what proportion of the Programme's budget has been spent.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), as PEACE II Managing Authority, is working closely with the two Member States and with Implementing Bodies to ensure that all PEACE II resources are spent.

Peace II Extension

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what contingency fund was set aside as the exit strategy for the Peace II extension. (AQW 7588/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: No contingency fund was set aside as an exit strategy for the PEACE II extension.

Provided they can satisfy the relevant selection criteria, PEACE II funded projects may be supported under the new PEACE III Programme, under other EU Programmes or from mainstream sources.

As EU PEACE funding is special, time-limited support, all PEACE II projects had to specify a formal end date and, if appropriate, a strategy for their sustainability following Programme closure.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Health Programmes North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the health programmes his department has planned for deprived areas in the North Down constituency. (AQW 6410/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Neighbourhood Renewal seeks to target those communities throughout Northern Ireland who are suffering the highest levels of deprivation. Neighbourhood Partnerships have been established for each Neighbourhood Renewal area as a vehicle for local planning and implementation to deliver improvements to the area. Health & Social Care is represented on the North Down Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership.

Programmes to date have included –

- Information on health education programmes available from the local Provider HSC Trust.

- Funding for North Down Community Network to employ a Community Development and Health Worker.
- A Health Needs Audit in each of the six identified disadvantaged areas across North Down.
- Funding to each of the six disadvantaged areas to access health education programmes/health improvement programmes to address their individual need.

Programmes planned include –

- Work underway with the local South Eastern HSC Trust, North Down Neighbourhood Partnership and Kilcooley Community Forum to bring forward an application to DSD to appoint new staff within the Kilcooley area to meet identified need in the area of mental health and emotional wellbeing and to co-ordinate a range of employment, education and health programmes.
- The local Investing for Health Partnership is currently finalising the Health Improvement Plan for 2008-2010. Within this there are a range of actions identified by North Down Neighbourhood Partnership, NIHE, local Community Networks, voluntary and local community organisations. Many of these actions are targeted at disadvantaged areas across the North Down Borough.

Suicide

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: The Health and Social Services Boards have advised that the information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency.

Suicide related problems are addressed, in part, out of the Boards' general mental health services allocation of £187 million in 2008/09. In addition, an extra £46 million has been made available for investment in mental health services over the next three years. This includes enhanced provision of psychotherapy services and crisis response services.

£2.01 million of the Suicide Prevention Strategy's £3m implementation budget was allocated, via the four Health and Social Services Boards, to be used to support local communities with the development of suicide prevention initiatives. I have supplied a breakdown in the table below showing the allocation of this funding to each of the Health and Social Services Boards in 2008/09.

Of the £2.01 million allocated for community-led initiatives, £0.5 million is ring fenced primarily

for addressing areas of disproportionate need. This element of the suicide prevention budget is non-recurrent and was allocated by parliamentary constituency as agreed between the Department and the Finance sub group of the Suicide Strategy Implementation Body.

Up to a further £1.0 million is available in 2008/09 for provision of services by community and voluntary groups to support the “Lifeline” crisis support service.

BREAKDOWN OF £2.01M SUICIDE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING TO HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES BOARDS

| Board Area | Funding 2008/09 (£) |
|------------|---------------------|
| Eastern | 996,547 |
| Northern | 424,581 |

| Board Area | Funding 2008/09 (£) |
|------------|---------------------|
| Southern | 327,470 |
| Western | 348,402 |
| Total | 2,097,000 |

Agency Staff at the Causeway Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on employing agency staff at Causeway Hospital over the last five years, broken down by job title.

(AQW 7386/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The details are as follows:

| GRADE | 03/04 | 04/05 | 05/06 | 06/07 | 07/08 | Total |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Nursing | 319,451 | 425,643 | 219,226 | 51,341 | 249,977 | 1,265,638 |
| Medical | | | | | | |
| Consultants | 955,292 | 2,178,498 | 853,567 | 329,763 | 303,925 | 4,621,045 |
| Middle Grade | 101,559 | 317,237 | 137,259 | 110,465 | 344,976 | 1,011,496 |
| Junior Doctors | 338,895 | 79,333 | 80,739 | 352,883 | 213,275 | 1,065,125 |
| SubTotal | 1,395,746 | 2,575,068 | 1,071,565 | 793,111 | 862,176 | 6,697,666 |
| Medical Photography | 16,807 | 16,875 | 16,093 | 1,908 | 0 | 51,683 |
| Admin | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6,097 | 0 | 6,097 |
| Lab | 51,251 | 17,160 | 14,774 | 3,688 | 0 | 86,873 |
| Catering | 0 | 89,182 | 63,119 | 764 | 2,536 | 155,601 |
| Grand Total | 1,783,255 | 3,123,928 | 1,384,777 | 856,909 | 1,114,689 | 8,263,558 |

Mental-Health Patients

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what intensive care services are available to mental health patients in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; and to outline plans to develop these services. (AQW 7403/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Psychiatric intensive care units (PICUs) are available in both the Gransha Hospital and Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospitals.

On the Gransha site, the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) facility has been integrated into the male and female admission units. Each unit now provides three gender specific ICU beds. The current arrangement is an interim one, pending the completion of the new 30 bed crisis facility at Gransha Park. This new facility will

replace the old admission units and all 30 beds will be built to PICU standards. The facility will have single en-suite rooms, 15 male and 15 female. Each ward will have 3 dedicated PICU beds which will be designed to operate as stand-alone units when required. The new facility should be ready by 2011.

The Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital has one 8 bed PICU. Future provision on this site is currently under discussion and a similar model to the Gransha proposal is being actively considered. Through the Developing Better Services programme, the admission wards and the PICU will be replaced by approximately 2012. The new admission facility will include two 13 bed gender specific wards, all with single en-suite bedrooms with the entire unit built to PICU standards.

Dalriada Out-of-Hours Service

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to reduce the service provided by the Dalriada doctor-led 'out of hours' urgent care service. (AQW 7404/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently all Out of Hours (OOH) services in Northern Ireland are subject to a review looking at their efficiency and effectiveness. It is expected that the review will be published in the near future, this being the case, no decisions have been made.

Front Line Children's Services

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that front line children's services are secured within his Department. (AQW 7410/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As a consequence of the Final Executive Budget announced at the end of January 2008, I have been able to allocate funding to provide additional services for children with complex needs, meet the costs of new child protection legislation and mainstream the Children and Young People's Package.

I have also been able to invest in service developments for a range of children's services. By 2010/2011, I will be investing an additional £10m per annum on improving children's services preventing children going into care and improving the outcomes for those in care.

Smoking in Public Places

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been prosecuted by local Councils for smoking in public places since the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 took effect on 30th April 2007, broken down by each of the 26 local government districts. (AQW 7429/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Provisional figures up to 31 March 2008 show that prosecutions have been brought against two individuals for smoking in a smoke-free place. One of the cases is being taken by North Down Borough Council and the other by Lisburn City Council.

During the same period, provisional figures show that 350 written warnings and 34 fixed penalty notices were issued in respect of smoking in a smoke free place.

Broken Limbs in the Antrim Area Hospital

Ms Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many re-settings were required for broken limbs in the Antrim Area Hospital, in each of the last 3 years; and how this compares with the United Kingdom average. (AQW 7430/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The re-setting of broken limbs is not carried out at Antrim Area Hospital.

Figures on the average number of re-settings required in the United Kingdom are not available.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on his Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7438/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Research into the Financial Cost of the Northern Ireland Divide was published in April 2007 and provided background for my Department in developing bids and presenting the DHSSPS case as part of the CSR2007 process.

As a consequence of the Final Executive Budget announced at the end of January 2008, I was able to secure funding to meet not only unavoidable or inescapable costs but also to meet the costs of service developments. Key areas where I have been able to provide development funding include mental health and learning disability services, children's services, long term conditions, acute services and public health.

Planned savings of £53m arising from the Review of Public Administration now form part of required Departmental CSR efficiency plans for the next three years. For the remainder of their CSR savings, I have asked Trusts to provide me with their proposals for delivering efficiencies. I am still considering these proposals.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting times for diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, in each Health Board area. (AQW 7453/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many health professionals are employed in the diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder in each Health Board area.

(AQW 7454/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Fertility Treatments

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding has been allocated for fertility treatments in 2008-09.

(AQW 7458/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: £1.6m has been allocated to the Health and Social Services Boards for fertility services in the 2008-09 financial year. It is for individual Boards to decide how this money should best be used to meet the needs of their resident population.

Fertility Counselling Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the £50,000 allocated to the Fertility Counselling Service was spent in 2007-2008; and who received it.

(AQW 7459/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An extra allocation of £50,000 to improve access to fertility counselling services was made available by my Department to the Health and Services Boards in late 2006. It is a matter for Boards to decide how best to allocate this money to deliver against their objectives in this area. A plan for the use of this extra funding was agreed in late 2007 and includes funding for the Infertility Network UK, additional fertility nurse adviser posts within Trusts and some additional funding for counselling services. This plan is in the process of being implemented.

Fertility Counselling Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to confirm the timescales for allocating money to the Fertility Counselling Service in 2008-09; and how this money will be allocated.

(AQW 7460/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: An extra allocation of £50,000 to improve access to fertility counselling services was made available by my Department to the Health and

Services Boards in late 2006. It is a matter for Boards to decide how best to allocate this money to deliver against their objectives in this area. A plan for the use of this extra funding was agreed in late 2007 and includes funding for the Infertility Network UK, additional fertility nurse adviser posts within Trusts and some additional funding for counselling services. This plan is in the process of being implemented.

Funding for Cancer Drugs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been allocated for cancer drugs in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 7461/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst it is not possible to give an exact figure for the spend on cancer drugs alone, £29m of additional funding has been made available in recent years for the introduction of new specialist drugs and therapies which includes cancer drugs –

| | |
|-----------|------|
| 2005/2006 | £5m |
| 2006/2007 | £11m |
| 2007/2008 | £13m |

The allocation of funding for specialist drugs is a matter for the four Health and Social Services Boards, as commissioners of services, taking into account the competing demands and pressures in their areas and the strategic objectives and priorities of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. However, the Department indicated to Boards that in 2006/07 and 2007/08, the additional funding should include £4m and £2m dedicated for the provision of specialist cancer drugs.

Registered Dentists

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were registered with a dentist in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 7468/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Central Services Agency holds a record of dentists who provide a full or partial Health Service treatment to patients. Information on dentists exclusively providing treatment outside the Health Service is not available. The information shown in table 1 below therefore includes Health Service patients only.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF PATIENTS^{1,2} REGISTERED WITH AN HEALTH SERVICE DENTIST BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY.

| Parliamentary Constituency | 2008 | 2007 | 2006 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Belfast East | 43,748 | 44,333 | 45,170 |
| Belfast North | 40,925 | 41,796 | 42,601 |
| Belfast South | 38,470 | 41,057 | 43,227 |
| Belfast West | 42,337 | 43,184 | 43,584 |
| East Antrim | 44,789 | 46,198 | 46,712 |
| East Londonderry | 49,181 | 49,666 | 49,976 |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 37,920 | 41,133 | 43,234 |
| Foyle | 47,812 | 50,101 | 52,182 |
| Lagan Valley | 50,416 | 55,730 | 55,584 |
| Mid Ulster | 42,615 | 42,996 | 41,789 |
| Newry and Armagh | 50,706 | 55,900 | 58,921 |
| North Antrim | 62,813 | 62,895 | 61,787 |
| North Down | 42,205 | 44,844 | 46,952 |
| South Antrim | 48,436 | 53,668 | 54,355 |
| South Down | 57,575 | 59,357 | 58,296 |
| Strangford | 53,118 | 52,098 | 56,085 |
| Upper Bann | 55,828 | 57,001 | 56,163 |
| West Tyrone | 32,284 | 34,957 | 35,010 |
| Residency unknown ³ | 21,686 | 20,928 | 21,675 |
| Northern Ireland | 862,864 | 897,842 | 913,303 |

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes

- Figures are quoted as at May of the relevant year. Data is derived from the list of dental registrations.
- The figures shown relate to registered Health Service patients, resident within the specified Constituency.
- Some patients could not be matched against a valid postcode, so could not be allocated to a Parliamentary Constituency

Colonic and Rectal Surgery Services at Altnagelvin Area Hospital

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of colonic and rectal surgery services at Altnagelvin Area Hospital. (AQW 7473/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Altnagelvin Hospital provides a full range of colorectal services, including colorectal

surgery for the population of the Western Trust area. Both inpatient and outpatient services are provided.

Following the recent resignation of two colorectal surgeons, the Western Trust has initiated a recruitment process for their replacement. The Trust, in consultation with other Trusts, is developing a transition plan to ensure that services to patients served by Altnagelvin are sustained until new staff are in post.

Smoking in Public Places

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many incidents of smoking in public places, in contravention of the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, have been recorded by each of the 26 local government district councils since it took legal effect on 30th April 2007. (AQW 7482/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Provisional figures up to 31 March 2008 show that, of 36,240 premises inspected, smoking in a smoke-free place was detected in 1,039 (2.9%) cases. A breakdown of this figure by district council area is shown in the following table.

| Council | Number of recorded incidents of smoking in a smoke-free place. |
|--|--|
| Antrim Borough Council | 25 |
| Ards Borough Council | 52 |
| Armagh City & District Council | 17 |
| Ballymena Borough Council | 63 |
| Ballymoney Borough Council | 3 |
| Banbridge District Council | 41 |
| Belfast City Council | 19 |
| Carrickfergus borough Council | 11 |
| Castlereagh Borough Council | 185 |
| Coleraine Borough Council | 11 |
| Cookstown District Council | 8 |
| Craigavon Borough Council | 55 |
| Derry City Council | 75 |
| Down District Council | 49 |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council | Nil |
| Fermanagh District Council | 18 |
| Larne Borough Council | 5 |
| Limavady Borough Council | 54 |
| Lisburn City Council | 83 |

| Council | Number of recorded incidents of smoking in a smoke-free place. |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Magherafelt District Council | 27 |
| Moyle District Council | 16 |
| Newry & Mourne District Council | 35 |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council | 8 |
| North Down Borough Council | 85 |
| Omagh District Council | 39 |
| Strabane District Council | 55 |
| Total | 1,039 |

Medical Records Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many medical records staff are employed at each hospital. (AQW 7487/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nursing vacancies there are currently in each hospital. (AQW 7488/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Ward Clerks

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ward clerks are currently employed in each hospital. (AQW 7489/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people with disabilities are currently employed by his Department. (AQW 7493/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 38 DHSSPS staff have declared a disability or long-term health condition.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people aged (i) under 25; (ii) between 25-35; (iii) between 35-50; and (iv) over 50, were diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7494/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Waiting Times for Restorative Dentistry

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the average waiting time was for people requiring restorative dentistry in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7495/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the average waiting time for people requiring reconstructive dentistry in each of the last 3 years, broken down by parliamentary constituency is not available.

Task Force on Speech and Language Therapy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he accepts the recommendations in the report by the Taskforce on Speech and Language Therapy; and to outline a timeframe for the implementation of the recommendations. (AQW 7502/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am currently considering the Report from the Regional Speech and Language Therapy Task Force. I will make an announcement about the Report and a timeframe before the end of June 2008.

Care Matters Strategy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Care Matters strategy. (AQW 7503/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The consultation on Care Matters in Northern Ireland ended on 3 September 2007 and I am pleased to advise that responses were broadly very positive and supportive of the proposals.

One of the main issues highlighted during the consultation was the need for adequate resources to implement the proposals. In response, my Department

has secured a £10 million investment over the next three years to develop and enhance services for children and families by implementing key elements of Care Matters, and the related Families Matter and Adopting the Future strategies. This investment is linked to a range of PFA and PSA targets designed to reduce the number of children in care and improve outcomes for care-experienced young people.

We have also moved ahead with a number of individual policy initiatives outlined in the consultation document, such as the introduction of innovative guides for young people entering the care system. In addition, we are now considering the provisions of the Children and Young Person's Bill currently before Parliament to ascertain whether it contains new proposals which would further strengthen the approach set out in Care Matters.

My Department is currently engaged in discussions with other Departments and our partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors to consider how best to move forward with wider-scale implementation of Care Matters. I expect to be in a position to make an initial announcement on the way ahead by early July and by September, I intend to publish a formal summary of the consultation responses, an action plan identifying a blueprint for implementation, and to establish the necessary infrastructure to oversee implementation in the longer term. I look forward to the continued support of other Departments in progressing this agenda.

Budget for Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the publication of the Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children, if he has any plans to increase his budget for children and young people. (AQW 7505/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Analysis of Public Expenditure on Children was published in May 2007 and provided background for my Department in developing bids as part of the CSR2007 process.

As a consequence of the Final Executive Budget announced at the end of January 2008, I was able to allocate funding to provide additional services for children with complex needs, meet the costs of new child protection legislation and mainstream the Children and Young People's Package.

In addition, I have also been able to invest in a range of service developments for children and young people. By 2010/2011, I will be investing an additional £10m per annum on improving children's services to prevent children going into care and to improve the outcomes for those in care.

Knockbracken Health Care Centre

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of bullying and harassment in the last three years have been lodged by staff in the Knockbracken Health Care Centre; and the manner in which they were resolved. (AQW 7515/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were four cases of bullying and harassment in this facility since 2005. Formal investigations were carried out in all four cases. Recommendations following the investigation included mediation, retraining and counselling.

Knockbracken Health Care Centre

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of qualified nurses that have voluntarily downgraded themselves to nursing assistants in Knockbracken Health Care Centre; and their reasons for taking this action. (AQW 7516/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: One qualified nurse in this facility has voluntarily requested to be downgraded citing personal stress as the reason for this request.

Knockbracken Health Care Centre

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of disciplinary cases that have been taken in Knockbracken Health Care Centre in the last three years; and the reasons for them. (AQW 7518/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were 23 disciplinary cases in this facility in the last three years. There are various reasons for these disciplinary cases ranging from failure to ensure a neutral working environment to casual absenteeism and work below an acceptable standard but given the sensitive nature of disciplinary cases I am not in a position to provide more detail.

Knockbracken Health Care Centre

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff, broken down by grade, have taken early retirement or left on grounds of ill-health from Knockbracken Health Care Centre in the last three years. (AQW 7519/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A total of 66 staff from this facility

have taken early retirement or left on the grounds of ill health since 2005. The details of staff numbers and the grade are set out in the following table: (This figure includes staff who have satisfied the criteria and been granted voluntary early retirement as a result of the re-organisation arising out of the RPA.)

| Grade Description | Staff Number |
|--|--------------|
| Administrative & Clerical Grade 3 (9); Grade 4 (1); Grade 5 (3); Grade 8 (1); Grade 10 (1) | 15 |
| Chief Executive | 1 |
| Cleaner/Domestic Assistant (9); Domestic Supervisor (1) | 10 |
| Medical Consultant | 1 |
| Director of Human Resources | 1 |
| Driver (D) | 2 |
| Enrolled Nurse (Grade D) | 1 |
| Hairdresser | 1 |
| Laundry Worker (Agenda for Change Band 1) | 1 |
| Mental Health Nurse (Agenda for Change Band 5) | 8 |
| Mental Health Nurse Support (Agenda for Change Band 2) | 11 |
| Nursing Assistant (Grade A) | 1 |
| Personal Secretary (Grade 3) | 1 |
| Senior Nurse/N.O. (Grade I) | 1 |
| Sister/Charge Nurse (Grade F) | 2 |
| Staff Nurse (Grade E) | 2 |
| Telephonist (I) | 1 |
| Unit Senior Manager I (1); Unit Senior Manager II (5) | 6 |

Respite Care

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what extra resources he is putting into respite care for parents. (AQW 7527/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total budget secured under the Comprehensive Spending Review for children and adults with disabilities in Northern Ireland is £8m, £11m and £24m respectively over the next 3 years.

Meeting with the Commissioner for Children and Young People

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why he has yet to meet

with the Commissioner for Children and Young People. (AQW 7528/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have in fact met twice with the Commissioner - on 29 June 2007 and 19 May 2008.

Children with Mental-Health Needs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to deal with the lack of beds for children with mental health needs. (AQW 7529/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new 18 bed mental health adolescent in-patient unit at Forster Green will be completed by 2010, and there are plans to build a new 15 bed Child and Family Centre linked to this. The Western HSS Board and HSC Trust are discussing the development of an interim children/young people in-patient unit within one of the two psychiatric hospitals in their area, until the new unit at Foster Green reaches full capacity. A new privately operated facility of around 30 beds for young people aged 12 – 17 has also been proposed. Should this go ahead, Health and Social Services Boards could commission additional in-patient provision from it.

However, in line with the Bamford Review recommendations, I intend to concentrate on developing community based care and minimising our reliance on hospital in-patient care. I will therefore re-assess the need for further statutory in-patient provision, following the completion of the new facility at Foster Green, and in the light of developments in the community and independent sectors.

Cross-Departmental Approaches to Health and Education

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking with the Minister of Education to promote cross-departmental approaches to health and education issues. (AQW 7530/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have set up a regular Permanent Secretaries meeting between the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Education. This is the conduit for all cross-departmental issues, for example, child protection, looked after children, children, young people and their families, speech and language therapy, domestic violence and drugs and alcohol.

I have also met with the Minister of Education on a number of occasions over the last twelve months to discuss a wide range of issues. In addition the Minister of Education and I sit on a number of inter-ministerial groups.

Families Matter Strategy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Families Matter strategy. (AQW 7532/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The strategy was received positively by the Health Committee on the 22 May and will be tabled at the next Executive meeting on 19 June. It would then be my intention to launch the family support strategy Families Matter: Supporting Families in Northern Ireland at the beginning of July.

Meeting with the Commissioner for Children and Young People

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has held meetings with the Commissioner for Children and Young People or her staff; and what was the purpose of these meetings. (AQW 7533/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have had two meetings with the Commissioner - on 29 June 2007 and 19 May 2008, when we covered a number of issues of mutual interest.

Waiting Times for Hip and Knee Replacements

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently on the waiting list for (i) a hip replacement operation; and (ii) a knee replacement operation; and what is the average waiting time for each of these operations. (AQW 7545/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 31st March 2008, the most recent quarter for which official waiting time data are available, there were 560 patients, recorded on the DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset, as waiting for a hip replacement operation and 587 patients recorded as waiting for a knee replacement operation.

The average waiting time for these patients was 71 days for a hip replacement operation and 69 days for a knee replacement operation.

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset.

School Age Childcare Services

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action has been taken by his Department to prevent the closure of School Age Childcare Services which were established under Governmental policy (Children First, 1999), given the fact that Playboard have begun informing parents that the service may not be available during the summer holidays and that a number of staff may face redundancy. (AQW 7556/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young People's 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 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.

While I do not consider that these projects come under my area of responsibility, I am not prepared to see them abandoned as they play a valuable role in helping to support children and their families. I have therefore decided that I will extend this funding from 30 June 2008 until the end of this calendar year. I understand that discussions will be on-going in relation to where departmental responsibility for childcare and these projects lie.

This arrangement will give the after school projects time to plan for their future.

Agenda for Change Bands

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which bands joiners have been assigned under Agenda for Change, in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7565/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The management in all HSC organisations working in partnership with local staff representative groups have either matched the skills and responsibilities of the jobs against benchmark national job profiles or where that has not been possible have evaluated the job to arrive at the Agenda for Change grading. Using these agreed principles joiners in the Belfast and Southern Trusts have been matched to the Agenda for Change Band 4; in the South Eastern Trust there is a mixture of Band 3 and Band 4 jobs and in the Northern and Western Trusts the joiners have been matched to Band 3.

Forensic Psychiatrists

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been provided to the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to appoint forensic psychiatrists; and how many forensic psychiatrists have been appointed by the Trust. (AQW 7612/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: £1m was allocated regionally to the Boards and Trusts in 07/08 for the further development of Community Forensic Mental Health services, which was a target in Priorities for Action. This added to an earlier allocation of £1m, made for 04/05, to develop consultant-led community forensic teams to complement the investment in the medium secure unit at Knockbracken, and with which forensic psychiatrists were to be appointed.

While all other Trusts have appointed Forensic Psychiatrists, and despite running a number of competitions, the Southern Trust has not yet been able to appoint a Consultant in Forensic Psychiatry. Further interviews are however scheduled for the end of June 2008.

Paramedic Cover in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many weekends in the last 5 months Omagh has been left without paramedic cover, with vehicles being staffed by all-technician crews. (AQW 7667/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have been advised that there have been no occasions over the past five months when a paramedic ambulance service response has not been available in the Omagh area. The ambulance service routinely responds to emergency calls in a variety of ways including mobile paramedic officers, paramedics in rapid response vehicles and A&E ambulances crewed by both paramedics and emergency medical technicians.

Ambulance resources are managed on a Northern Ireland basis and specific requests for a paramedic response are considered and addressed in the context of all available resources not just those based in a particular area.

Trained Ambulance Staff in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are based at the Ambulance Headquarters at Omagh; how many

staff are (a) fully trained; and (b) trainees; and how many are from the Omagh area. (AQW 7670/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has confirmed that there are currently 41 A&E ambulance personnel based in Omagh ambulance station. Of these, 33 are fully trained, 8 are trainee emergency medical technicians or paramedics and 10 live in the Omagh area.

Ambulance Resources in Fermanagh and Tyrone

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service was notified of the new ambulance resources for Tyrone and Fermanagh prior to the announcement by the Minister; and when these resources will be available on the ground. (AQW 7673/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I commissioned the Western Health and Social Services Board to develop proposals to improve emergency response in Fermanagh and West Tyrone. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) was closely engaged throughout that process and made an important contribution to the development of those proposals. I have now asked the Western Board to bring forward by mid-June a costed implementation plan for their proposed improvements, in association with NIAS.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were treated in each hospital for clostridium difficile in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2008. (AQW 7687/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

| Northern | 2007 | 2008 |
|---------------|------|------|
| Antrim | 163 | 73 |
| Whiteabbey | 36 | 27 |
| Mid Ulster | 38 | 27 |
| Moyle | 12 | 16 |
| Braind Valley | 22 | 4 |
| Causeway | 55 | 27 |
| Robinson | 2 | 2 |
| Dalriada | 1 | 0 |

| Northern | 2007 | 2008 |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Hollywell | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 329 | 176 |

All age groups

| Western | 2007 | 2008 |
|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Altnagelvin | 136 | 58 |
| Tyrone County | 17 | 11 |
| Erne | 10 | 6 |
| Total | 163 | 75 |

All age groups

| Southern | 2007 | 2008 |
|-------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Craigavon Area Hospital | 79 | 48 |
| Daisy Hill | 8 | 14 |
| Lurgan | 24 | 11 |
| South Tyrone | 1 | 4 |
| Mullinure | 4 | 2 |
| Total | 116 | 79 |

All age groups

| Belfast | 2007 | 2008 |
|--|------------|------------|
| Belfast City | 149 | 56 |
| Cancer Centre (previously Belvoir Park) | 27 | 10 |
| Royal Victoria | 134 | 70 |
| Mater | 55 | 38 |
| Muckamore Abbey | 3 | 2 |
| Knockbracken | 1 | 1 |
| Musgrave Park | 15 | 9 |
| Total | 384 | 186 |

All age groups

SOUTH EASTERN TRUST

The South Eastern Trust can only provide robust validated figures for patient in the age group 65>

| South Eastern Patients aged 65 > | 2007 | 2008 1st Quarter |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Ulster | 187 | 39 |
| Ards | | 1 |
| Downe | 19 | 5 |
| Lagan Valley | | 5 |
| Total | 206 | 50 |

As of April 2008 mandatory surveillance covers all patient episodes regardless of age.

Respite Facilities

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many respite places are available in the (i) Magherafelt District Council; (ii) Cookstown District Council; and (iii) Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, areas.

(AQW 7688/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested.

Waiting Times for Arthritis Patients

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's efforts to reduce waiting times for the receipt of treatment for arthritis with the range of Anti TNF drugs currently available.

(AQW 7690/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the last two years over 540 patients have been started on anti-TNF therapy for the treatment of arthritic conditions and in total the health service in Northern Ireland now spends around £9 million on these drugs each year. At the end of March 2008 there were 865 patients receiving treatment with anti-TNF drugs and 536 people on the waiting list for anti-TNF treatment for arthritis.

I am fully committed to further improving access to anti-TNF 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.

Treating a significantly increased number of patients will require a sizeable step-up in infrastructure to deliver the treatment safely. Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts have therefore agreed a stepped reduction in waiting times over the next three years, with interim targets of an 18 month waiting time by March 2009 and a maximum 9 month wait by March 2010.

Orthopaedic Appointments at Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients from the Western Health and Social Care Trust area,

awaiting orthopaedic appointments at Altnagelvin Hospital (i) were offered appointments at the North West Independent Hospital; and (ii) subsequently had follow up appointments and surgery at the North West Independent Hospital, in the (a) 2005-06; (b) 2006-07; and (c) 2007-08 financial years; and how much was paid by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to cover the cost of all such appointments and surgical procedures. (AQW 7744/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is set out below: Number of orthopaedic patients from the Western Health and Social Care Trust seen at the North West Independent Hospital (NWIH)

| | Outpatients sent to NWIH | Number of patients who had surgery at NWIH | Total Cost |
|---------|--------------------------|--|------------|
| 2005/06 | None | None | 0 |
| 2006/07 | 991 | 503 | £2.3m |
| 2007/08 | 390 | 864 | £3.453m |

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Notes:

Number of patients who had surgery reflects both outpatient conversions and daycase / inpatient waiting list patients

It has been necessary to use the independent sector to supplement health service capacity to deliver the reductions in waiting times seen over the last year. This will continue to be necessary while waiting times are further reduced and any shortfalls in capacity addressed.

Waiting Times for Ambulances

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he is taking to ensure that ambulances arrive at rural destinations as quickly as possible despite ambulance staff being forbidden to give the name of the person they are attending when seeking directions. (AQW 7814/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has a range of measures to identify the location of emergency incidents to support prompt response. These are: the structured training provided to its call-handlers;

- the telephone service provider's Enhanced Information System for Emergency Calls (EISEC) which links caller identification to location information;
- digital mapping linking call location to postcode or address; and
- a new satellite navigation system in ambulances to supplement the ambulance driver's knowledge.

Should ambulance personnel require further support and information about incident locations, this must be sought without compromising patient confidentiality.

The improvement in emergency response times recorded throughout Northern Ireland over the past year clearly shows that ambulances are arriving at both rural and urban emergency response locations more quickly than ever before.

School Age Childcare Services in West Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to meet the requirements of School Age Childcare Services in West Tyrone constituency, with specific reference to Carrickmore, Loughmacrory, Sixmilecross, Strathroy and Strabane. (AQW 7815/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young People's 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 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.

While I do not consider that these projects come under my area of responsibility, I am not prepared to see them abandoned as they play a valuable role in helping to support children and their families. I have therefore decided that I will extend this funding from 30 June 2008 until the end of this calendar year. I understand that discussions will be on-going in relation to where departmental responsibility for childcare and these projects lie.

This arrangement will give the after school projects time to plan for their future.

Cheap Alcohol

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has had contact with supermarkets or drinks companies following his recent comments on the availability of cheap alcohol. (AQO 3762/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I intend to meet with a broad range of representatives from the industry, including producers, supermarkets and other retailers, and bars/pubs/clubs,

to discuss issues relating to alcohol misuse, underage and binge drinking prior to the summer.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the positive responses I have received to date on this issue, particularly from Sainsbury's, the Musgrave Group, and the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Association. We have also raised the issue with the Federation of Retail Licenced Trade and the Northern Ireland Drinks Industry Group who are keen to be involved in this process.

Schizophrenia

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his policy on treating people with schizophrenia or suspected schizophrenia. (AQO 3771/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Schizophrenia is one of the more common, severe and enduring mental health disorders. As with many other psychiatric illnesses, it is usually treated by a combination of social, psychotherapy and pharmacological interventions. People with schizophrenia are treated in mainstream mental health services.

The Executive's formal response to the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability will shortly be issued for public consultation. This document includes my Department's proposals to modernise the full range of mental health services.

Referral to Hospitals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policies his Department has available for patients to choose which hospital they receive treatment. (AQW 7839/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision to refer a patient to hospital for investigation or treatment will be influenced by the patient's condition and its severity and also by patient preference. Patients will typically discuss treatment options with their general practitioner in reaching a decision about the appropriate referral and treatment. Within the health service, patients may request that they are referred to a specific hospital for treatment. It has been customary for patient preferences to be accommodated where possible within the Northern Ireland health system.

Health and Social Services Boards, who commission services in Northern Ireland, operate arrangements to manage the referral of patients between Board areas, other parts of the UK and, where appropriate, outside the UK.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Discharges from Waste Water Treatment Works

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to monitor discharges from waste water treatment works. (AQW 7392/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Discharges from Northern Ireland Water (NIW) Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) are subject to control under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Under the Order, no discharge can be made to a waterway or underground stratum without the consent of the Department of the Environment. The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) sets discharge consents detailing conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that can be discharged to the water environment and these include the requirements of relevant European Directives.

Compliance is assessed by EHS using data provided by NIW in accordance with an agreed monitoring programme and is reported annually. I have been advised that NIW's sampling staff and laboratories are fully accredited to ISO 17025 and are audited by external accreditation bodies and EHS. EHS also requires NIW to model all new WWTW discharging to the marine environment to display compliance with the microbiological standards set in the existing and revised Bathing Water Directive.

Pollution of Beaches

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the Marine Conservation Society's 'Good Beach Guide', what liaison has taken place with Northern Ireland Water, to ensure that it is not adding to the pollution of beaches. (AQW 7393/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Discharges by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) are subject to full environmental regulation by the Environment and Heritage Service of DOE under the consenting regime set out in the Water (NI) Order 1999. The Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) continues to meet regularly with NIW to detail the requirements of new and existing Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTWs). EHS requires NIW to model all new WWTWs discharging to the marine environment to demonstrate compliance with the microbiological standards set in the existing and revised Bathing Water Directive. EHS and NIW meet bi-monthly to discuss the Northern Ireland Drainage Area Plan where EHS sets standards for all

potential discharges from the North's sewer network. All intermittent discharges at bathing waters include a spill frequency which is set in order to afford protection to the receiving water.

My Department is currently providing investment of half a billion pounds to bring waste water treatment to required standards by 2014. The benefits this investment will provide for bathing water quality were acknowledged by the Marine Conservation Society in its Good Beach Guide for 2008. My officials are in regular contact with NIW and the relevant regulatory authorities on a range of environmental matters.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on travel expenses since devolution. (AQW 7422/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department spent £2,613,336 on official travel expenses in the period from devolution on 8 May 2007 to 31 May 2008. £62,787 was also spent on travel and subsistence for staff on training courses, conferences and further education training but it is not possible to separately identify the travel amounts.

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on his Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7439/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The report highlights roads, public transport and the school bus service, as specific areas within my Department where the costs of division can be identified and where potential savings might be gained as a result of the peace process and greater integration. I would agree with the report's identification of these areas. However, although some efficiency savings have been evident in recent years these have been relatively small in relation to the Department's overall budget and are likely to be minimal in future years.

Metal Theft on Railway Lines

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many incidents of 'metal theft' were recorded on the rail network in each of the last 5 years; and the cost to make good any damage caused. (AQW 7474/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Northern Ireland Railways have reported there have been no incidents of metal theft in each of the last five years.

Damage to Railway Lines

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it has cost to repair railway lines damaged by vandalism in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7475/08)

Mr C Murphy: The reported cost to repair railway lines damaged by vandalism in each of the last five years is as follows:

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 2003/04 | £3 |
| 2004/05 | £0 |
| 2005/06 | £3 |
| 2006/07 | £124 |
| 2007/08 | £4 |
| Total | £134 |

The reason why the figures are low is that it takes extreme force to damage rail and specialist tools to dismantle it. As a result, damage sustained has been mainly at crossings, which can be easily accessed. Such damage is generally caused by fire, usually a burning vehicle.

Comber Town Bus Service

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have used the new Comber Town Bus Service since its inception in September 2007. (AQW 7476/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The information is not available in the form requested. Translink records the number of trips undertaken rather than the number of passengers. The number of passenger trips recorded for the Comber Town Service No. 311, from 3 September 2007 to 25 May 2008 was 1,261.

Road Standards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department retains a bond for developers to ensure that roads are finished with tarmac that meets his Department's road standards. (AQW 7496/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Prior to starting building works on any development, where

the layout of roads and footways has been determined under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, a developer is required to enter into an agreement with my Department's Roads Service to provide the roads to the Department's standards, as prescribed in The Private Streets (Construction) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994.

This agreement is secured by a bond, which may be used by Roads Service to complete the road works should the developer default.

Traffic Congestion at the Stranmillis Roundabout

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures he intends to take to alleviate traffic congestion around the Stranmillis roundabout in South Belfast. (AQW 7498/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Stranmillis Roundabout, in common with many junctions throughout the Greater Belfast area, caters for a high number of vehicles, particularly at peak traffic times. Officials from my Department's Road Services have advised that they have carried out observations at the roundabout during peak traffic times and have noted that vehicles pass through the junction in a slow and controlled manner. It is considered that the roundabout copes well with the conflicting demands of traffic and delays are not considered to be excessive. Roads Service, therefore, has no plans, to change the road layout or introduce additional traffic control measures at this roundabout at this time.

Grass-Cutting on the Ards Peninsula

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how many tractors for grass-cutting are owned by his Department in each parliamentary constituency; and, in particular, for use in the Ards Peninsula. (AQW 7538/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 7538/08, my Department's Roads Service has advised me that it has 67 tractor/mower units available for grass cutting. Unfortunately, the location of these units is not broken down on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, the location of these units and the Council Area/Areas that are serviced by each Depot are listed in the following table.

| Location of tractor/mower unit | Council Area serviced by each depot | Number of units at each depot |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Antrim Depot | Antrim | 4 |
| Armagh Depot | Armagh | 2 |
| Arvalee Depot | Omagh | 4 |
| Ballycastle Depot | Moyle | 2 |
| Ballymena Depot | Ballymena | 4 |
| Ballymoney Depot | Ballymoney | 2 |
| Banbridge Depot | Banbridge | 2 |
| Bangor Depot | Ards and North Down | 4 |
| Castlenavan Depot | Down | 4 |
| Coleraine Depot | Coleraine | 6 |
| Cookstown Depot | Cookstown | 2 |
| Craigavon Depot | Craigavon | 1 |
| Dungannon Depot | Dungannon | 5 |
| Enniskillen Depot | Fermanagh | 6 |
| Larne Depot | Larne | 2 |
| Limavady Depot | Limavady | 2 |
| Londonderry Depot | Derry | 4 |
| Magherafelt Depot | Magherafelt | 2 |
| Sandyknowes Depot | Carrickfergus, Newtown-abbey & parts of Belfast | 2 |
| Sprucefield Depot | Lisburn | 5 |
| Strabane Depot | Strabane | 2 |
| Total | | 67 |

I understand that in a number of Council areas external contractors are involved in grass cutting operations

I am further advised that the Roads Service have 3 tractors that are used for grass cutting in the Ards Peninsula and as the grass cutting season progresses, mowers that become free are shared between neighbouring council areas to maximise use of available equipment.

Grass-Cutting on the Ards Peninsula

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the delay in cutting grass verges on the roads of the Ards Peninsula; when will the grass cutting start; and what is the schedule for the Ards Peninsula. (AQW 7539/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 7539/08 Roads Service has advised me that its current grass cutting policy stipulates

that grass in rural areas is cut twice per annum (or as required at junction sightlines for road safety purposes). Rural grass cutting normally commences on the first week in May and continues to around mid-September. This policy sets a target for completion of 90% of the first cut by the end of June.

Grass cutting to roads in the Ards Section commenced on 13 May 2008 and approximately 37% of the first cut has been completed. It is anticipated that the overall target of 90% of the first cut will be completed in rural areas by the end of June 2008.

20 mph Speed Limit in School Areas

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce a 20 mph speed limit in the vicinity of schools. (AQW 7544/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The introduction of speed limits at schools has been considered by both my Department's Roads Service and the PSNI, who are responsible for enforcement. It is acknowledged that for a large percentage of the time, for example at nights, weekends and holiday periods, reduced speed limits at schools may be totally inappropriate. Experience has shown that inappropriate speed limits are often ignored and may have the potential to bring speed limits, generally, into disrepute.

However, Roads Service is planning to pilot a variable speed limit at two schools over the next year, to measure their effectiveness. A variable speed limit at a school refers to a part-time speed limit, for example 20mph, which is effective at certain times of the day, when children are arriving and leaving. The speed limit is indicated by a variable message sign on the approach to the school and would be enforced by the police, in the normal manner.

The necessary orders for sign authorisations and speed limit changes are currently being processed. Once these pilots have been installed, they will be monitored and assessed to determine their effectiveness at reducing traffic speeds and other dangers, before consideration is given to introducing a more widespread programme outside schools where traffic speeds are high.

As part of its Safer Routes to Schools programme, Roads Service continues to work proactively with schools across the North to promote road safety at schools and on the journey to school. Since this initiative started in 2001, Roads Service has implemented a series of speed management measures at around 140 schools, with a further 50 planned for 2008/09. These measures alert drivers to the presence of school children and encourage them to drive responsibly.

Sewer Laying Work on Summerhill Avenue

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the sewer laying work currently underway on Summerhill Avenue and adjacent streets; and when the work will be completed. (AQW 7570/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the work currently underway on Summerhill Avenue is part of the Cloughan Park Sewerage Project. The work involves the laying of sewers to improve the drainage in the area and reduce the risk of out of sewer flooding. Progress has been slower than anticipated as excavation work for the sewers has encountered difficult ground conditions. However, it is expected that work on the project will be completed by August 2008.

Daily Vehicle Use on the B23

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development how many vehicles, on average, use the B23 route on a daily basis. (AQW 7599/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to AQW 7599/08, 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.

Roads Service has a traffic census point located on the B23 Hillhall Road, Lisburn, near Ballyaghlin. The annual average daily two way traffic flow in 2006, the latest year for which information is available, was 12,260 vehicles per day.

Brownfield Land

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Regional Development Strategy will be amended to exclude gardens from land defined as brownfield for development purposes. (AQW 7603/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am changing the definition of brownfield land to exclude the gardens of dwelling houses as part of the 5 year review of the Regional Development Strategy. I expect to publish the review document by the end of June.

Improvements on the B23

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what plans he has to upgrade the B23 route. (AQW 7604/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In relation to AQW 7604/08, Roads Service carried out a route study on the B23, Hillhall Road and the connecting routes on the B205, Ballylessen Road and Purdysburn Hill in 1999. This study identified a number of schemes, of which three have since been completed. The most recent being a junction improvement, at the Glen Road/261 Hillhall Road junction, completed in November 2006.

You may also be aware that a collision remedial scheme is currently in progress on the Hillhall Road, 250m south of the junction with the Glen Road. This scheme involves the provision of high friction surfacing and enhanced signing and should be completed by the end of June 2008.

In light of the continuing development in the Lisburn City area, Roads Service recently initiated a further route study which is nearing completion. This has identified the potential for further schemes to enhance road safety and traffic progression thereby reducing driver frustration. These proposals will now be considered for inclusion in Roads Service's Minor Works programme.

It should be noted, however, that route studies are for feasibility purposes only, with no guarantee that proposals will be implemented, as they are subject to the availability of the necessary lands and finances and must compete for priority with all other minor works proposals in the Division.

Rail-Travel Time between Belfast and Dublin

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development when he will be in a position to announce a reduction in the travel time by rail between Belfast and Dublin. (AQO 3745/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Work is ongoing to develop a business case for improving railway services between Belfast and Dublin. The work is being taken forward jointly by Iarnród Éireann and Translink.

When the fully costed Business Case is complete, it will be considered by the North South Ministerial Council. After that the necessary resources to fund the preferred option will have to be identified.

It is only when this process has been completed that I will be in a position to make any announcements.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people with disabilities are currently employed by his Department. (AQW 7618/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Amongst the Department's current workforce, a total of 90 individual members of staff have declared that they have a disability.

Proposed Footpath at Clanabogan Hamlet in Cavanacaw, Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development when work to the proposed footpath at Clanabogan Hamlet, Cavanacaw, Omagh, is due to start. (AQW 7668/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it plans to carry out the design and acquisition of any necessary land for the footpath along the Old Clanabogan Road, this financial year.

It is anticipated that work will commence on site during the 2009/10 financial year, subject to Roads Service funding levels remaining as anticipated.

Penalty Charge Notices in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices were issued in Omagh from 1 January 2008 to 31 May 2008; and how many of these were overturned on appeal. (AQW 7669/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that from 1 January 2008 to 31 May 2008, a total of 2,207 Penalty Charge Notices were issued in Omagh. To date, 332 of these have been cancelled following consideration of challenges, representations and formal appeals.

Greenan Graveyard in County Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what remedial action has been taken by the Roads Service to prevent further flooding at Greenan graveyard near Gortin, County Tyrone; (ii) what communications have taken place between his Department and family members of those buried in Greenan graveyard; and (iii) whether he is considering compensation for repairs to graves damaged by past flooding. (AQW 7811/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department has exercised its discretionary powers of improvement and has replaced a 50 metre stretch of the former 6 inch diameter road drain pipe system with 12 inch diameter pipe linked to enlarged road gullies. Certain family members have been in correspondence with Central Claims Unit, the legal office which handles claims work and litigation on behalf of the Department. They have lodged compensation claims, which have been legally assessed and rejected. As this is an ongoing legal matter it would be inappropriate to comment on it further.

Traffic Accidents on the Hillhall Road

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many accidents occurred on the Hillhall Road between Lisburn and Belfast in the week commencing Monday 26 May; (ii) how these accidents impacted on the traffic flow to and from Belfast; and (iii) his strategy for keeping traffic moving in the event of future hold-ups on the Hillhall Road. (AQW 7812/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: It is normal practice for my Department's Road Service to receive information from the PSNI concerning traffic collisions which result in personal injury. To date, no such details have been received for the week commencing Monday 26 May 2008. However, Roads Service officials are aware of five collisions occurring along the length of the B23, which includes the Hillhall Road, during this week. Roads Service is aware that these collisions resulted in the road being closed for a time.

In the event of road traffic collisions, responsibility for implementing emergency traffic measures lies with the PSNI. The PSNI may advise Roads Service of the situation and request assistance to alleviate resulting traffic delays. On receipt of such information, Roads Service officials make it immediately available to the public through the broadcast media and a recorded telephone message service.

Junction Realignments in Castlederg

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a timescale for completion of the junction realignment of Corgary Road/Park Road with the Magheranageeragh/Aghyaran Road upper, Castlederg. (AQW 7822/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has an assessment procedure that compares and prioritises potential schemes, taking into account a number of

factors, including traffic volumes, pedestrian usage and the history of accidents. Schemes with the highest priority are included in the annual programme of Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSMs). Each year the proposals in the draft two year programme are considered, to determine which schemes can be delivered in that financial year.

In relation to AQW 7822/08, Roads Service officials have advised that the scheme to improve visibility at the junction of Corgary Road/Park Road with the Magheranageeragh/Aghyaran Road Upper, was included in the draft LTSM programme for the years 2008/09 and 2009/10, which was presented to Strabane District Council in December 2007. While this scheme is not included in the programme for 2008/09, it will be considered for inclusion in the 2009/10 programme for the Strabane District Council area, subject to the availability of land and resources.

In relation to AQW 7823/08, my officials have advised that Roads Service proposes to carry out a collision remedial scheme at the Carn Road and Magheranageeragh Road junction. The scheme involves replacing the crossroads with a staggered junction and improvements to the sightlines.

The scheme is already in the 2008/09 LTSM programme for the Strabane District Council area and, provided the land required for the works can be successfully acquired, the works will be undertaken this year.

Junction Realignments in Castlederg

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development to give a timescale for completion of sightline improvements at the junction of Carn Road and Magheranageeragh Road, Castlederg. (AQW 7823/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has an assessment procedure that compares and prioritises potential schemes, taking into account a number of factors, including traffic volumes, pedestrian usage and the history of accidents. Schemes with the highest priority are included in the annual programme of Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSMs). Each year the proposals in the draft two year programme are considered, to determine which schemes can be delivered in that financial year.

In relation to AQW 7822/08, Roads Service officials have advised that the scheme to improve visibility at the junction of Corgary Road/Park Road with the Magheranageeragh/Aghyaran Road Upper, was included in the draft LTSM programme for the years 2008/09 and 2009/10, which was presented to Strabane District Council in December 2007. While this scheme

is not included in the programme for 2008/09, it will be considered for inclusion in the 2009/10 programme for the Strabane District Council area, subject to the availability of land and resources.

In relation to AQW 7823/08, my officials have advised that Roads Service proposes to carry out a collision remedial scheme at the Carn Road and Magheranageeragh Road junction. The scheme involves replacing the crossroads with a staggered junction and improvements to the sightlines.

The scheme is already in the 2008/09 LTSM programme for the Strabane District Council area and, provided the land required for the works can be successfully acquired, the works will be undertaken this year.

Water Bills

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what (i) exemptions; and (ii) discounts, are available in relation to water bills for (a) charitable organisations; and (ii) community associations. (AQW 7862/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Independent Water Review Panel in their Strand 1 report recommended that payment for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic consumers and should be reviewed by the Regulator in due course. The Executive accepted this recommendation but agreed to phase in the new non-domestic payments over a two year period with customers paying 50% in 2008/09 and 100% in 2009/10. Accordingly, all non-domestic premises including charitable organisations and community associations have been billed for water and sewerage services since April. Many non-domestic customers (including some charitable organisations) have paid metered water charges for many years and NIW continues to extend metering throughout the non-domestic sector.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Improvements in Housing Executive Housing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been spent on improving housing conditions in (i) nationalist housing executive areas; and (ii) unionist housing executive areas, over the last three years. (AQW 7162/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): Information is not collated by nationalist

or unionist area and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. A table detailing the expenditure has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Housing in the Harbour Area in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much money will be invested in the Harbour area of Bangor to improve housing. (AQW 7165/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There is no existing social housing stock within the Harbour area of Bangor. However, there are new build schemes within the area included in the Social Housing Development Programme as detailed in the following table: North Down Borough Council area 2008/09 – 20012/13

| Housing Association | Scheme Name | Units | Need Group |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| 2008/09 | | | |
| Belfast Community | Acquisitions Phase 2, Bangor | 5 | General Needs |
| BIH | 1-3 Crawfordsburn Road, Bangor | 20 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| BIH | Rathgill Zone 1, Bangor | 36 | General Needs |
| Oaklee | Gibson's Lane, Bangor | 21 | General Needs |
| Oaklee | Central Avenue, Bangor | 48 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| Oaklee | Shaftesbury Road, Bangor | 35 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| Trinity | 115 - 117 Hamilton Road, Bangor | 6 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| Trinity | 38 - 40 Bryansburn Road, Bangor | 12 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| Trinity | Holburn Avenue, Bangor | 14 | Elderly (CAT1) |
| Ulidia | 111 Hamilton Road, Bangor | 4 | Singles/Couples |
| 2009/10 | | | |
| Clanmil | 267-271 Old Belfast Road, Bangor | 40 | General Needs |
| Clanmil | South Circular Road, Bangor | 25 | General Needs |
| Fold | Chester Avenue, Bangor | 7 | General Needs |
| Habinteg | 34-36 Bangor Road, Holywood | 8 | General Needs |
| Oaklee | Strand Avenue, Millisle | 6 | General Needs |

| Housing Association | Scheme Name | Units | Need Group |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Trinity | Strand Avenue, Holywood | 16 | General Needs |
| 2010/11 | | | |
| Trinity | Clandeboyne Road, Bangor | 20 | General Needs |
| 2012/13 | | | |
| BIH | Bingham Street, Bangor | 20 | General Needs |
| Supported Selection | UC&HT Dispersed, Phase 1, Bangor | 4 | Learning Disabilities |
| Marker Scheme | Bloomfield/Balloo Marker | 275 | General Needs |

Social Housing in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development for (i) the total number of social houses in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency; and (ii) the number of those houses which are unoccupied. (AQW 7168/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is not readily available by parliamentary constituency. The Housing Executive has 7284 properties of which 284 are unoccupied in their Belfast East and Castlereagh Districts. In East Belfast, housing associations have 2787 properties of which 47 are unoccupied.

Village Urban Renewal Area in South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development what assistance will be available for houses within the 'Improvement area' of the Village Urban Renewal Area in South Belfast. (AQW 7281/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Homeowners affected by vesting are entitled to the market value of their property at the date of vesting and also Home Loss and Disturbance payments. Homeowners can also appoint an agent to act on their behalf and appropriate fees will be paid by the Housing Executive. Tenants affected by the acquisition of property will also be entitled to Home Loss and Disturbance payments.

The Housing Executive has already issued an Advice and Guidance leaflet to all residents of Donegall Road who may be affected by the proposals.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many community and voluntary groups her Department is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7311/08)

The Minister for Social Development: In the months April and May of this current financial year 2008-2009 the Department for Social Development has contracted almost £13.5m of funding to 211 voluntary and community organisations. This will increase further as work to finalise further annual contracts is completed, and contracts for funding are issued and accepted by more voluntary and community organisations. A table listing the amount of funding given to each of these 211 organisations has been placed in the library.

Housing Executive Improvement Schemes in North Belfast

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the status of all improvement schemes that (i) are forthcoming; and (ii) may be postponed or discontinued by the Housing Executive in North Belfast. (AQW 7395/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has an extensive programme for North Belfast involving planned Improvement Schemes for 2008/09 to 2012/13 and Group Repair Schemes for 2008/09 and 2009/10. I have arranged for a copy of the schedules to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Social Housing in North Belfast

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how the additional resources that her Department received in the budget and monitoring rounds will impact on providing more social housing in North Belfast. (AQW 7399/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The social housing programme is formulated on the basis of need rather than geographical area and is subject to land availability. Funding is therefore allocated through the programme taking these criteria into account. The additional funding will mean that significantly more new housing can be provided both in North Belfast and throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

Departmental Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what grants are available through her Department for non-statutory bodies. (AQW 7444/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The following is a list of the presently available funding programmes delivered by the Department for Social Development, which offer grants to individuals or to organisations.

- The Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund
- Areas at Risk Pilot Programme
- Urban Development Grant
- Liganside Events Grant
- Liganside Community Activity Grant
- Belfast City Centre Promotions
- The Social Fund Community Care Grants
- Sure Start Maternity Grants

Access to some Grants will be subject to the availability of funding and entitlement conditions.

European Social Funds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development why her Department does not match fund European Social Funds available from the Department of Employment and Learning. (AQW 7445/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does provide match funding for projects in receipt of European Social Funds from the Department of Employment and Learning.

Increases in Fuel Prices

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to negate the impact of increases in fossil fuel prices, in relation to heating systems in social housing and to combat fuel poverty. (AQW 7471/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I do not have ministerial responsibility for energy policy or prices. Government has in place the right policies on energy efficiency and support to address fuel poverty over the longer-term. This year, I am planning to spend £14 million on improving energy efficiency in Housing Executive stock as well as substantial sums on the Warm Homes Scheme. In response to the recent sharp increases in fuel costs, I have focused work across Government and the wider energy sector in a Task Force on fuel poverty. The Task Force will report back to me later this summer. It is my intention

to secure Executive support for a package of short-term measures to help those people most in need this winter.

Departmental Funding for Women's Groups

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what funding has been made available by her Department to each women's group for the 2008-09 financial year; and what programme each group is funded under. (AQW 7481/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is as follows:

| Group Name Community Investment Fund | Funding in 2008/09 £ |
|---|----------------------------|
| Atlas Women's Centre | 79,016.00 |
| Ballybeen Women's Centre | 80,000.00 |
| Chrysalis Women's Centre | 56,792.00 |
| First Steps Women's Group | 78,380.00 |
| Footprints Women's Centre | 80,000.00 |
| Foyle Women's Information Network | 51,232.25 |
| Greenway Women's Group | 80,000.00 |
| Magherafelt Women's Group | 77,065.09 |
| Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd | 72,419.68 |
| The Women's Centre Derry | 80,000.00 |
| Waterside Women's Centre | 54,251.00 |
| Windsor Women's Centre | 73,504.45 |

| Women's Centres Childcare Fund | £ |
|--|-----------|
| First Steps Women's Group | 39,765.48 |
| Greenway Women's Group | 65,016.10 |
| Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group Ltd | 13,512.88 |

| Regional Infrastructure Programme | £ |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Women's Centres Regional Partnership | 334,757.00 |

| Grants to Voluntary Bodies | £ |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Omagh Women's Area Network | 55,000.00 |

| Community Volunteering Scheme 2006/2009 | £ |
|---|-----------|
| Falls Women's Centre | 29,493.00 |
| Fermanagh Women's Aid | 4,485.00 |
| Footprints Women's Centre | 30,000.00 |

| Community Volunteering Scheme 2006/2009 | £ |
|--|-----------|
| Women's Aid Belfast & Lisburn | 30,000.00 |

| Modernisation Fund Revenue | £ |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Women's TEC | 26,817.00 |

| Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund1 | £ |
|--|-----------|
| Ardoyne Women's Group | 19,587.51 |
| Ashton Community Trust | 4,461.51 |
| Ballymurphy Women's Centre | 44,376.36 |
| Bogside and Brandywell Women's Group2 | 16,855.95 |
| Falls Women's Centre | 50,870.68 |
| Footprints Women's Centre | 95,942.00 |
| Galliagh Women's Group2 | 14,942.93 |
| Lenadoon Women's Group | 15,883.89 |
| Newtownabbey Women's Group | 8,913.20 |
| Newtownards Women's Group Ltd | 47,270.08 |
| North Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Group | 13,068.80 |
| Shankill Women's Centre | 97,191.87 |
| Voices Women's Group | 13,458.20 |
| Waterside Women's Centre2 | 4,120.14 |
| Windsor Women's Centre | 10,875.63 |
| Women's News | 9,445.38 |

Notes:

- 1 Funding provided under the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund covers the period 01/04/08 to 31/08/08.
- 2 Funding amounts are estimated based on 2007/08 funding awards as Contracts for Funding for 2008/09 have not yet issued.

Energy Efficiency in Housing Executive Homes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals her Department has to introduce energy efficient heating and lighting systems into new homes being built by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7485/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Housing Associations now provide all new social housing. The requirements set down by my Department for social housing are that new homes should achieve maximum energy efficiency and minimal environmental impact, heat loss and running costs.

All social new build self-contained homes are already required to achieve the Eco Homes very good

standard, which is broadly equivalent to the three star rating of the 'Code for Sustainable Homes' standard.

Beechfield Estate in Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee, are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 7491/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive owns 114 properties in the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.

Annadale Flats Multi-Element Improvement Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) 3 bedroom; (ii) 2 bedroom; and (iii) 1 bedroom flats, owned by the Housing Executive, are projected to be in place following the planned Annadale Flat Multi-Element Improvement Scheme. (AQW 7551/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Annadale Flats Multi-Element Improvement Scheme proposes 17 three bedroom and 128 two bedroom flats. There will be no one bedroom flats.

Co-ownership Housing Association

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses are owned by co-ownership schemes in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7581/08)

The Minister for Social Development: I refer the member to the written answer to Assembly Question 5882/08 on 29 April 2008. At 31 March 2008 there were 458 properties partly owned by the Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association in the North Down constituency.

North Belfast Community Action Unit

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has for the North Belfast Community Action Unit. (AQW 7593/08)

Ms M Ritchie: The North Belfast Community Action Unit is funded by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister and managed by DSD. The Unit was established in 2002 in response to community tension in North Belfast, at that time the Unit's remit was further extended to 31 March 2009 following a review in 2006.

My department regularly reviews its operating environment to determine needs and how we can address them effectively, efficiently and improve our services.

I have asked officials in the Unit to examine conditions and the provision of services in North Belfast with a view to presenting recommendations for the future. I will discuss these recommendations with Ministerial Colleagues to enable us to provide a cost effective and efficient service to the community.

Bonfires

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding has the Housing Executive in Newtownards allocated for bonfire management in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7597/08)

The Minister for Social Development: During the past 5 years the Housing Executive has not allocated any funding in Newtownards for bonfire management. However, during that period costs to clear or reinstate grass areas following bonfires within the Newtownards area were:

| | £ |
|------|-------|
| 2003 | 3,890 |
| 2004 | 2,720 |
| 2005 | 600 |
| 2006 | 500 |
| 2007 | 4,179 |

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development how many people will be made redundant due to the ending of Neighbourhood Renewal funding in North Belfast in August 2008; and what provision has been made to help voluntary and community organisations meet their legal requirements as employers in relation to redundancy payments. (AQW 7613/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Officials are currently working to determine which projects, currently funded to August 2008, will receive funding beyond this date. This work is not yet complete and funding decisions are subject to detailed appraisal procedures.

If an employer cannot meet its redundancy commitments, the Redundancy Payments Service may provide certain compensation, within statutory limits,

to employees under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 for Redundancy Payments.

Bonfires

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why the Housing Executive in Newtownards took the decision to stop funding the Bonfire Strategy, which is done in conjunction with Ards Borough Council. (AQW 7656/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has not funded any bonfire programmes to date in 2008/09. Furthermore, the Housing Executive has not received a formal application for funding from Ards Borough Council with regard to its bonfire scheme.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in (i) January; (ii) February; and (iii) March, of 2005. (AQW 7666/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE – RECIPIENTS

| | January | February | March |
|------|---------|----------|---------|
| 2005 | 163,887 | 164,037 | 164,478 |

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Staff Gender Breakdown

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Assembly Commission how many (i) females; and (ii) males, are currently employed by the Assembly, broken down by grade. (AQW 7398/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr Robert Coulter): At 1 June 2008 there were 372 staff employed in the Assembly. Of these 110 are directly employed (Direct Recruits) by the Assembly Commission. Fifty six (56) have been directly recruited by the Commission but remain on secondment from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (Direct Recruit Secondees). The remainder are made up of staff seconded to the Assembly Commission from other organisations but not recruited through open competition (Secondees) (108) and staff recruited

temporarily from a recruitment agency (Agency) (98). Included within these figures are 68 staff who are currently temporarily promoted.

The table attached details the breakdown of these staff by Assembly Grade (AG) and gender (M/F) as requested.

ASSEMBLY STAFF BY GRADE AND GENDER AT 1 JUNE 2008

| | Direct Recruits | | | Direct Recruit Secondees | | | Secondees | | | Agency | | | Totals | | |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Grade | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total | M | F | Total |
| AG1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| AG2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| AG3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| AG4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 12 | 7 | 19 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 8 | 26 |
| AG5 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| AG6 | 7 | 17 | 24 | 8 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 8 | 16 | 6 | 12 | 18 | 29 | 41 | 70 |
| AG7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 11 |
| AG8 | 15 | 14 | 29 | 3 | 9 | 12 | 14 | 23 | 37 | 9 | 1 | 10 | 41 | 47 | 88 |
| AG9 | 29 | 8 | 37 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 17 | 17 | 34 | 53 | 15 | 68 | 104 | 43 | 147 |
| Totals | 61 | 49 | 110 | 32 | 24 | 56 | 50 | 58 | 108 | 68 | 30 | 98 | 211 | 161 | 372 |

Assembly Grade (AG) bands cover the following posts: AG1: Clerk / Director General

AG2: Director / Examiner of Statutory Rules / Director Legal Services

AG3: Clerk Assistant / Editor of Debates / Adviser to Speaker / Legal Adviser

AG4: Assembly Clerk / Heads of Audit, Finance, Procurement, Personnel, Recruitment, Research & Library, Information Systems, Assistant Legal Advisers

AG5: Deputy Editors / Education Officers / Senior Researchers / Senior Librarians / Information Officers / Senior Systems Analysts / Deputies of Finance, Procurement, Personnel, Recruitment / Audit Manager / Deputy Principals of Estates project, Security, Buildings/facilities.

AG6: Assistant Assembly Clerk / Staff Officer / Assistant Editor / Librarian / Researcher / Auditor / Systems Analyst / Web Manager

AG7: Assistant Librarian / Programme Analyst / Principal Doorkeeper

AG8: Clerical Supervisor / Parliamentary Reporter / Senior Personal Secretary / Personal Secretary / Senior Doorkeeper

AG9: Clerical Officer / Typists / Doorkeeper

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 20 June 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many community and

voluntary groups it is currently funding; the amount of funding given to each project; and where these projects are based. (AQW 7312/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Information on the number of community and voluntary groups to which OFMDFM currently provides funding, the amount of funding given to each project and where these projects are based is provided in the table below.

Additional information on the period in financial years over which the funding is provided and on the impact of the reach of some of the projects has also been provided in the table.

| Name Of Project | Amount of Funding | Period Funding Covers | Where Based | Impact |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 174 Trust | £44,000 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Ballynaveigh Community Development Association | £33,745 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | South Belfast |
| Belfast Interface Project | £65,403 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Belfast-Wide |
| Centre For Contemporary Christianity In Ireland | £42,268 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Community Relations Forum | £32,525 | 2008-2009 | Newtownabbey | Local |
| Corrymeela Community | £132,088 | 2008-2009 | Belfast / Coleraine | Multiple |
| Downtown Women's GroUp / Women Into Politics | £20,077 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| The Fermanagh Trust | £29,588 | 2008-2009 | Enniskillen | Local |
| Groundwork Ni | £27,755 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Institute For Conflict Research | £31,701 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Interaction Belfast | £56,534 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | West Belfast |
| Intercomm | £24,218 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| The Junction / Holywell Trust | £86,773 | 2008-2009 | Derry | Multiple |
| Kilcranny House | £27,474 | 2008-2009 | Coleraine | Local |
| Linc Resource Centre | £78,769 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Mediation Northern Ireland | £123,106 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |

| Name Of Project | Amount of Funding | Period Funding Covers | Where Based | Impact |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| The Nerve Centre | £17,118 | 2008-2009 | Derry | Multiple |
| North Belfast Interface Network / Ashton Community Trust | £80,098 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Pakt (Lurgan) | £27,901 | 2008-2009 | Lurgan | Local |
| Partisan Productions | £24,000 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Peace & Reconciliation Group | £87,729 | 2008-2009 | Derry | Multiple |
| React | £37,582 | 2008-2009 | Armagh | Local |
| Rural Community Network | £41,417 | 2008-2009 | Cookstown | Multiple |
| Suffolk / Lenadoon Interface Group (SIlg) | £12,725 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Local |
| Tides (Training) | £42,400 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Tinderbox Theatre Company | £18,073 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Trademark | £60,000 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Ulster People's College | £27,454 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| Workers' Education Association | £46,783 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | Multiple |
| North Belfast Advice Partnership | £124,261 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Rathcoole Community Empowerment Partnership | £103,769.92 | 2008-2009 | Newtownabbey | North Belfast |
| Upper Ardoyne Community Empowerment Partnership | £65,852. | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Upper North Belfast Community Empowerment Partnership | £112,476.56 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| North Belfast Developing Leadership Community Empowerment Partnership | £157,806.60 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Greater New Lodge Community Empowerment Partnership | £108,129.57 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Greater Greencastle Community Empowerment Partnership | £81,504.12 | 2008-2009 | Newtownabbey | North Belfast |
| Greater Ballysillan Community Empowerment Partnership | £67,803.48 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Citizen Youth Community Empowerment Partnership | £66,772.64 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Ardoyne Marrowbone Community Empowerment Partnership | £109,379.31 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |
| Cliftonville Community Empowerment Partnership | £113,918.01 | 2008-2009 | Belfast | North Belfast |

| Name Of Project | Amount of Funding | Period Funding Covers | Where Based | Impact |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Lesbian, Gay And Bi-Sexual Sector (Lgb Sector), Administered By The Umbrella Body Coalition On Sexual Orientation | £230,000 | 2007-2009 | Belfast. | Multiple |
| An Munia Tober | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | West Belfast | Belfast-Wide Service |
| An Munia Tober – Regional | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | West Belfast | Multiple |
| Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Ballymena | Local |
| Belfast Islamic Centre | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Chinese Welfare Association | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Craigavon Intercultural Programme | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Craigavon | Local |
| East Belfast Independent Advice Centre | £38,000 | 2008-2009 | East Belfast | Local |
| Kilcranny House | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Coleraine | Multiple |
| Multi-CultUral Resource Centre | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Nicem | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Nicras | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Old Warren Partnership | £31,000 | 2008-2009 | Lisburn | Local |
| Polish Association Ni | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Seeds | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | North West | Local |
| South Belfast Partnership Board | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Local |
| Step | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Dungannon | South Tyrone, Dungannon And Beyond |
| Wah Hep | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Craigavon | Local |
| Youthaction Ni | £45,000 | 2008-2009 | Newry | Local |
| Artsekta | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | Greater Belfast | Multiple |
| An Munia Tober | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | West Belfast | Multiple |
| Belfast Islamic Centre | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Feile An Phobail | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | West Belfast | Local |
| Multi Cultural Resource Centre | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Mornington Community Project | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Local |
| St Patrick's Conference St Vincent De Paul Society | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | Armagh | Local |
| Voluntary Service Bureau | £15,000 | 2008-2009 | South Belfast | Multiple |
| Aisling Centre | £163,439.94 | 2003-2009 | Fermanagh | |
| Ashton Centre | £190,111.44 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |

| Name Of Project | Amount of Funding | Period Funding Covers | Where Based | Impact |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------|
| Ballymurphy Women's Centre | £139,900.98 | 2003-2009 | Ballymurphy | |
| C.A.L.M.S | £279,468.34 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| Contact Youth | £179,225.86 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Corpus Christi Services | £281,181.47 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Cunamh | £346,515.85 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| Derry Well Woman | £170,821.09 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| F.A.I.R | £337, 837.55 | 2003-2009 | Markethill | |
| F.O.D.D.D | £189,011.64 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| FiriNne | £263,018.06 | 2003-2009 | Lisnaskea | |
| H.A.V.E.N | £160,842.27 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Icpd | £164,970.24 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Koram Centre | £301,049.28 | 2003-2009 | Strabane | |
| Lenadoon Community Counselling Project | £165,056.11 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Lifeline | £38,750.00 | 2003-2009 | Lurgan | |
| Lifeways Psychotherapy Counselling Centre | £225,139.27 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| M.A.S.T | £93,680.39 | 2003-2009 | Kilkeel | |
| Make Your Mark | £172,402.57 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| New Life Counselling Service | £132,778.40 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Nexus Institute | £81,667.56 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Ni Music Therapy Trust | £161,983.73 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Nova Project | £564,231.11 | 2003-2009 | Portadown | |
| Regimental Association Of Udr | £180,860.74 | 2003-2009 | Coleraine | |
| Relatives For Justice | £545,675.77 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| S.A.V.E.R./N.A.V.E.R | £292,238.91 | 2003-2009 | Markethill | |
| S.E. Fermanagh Foundation | £281,259.73 | 2003-2009 | Lisnaskea | |
| Shankill Stress And Trauma Group | £394,204.21 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| South Down Action For Healing Wounds | £261,565.69 | 2003-2009 | Rathfriland | |
| Springhill Community House | £196,039.93 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Streetbeat Youth Project | £201,110.13 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Survivors Of Trauma | £280,165.13 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Tara Centre | £332,626.18 | 2003-2009 | Omagh | |
| The Cross Group | £29,240.00 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| The Ely Centre | £303,926.28 | 2003-2009 | Enniskillen | |
| The Wider Circle | £175,411.99 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |

| Name Of Project | Amount of Funding | Period Funding Covers | Where Based | Impact |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------|
| United Services Club Victims Survivors Group | £152,163.27 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| Vast | £263,901.43 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Wave Trauma Centre, Armagh | £278,148.40 | 2003-2009 | Armagh | |
| Wave Trauma Centre, Ballymoney | £205,479.58 | 2003-2009 | Bellymoney | |
| Wave Trauma Centre, Belfast | £430,642.01 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Wave Trauma Centre, Omagh | £251,659.61 | 2003-2009 | Omagh | |
| Wave Trauma Centre, Londonderry | £320,820.73 | 2003-2009 | Londonderry | |
| West Tyrone Voice | £369,969.58 | 2003-2009 | Newtownstewart | |
| Omagh Self Help And Support Group | £213,607.61 | 2003-2009 | Omagh | |
| Hurt | £261,487.99 | 2003-2009 | Lurgan | |
| Ex-Servicemen (Combat Stress) | £238,640.37 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |
| Ruc Families | £15,000 | 2003-2009 | Belfast | |

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on the Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7441/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

As stated previously, the research was commissioned by the previous administration on 29th March 2006 and was conducted and finalised during direct rule.

The interpretation of and commentary on the datasets contained in the report represent the views of Deloitte and not us nor the Executive. The report does not form an agreed basis for future policy development.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much it has spent on fuel for vehicles it (i) owns; and (ii) leases. (AQW 7730/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

As the Department does not own or lease any vehicles it has not incurred any expenditure on fuel for vehicles.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many cars it (a) owns; and (b) leases, and for each car, its (i) make and model; (ii) engine size; (iii) type of fuel used; (iv) fuel efficiency; and (v) purpose. (AQW 7731/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

The Department does not own or lease any cars.

Sustainable Development Targets

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why no measures are being taken against those Departments who failed to meet Sustainable Development targets; and (ii) have any steps been put in place to help Departments meet Sustainable Development targets. (AQW 7735/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

OFMDFM does not have legislative powers to take measures against departments for failure to achieve legacy sustainable development targets. However, through our Sustainable Development Unit, we are engaging co-operatively with all departments in working towards the development and delivery of suitable sustainability goals.

It is intended that in developing a new Sustainable Development Strategy and associated Plans, OFMDFM will consider all options for ensuring the effective

delivery of the sustainable development programme and any Sustainable Development targets that arise from it.

Changing Times Stormont Paper

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Changing Times Stormont paper has not been published, who was responsible for the delay in its publication and what is the cost of its publication to date. (AQW 7870/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There have been internal discussions in OFMDFM on the possibility of a publication to mark the work of the Executive to date.

Some drafts had been produced for Ministers to consider. However, we have not yet taken any decision in relation to any possible content. Therefore no copies of a publication have been printed.

Capital Realisation Task Force

Mr Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all assets and their estimated value, that have been identified by the Capital Realisation Taskforce for sale, to enable reinvestment in alternative public infrastructure. (AQW 7904/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We regret that we are unable to provide the information that you have requested. Publication of this information would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interest of the public sector as owner of the assets identified in the report Capital Realisations Taskforce in any future sale processes that may take place.

Capital Realisation Task Force Report

Mr Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made following publication of the Capital Realisation Taskforce Report. (AQO 4141/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: As recommended in the Capital Realisation Taskforce Report, a Central Assets Realisations Team (CART) is being created. Recruitment for key posts is underway and specialist advisory services to support the work of the Team have been procured and are operational.

An interim programme director for CART has been working for a number of months to undertake critical tasks until the permanent team is in post to help ensure delivery of its targets for realisation of assets in the Budget.

Cost of Financial Division

Dr Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, further to its answer to AQW 7106/08, for the cost implications of responding to individual requests for copies of the Deloitte Touche report into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide compared to the cost of placing the document on the OFMDFM website. (AQW 7982/08)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There are very minimal administrative costs associated with the provision of electronic versions of the Deloitte Touche report. Since August 2007 only 27 requests have been received and responded to by the Community Relations Unit.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress is being made on measures to deal with bovine tuberculosis, particularly on vaccination and husbandry.[R] (AQW 7657/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Recent developments within the TB programme include the use of supplementary blood testing where appropriate and enhanced movement restriction regimes.

At present, there is no vaccine against bovine TB available to use as part of our programme. Work is currently underway in Britain and in the South on vaccination against bovine TB. The South is looking at vaccination of badgers, whereas Britain is looking at both the vaccination of cattle and badgers. My Department will continue to maintain contact with, and where appropriate seek to collaborate with, this work.

An information package titled "TB In Your Herd" is available on the internet and each herdkeeper has been sent a copy of the "Biosecurity Code". Both contain preventative husbandry advice. In addition, each breakdown herd is contacted by a Veterinary Officer who gives preventative husbandry advice specific to the farm in question.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her most recent estimate is of the proportion of the badger population carrying bovine tuberculosis. (AQW 7658/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The most recent information of bovine TB in the badger population available is from the Badger Road Traffic Accident Survey. In this survey, badgers found dead at a road side may be collected for examination.

Within this survey 18% of badgers were found on post mortem examination to have bovine tuberculosis.

However it is not possible to draw, with certainty, any conclusions on the whole badger population due to the natural limitations of the survey.

My staff are currently assessing the feasibility a disease prevalence survey in badgers that should provide a more complete picture of the whole population in future.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to the recommendations within Sir David King's report, which included a controlled badger cull in affected areas, in an attempt to eradicate tuberculosis. [R] (AQW 7659/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: On foot of the Badger Stakeholder Group's work, my Department has a number of actions underway which are aimed at gathering information to better inform decisions relating to badgers and the control of TB in cattle in the North. One of these actions is an assessment of the available evidence in relation to the role of badgers in bovine TB. This assessment will consider Sir David King's report, alongside the other available evidence. The aim of this work is to assess the significance of the available evidence to the situation in the North and to inform an appropriate course of action here, including whether it is appropriate to run a pilot badger management strategy (which may include the removal or vaccination of badgers). I expect that this work will be concluded shortly.

I will give full consideration to the conclusions of this work, and to what the Badger Stakeholder Group has said in its report, before coming to a decision on the way forward.

As the badger is a protected species, any decision to intervene in badger populations will also require the agreement of the Environment Minister.

Radioactivity Monitoring

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what level of radioactivity

monitoring is carried out by her Department around the Irish Sea and across Northern Ireland.

(AQW 7663/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department routinely monitors radioactivity levels in milk and milk products on behalf of the Food Standards Agency. A range of monitoring of radioactivity in food and the environment is undertaken by other Departments and Agencies.

Departmental 2006 Consultation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she intends to make publicly available an analysis of the responses to the Departmental 2006 consultation on animal health and welfare. (AQW 7676/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said in my previous written answer to the Member on 14 March 2008, the Department consulted on proposals for new animal welfare legislation in late 2006 and, as this consultation was carried out under a different administration, I want to take time to consider the responses.

In order to ensure that any legislative proposals introduced here will provide the necessary protection for animals, I am continuing to meet animal welfare groups to discuss their views on the current legislative position.

I have asked my officials to finalise a report that will summarise the outcome of the responses to the 2006 consultation, and in doing so to reflect on the position in Britain and emerging legislative developments in the South.

Publication of the final analysis of the responses to the 2006 consultation, and the specific provisions of any new legislation, will therefore depend on my detailed consideration of the report on the 2006 consultation and on the outcome of my on-going meetings with stakeholders.

With regard to animal health, the Department consulted on a draft Diseases of Animals Bill earlier this year. The purpose of the Bill is to update existing legislation aimed at protecting and improving our animal health status through enhanced disease prevention, biosecurity and control measures. The Bill will provide flexibility to deal quickly and effectively with a disease outbreak in accordance with any relevant EU requirements. It will also enable policies to be introduced reflecting current and future developments in research and technology to trace and combat disease.

I was encouraged by the broad support for the Bill's objectives and acceptance of the need for a more effective framework to deal with animal diseases in the future.

I hope to introduce the Bill to the Assembly for initial consideration before the summer recess. At that stage a summary of the consultation responses will be available on the Department's website.

Animal Health and Welfare Bill

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to introduce an Animal Health and Welfare Bill. (AQW 7677/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have asked my officials to finalise a report that will summarise the outcome of the responses to a 2006 consultation on proposals for new animal welfare legislation, and in doing so to reflect on the position in Britain and emerging legislative developments in the South. I am also meeting a number of animal welfare groups to hear their views on what new legislation may be required.

While the specific provisions of any new legislation will depend on my detailed consideration of the report and on the outcome of my on-going meetings with stakeholders, I have asked that my officials submit animal welfare legislative proposals to me by the end of the year.

With regard to animal health, the Department consulted on a draft Diseases of Animals Bill earlier this year. The purpose of the Bill is to update existing legislation aimed at protecting and improving our animal health status through enhanced disease prevention, biosecurity and control measures. The Bill will provide flexibility to deal quickly and effectively with a disease outbreak in accordance with any relevant EU requirements. It will also enable policies to be introduced reflecting current and future developments in research and technology to trace and combat disease.

I was encouraged by the broad support for the Bill's objectives and acceptance of the need for a more

effective framework to deal with animal diseases in the future.

I hope to introduce the Bill to the Assembly for initial consideration before the summer recess.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Hillsborough

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the annual running costs of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Hillsborough. (AQW 7689/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

The 2007 annual running costs of AFBI Hillsborough (one of the seven AFBI sites) are as follows:

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Staff costs (industrial and non-industrial) | £2.4m |
| Other direct costs: consumables, fertilisers, etc. | £0.4m |
| Rates, water, cleaning, security, maintenance, etc | £0.7m |
| Lease (paid to DARD) | £0.3m |
| Utilities: Electricity, gas, oil | £0.2m |
| Total | £4.0m |

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by her Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7705/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table details the number of cars currently owned by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development including the make, model, engine size, fuel type and purpose of each car.

| Number of Cars Owned | Make of Car | Model of Car | Engine Size | Fuel Type | Purpose of Car | Fuel Efficiency |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--|------------------------|
| 3 | Vauxhall | Combo | 1686cc | Heavy Oil | Fisheries Inspectorate Fleet Vehicle – Inspection and Monitoring | 25-30 miles per gallon |
| 1 | Ford | Ranger 4x4 | 2499 cc | Heavy Oil | Fisheries Inspectorate Fleet Vehicle – Inspection and Monitoring | 25-30 miles per gallon |

| Number of Cars Owned | Make of Car | Model of Car | Engine Size | Fuel Type | Purpose of Car | Fuel Efficiency |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|--|------------------------|
| 1 | Toyota | Landeruise | 2982cc | Heavy Oil | Fisheries Inspectorate Fleet Vehicle – Inspection and Monitoring | 25-30 miles per gallon |
| 1 | Toyota | Landeruise Amazon | 4164cc | Heavy Oil | Fisheries Inspectorate Fleet Vehicle – Inspection and Monitoring | 25-30 miles per gallon |
| 1 | Citreon | Synergie 1.9TD | 1905cc | Heavy Oil | Fisheries Inspectorate Fleet Vehicle – Inspection and Monitoring | 35-40 miles per gallon |

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money has been spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by her Department, since devolution. (AQW 7712/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and its Agencies has spent £675,822 on fuel for vehicles (includes cars, vans, jeeps/landrovers, minibuses, boats, and plant machinery etc) that are owned and leased by the Department since 8 May 2007. It is not possible to separate fuel expenditure for owned and leased vehicles.

Cattle in Ballymena and Larne

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cattle in Ballymena and Larne areas have tested positive for brucellosis as a result of the thirty day test. (AQW 7747/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Premovement testing was introduced in the North in December 2004 to comply with the requirements of EC Animal Trade Directive 64/432/EEC.

Since then, in the Ballymena division there have been 2 reactors disclosed at premovement testing with 324 animals giving inconclusive results.

In Larne division since 2004 there have been no reactors disclosed at premovement testing and 337 animals giving inconclusive results.

Cattle in Ballymena and Larne

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of cases of brucellosis in the (i) Ballymena area; and (ii) Larne area, in 2007. (AQW 7748/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: (i) In 2007, Ballymena division had 5 herds with serological reactors. None of the reactors were confirmed as being infected with *Brucella abortus* on bacteriological culture.

(ii) In 2007, Larne division had 9 herds with serological reactors. Four of the herds had animal(s) which were confirmed as being infected with *Brucella abortus* on bacteriological culture.

Welfare of Circus Animals

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation exists to protect the welfare of circus animals while they are at their 'winter quarters'; how many inspections were carried out over the past five years, and what the findings of these inspections were. (AQW 7760/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My Department's role in circuses is currently very limited. Part III of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 protects all animals from unnecessary cruelty or suffering. There are, however, no specific provisions on the welfare of animals in circuses.

DARD does not have powers of entry to circuses, and therefore has no authority to inspect circus animals at their 'winter quarters'. No routine inspections have been carried out. However, if a welfare complaint is received regarding a circus animal, the PSNI does have the legal power of entry under the 1972 Act.

The Department did consult on proposals for new animal welfare legislation in 2006, including on the need for regulation of circuses. My officials are currently working on a paper summarising the outcome of the consultation exercise and lessons learned from the introduction of animal welfare legislation in Britain. The paper will also reflect on the recently published outline legislative proposals in the South. When I have considered this paper, I will decide what new legislation is needed.

Welfare of Animals During Transportation

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether European legislation in relation to the welfare of animals during transportation (Council regulation (EC) No.1/2005) applies to animal circuses; how many inspections were carried out over the past five years; and what the findings of these inspections were. (AQW 7761/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: EU Regulation 1/2005 aims to improve animal welfare through raising transportation standards. However, the transport of circus animals is not within the scope of the Regulation as the animals can be described as travelling in their housing. Therefore the Department has not carried out any routine inspections on animal circuses over the last 5 years.

There are however, no exclusions or exemptions from the general obligation under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 which requires that animals must be transported in a way which does not cause, or is unlikely to cause, injury or unnecessary suffering.

Departmental Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7788/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The following table provides approximate information regarding the number of staff hours relating to staff away days, cross-departmental away days and staff team building exercises in each of the last five financial years.

| 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 4,921 | 18,389 | 9,515 | 8,552 | 5,428 |

Departmental Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years. (AQW 7790/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The table below shows the total cost of staff away days and staff team building exercises carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and its Agencies in each of the last five financial years.

| Year | Total Cost of Staff Away Days | Total Cost of Staff Team Building Exercises |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| 2003/2004 | £17,305 | £5,882 |
| 2004/2005 | £87,626 | £14,471 |
| 2005/2006 | £36,478 | £2,539 |
| 2006/2007 | £27,147 | £13,811 |
| 2007/2008 | £23,160 | £3,597 |

Departmental Land

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the revised value of £3-6 million given to land and property owned by the Department at Crossnacreevy in light of an earlier valuation given at £200 million. (AQW 7791/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In June 2007 an initial informal valuation based on the market value of land at that time suggested that with appropriate planning permission, the holding could provisionally yield a capital receipt in the region of £200m, depending on future planning and development considerations. The Department was clear about this in correspondence with the ARD Committee at that time.

Since then, my officials have been working on the project and have encountered some difficulties, primarily around the prospect of securing the appropriate planning permission. In the context of acceptable alternative uses that do not involve planning permission, the current likely valuation is in the range £3m-£6m. This does not affect our agreement with DFP that funding is available in 2008/09 for the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme.

No change has been made to the activities on the site at Crossnacreevy and we await a report from AFBI on the advantages and costs of relocation.

Single Farm Payments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the £8 million overpayments made in relation to Single Farm Payments. (AQW 7792/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The SFP budget issue has had no impact on farmers' payments. It has not given rise to, or been caused by, overpayments to farmers.

The SFP 2007/08 expenditure requirements were under estimated by some £14m because the Estimate

was made on a cash, as opposed to an accruals, basis. The same applies to SFP income. The £14m reduces to £8m within the Department's overall CAP budget. As SFP expenditure is matched by EU income overall, there is zero impact on DARD's SFP budget.

2007-2013 Rural Development Fund

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the series of miscalculations made in relation to the first £50 million of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Fund. (AQW 7794/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No actual funds were issued on the basis of the miscalculations which were issued as part of the guidance pack to council clusters last month to assist them in drawing up a local strategy (as required by the EU Regulations). Once the error was detected officials were able to provide me with the correct calculations based on population and deprivation.

The figures were based on an erroneous application by officials of the methodology for calculating deprivation and were therefore incorrect. This mistake was brought to my attention by my Special Advisor and a Sinn Féin statement from Martina Anderson, Francie Brolly and Pat Doherty. I subsequently announced the correct allocations at Oral Questions in the Assembly on 9 June.

Departmental Underspend

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the £31.4 million underspend by her Department. (AQW 7795/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Whilst there is room for improvement in the headline figure it may be helpful to explain it within the context of the two main areas of expenditure: Current and Capital.

The Current expenditure underspend is £8.2m (3.4%). Of this, £1.0m is on Administration where we have been trying to keep costs down; £1.9m is in respect of a reduction in pension liabilities; and we have earned £1.4m more income than we had budgeted for.

A further £3.7m is in Modulation Match Funding which over the past number of years has been carried forward to help fund the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme until 2013.

The capital and capital grant underspend is £23.5m (34.6%). Some £14.5m is in respect of the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme (FNMS) and to a

degree this reflects the demand led nature of capital grant schemes.

Similarly, expenditure fell short on other demand led capital grants – the Integrated Development Funds (£3.7m) and rural development schemes (£1.5m). We are seeking to carry forward £4.8m into 2008/09 to continue these schemes.

We have also been slower to spend capital than we had planned with an underspend of £3.3m on a small number of projects. Again we are seeking to carry this forward to 2008/09.

However, the Department is endeavouring to improve its monitoring and control processes and I expect to report a better position at the end of this financial year.

Farm Nutrient Management Scheme

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the £14.4 million that was returned to the Department of Finance and Personnel from the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme. (AQW 7797/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Farm Nutrient Management Scheme (FNMS) underspend reflects the fact that forecasting capital grant expenditure is less straight-forward than for other types of expenditure because such schemes are, in part, driven by the activities of third parties.

The 2007/08 FNMS budget was based on an accruals estimate of the value of work that farmers would have completed at 31 March. The underspend reflects that for various reasons farmers have not been able to progress works for which they sought FNMS grant as quickly as was expected.

DARD has a budget of £50m in FNMS grant aid in 2008/09, and I encourage farmers to proceed with their works before the deadline runs out at 31 December 2008.

Pit-Bull-Type Dogs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will make (i) muzzling; and (ii) the requirement for animals to be on a leash, mandatory for pit-bull-type dogs in public places. (AQW 8140/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The control of dogs, including dangerous dogs, is regulated under the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dangerous Dogs Order 1991. The

Order designates certain types of dogs which it is an offence to be in possession of, such as the pit bull terrier.

District Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and may already seize any dog that appears to be a banned type. Such dogs should therefore not be in a public place, whether muzzled or on a leash.

However, I appreciate that there are conflicting views about the effectiveness of legislating for specific breeds or types of dogs, where such legislation may ban certain breeds or types, or may place specific control requirements on their owners such as muzzling. The issue of breed specific legislation is therefore central to my on-going review, and is an issue that I am continuing to discuss with experts and those with enforcement responsibilities.

Pit-Bull-Type Dogs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will make seizure of suspected pit-bull-type dogs mandatory until their breed is established beyond doubt. (AQW 8141/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The control of dogs, including dangerous dogs, is regulated under the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dangerous Dogs Order 1991. The Order designates certain types of dogs which it is an offence to be in possession of, such as the pit bull terrier.

District Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and may currently seize any dog that appears to be a banned type. It is already the case that where a District Council believes a dog is a banned type, then the dog will be kept by the Council pending a court decision as to the type of dog and therefore whether an offence has been committed.

The issue of identification of dogs is something that I am looking at as part of the Review which I announced in the Assembly in November.

Dangerous Dogs Legislation

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her review of the Dangerous Dog legislation that she announced on 20 November 2007. (AQW 8142/08)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since I made my statement to the Assembly on 20 November 2007 on my plans to undertake a review of dangerous dogs and dog fighting legislation, my officials have been carrying out a scoping exercise on existing legislation with

regard to all aspects of dog control, including dangerous dogs.

As part of my review I have met a number of key stakeholders including senior officials from the PSNI and District Councils, as well as a number of animal welfare groups, including the Kennel Club, the Companion Animal Welfare Committee and the Animal Welfare Federation. Arrangements are also in hand to meet the USPCA.

The review is ongoing. Once the scoping exercise is complete, I will consider a number of options, including whether new legislation is required and what it might cover.

Enforcement of the legislation remains a crucial aspect of the review as the issue of the safety of District Council officials in undertaking their duties has been raised on a number of occasions. As a result, when I met senior PSNI representatives I put forward a proposal for the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between District Councils and the PSNI on enforcement of dangerous dogs legislation. During my subsequent meeting with District Councils, my proposal was welcomed. As a result a small Working Group of Council and PSNI officers, together with my officials, is currently drafting the MOU.

I am currently considering the comments made during my stakeholder meetings, along with the written comments made to me in correspondence from a range of interested individuals and groups. A number of complex issues have been raised which will take time to analyse. However, once I have completed my consideration of all these comments, it is my intention to make a full report to the Assembly on the outcome of my review.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Financial Cost of Division

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what conclusions have been drawn from the report of Deloitte and Touche into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide (i) on his Department's work; and (ii) in relation to potential efficiency savings. (AQW 7363/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr Campbell): The report "The cost of division – A Shared Future Strategy" was a piece of research commissioned by the previous administration and represents the views of Deloitte and Touche only.

My Department has accordingly not considered it in planning its own work or in considering potential efficiency savings.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7522/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Neither the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure or its former Agency, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland has in the last 3 years operated any 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers.

Old Castle Gardens School in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will consider releasing funds to assist the costs of the demolition of the Old Castle Gardens School, Newtownards, which is the site for the new library for Newtownards, as there are currently health and safety and anti-social behaviour issues associated with it. (AQW 7605/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I would indeed consider releasing funds for clearing the site. The South Eastern Education and Library Board, which is responsible for the former Castle Gardens Primary School site, has been informed that they may put a case to the Department for additional funding to clear the site on the grounds of Health and Safety.

Angling Industry Report

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking in light of the recent report by Price Waterhouse Coopers, which stated that the angling industry is working at only a third of its potential capacity. (AQW 7691/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: 'The Social and Economic Impact to Northern Ireland, and areas within the Loughs Agency, of Recreational Fisheries, Angling and Angling Resources', was commissioned to evaluate the social and economic impact of angling in Northern Ireland and to assist future planning and development. My Department is committed to providing angling services in Northern Ireland, through the provision of the public angling estate and the recommendations are currently being given full consideration in the context of potential benefits and available resources for implementation.

2008 Beijing Olympic Games

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff from his Department will be attending the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in whole or in part; and how much this will cost. (AQW 7692/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is still considering staff representation at the Beijing Olympic Games and how best Northern Ireland can be represented on this important world stage. To date one member of DCAL staff will be attending in their capacity as the Nations and Regions Group (NRG) representative as part of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) structure. The programme is being organised by the VisitBritain Olympic Family Networking Programme at an estimated cost of £ 15,000.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by his Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7707/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department does not own or lease any cars.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by his Department, since devolution. (AQW 7710/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since the restoration of devolution my Department has spent a total of £37,755.72 on fuel. This fuel has been used in vehicles which are owned by the Department.

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much his Department has spent on travel since devolution. (AQW 7728/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Total expenditure on travel since devolution by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has been £255,060.56.

Irish-Language Broadcasting Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many jobs were created by the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund from 2005 to 2007.
(AQW 7771/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:
The total number of people employed by productions delivered by the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund, which were allocated funding from 2005 to 2007, is 1157.

Departmental Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff hours have been taken up with departmental or cross-departmental away days, or team-building exercises, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 7786/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In total DCAL has organised 62 away days and team building events in the past five financial years.

The number of staff hours taken up by these events are detailed in the attached table.

- The away days covered a variety of subjects but most were related to strategic and business planning.
- The breakdown by number of staff hours per year is as follows.

| Year | Number of staff hours* |
|--------------|------------------------|
| 2003-2004 | 810hrs 50mins |
| 2004-2005 | 786hrs 10mins |
| 2005-2006 | 1,757hrs 30mins |
| 2006-2007 | 918hrs 35mins |
| 2007-2008 | 791hrs 30mins |
| Total | 5,064hrs 35mins |

* 1 Day = 7hrs 25mins.

This answer is consistent with AQW7819 and AQ7922

Departmental Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many away days and team-building exercises have been organised by his Department for departmental staff in each of the last five years.
(AQW 7819/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In total DCAL has organised 62 away days and team building events in the past five financial years.

Brandywell Sports Stadium

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that Derry City Football Club play in the Eircom League, what funding can his Department provide to Brandywell Properties to upgrade the Brandywell sports stadium and surrounding area.
(AQW 7884/08)

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 runs a number of programmes to which Derry City FC could be eligible to apply to help it upgrade Brandywell stadium. These include a Building Sport programme and a Stadia Safety programme. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is also currently considering a proposal from Brandywell Properties Trust Ltd to upgrade the Brandywell Sports stadium and surrounding area. This proposal is being considered in the context of both the capital budget for sport announced in the recent Budget and value for money and accountability requirements of public funding.

Chess in Schools

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action his Department has taken to promote chess, particularly within schools, in the last 5 years.
(AQW 7885/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:
Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland. Chess is not currently recognised by SNI as a sporting activity, however, a chess governing body would be eligible to apply for recognition to SNI.

The promotion of chess within schools is a matter for individual schools to determine.

Amateur Athletic Union Junior Olympics

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department will provide funding to develop Inline/Roller Hockey, in light of representatives from Northern Ireland being selected to represent Great Britain at the Amateur Athletic Union Junior Olympics.
(AQW 7886/08)

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. The British Roller Sports Federation (BRSF) is the governing body for roller sports in Great Britain only and its jurisdiction does not currently extend to Northern Ireland. Until such

time as the BRSF is recognised in Northern Ireland, SNI is unable to provide assistance from its funding programmes.

Zebra Mussels

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what effect Zebra mussels are having on course and game fish stock in local waters.
(AQW 7896/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Zebra Mussels were introduced into the Erne system circa 1996. Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and DCAL have been conducting surveys of Lower Lough Erne at intervals of approximately three years since 1991, enabling us to detail changes in fish stocks since before the arrival of zebra mussels. This is an important record enabling prediction of what might happen if and when zebra mussels reach new sites

Zebra mussels feed by filtering the water, removing microscopic algae and small animal plankton. The first effect they have is to make water clearer, particularly in summer. The removal of some of the plankton and filtering the water has changed the balance of numbers between different species of coarse fish. This is probably a result of changes in the food supply available, particularly to young fish, and changes in the ease with which fish can find food. Small perch have become much more abundant and small roach less abundant. A ratio of two or three roach to every perch has changed to a ratio of one roach to every perch in Lower Lough Erne.

This change in numbers of perch and roach has, however, not affected the relative proportions of fish in survey catches when expressed as weight. This is due to the fact that those roach that do manage to survive the first 3 years then go on to do well, whereas there appears to be high mortality of perch following improved survival in their early years.

Other coarse fish species are not measurably affected by zebra mussels. We detect no change in pike or bream stocks in surveys. Bream and the hybrids between roach and bream are able to feed heavily on zebra mussels.

The Department has not detected any significant changes in game fish abundance (salmon, trout and pollan) as a result of zebra mussels.

From reports by anglers, however there appears to have been an increase in the ease with which the trout present may be caught by anglers. This would tally with the noted increase in water clarity- trout feed by sight. Some of the factors controlling trout numbers are outside the lake waters in the feeder rivers where trout spawn and where the juveniles grow. These fast flowing rivers are not affected by zebra mussels

Pollan remain in Lower Lough Erne at low, perhaps endangered, numbers, as they were before zebra mussels arrived. Pollan eat plankton, but inhabit the deep water of the open lake, where their food and feeding is probably less impacted by zebra mussel. They spawn inshore on hard grounds, but seem to be holding on despite zebra mussel impacts in these areas.

Salmon do not feed in fresh water and are largely unaffected by zebra mussels in lakes. As for trout, their most sensitive spawning and juvenile life stages take place in fast flowing rivers where zebra mussels do not thrive.

Zebra Mussels are present in some small lakes in addition to Lower and Upper Lough Erne. No major changes have been observed, other than increases in water clarity.

Zebra mussels have been present in Lough Neagh since 2005. They are as yet there at very low numbers and have not yet affected water clarity or fish stocks. AFBI is actively investigating their spread and the potential for them to affect Lough Neagh fish. Their initial rate of increase in Lough Neagh appears to be lower than in the Erne system but a major infestation is distinctly possible in the near future.

Departmental Team-Building Exercises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the total cost incurred by the Department on away days or team-building exercises in each of the last five years.
(AQW 7922/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In total DCAL has organised 62 away days and team building events in the past five financial years.

The cost incurred by the Department is detailed in the attached table.

- The away days covered a variety of subjects but most were related to strategic and business planning.
- The breakdown of the cost incurred by the department is as follows.

| Year | Cost (£) |
|--------------|---------------|
| 2003-2004 | 5,270 |
| 2004-2005 | 2,210 |
| 2005-2006 | 12,447 |
| 2006-2007 | 3,547 |
| 2007-2008 | 3,581 |
| Total | 27,055 |

This answer is consistent with AQW7819 and AQW7786

Commonwealth Games Council

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions his Department has had with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council to increase the number of sports that Northern Ireland teams can compete in at the Commonwealth Games.

(AQW 8110/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Responsibility for determining which sports Northern Ireland athletes compete in at the Commonwealth Games rests with the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council. I am due to meet with representatives of this body within the next few weeks, however, and will be happy to raise this matter.

Commonwealth Games Council

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will hold discussions with (i) the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council; (ii) the Irish Hockey Union; and (iii) the Ulster Branch of the Irish Hockey Union, to establish a Northern Ireland hockey team to compete in the Commonwealth Games.

(AQW 8111/08)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Representation and affiliation arrangements within any sport are a matter, in the first instance, for the relevant governing bodies. I have, however, recently written to both the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council and the Ulster Branch of the Irish Hockey Association to ask them to consider this matter.

EDUCATION

School Admissions Criteria

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail any current legislation that would prevent schools from giving priority, in terms of admissions, to children who live in Northern Ireland. (AQW 3394/08)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Níl aon dlí ann faoi láthair a chuirfeadh cosc ar scoileanna tús áite a thabhairt, ó thaobh iontrála de, do dhaoine óga atá ina gcónaí i dTuaisceart Éireann.

There is no legislation at present that would prevent schools from giving priority, in terms of admissions, to children who live in the North of Ireland.

I am however reviewing existing education legislation in this area to assess whether it conflicts with EU legislation.

Newbuild Programmes for Schools

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to provide a timescale within which the new build programme for schools will start; and to detail the proposed completion dates. (AQW 5839/08)

The Minister of Education: Is próiseas leanúnach é soláthar foirgneamh nua. Sainaitníonn Tábla A thíos mórthionscadail chaipitil oibre a bhfuil a dtógáil ar siúl faoi láthair.

The provision of new buildings for schools is an ongoing process. Table A below identifies major capital works projects for which construction is currently underway.

TABLE A

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Bangor Academy | New replacement school on existing site | May 2008 |
| Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen | Extension & Refurbishment | June 2008 |
| Holy Cross College, Strabane | New replacement school on existing site | July 2008 |
| St Patrick's P.S. Saul | New replacement school on new site | July 2008 |
| Moorfields P.S. Ballymena | New replacement school on existing site | Aug 2008 |
| Burnfoot/Dungiven/Largy P.S. | New replacement school on existing site | Aug 2008 |
| Waringstown P.S. | Extension & Refurbishment | Sep 2008 |
| Victoria P.S. Ballyhalbert | New replacement school on extended site | Sep 2008 |
| Ballymacrickett P.S. | New replacement school on extended site | Nov 2008 |
| Brookefield Special School, Moira | New replacement school on existing site | Feb 2009 |
| Ballinderry P.S. | New replacement school on existing site | Feb 2009 |
| St Colman's College, Newry | Extension & Refurbishment | Feb 2009 |
| La Salle Boys' S.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | April 2009 |
| Drumragh Integrated College. Omagh | New replacement school on new site | April 2009 |

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Pond Park P.S. Lisburn | New replacement school on extended site | April 2009 |
| Towerview P.S. Bangor | New replacement school on existing site | July 2009 |
| St Peter's P.S. Cloughreagh | New replacement school on existing site | Sep 2009 |
| Abbey G.S. Newry | New replacement school on new site | Nov 2009 |
| Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch | Extension & Refurbishment | Dec 2009 |
| St Dominic's H.S. Belfast | Extension & Refurbishment | Jan 2010 |

There are also a number of major capital projects announced for funding in previous years and which are currently at various stages of the planning process prior to the construction stage. The details of these projects are listed in Table B. These projects are being progressed with the relevant education authorities and the estimated timescales for doing so will be subject to all statutory approvals being achieved, the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily, and the availability of resources in any particular year.

TABLE B

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| St Joseph's P.S. Madden, Armagh | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| St Catherine's College, Armagh | Extension to Irish medium unit | 2008/09 |
| Lisnagelvin P.S. | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Whitehouse PS, N'Abbey | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| Banbridge Academy | Extension & refurbishment | 2011/12 |
| St Mary's P.S. Newcastle | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Lisbellaw P.S. | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Templepatrick PS | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| St Columba's P.S. Straw, Draperstown | New replacement school on new site | 2009/10 |

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|--|---|--|
| St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. B'castle | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Magherafelt HS | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Magherafelt P.S. | New replacement school on new site | 2009/10 |
| Coranny & Cornagague P.S. | New replacement school on new site | 2009/10 |
| Glendhu NS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2008/09 |
| Ravenscroft NS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2008/09 |
| St Clare's Abbey PS Newry | New replacement school on extended site | 2010/11 |
| Bangor Grammar | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Strathearn GS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Scoil Na Fuisioige P.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| St Colman's P.S. Lambeg | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore | New replacement school on extended site | 2010/11 |
| St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| Parkhall College, Antrim | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Dromintee P.S. | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| St Teresa's PS, Lurgan | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| Knockbreda HS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| St Louis Grammar, Kilkeel | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Colaiste Feirste, Belfast | Extension & refurbishment | 2010/11 |
| St Patrick's College, Banbridge | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| St Columbanus College, Bangor | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| St Mary's P.S. Banbridge | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|---|---|--|
| Knockevin Spec School, Downpatrick | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| St Bronagh's P.S (Conv of Mercy/St Mary's Boys P.S) Rostrevor | New replacement school on extended site | 2010/11 |
| Dromore Central P.S. | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| Edendork P.S | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| Little Flower Girls S.S, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Glastry College, Ballyhalbert | New replacement school on extended site | 2011/12 |
| St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Lurgan College | New replacement school on existing site | 2012/13 |
| St Pat's Boys/Girls Acad, Dgnon | New replacement school on existing site | 2012/13 |
| Portadown College | New replacement school on existing site | 2012/13 |
| Artigarvan PS, Strabane | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| BallyKelly PS, Limavady | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| New Buildings PS, Derry | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Eglinton PS, Derry | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Enniskillen Model PS | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Victoria College, Belfast | Extension & refurbishment | 2012/13 |
| St Patrick's G.S. Armagh | Extension & refurbishment | 2012/13 |
| Ebrington PS, L'Derry | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| Springhill P.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Strand / Sydenham P.S. | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Glenwood P.S./ Edenderry NS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Strandtown PS, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| St Conor's P.S, Omagh | New replacement school on extended site | 2010/11 |
| Foyle & Londonderry College | New replacement school on new site | 2012/13 |
| Methodist College, Belfast | Extension & refurbishment | 2013/14 |
| Omagh IPS | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |
| Priory College, Holywood | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| The High School, Ballynahinch | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Holy Family PS, Magherafelt | New replacement school on extended site | 2011/12 |
| Belmont Special School | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Limegrove / Glasvey Special School | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Dean Maguire College, Carrickmore | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Devenish College | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Mitchell House Special School | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Greenwood Assessment Centre | New replacement school on new site | 2011/12 |
| Cranny Special School, Omagh | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Arvalee Spec School, Omagh | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Taughmonagh P.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Hollywood PS | New replacement school on new site | 2012/13 |
| Ashfield Girls H.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Belfast Boys Model School | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Belfast Model School for Girls | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Grosvenor G.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |

| School | Details of Project | Estimated Construction Completion Date |
|--|---|--|
| Orangefield P.S. Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Ballymoney H.S. | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| Holy Trinity College, Cookstown | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Loreto College, Omagh | New replacement school on existing site | 2011/12 |
| Lagan College, Belfast | Extension & refurbishment | 2010/11 |
| Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Belfast | New replacement school on existing site | 2010/11 |
| St Cecilia's College, Derry (PPP) | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| St Mary's College, Derry | New replacement school on new site | 2009/10 |
| St Mary's P.S. Portlengone | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| S Joseph's P.S. Carryduff | New replacement school on extended site | 2009/10 |
| St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick | New replacement school on existing site | 2009/10 |
| Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald | New replacement school on new site | 2010/11 |

St Colman's Primary School in Newry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail her plans to provide additional classroom facilities for the pupils and teachers of St Colman's Primary School, Saval, Newry. (AQW 5936/08)

The Minister of Education: Fuair mo Roinn iarratas ar chóiríocht bhreise i mí Aibreáin dhá mhíle a seacht.

A request for additional teaching accommodation was received in my Department in April 2007. The assessment made at the time was that there was sufficient accommodation for the current enrolment though there was a deficiency in special needs provision. My department has approved special needs provision for the school. The projected intake for September 2008 should be able to be accommodated at the school but I have arranged for departmental officials to undertake a further assessment of the provision. I visited the school recently and was very

impressed by the commitment and dedication of the teachers and pupils.

Regulation of Pupil Behaviour on School Buses

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to outline her policies for dealing with unruly schoolchildren travelling on regularly scheduled buses. (AQW 6020/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon bheartas Roinne ann maidir le déileáil le hiompar daltaí ar bhusanna atá ar sceideal rialta. Is ceist do scoileanna é iompar daltaí.

There is no Departmental policy on dealing with pupil behaviour on regularly scheduled buses. Pupil behaviour is a matter for schools.

All grant-aided schools are required, by law, to have measures in place to promote good pupil behaviour as part of their discipline policy. The Department has issued guidance to schools on this; however, it is for each school to decide, taking account of its own ethos and circumstances, what behaviours and situations will be covered by its discipline policy.

When developing a policy, a school community must decide on its position in respect of pupil behaviour off site and out of school hours, for example while travelling to and from school. The school's position should be clearly set out in the discipline policy and the entire school community, including pupils, parents and staff, should be fully aware of it and its implications.

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Education 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 6287/08)

The Minister of Education: Cuireann an tábla leis seo sonraí ar fáil i dtaca leis na hacmhainní, chomh maith leis an maoiniú i gcoitinne, atá cionroinnte i Limistéir Athnuachana Chomharsanachta do raon de chlár oideachas-bhunaithe i ngach ceann den dá bhliain seo caite.

The attached table provides details of resources, in addition to mainstream funding, allocated in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas for a range of education based programmes in each of the last two years.

2007/08 2008/09

| | Neighbourhood Renewal Areas | Strabane | Neighbourhood Renewal Areas | Strabane |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|
| Early Years | £1,345k | £0 | £0 | £0 |
| Extended Schools | £4,036k | £64k | mainstreamed | mainstreamed |
| Belfast Regeneration Office – Youth Provision | £55k | £0 | £0 | £0 |
| Healthy Schools | £410k | £0 | £80k | £0 |
| IDF BELB | £2,272k | £0 | | |
| IDF SEELB | £948k | £0 | mainstreamed | mainstreamed |
| Nurture Units | £105k | £0 | £75k | £0 |
| Renewing Communities | £715k | £0 | £230k | £0 |
| School Improvement | £670k | £0 | £0 | £0 |
| Special Education | £187k | £92k | £0 | £0 |
| Youth & Community Relations | £89k | £0 | £61k | £0 |
| Specialist Schools & Vocational Education Programme | £2,678k | £0 | £632k (further resources to be allocated in year) | £0 |
| Neighbourhood Renewal programmes (technical transfers from DSD) | £134k | £0 | resources to be allocated in year | £0 |
| Total | £13,644k | £156k | £1078k | £0 |

Extended Schools Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the consultations she undertook with key stakeholders before the change of criteria for funding through the Extended Schools scheme. (AQW 6412/08)

The Minister of Education: The main difference to the criteria has been the move to more accurate, post-code based data for special and primary schools which draw over half their pupils from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA). It was always our intention to use that more accurate data once it became available. We have, additionally and necessarily, targeted the available resources directly at schools serving the most socially disadvantaged communities. This is in line with the aim of the Extended Schools programme.

Bhí na critéir cháilitheachta mar ábhar plé leis an Idir-Bhord de chuid Phainéal na Scoileanna Sínte agus CSCC.

The eligibility criteria were the subject of discussions with the Inter-Board Extended Schools Panel and CCMS.

Children First Policy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to confirm which Department is responsible for overseeing the Children First policy. (AQW 6413/08)

The Minister of Education: Rianaigh an ráiteas polasaí Children First (Leanaí sa Chéad Áit) na bearta chun cúram leanaí d'ardchaighdeán agus ar chostas réasúnta le haghaidh leanaí d'aois suas le 14 i ngach pobal áitiúil i dTuaisceart Éireann a chinntiú.

The Children First policy statement outlined the measures to ensure high quality, affordable childcare for children aged up to 14 in every local community in the North of Ireland. This was a shared Policy Statement between three central departments: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. Since the policy was reviewed in 2005, policy responsibility for Early Years transferred to DE in 2006. Policy responsibility for Sure start, 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. Policy responsibility for childcare 0 – 14 remains divided between a number of government Departments.

Appointment of Members of the Five Area Groups

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how the members of the five area groups were appointed; (ii) how the positions were advertised before they were filled; and (iii) the expenses that can be directly claimed by the central group and the five local groups. (AQW 6849/08)

The Minister of Education: The members of the five area groups were drawn from sectors and organisations which are owners or promoters of schools – the education and library boards, the catholic managed sector, Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta, the Council for Integrated Education, the Governing Bodies Association and the Transferors Representatives' Council - as well as from the further education sector which has an important interface with post primary education provision. These organisations and sectors were asked to nominate representatives to the groups. I selected the chairpersons on the basis of their contribution to our community and to education in the north of Ireland.

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.

Beidh aisíocaíocht taistil agus cothabhála ar rátaí státseirbhíse ar fáil ag baill na ngrúpaí láir agus áitiúla.

Reimbursement of travel and subsistence at civil service rates will be available to the members and chairpersons of the central and local groups.

Extended Schools Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education which schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board qualified for extended schools funding in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. (AQW 7092/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board Area that qualified for extended schools funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

The Extended Schools programme will continue to be funded during the 2008/09 financial year. The amount previously available under the Children and Young People funding Package (CYPFP) has unfortunately been greatly reduced.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the things we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I had to consider very carefully the

allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained and inescapable pressures covered. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPFP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPFP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;
- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary, Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

| DENI Ref | Extended Schools Eligible For 2008/09 | Eligible Allocation | | Annex 1 |
|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------|
| 3010726 | Dunseverick Ps | £ 11,480 | New School | |
| 3010781 | Harryville Ps | £ 10,472 | | |
| 3010827 | Whitehouse Ps | £ 19,075 | | |
| 3010842 | The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Ps | £ 8,288 | | |
| 3010860 | Sunnylands Ps | £ 11,984 | | |
| 3010862 | Abbots Cross Ps | £ 17,045 | | |
| 3010873 | Bushmills Ps | £ 10,094 | | |
| 3010895 | Rathcoole Ps | £ 13,286 | | |
| 3012237 | Killowen Ps | £ 13,202 | | |
| 3012264 | Millburn Ps | £ 19,936 | | |
| 3013315 | Ballykeel Ps | £ 17,899 | | |
| 3013331 | Ballycraigy Ps | £ 9,688 | | |
| 3016005 | Silverstream Ps | £ 10,976 | | |
| 3016038 | Hollybank Ps | £ 12,908 | | |
| 3016040 | Armoy Ps | £ 7,000 | | |
| 3016052 | Harpurs Hill Ps | £ 13,538 | | |
| 3016058 | Parkhall Ps | £ 7,928 | Buffer School | |
| 3016063 | Dunclug Ps | £ 10,640 | | |
| 3016171 | Ballee Ps | £ 8,288 | | |
| 3016249 | Earlview Ps | £ 11,522 | | |
| 3016252 | Ballysally Ps | £ 14,175 | | |
| 3030719 | St Olcan's Ps | £ 7,168 | | |
| 3033317 | St John's Ps | £ 12,866 | | |
| 3036039 | St Mary's Ps (Glenview) | £ 17,584 | New School | |
| 3036559 | St Patrick's & St Brigid's Ps | £ 19,285 | New School | |
| 3050519 | Carnlough Controlled Integrated Ps | £ 6,832 | | |
| 3053333 | Ballycastle Integrated School | £ 10,850 | | |
| 3056231 | Rathenraw Integrated Ps | £ 8,960 | | |
| 3056248 | Roundtower Integrated Ps | £ 13,790 | | |
| 3116263 | Ballysally Nursery School | £ 7,112 | | |

| DENI Ref | Extended Schools Eligible For 2008/09 | Eligible Allocation | | Annex 1 |
|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|---------|
| 3210090 | Maghera High School | £ 12,068 | | |
| 3210124 | Ballycastle High School | £ 18,277 | | |
| 3210200 | Monkstown Community School | £ 24,038 | | |
| 3210233 | Ballee Community High School | £ 18,109 | | |
| 3210279 | Newtownabbey Community High School | £ 15,015 | | |
| 3230203 | Edmund Rice College | £ 21,966 | | |
| 3310018 | Rosstulla Special School | £ 12,404 | New School | |
| 3316512 | Sandelford Special School | £ 11,690 | | |
| 3316676 | Castletower School | £ 16,380 | New School | |
| 3340002 | Jordanstown Special School | £ 7,504 | | |

NB the buffer zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer” zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

| DENI Ref | Schools - Not Eligible | Allocation | | Annex 2 |
|----------|---------------------------|------------|--|---------|
| 3010553 | Carrickfergus Model Ps | £ 3,553 | | |
| 3010558 | Duneane Ps | £ 1,110 | | |
| 3010631 | Ballyclare Ps | £ 4,338 | | |
| 3010841 | Carrickfergus Central Ps | £ 2,200 | | |
| 3010870 | Moyle Ps | £ 3,464 | | |
| 3010880 | King's Park Ps | £ 3,835 | | |
| 3012267 | Magherafelt Controlled Ps | £ 3,702 | | |
| 3013301 | Carnmoney Ps | £ 3,286 | | |
| 3013322 | Camphill Ps | £ 3,818 | | |
| 3013325 | Leaney Ps | £ 3,204 | | |

| DENI Ref | Schools - Not Eligible | Allocation | | Annex 2 |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------|--|---------|
| 3016015 | Mossley Ps | £ 4,085 | | |
| 3016594 | Bushvalley Ps | £ 2,496 | | |
| 3030713 | Carlane Ps | £ 1,219 | | |
| 3030898 | St Anne's Ps | £ 1,725 | | |
| 3030900 | St Anthony's Ps | £ 2,056 | | |
| 3033303 | St Oliver Plunkett's Ps | £ 2,461 | | |
| 3033304 | Tir-Na-Nog Ps | £ 1,219 | | |
| 3033709 | St John's Ps | £ 2,737 | | |
| 3036046 | St Mary's On The Hill Ps | £ 3,038 | | |
| 3036050 | St Joseph's Ps | £ 2,997 | | |
| 3036100 | St James' Ps | £ 3,242 | | |
| 3036154 | St Patrick's Ps | £ 2,823 | | |
| 3036562 | Holy Family Ps | £ 4,451 | | |
| 3036563 | St Nicholas' Ps | £ 1,803 | | |
| 3066561 | Corran Integrated Ps | £ 2,875 | | |
| 3110037 | Ballymena Nursery School | £ 1,205 | | |
| 3116162 | Mossley Nursery School | £ 1,270 | | |
| 3116165 | Dunclug Nursery School | £ 1,275 | | |
| 3116177 | Magherafelt Nursery School | £ 1,760 | | |
| 3116215 | Kylemore Nursery School | £ 1,438 | | |
| 3116220 | Ballyclare Nursery School | £ 1,765 | | |
| 3136183 | St Joseph's Nursery School | £ 1,461 | | |
| 3136332 | St Anthony's Nursery School | £ 1,461 | | |
| 3316510 | Hill Croft Special School | £ 1,590 | | |
| 3316514 | Roddens Vale Special School | £ 1,783 | | |
| 3316570 | Kilronan Special School | £ 1,430 | | |

Extended Schools Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education which schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area will no longer qualify for extended schools funding in 2008-2009. (AQW 7093/08)

The Minister of Education: Details are set out in the annexes:-

Annex 1 - lists the schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board Area that qualified for extended schools funding in 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Annex 2 - lists those schools that no longer meet eligibility criteria and exit the programme.

The Extended Schools programme will continue to be funded during the 2008/09 financial year. The amount previously available under the Children and Young People funding Package (CYPFP) has unfortunately been greatly reduced.

As is the case in any budget process there is never sufficient resources to address all of the things we would want to address and difficult choices have to be made. I had to consider very carefully the allocation of the education budget across a range of competing priorities to ensure that key priority areas were addressed and at the same time core services maintained and inescapable pressures covered. In doing so I ensured that the £16m which had been provided direct to schools under the CYPFP was mainstreamed within school delegated budgets. That funding is therefore being maintained on a recurrent basis as part of schools delegated budgets. In addition to this I have made provision for other elements of former CYPFP funding including £8m a year for the early years programmes and counselling services in schools.

As regards the extended schools programme I wanted to continue funding at previous levels but with the resources available was unable to do so. Despite finding efficiencies from other areas I have only been able to continue funding at 60% of the level available to schools over the last two years meaning a massive cut from £10m to £5.8m.

In determining how best to allocate the reduced budget, we have had to take account of several key factors;

- Continuing to facilitate those schools that draw very significant pupil enrolments from areas of social disadvantage;
- Minimise the negative impact for schools and local communities.

Accordingly the following eligibility criteria apply for schools in the 2008/09 financial year;

Primary, Post-primary, Special schools with 51% or more of their pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area or from the 30% most deprived wards or with a free school meals entitlement at or above 37%;

Nursery School pupils with FSME or income based job seekers allowance at or above 37%.

I have raised the difficulties and registered most strongly my concerns, as far back as 20 September 2007 in a meeting with the Finance Minister and through correspondence on 8 separate occasions since, that the shortfall in funding presents.

Leanfaidh mé, gach deis atá ar fáil le linn na bliana, de bheith ag iarraidh tuilleadh acmhainní, ó thacaigh an Tionól le linn rún 20 Bealtaine, le hathbhunú an chláir thábhachtaigh seo.

I will continue to press at every available opportunity during the year for additional resources, given the endorsement by the Assembly during the motion on 20 May, to restore this important programme.

| DENI Ref | Extended Schools Eligible For 2008/09 | Eligible Allocation | | Annex 1 |
|----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------|
| 3010726 | Dunseverick Ps | £ 11,480 | New School | |
| 3010781 | Harryville Ps | £ 10,472 | | |
| 3010827 | Whitehouse Ps | £ 19,075 | | |
| 3010842 | The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Ps | £ 8,288 | | |
| 3010860 | Sunnylands Ps | £ 11,984 | | |
| 3010862 | Abbots Cross Ps | £ 17,045 | | |
| 3010873 | Bushmills Ps | £ 10,094 | | |
| 3010895 | Rathcoole Ps | £ 13,286 | | |
| 3012237 | Killowen Ps | £ 13,202 | | |
| 3012264 | Millburn Ps | £ 19,936 | | |
| 3013315 | Ballykeel Ps | £ 17,899 | | |
| 3013331 | Ballycraig Ps | £ 9,688 | | |
| 3016005 | Silverstream Ps | £ 10,976 | | |
| 3016038 | Hollybank Ps | £ 12,908 | | |
| 3016040 | Armoy Ps | £ 7,000 | | |
| 3016052 | Harpurs Hill Ps | £ 13,538 | | |
| 3016058 | Parkhall Ps | £ 7,928 | Buffer School | |
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| 3016171 | Ballee Ps | £ 8,288 | | |
| 3016249 | Earlview Ps | £ 11,522 | | |

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| 3016252 | Ballysally Ps | £ 14,175 | | |
| 3030719 | St Olcan's Ps | £ 7,168 | | |
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| 3036039 | St Mary's Ps (Glenview) | £ 17,584 | New School | |
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| 3056248 | Roundtower Integrated Ps | £ 13,790 | | |
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| 3210233 | Ballee Community High School | £ 18,109 | | |
| 3210279 | Newtownabbey Community High School | £ 15,015 | | |
| 3230203 | Edmund Rice College | £ 21,966 | | |
| 3310018 | Rosstulla Special School | £ 12,404 | New School | |
| 3316512 | Sandelford Special School | £ 11,690 | | |
| 3316676 | Castletower School | £ 16,380 | New School | |
| 3340002 | Jordanstown Special School | £ 7,504 | | |

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| DENI Ref | Schools - Not Eligible | Allocation | | Annex 2 |
|----------|----------------------------|------------|--|---------|
| 3010553 | Carrickfergus Model Ps | £ 3,553 | | |
| 3010558 | Duneane Ps | £ 1,110 | | |
| 3010631 | Ballyclare Ps | £ 4,338 | | |
| 3010841 | Carrickfergus Central Ps | £ 2,200 | | |
| 3010870 | Moyle Ps | £ 3,464 | | |
| 3010880 | King's Park Ps | £ 3,835 | | |
| 3012267 | Magherafelt Controlled Ps | £ 3,702 | | |
| 3013301 | Carnmoney Ps | £ 3,286 | | |
| 3013322 | Camphill Ps | £ 3,818 | | |
| 3013325 | Leaney Ps | £ 3,204 | | |
| 3016015 | Mossley Ps | £ 4,085 | | |
| 3016594 | Bushvalley Ps | £ 2,496 | | |
| 3030713 | Carlisle Ps | £ 1,219 | | |
| 3030898 | St Anne's Ps | £ 1,725 | | |
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| 3033303 | St Oliver Plunkett's Ps | £ 2,461 | | |
| 3033304 | Tir-Na-Nog Ps | £ 1,219 | | |
| 3033709 | St John's Ps | £ 2,737 | | |
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| 3036050 | St Joseph's Ps | £ 2,997 | | |
| 3036100 | St James' Ps | £ 3,242 | | |
| 3036154 | St Patrick's Ps | £ 2,823 | | |
| 3036562 | Holy Family Ps | £ 4,451 | | |
| 3036563 | St Nicholas' Ps | £ 1,803 | | |
| 3066561 | Corran Integrated Ps | £ 2,875 | | |
| 3110037 | Ballymena Nursery School | £ 1,205 | | |
| 3116162 | Mossley Nursery School | £ 1,270 | | |
| 3116165 | Dunclug Nursery School | £ 1,275 | | |
| 3116177 | Magherafelt Nursery School | £ 1,760 | | |
| 3116215 | Kylemore Nursery School | £ 1,438 | | |
| 3116220 | Ballyclare Nursery School | £ 1,765 | | |

| DENI Ref | Schools - Not Eligible | Allocation | | Annex 2 |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------|--|---------|
| 3136183 | St Joseph's Nursery School | £ 1,461 | | |
| 3136332 | St Anthony's Nursery School | £ 1,461 | | |
| 3316510 | Hill Croft Special School | £ 1,590 | | |
| 3316514 | Roddens Vale Special School | £ 1,783 | | |
| 3316570 | Kilronan Special School | £ 1,430 | | |

Mobile Classrooms in Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4564/08, how long is 'short term'. (AQW 7148/08)

The Minister of Education: There are no set timescales for the use of temporary accommodation. It will depend on the overall accommodation needs at the school, taking into account whether a replacement school is planned or whether the need to accommodate increased enrolments is expected to continue. It would be expected in such circumstances that short term could be for a period of several years.

Déantar an gá atá le seomraí so-aithritheacha a athsholáthar ar bhonn thosca ar leith na scoile.

The need to replace mobiles is assessed on the basis of the particular circumstances at the school.

Mobile Classrooms in Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many schools, broken down by sector and Education and Library board, operate completely out of mobiles. (AQW 7149/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá na scoileanna amháin atá ag feidhmiú go huile as cóiríocht sho-aistritheach sna hearnálacha comhtháite trí Ghaeilge agus faoi chothabháil stáit. Is é a líon mar seo a leanas:

The only schools operating completely out of mobile accommodation are in the Irish medium and grant maintained integrated sectors. The numbers are as follows:

| Education and Library Board area | Irish medium schools | Grant maintained integrated schools |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| BELB | 2 | 0 |
| SEELB | 2 | 2 |

| Education and Library Board area | Irish medium schools | Grant maintained integrated schools |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| NEELB | 4 | 2 |
| SELB | 1 | 2 |
| WELB | 5 | 2 |

Proposed Leaflet Concerning the Post-Primary Transfer Policy

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how much it will cost to produce and deliver to every household the proposed leaflet concerning the post-primary transfer policy. (AQW 7242/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi láthair tá mé ag smaoinéamh ar conas is fearr mo chuid moltaí maidir le haistriú iarbhunscoile a chur in iúl agus a mhíniú don phobal i gcoitinne.

I am currently considering how best to communicate and explain my proposals on post primary transfer to the wider community.

Taughmonagh Primary School

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education for an update on plans for a new build for Taughmonagh Primary School, South Belfast. (AQW 7282/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste go bhfuil pleanáil don scoil nua ar siúl agus go bhfuil idirbheartaíocht ar bun lena chomhpháirtí straitéiseach faoin tionscadal.

The Belfast Education and Library Board has advised that planning of the new school is underway and that negotiations are taking place with its strategic partner on the project. It is estimated that construction work could start on site in the autumn 2009 with an estimated 18 month construction period. The timescale is of course subject to the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year.

Grammar Schools and Entrance Exams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what Grammar schools have indicated they intend to set their own entrance exams. (AQW 7297/08)

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.

The Department has only taken receipt of one school's (Lumen Christi Grammar School, Derry) intention to introduce an entrance examination for admissions in September 2010, an intention also announced in the Press on 20 March, 2008.

In addition, in a press release issued by the Association for Quality Education on 23 April, it was stated that thirty grammar schools had agreed to the establishment of a corporate mechanism to deliver a common entrance examination. These schools are named in the AQE Press Release.

Departmental Meetings with Teaching Unions

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many meetings she has held with each of the teaching unions since taking up office, including (i) the date of, and (ii) the reason for, each meeting. (AQW 7414/08)

The Minister of Education: Ó chuaigh mé i mbun oifige thionóil mé cruinnithe le gach ceann de na ceardchumainn mhúinteoireachta mar seo a leanas:

Since taking up office I have held meetings with each of the teaching unions as follows:

| NASUWT Meetings | 2 Meetings |
|-----------------|---|
| 31 May 2007 | The vision for Education in NI |
| 16 January 2008 | Negotiating Arrangements Social Partnership Restoration of Parity Workforce Review |

| NAHT Meetings | 2 Meetings |
|---------------|---|
| 2 July 2007 | Funding Teacher Welfare Teacher Workload/Overload Special Education/Social Inclusion |
| 25 April 2008 | English as an Additional Language |

| INTO Meetings | 2 Meetings |
|-----------------|--|
| 20 June 2007 | Education Funding RPA Post Primary Review |
| 7 November 2007 | Curran Report Planning, Preparation & Assessment Time Teacher Education Negotiating Committee Constitution Colleges to offer Irish as an option in Primary Initial Teacher Training Classes Revised Curriculum |

| NITC Meetings | 2 Meetings |
|---------------|--|
| 29 June 2007 | Education Funding RPA Academic Selection |
| 5 March 2008 | Academic Selection Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme Teacher Education Negotiating Committee Constitution |

| All Teacher Unions | 1 Meeting |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 19 May 2008 | Post Primary Transfer |

As well as the meetings detailed above, I have also attended the following events:

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| 13 April 2007 | NASUWT Conference |
| 7 March 2008 | NASUWT Conference |
| 14 March 2008 | UTU Conference |
| 8 August 2007 | Interview for ATL Magazine |
| 29 May 2008 | NAHT Conference |
| 29 February 2008 | INTO Northern Conference |
| 25 March 2008 | INTO Conference |

Violence and Expulsion in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) incidents of persistent bad behaviour; (ii) incidents of violence; and (iii) expulsions, have occurred in (a) primary; (b) secondary; and (iii) grammar schools, in the East Belfast constituency, in each of the last 3 academic years. (AQW 7426/08)

The Minister of Education: Information collected annually from the Education and Library Boards on

suspensions and expulsions gives an indication of the level of persistent bad behaviour and violence in schools. The position in schools in the East Belfast constituency in each of the last 3 academic years is set out in the following tables:

TABLE A

NUMBER OF SUSPENSIONS IN THE EAST BELFAST CONSTITUENCY DUE TO INCIDENTS OF PERSISTENT BAD BEHAVIOUR¹

| Sector | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Primary | 5 | * | * |
| Secondary | 44 | 32 | 42 |
| Grammar | * | 6 | 26 |

¹ Incidents of persistent bad behaviour includes the number of occasions pupils were suspended for persistent infringement of school rules

* denotes fewer than five cases

TABLE B

NUMBER OF SUSPENSIONS IN THE EAST BELFAST CONSTITUENCY DUE TO INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE¹

| Sector | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Primary | 27 | 23 | 13 |
| Secondary | 55 | 54 | 59 |
| Grammar | 11 | 19 | 14 |

¹ Incidents of violence includes the number of occasions pupils were suspended for a physical attack on a pupil or for a physical attack on a member of staff

Ina iomláine, tharla níos lú ná 5 dhíbirt ó bhunscoileanna, meánscoileanna agus scoileanna gramadaí i dToghlach Bhéal Feirste Thoir le linn na 3 bliana seo caite.

In total, there have been fewer than 5 expulsions from primary, secondary and grammar schools in the East Belfast Constituency over the course of the last 3 school years.

Improvement of Educational Achievement Levels in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education to outline her strategy to (i) improve educational achievement levels; and (ii) upgrade the schools' estate, at primary level in the East Belfast constituency. (AQW 7427/08)

The Minister of Education: Mar Aire Oideachais, dírim ar fheabhsú leibhéil ghnóthachtála ar fud an tuaiscirt agus go háirithe ar a chinntiú go mbainfidh na daoine óga uilig amach a n-acmhainneacht.

As Education Minister my focus is on improving achievement levels across the north and particularly on ensuring that all our young people fulfil their potential.

The revised school improvement policy, 'Every School a Good School' is a key policy in our drive to promote achievement and tackle underachievement. Consultation on proposals for the revised policy has been completed and we are reviewing and amending the policy in light of the comments received.

The school improvement policy will be supported and complemented through other developments such as the revised curriculum; a review of Special Educational Need and in particular a revised literacy and numeracy strategy which will be published for consultation in the coming weeks. Additionally, the Belfast and Western Education Library Boards are undertaking targeted programmes aimed at supporting teachers and young people in the two cities in addressing particular challenges relating to underachievement in literacy and numeracy.

In relation to your question about the schools' estate at primary level, I can advise that a number of major capital projects are currently being planned for schools in the East Belfast constituency. These include the amalgamation of Strand P.S. with Sydenham P.S. in a new school on their existing site and a new school for Strandtown P.S. on the existing site. Funding for both projects was approved in 2004 and 2006 respectively and planning is currently being taken forward by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). A new school for Orangefield P.S. on a new site is also being taken forward by the BELB. This project will be funded through a Public Private Partnership (PPP) and is currently under construction, with an estimated completion date of April 2009.

CCMS has also identified the potential need for a capital scheme for St Joseph's P.S., Holland Drive. However, they have also identified a number of other, rationalisation, schemes that they consider to be of a higher priority and these schemes are being progressed in the first instance.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) as part of its strategic review of the school estate within its domain, has identified the need for future rationalisation of primary provision along the Castlereagh dual carriageway area but there are no current or imminent proposals.

The BELB last year published a consultation document on "Building Schools for the Future" in which it examined the position of the primary school estate within its domain. Although the Board has held a series of consultations about the schools estate with a number of primary schools no proposals have been confirmed as yet.

Youth Groups in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many youth groups in the East Belfast constituency are registered with the Belfast Education and Library Board; how much funding is received by each of these groups; and what plans she has to increase the funding for these groups. (AQW 7428/08)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Belfast Education and Library Board for youth services in its area.

The Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board has confirmed that there are 82 youth groups in the East Belfast constituency registered with the Board, of which 54 received funding during the 2007/08 financial year. Information for 2008/09 is not yet available as funding applications are still being processed by the Board.

The table below details the groups registered with the Belfast Education and Library Board and the amount of funding they received under the two funding schemes operated by the Board:

YOUTH SERVICE PROGRAMME

| Unit | 2007/08 £s |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| 100th Boys Brigade | 500 |
| 10th Belfast Scouts | 3,145 |
| 113th Boys Brigade | Nil |
| 114th Girl Guides | 600 |
| 11th Belfast Scouts | 2,847 |
| 11th Belfast Venture Scouts | 210 |
| 11th Brownies | Nil |
| 148th Girls Brigade | Nil |
| 15th Cregagh Methodist Girls Brigade | 75 |
| 233rd Girls Brigade | Nil |
| 25th Belfast Boys Brigade | 2,504 |
| 26th Belfast Scouts | 952 |
| 29th Girls Brigade | Nil |
| 30th Belfast Guides | Nil |
| 30th Boys Brigade | Nil |
| 33rd Belfast Scouts | 447 |
| 3rd St Brendan's Scouts | 500 |
| 4th Belfast Scouts | Nil |
| 66th South East Scouts | Nil |
| 69th Belfast Guides | Nil |

| Unit | 2007/08 £s |
|---|---------------|
| 79th Boys Brigade | Nil |
| 82nd Boys Brigade | 296 |
| 83rd Girls Brigade | 75 |
| 86th Belfast Guides | Nil |
| 89th Girl Guides | Nil |
| 93rd Belfast Brownies | Nil |
| 93rd Belfast Guides | Nil |
| 93rd Girls Brigade | Nil |
| 94th Boys Brigade | Nil |
| 95th Girls Brigade | Nil |
| 99th Belfast Scouts | Nil |
| AGAPE Youth Fellowship | Nil |
| Archway Youth Club | 42,491 |
| Ardcarn Residents Association | 1,000 |
| Ballymac | 4,000 |
| Bloomfield Methodist | Nil |
| CEHT Community House | 1,000 |
| Clarawood Youth Club | 7,599 |
| Doyle Youth Club | 80,889 |
| East Belfast Area Project | 197,580 |
| East Belfast Mission | 2,000 |
| Inner East Youth Project | 6,500 |
| Knock Junior Youth Club | Nil |
| Knocknagoney Youth Club | 4,142 |
| KPC Youth | 1,063 |
| Ledley Hall Youth Club | 45,941 |
| Nemesis Special Needs Club | Nil |
| Orangefield Youth Club | 15,809 |
| Park Avenue Free Methodist Church | 500 |
| Playzone | 1,100 |
| Roslyn Street Youth Club | 7,001 |
| St Brendan's Rainbows, Brownies & Guides | 500 |
| St Mathews Guides | Nil |
| Stormont Guides | Nil |
| Sydenham Methodist Girls Brigade | Nil |
| Sydenham Youth club | 17,367 |
| The Bridge Community Association Youth Club | 1,300 |
| Walkway Community Association | 5,741 |
| Wandsworth Community Centre | 1,000 |

| Unit | 2007/08 £s |
|-------|---------------|
| Total | 456,674 |

YOUTH SERVICE COMMUNITY RELATIONS SUPPORT SCHEME

| Unit | 2007/08 £s |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 10th Belfast Scout Troop | 600 |
| 11th Belfast Scouts | 600 |
| St Colmcille's Brigin Section | 563 |
| Archway Youth Centre | 1,245 |
| Ardcarn Residents Association | 600 |
| Ballymac Youth Project | 287 |
| CEHT Community House | 600 |
| Clarawood Community Association | 1,200 |
| Doyle Youth Club | 5,399 |
| East Belfast Area Project | 7,328 |
| East Belfast Mission | 600 |
| Inner East Youth Project | 600 |
| KPC Youth | 600 |
| Ledley Hall Boys & Girls Club Trust | 1,060 |
| Park Avenue Free Methodist Church | 120 |
| Playzone | 600 |
| Roslyn Street Youth Club | 600 |
| Sydenham Youth Club | 1,100 |
| The Bridge Youth Club | 520 |
| Walkway Community Association | 600 |
| Wandsworth Community Association | 500 |
| Total Funding | 25,322 |

Tá an fhreagracht ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste cinneadh a dhéanamh faoi conas a bhuisead a dháileadh agus faoi na grúpaí a mhaoíníonn sé bunaithe ar a mheasúnú ar riachtanais sa limistéar.

It is the responsibility of the Belfast Education and Library Board to decide how to distribute its budget and what groups funds based on its assessment of needs in the area.

Special Education Officers

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many officers dealing with special education,

particularly children with cerebral palsy, are qualified teachers with a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and qualified to teach children with cerebral palsy, broken down by Education and Library Board. (AQW 7462/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards that the number of officers dealing with special education who are qualified teachers with a minimum of 5 years teaching experience and qualified to teach children with cerebral palsy is as follows:-

| | |
|-------|----|
| BELB | 78 |
| NEELB | 56 |
| SEELB | 43 |
| SELB | 55 |
| WELB | 38 |

Déanann na figiúirí thuas tagairt d'oifigigh Bhoird ar a n-áirítear múinteoirí taistil.

The above figures refer to Board officers including peripatetic teachers.

Independent Special Schools

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to list the special schools that specialise in educating children with cerebral palsy in each Education and Library Board area. (AQW 7465/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní chomhlíonann aon scoil ar leith sainfheidhm eisiatach i dtaca le pairilís cheirbreach. Ach tá ar chumas gach scoil speisialta faoi chothabháil stáit soláthar cuí a dhéanamh in oiliúint linbh le pairilís cheirbreach agus lucht sláinte gairmiúil oile ag tacú leo a chuirfeadh teiripe ar fáil atá sainiúil do riachtanais an pháiste

No individual school fulfils an exclusive specialist function in relation to cerebral palsy. Rather all grant-maintained special schools are capable of making appropriate provision in educating a child with cerebral palsy supported by trained health professionals who would provide therapy specific to the needs of the child.

Independent Special Schools

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to list the independent special schools in each Education and Library Board area; and how many of these schools educate children with cerebral palsy. (AQW 7466/08)

The Minister of Education:

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| BELB | None |
| NEELB | None |
| SEELB | Glencraig Curative School, Craigavad |
| SELB | Buddy Bear School, Dungannon |
| WELB | None |

Díobh siúd cuireann an Buddy Bear School oideachas stiúrtha ar fáil do leanaí le pairilís cheirbreach.

Of these the Buddy Bear School currently offers conductive education to children with cerebral palsy.

Sure Start Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Sure Start funded group for the Ards peninsula does not cover Millisle. (AQW 7477/08)

The Minister of Education: The current policy of the Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20% most deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Score. As Millisle falls outside the catchment areas there are no Sure Start programmes/services available within their ward area.

Ó thaobh na tíreolaíochta de, tá na limistéir bharda atá cuimsithe ag Sure Start agus an maoiniú measta atá ar fáil i 2008/2009, do gach tionscadal, le fáil sa tábla seo thíos:

Geographically, the ward areas covered by Sure Start and the estimated funding available in 2008/09, for each project, are contained within the table below:

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Smile | New Lodge Waterworks Duncairn Mt.Vernon & Shore Cres. (Castleview) York Park (Fortwilliam) | £441244 |
| Glenbrook | Ardoyne Cliftonville Legoniel | £411704 |
| Shankill | Shankill Highfield Glencairn Woodvale Ballysillan Crumlin (Belfast) | £487149 |
| Clan Mor | Falls Clonard | £447685 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Downpatrick | Cathedral Ardglass Ballymote (Flying Horse) Audleys Acre Quoile Strangford Killough | £551404 |
| Lower Ards Peninsula | Portaferry Ballywalter Kircubbin Portavogie Scrabo | £481795 |
| Colin Neighbourhood | Collin Glen Twinbrook Kilwee Lagmore (Derryaghey) Old Warren Poleglass | £546349 |
| East Belfast | Island The Mount Ballymacarrett Woodstock Enler Tullycarnet | £594634 |
| South Belfast | Shaftesbury Ballynafeigh Botanic Blackstaff Upper Malone | £618620 |
| Outer West (Andersonstown) | Andersonstown Glencolin Glen Road Ladybrook | £419682 |
| Upper Springfield | Falls Park Upper Springfield Whiterock | £378682 |
| Beechmount | Beechmount | £163432 |
| Little Hands, Creevagh | Rosemount Creavagh Springtown | £440984 |
| Shantallow | Shantallow East Shantallow West Carnhill Culmore Area | £500370 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Dungiven | Greystone The Highlands Dungiven Feeny Upper Glenshane Glack Coolessan | £461186 |
| Strabane | North South East West Ballycolman Sion Mills Finn Dunnamanagh Plumbridge | £667787 |
| Last, Omagh | Lisanelly Drumragh Killyclogher Camowen Strule Fintona Termon | £508805 |
| Cherish Irvinestown | Irvinestown Kesh, Ederney and Lack Lisnarrick Ballinamallard Trillick Devenish Rosslea Newtownbutler | £511688 |
| West Bank, Derry | Brandywell The Diamond Westland Strand Beechwood Creggan Central Creggan South | £338458 |
| East Bank, Derry | Victoria Ebrington Clondermott Enagh | £438979 |
| West Tyrone | Castleberg Glenderg Clare Drumquin Newtownstewart | £321387 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Ballymena South | Dunclug Fair Green Ballykeel Moat Ballee Harryville | £658642 |
| Coleraine | University Ballysally Cross Glebe Central Churchland Knocklynn | £539433 |
| Dalriada | Ballylough Bushmills Dunseverick Kinbane Moss-side and Moyarget Armoy Dalriada Glentaisie Benamargy and Rathlin | £487882 |
| Gold | Oldtown Gortallowry Killymoon Ardboe | £553169 |
| Horizon/Larne | Love Lane Northland Clipperstown Sunnylands Ballyloran Craigy Hill Antiville | £449864 |
| Newtownabbey | Cloughfern Monkstown Dunanney Coole Abbey Whitehouse Valley | £567556 |
| Clogher Valley | Anghnacloy Augher Ballygawley Clogher Fivemiletown | £455728 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Orana | Ballybot Daisyhill Drumalane Drumgullion St Mary's St Patrick's Windsor Hill | £638249 |
| Close To Home (Dungannon) | Ballysaggart Benburb Coalisland South Coolhill Drumglass Killymeal Moygashel Mullaghmore Castlecaulfield | £500127 |
| South Armagh | Bessbrook Camlough Creggan Crossmaglen Derrymore Newtownhamilton | £549277 |
| Blossom | Annagh Ballybay Ballyoran Brownstown Corcrain Tavanagh | £501947 |
| Arke Early Years | Keady Callanbridge | £102500 |
| Splash | Church Court Drumgask Drumgor Drumnamoe Taghnevan | £552359 |

Sure Start Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what Sure Start funded programmes are available for people in Millisle.
(AQW 7478/08)

The Minister of Education: The current policy of the Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20% most deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Score. As Millisle falls

outside the catchment areas there are no Sure Start programmes/services available within their ward area.

Ó thaobh na tíreolaíochta de, tá na limistéir bharda atá cuimsithe ag Sure Start agus an maoiniú measta atá ar fáil i 2008/2009, do gach tionscadal, le fáil sa tábla seo thíos:

Geographically, the ward areas covered by Sure Start and the estimated funding available in 2008/09, for each project, are contained within the table below:

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Smile | New Lodge Waterworks Duncairn Mt.Vernon & Shore Cres. (Castleview) York Park (Fortwilliam) | £441244 |
| Glenbrook | Ardoyne Cliftonville Legoniel | £411704 |
| Shankill | Shankill Highfield Glencairn Woodvale Ballysillan Crumlin (Belfast) | £487149 |
| Clan Mor | Falls Clonard | £447685 |
| Downpatrick | Cathedral Ardglass Ballymote (Flying Horse) Audleys Acre Quoile Strangford Killough | £551404 |
| Lower Ards Peninsula | Portaferry Ballywalter Kircubbin Portavogie Scrabo | £481795 |
| Colin Neighbourhood | Collin Glen Twinbrook Kilwee Lagmore (Derryaghey) Old Warren Poleglass | £546349 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|----------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| East Belfast | Island The Mount Ballymacarrett Woodstock Enler Tullycarnet | £594634 |
| South Belfast | Shaftesbury Ballynaveigh Botanic Blackstaff Upper Malone | £618620 |
| Outer West (Andersonstown) | Andersonstown Glencolin Glen Road Ladybrook | £419682 |
| Upper Springfield | Falls Park Upper Springfield Whiterock | £378682 |
| Beechmount | Beechmount | £163432 |
| Little Hands, Creevagh | Rosemount Creevagh Springtown | £440984 |
| Shantallow | Shantallow East Shantallow West Carnhill Culmore Area | £500370 |
| Dungiven | Greystone The Highlands Dungiven Feeny Upper Glenshane Glack Coolessan | £461186 |
| Strabane | North South East West Ballycolman Sion Mills Finn Dunnamanagh Plumbridge | £667787 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Last, Omagh | Lisanelly Drumragh Killyclogher Camowen Strule Fintona Termon | £508805 |
| Cherish Irvinestown | Irvinestown Kesh, Ederney and Lack Lisnarrick Ballinamallard Trillick Devenish Rosslea Newtownbutler | £511688 |
| West Bank, Derry | Brandywell The Diamond Westland Strand Beechwood Creggan Central Creggan South | £338458 |
| East Bank, Derry | Victoria Ebrington Clondermott Enagh | £438979 |
| West Tyrone | Castlederg Glenderg Clare Drumquin Newtownstewart | £321387 |
| Ballymena South | Dunclug Fair Green Ballykeel Moat Ballee Harryville | £658642 |
| Coleraine | University Ballysally Cross Glebe Central Churchland Knocklynn | £539433 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Dalriada | Ballylough Bushmills Dunseverick Kinbane Moss-side and Moyarget Armoy Dalriada Glentaisie Benamargy and Rathlin | £487882 |
| Gold | Oldtown Gortallowry Killymoon Ardboe | £553169 |
| Horizon/Larne | Love Lane Northland Clipperstown Sunnylands Ballyloran Craigy Hill Antiville | £449864 |
| Newtownabbey | Cloughfern Monkstown Dunanney Coole Abbey Whitehouse Valley | £567556 |
| Clogher Valley | Anghnacloy Augher Ballygawley Clogher Fivemiletown | £455728 |
| Orana | Ballybot Daisyhill Drumalane Drumgullion St Mary's St Patrick's Windsor Hill | £638249 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Close To Home (Dungannon) | Ballysaggart Benburb Coalisland South Coolhill Drumglass Killymeal Moygashel Mullaghmore Castlecaulfield | £500127 |
| South Armagh | Bessbrook Camlough Creggan Crossmaglen Derrymore Newtownhamilton | £549277 |
| Blossom | Annagh Ballybay Ballyoran Brownstown Corcrain Tavanagh | £501947 |
| Arke Early Years | Keady Callanbridge | £102500 |
| Splash | Church Court Drumgask Drumgor Drumnamoe Taghnevan | £552359 |

Sure Start Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what geographical areas are covered by each of the Sure Start funded groups. (AQW 7479/08)

The Minister of Education: The current policy of the Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20% most deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Score. As Millisle falls outside the catchment areas there are no Sure Start programmes/services available within their ward area.

Ó thaobh na tíreolaíochta de, tá na limistéir bharda atá cuimsithe ag Sure Start agus an maoiniú measta atá ar fáil i 2008/2009, do gach tionscadal, le fáil sa tábla seo thíos:

Geographically, the ward areas covered by Sure Start and the estimated funding available in 2008/09, for each project, are contained within the table below:

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|----------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Smile | New Lodge Waterworks Duncairn Mt.Vernon & Shore Cres. (Castleview) York Park (Fortwilliam) | £441244 |
| Glenbrook | Ardoyne Cliftonville Legoniel | £411704 |
| Shankill | Shankill Highfield Glencairn Woodvale Ballysillan Crumlin (Belfast) | £487149 |
| Clan Mor | Falls Clonard | £447685 |
| Downpatrick | Cathedral Ardglass Ballymote (Flying Horse) Audleys Acre Quoile Strangford Killough | £551404 |
| Lower Ards Peninsula | Portaferry Ballywalter Kircubbin Portavogie Scrabo | £481795 |
| Colin Neighbourhood | Collin Glen Twinbrook Kilwee Lagmore (Derryaghey) Old Warren Poleglass | £546349 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| East Belfast | Island The Mount Ballymacarrett Woodstock Enler Tullycarnet | £594634 |
| South Belfast | Shaftesbury Ballynafeigh Botanic Blackstaff Upper Malone | £618620 |
| Outer West (Andersonstown) | Andersonstown Glencolin Glen Road Ladybrook | £419682 |
| Upper Springfield | Falls Park Upper Springfield Whiterock | £378682 |
| Beechmount | Beechmount | £163432 |
| Little Hands, Creevagh | Rosemount Crevagh Springtown | £440984 |
| Shantallow | Shantallow East Shantallow West Carnhill Culmore Area | £500370 |
| Dungiven | Greystone The Highlands Dungiven Feeny Upper Glenshane Glack Coolissan | £461186 |
| Strabane | North South East West Ballycolman Sion Mills Finn Dunnamanagh Plumbridge | £667787 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Last, Omagh | Lisanelly Drumragh Killyclogher Camowen Strule Fintona Termon | £508805 |
| Cherish Irvinestown | Irvinestown Kesh, Ederney and Lack Lisnarrick Ballinamallard Trillick Devenish Rosslea Newtownbutler | £511688 |
| West Bank, Derry | Brandywell The Diamond Westland Strand Beechwood Creggan Central Creggan South | £338458 |
| East Bank, Derry | Victoria Ebrington Clondermott Enagh | £438979 |
| West Tyrone | Castledearg Glenderg Clare Drumquin Newtownstewart | £321387 |
| Ballymena South | Dunclug Fair Green Ballykeel Moat Ballee Harryville | £658642 |
| Coleraine | University Ballysally Cross Glebe Central Churchland Knocklynn | £539433 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Dalriada | Ballylough Bushmills Dunseverick Kinbane Moss-side and Moyarget Armoy Dalriada Glentaisie Benamargy and Rathlin | £487882 |
| Gold | Oldtown Gortallowry Killymoon Ardboe | £553169 |
| Horizon/Larne | Love Lane Northland Clipperstown Sunnylands Ballyloran Craigy Hill Antiville | £449864 |
| Newtownabbey | Cloughfern Monkstown Dunanney Coole Abbey Whitehouse Valley | £567556 |
| Clogher Valley | Anghnacloy Augher Ballygawley Clogher Fivemiletown | £455728 |
| Orana | Ballybot Daisyhill Drumalane Drumgullion St Mary's St Patrick's Windsor Hill | £638249 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Close To Home (Dungannon) | Ballysaggart Benburb Coalisland South Coolhill Drumglass Killymeal Moygashel Mullaghmore Castlecaulfield | £500127 |
| South Armagh | Bessbrook Camlough Creggan Crossmaglen Derrymore Newtownhamilton | £549277 |
| Blossom | Annagh Ballybay Ballyoran Brownstown Corcrair Tavanagh | £501947 |
| Arke Early Years | Keady Callanbridge | £102500 |
| Splash | Church Court Drumgask Drumgor Drumnamoe Taghnevan | £552359 |

Sure Start Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been made available to each Sure Start group for the 2008-09 financial year. (AQW 7480/08)

The Minister of Education: The current policy of the Department of Education is to maintain Sure Start coverage of the 20% most deprived ward areas in the north of Ireland, as ranked by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure Score. As Millisle falls outside the catchment areas there are no Sure Start programmes/services available within their ward area.

Ó thaobh na tíreolaíochta de, tá na limistéir bharda atá cuimsithe ag Sure Start agus an maoiniú measta atá ar fáil i 2008/2009, do gach tionscadal, le fáil sa tábla seo thíos:

Geographically, the ward areas covered by Sure Start and the estimated funding available in 2008/09, for each project, are contained within the table below:

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| Clan Mor | Falls Clonard | £447685 |
| Downpatrick | Cathedral Ardglass Ballymote (Flying Horse) Audleys Acre Quoile Strangford Killough | £551404 |
| Lower Ards Peninsula | Portaferry Ballywalter Kircubbin Portavogie Scrabo | £481795 |
| Colin Neighbourhood | Collin Glen Twinbrook Kilwee Lagmore (Derryaghey) Old Warren Poleglass | £546349 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|----------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| East Belfast | Island The Mount Ballymacarrett Woodstock Enler Tullycarnet | £594634 |
| South Belfast | Shaftesbury Ballynafeigh Botanic Blackstaff Upper Malone | £618620 |
| Outer West (Andersonstown) | Andersonstown Glencolin Glen Road Ladybrook | £419682 |
| Upper Springfield | Falls Park Upper Springfield Whiterock | £378682 |
| Beechmount | Beechmount | £163432 |
| Little Hands, Creevagh | Rosemount Creevagh Springtown | £440984 |
| Shantallow | Shantallow East Shantallow West Carnhill Culmore Area | £500370 |
| Dungiven | Greystone The Highlands Dungiven Feeny Upper Glenshane Glack Coolessan | £461186 |
| Strabane | North South East West Ballycolman Sion Mills Finn Dunnamanagh Plumbridge | £667787 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Last, Omagh | Lisanelly Drumragh Killyclogher Camowen Strule Fintona Termon | £508805 |
| Cherish Irvinestown | Irvinestown Kesh, Ederney and Lack Lisnarrick Ballinamallard Trillick Devenish Rosslea Newtownbutler | £511688 |
| West Bank, Derry | Brandywell The Diamond Westland Strand Beechwood Creggan Central Creggan South | £338458 |
| East Bank, Derry | Victoria Ebrington Clondermott Enagh | £438979 |
| West Tyrone | Castleberg Glenderg Clare Drumquin Newtownstewart | £321387 |
| Ballymena South | Dunclug Fair Green Ballykeel Moat Ballee Harryville | £658642 |
| Coleraine | University Ballysally Cross Glebe Central Churchland Knocklynn | £539433 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Dalriada | Ballylough Bushmills Dunseverick Kinbane Moss-side and Moyarget Armoy Dalriada Glentaisie Benamargy and Rathlin | £487882 |
| Gold | Oldtown Gortallowry Killymoon Ardboe | £553169 |
| Horizon/Larne | Love Lane Northland Clipperstown Sunnylands Ballyloran Craigy Hill Antiville | £449864 |
| Newtownabbey | Cloughfern Monkstown Dunanney Coole Abbey Whitehouse Valley | £567556 |
| Clogher Valley | Anghnacloy Augher Ballygawley Clogher Fivemiletown | £455728 |
| Orana | Ballybot Daisyhill Drumalane Drumgullion St Mary's St Patrick's Windsor Hill | £638249 |

| Sure Start Projects | Ward Areas Covered | Estimated available budget 08-09 |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Close To Home (Dungannon) | Ballysaggart Benburb Coalisland South Coolhill Drumglass Killymeal Moygashel Mullaghmore Castlecaulfield | £500127 |
| South Armagh | Bessbrook Camlough Creggan Crossmaglen Derrymore Newtownhamilton | £549277 |
| Blossom | Annagh Ballybay Ballyoran Brownstown Corcrain Tavanagh | £501947 |
| Arke Early Years | Keady Callanbridge | £102500 |
| Splash | Church Court Drumgask Drumgor Drumnamoe Taghnevan | £552359 |

Primary Languages Programme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education who will monitor and evaluate the Primary Languages Programme; what methods will be used in the monitoring; and when it will take place.
(AQW 7500/08)

The Minister of Education: A Primary Languages Group, representative of key education partners, has been set up to manage and monitor the Primary Languages Programme on an ongoing basis. The Group reports to the Partnership Management Board and to my Department.

D'iarr mé ar an gCigireacht Oideachais & Oiliúna measúnú neamhspleách a dhéanamh ar mo Chlár Teangacha Bunscoile, a mbeidh i gceist leis agallaimh le múinteoirí, teagascóirí agus príomhoidí agus

cleachtas sa seomra ranga a bhreathnú. Beidh sé sin ar siúl le linn na scoilbhliana 2008-9.

I have asked the Education & Training Inspectorate to carry out an independent evaluation of my Primary Languages Programme, which will involve interviews with teachers, tutors and principals and observation of practice in the classroom. This will take place during the 2008-09 school year.

Retirement Age of Education and Library Board Officers

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education to clarify the age of retirement (i) Education and Library Board officers; and (ii) departmental officials.
(AQW 7513/08)

The Minister of Education: The compulsory retirement age for Education and Library Board officers is 65 (except where this has been increased by local agreement, i.e. School Crossing Patrols age 75).

The compulsory age of retirement for department officials is 65. However, Department staff may retire without having their accrued pension entitlement reduced, at age 60 or 65, depending on their pension arrangements under the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI).

Ina theannta sin, tugann na Rialacháin um Chomhionannas Fostaíochta (Tuaisceart Éireann) 2006, a tháinig i bhfeidhm ó Dheireadh Fómhair 2006, an ceart bunreachtúil do gach fostaí obair a iarraidh i ndiaidh aois a 65.

In addition, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, effective from October 2006, gives all employees the statutory right to request to work beyond 65.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education if (i) any of the Education and Library Boards; or (ii) her Department, have made, or are currently making, adjustments to accommodate individuals working beyond the age of 65.
(AQW 7514/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug na Rialacháin um Chomhionannas Fostaíochta (Aois) 2006, atá i bhfeidhm ó 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2006, an ceart reachtúil d'fhostaithe obair a iarraidh i ndiaidh aois 65.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, effective from 1 October 2006, has provided employees with the statutory right to request to work beyond age 65.

No applications to work beyond 65 have been received by the Department. Available information from the Education and Library Boards indicates that 295 applications have been received, of which 254 have been approved; 36 remain under consideration; and 5 have been turned down. These figures are in respect of all non-teaching staff, including school-based staff. The decision on approval or otherwise rests with the employing authority and the legislation does not require a reason to be given for the decision. There is no provision within age discrimination legislation to make adjustments to accommodate individuals working beyond 65. The Boards advise that no adjustments were necessary in respect of the applications that have been approved.

Chief Executive Officers of Education and Library Boards

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education what (i) quangos; and (ii) non-departmental bodies or agencies, on which the Chief Executive officers of (a) the Education and Library Boards; and (b) Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, are currently members. (AQW 7517/08)

The Minister of Education: Sainaithníonn an tábla seo thíos na comhlachtaí a bhfuil Príomhoifigí Fheidhmiúcháin (a) na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, agus (b) Chomhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil ina mbaill díobh faoi láthair.

The table below identifies the bodies of which the Chief Executive officers of (a) the Education and Library Boards; and (b) Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are currently members.

| BOARD/CCMS | QUANGO/NDPB /AGENCY |
|------------|--|
| BELB | Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards. British Council NI Advisory Committee. |
| CCMS | Middletown Autism Centre. DARD – Independent Board Member. South Eastern Trust – Non Executive Director. |
| NEELB | The General Teaching Council (NI). |
| SEELB | None |
| SELB | Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). Cookstown Local Strategic Partnerships. Newry Local Strategic Partnerships. |

| BOARD/CCMS | QUANGO/NDPB /AGENCY |
|------------|--|
| WELB | Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards. |

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, her Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7523/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní fheidhmíonn an Roinn Oideachais ná Comhlachtaí Neamhrannacha Poiblí (CNRP) in earnáil an oideachais uimhreacha teileafóin 0845 ná 0870 ar bith. Níl áisinteachtaí ar bith ag an Roinn.

Neither the Department of Education nor any Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) in the education sector operate 0845 or 0870 telephone numbers. The Department does not have any agencies.

Summer Schemes for Children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education what funding is available for summer schemes for children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder in the Strangford constituency; and if any schemes are pending this funding. (AQW 7540/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that the Board does not plan to arrange summer schemes for children with a specific diagnosis of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder in the Strangford constituency.

Beidh scéim samhraidh ann, áfach, do dhaltai le mórdheacrachtaí foghlama atá ina ndaltai ag Scoil Speisialta Clifton, Beannchar.

There will be, however, a summer scheme for pupils with severe learning difficulties who are pupils at Clifton Special School, Bangor.

Lisnasharragh High School

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what plans she has for the Lisnasharragh High School building/site, following the closure of the school. (AQW 7546/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt

go bhfuil beartaithe acu láithreán Lios na Searrach a choinneáil ar feadh tamaill agus iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar a oiriúnacht d'úsáid eile oideachais.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that it plans is to retain the Lisnasharragh site for the time being and to explore its suitability for alternative educational use.

Lisnasharragh High School

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to provide additional support to the secondary schools that will be receiving pupils with special needs requirements from Lisnasharragh High School, following the closure of the school.

(AQW 7547/08)

The Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Belfast and South-Eastern Education and Library Boards that there are currently 7 pupils with special educational needs attending Lisnasharragh High School.

I ngach cás beidh soláthar iomchuí oideachais á shocrú ag an mBord, ar a n-áirítear breis tacaíochta teagaisc, chun freastal ar riachtanais speisialta oideachais na ndaltaí ina suíomh nua scoile.

In all cases the Board will be arranging the appropriate educational provision, including additional teaching support, to meet the pupils' special educational needs in their new school setting.

School Age Childcare Services

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education what action has been taken by her Department to prevent the closure of School Age Childcare Services which were established under Governmental policy (Children First, 1999), given the fact that Playboard have began informing parents that the service may not be available during the summer holidays and that a number of staff may face redundancy. (AQW 7554/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon fhreagracht ar an Roinn Oideachais tacú leis na Seirbhísí Cúraim Leanaí d'Aois Scoile a sholáthraíonn Playboard ná maoiniú a chur ar fáil.

The Department of Education does not have responsibility nor the funding available to fund the School Age Childcare Services provided by Playboard.

Nursery School Places in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many nursery school places are currently available in East Belfast. (AQW 7566/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 234 áit i naíscoileanna reachtúla agus 468 áit i naí-aonaid atá i gceangal le bunscoileanna reachtúla i mBéal Feirste Thoir. Ina theannta sin, tá 120 áit réamhscoile mhaoinithe san earnáil dheonach/phríobháideach.

There are 234 places in statutory nursery schools and 468 places in nursery units attached to statutory primary schools in East Belfast. In addition, there are 120 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Nursery School Places in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to change the number of nursery school places available in East Belfast. (AQW 7567/08)

The Minister of Education: In relation to the present position, it is too early to say if the number needs to be increased 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.

Déanfaidh BOLBF agus BOLOD monatóireacht leanúnach ar an soláthar réamhscoile d'fhonn aghaidh a thabhairt ar ghá ar bith le háiteanna breise réamhscoile má shaináithnítear a leithéid.

The BELB and the SEELB will continue to monitor pre-school provision in East Belfast in order to address any need for additional pre-school places if identified.

Nursery School Admission Criteria

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education what the criteria is for admission to nursery schools; and what changes to this criteria are planned (i) to reduce

long waiting lists; and (ii) to address over demand for places. (AQW 7568/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá socraithe ag an Roinn go dtabharfadh scoileanna tosaíocht, in ord na tosaíochta seo a leanas do:

The Pre-School Education in Schools (Admissions Criteria) Regulations 1999 state that schools should give priority in their admissions criteria in the following order of priority to:

1. children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year
2. children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year
3. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year
4. children not falling within i. or ii. who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year.

There are currently no plans for changes to be made to the above regulations.

Additional criteria for admission to particular nursery schools are the responsibility of the board of governors of each school and will reflect the governors' priorities for admission to their school.

It is too early to say if there will be a shortfall in the number of funded places in pre-school settings in the 2008/09 school year 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.

The education and library boards will continue to monitor pre-school provision in their respective areas in order to address any need for additional pre-school places, if identified.

English as a Second Language

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education how many children born outside the United Kingdom were admitted to nursery schools in East Belfast in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7569/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhailítear an fhaisnéis atá á iarraidh. Tá líon na bpáistí le Béarla mar theanga bhreise (BTB) curtha ar fáil ina ionad.

The information requested is not collected. Numbers of children with English as an additional language (EAL) has been provided as a proxy.

EAL pupils attending nursery schools in the East Belfast constituency – Last 3 years

| Year | No. of EAL pupils |
|---------|-------------------|
| 2005/06 | 6 |
| 2006/07 | 6 |
| 2007/08 | 10 |

Source: school census

Note: A child with English as an additional language is defined as one for whom English is not their first language and who has significant problems with the English language and requires assistance.

New Nursery and Primary School in Magherafelt

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 1868/08, for an update on the start date for work to commence on a new nursery and primary school in Magherafelt. (AQW 7575/08)

The Minister of Education: Planning of the proposed new schools for Magherafelt P.S. and Magherafelt N.S. is currently at pre-tender stage. The NEELB had earlier anticipated that planning approval would have been obtained to allow the scheme to start this spring. However Planning approval has not yet been granted for the construction of the new schools on the proposed new site at Castledawson Road. I understand this has also been delayed following a recent request from the Environment and Heritage Service for further ground investigation reports of the proposed new site. The Board has confirmed that work on this is underway.

Go dtí go ndéanfaítear cead pleanála, ní féidir le BOLO sealbhú an láithreáin a chur i gerích. Agus seo amhlaidh, chuir an Bord in iúl nach féidir san am seo dáta táscach a dtosófar an obair thógála a thabhairt, ach táthar ag súil go gcuirfear tús léi go luath sa bhliain 2009.

Until planning approval has been granted, the NEELB cannot complete the acquisition of the site. In light of this the Board has advised that it is not possible at this stage to give an indicative date for construction work to commence but it is hoped that this should be in early 2009.

Upgrading Primary Schools in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to outline her strategy to upgrade the schools' estate at primary school level, in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7577/08)

The Minister of Education: The planning of the schools estate is initiated in the first instance by the relevant school authorities.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board, as part of its strategic review of the schools estate within its responsibility, identified the need for some rationalisation of primary provision in the Bangor area, though there are no current proposals for this.

The Board is also progressing two major capital projects for primary schools for which funding has been approved by the Department. These are a new 11 classbase school for Towerview P.S. and the amalgamation of Holywood P.S. and Redburn P.S. in a new school building on a new site. Construction work is underway on the new building for Towerview P.S. and is expected to be completed in spring 2009. The project for Holywood / Redburn P.S. is in the early stages of planning.

In addition major capital works at two other schools in the constituency have recently been completed. These are a new school building for Kilmaine P.S. which was completed in February 2006 and a major extension & refurbishment for Ballyholme P.S. which was completed in February 2008.

Faoi láthair níl moltaí ar bith ann bunscoileanna faoi chothabháil i dToghlach Dhúin Thuaidh a uasghrádú.

There are no proposals currently to upgrade any of the maintained primary schools in the North Down constituency.

Post-Primary School Places

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of, P7 children attending schools in the North Down constituency have not been allocated a place at a post-primary school for the 2008-09 academic year. (AQW 7582/08)

The Minister of Education: Bhí 30 leanbh B7, atá comhionann le 3 faoin gcéad, ag freastal ar scoileanna

i dToghlach Dhúin Thuaidh nár cionroinneadh ionad dóibh ag iarbhunscoil don bhliain acadúil 2008-09.

There were 30 P7 children, which equates to 3 percent, attending schools in the North Down constituency who have not been allocated a place at a post-primary school for the 2008-09 academic year.

Post-Primary School Figures

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education how many year 8 places there are in each post-primary school in the (i) North Down; (ii) Strangford; and (iii) East Belfast constituencies, for the 2008-09 academic year; and how many of these have been filled for each post-primary school. (AQW 7583/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá líon na n-ionad do bhliain a hocht atá i ngach iarbhunscoil i dtoghlaigh (i) Dhún Thuaidh; (ii) Loch Cuain; (iii) Bhéal Feirste Thoir, don bhliain acadúil 2008-09; agus cé mhéad díobh atá líonta do gach iarbhunscoil ar fáil sa tábla atá leis seo.

The number of year 8 places there are in each post-primary school in the (i) North Down; (ii) Strangford; and (iii) East Belfast constituencies, for the 2008-09 academic year; and how many of these have been filled for each post-primary school is provided on the attached table.

| | | (i) Approved Year 8 Places 2008/09 | (ii) Filled Year 8 Places 2008/09 |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| North Down | | | |
| 4210031 | Donaghadee High School | 76 | 10 |
| 4210296 | Bangor Academy And 6th Form College | 242 | 242 |
| 4230107 | St Columbanus' College | 90 | 90 |
| 4250024 | Priory College | 94 | 94 |
| 4410097 | Glenlola Collegiate | 157 | 157 |
| 4420015 | Bangor Gs | 125 | 125 |
| 4420044 | Sullivan Upper School | 150 | 150 |
| Strangford | | | |
| 4210012 | Movilla High School | 180 | 77 |
| 4210045 | Nendrum College | 80 | 80 |

| | | (i) Approved Year 8 Places 2008/09 | (ii) Filled Year 8 Places 2008/09 |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 4210046 | Glastry College | 112 | 112 |
| 4210063 | Saintfield High School | 69 | 69 |
| 4210262 | Dundonald High School | 120 | 37 |
| 4230067 | St Columba's High School | 104 | 51 |
| 4260295 | Strangford Integrated College | 80 | 80 |
| 4410063 | Regent House School | 210 | 210 |
| East Belfast | | | |
| 1210014 | Ashfield Girls' High School | 113 | 113 |
| 1210015 | Ashfield Boys' High School | 110 | 110 |
| 1210266 | Orangefield High School | 145 | 31 |
| 1410079 | Grosvenor Gs | 155 | 155 |
| 1420018 | Bloomfield Collegiate | 100 | 100 |
| 1420020 | Campbell College | 140 | 140 |
| 1420089 | Strathearn School | 110 | 110 |
| 4210086 | Knockbreda High School | 120 | 120 |
| 4260255 | Lagan College | 200 | 200 |
| 4420259 | Our Lady And St Patrick's College | 181 | 181 |

Donaghadee High School

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the impact the proposed closure of Donaghadee High School will have on the availability of year 8 places in post-primary schools in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7584/08)

The Minister of Education: The two-month consultation period for the receipt of comments on the development proposal for the closure of Donaghadee High School ends on 30 June 2008. The availability of suitable alternative post-primary provision in the area will be examined before deciding on this proposal.

Déanfar cinneadh freisin maidir leis an moladh forbartha ar leith, a foilsíodh ar 26 Feabhra 2008, chun go bhfaighidh an scoil stádas comhtháite rialaithe.

A decision will also be made on the separate development proposal, published on 26 February 2008, for the school to acquire controlled integrated status.

New School in Millburn, Coleraine

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to build a new school in Millburn, Coleraine. (AQW 7595/08)

The Minister of Education: Is bunscoil rialaithe í seo faoi shainchúram Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt (BOLOT) agus chuir an Bord in iúl nach bhfuil beartaithe acu Bunscoil Millburn a athsholáthar.

This is a controlled primary school within the remit of the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) and the Board has advised that it has no plans to replace Millburn Primary School.

Primary School Capacity in Derry/Londonderry

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what is the pupil capacity for each primary school in the city of Derry/Londonderry, for each sector, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 7608/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an acmhainneacht daltaí do gach bunscoil i gcathair Dhoire, do gach earnáil, i ngach ceann de na 5 bliana seo caite á cur ar fáil sa tábla atá leis seo.

The pupil capacity for each primary school in the city of Derry, for each sector, in each of the last 5 years is provided in the attached table.

| | | Approved Enrolment Numbers | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | 2003/2004 | 2004/2005 | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 |
| 2010380 | Londonderry Model Ps | 380 | 380 | 380 | 380 | 380 |
| 2010382 | Ebrington Controlled Ps | 551 | 551 | 551 | 551 | 551 |
| 2012052 | Culmore Ps | 77 | 77 | 82 | 82 | 75 |
| 2012227 | Drumahoe Ps | 261 | 261 | 290 | 290 | 290 |
| 2012261 | Newbuildings Ps | 355 | 355 | 355 | 355 | 355 |
| 2016071 | Greenhaw Ps | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 | 254 |

| | | Approved Enrolment Numbers | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | 2003/2004 | 2004/2005 | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 |
| 2016124 | Ashlea Ps | 230 | 230 | 230 | 230 | 230 |
| 2016203 | Lisnagelvin Ps | 592 | 592 | 592 | 592 | 592 |
| 2016564 | Fountain Ps | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 | 141 |
| 2030364 | Rosemount Ps | 523 | 523 | 523 | 523 | 523 |
| 2030373 | Nazareth House Ps | 395 | 395 | 395 | 395 | 395 |
| 2030381 | Holy Child Ps | 404 | 404 | 404 | 404 | 404 |
| 2036032 | St John's Ps | 726 | 726 | 726 | 726 | 726 |
| 2036069 | St Anne's Ps | 724 | 724 | 724 | 724 | 724 |
| 2036084 | Steelstown Vol Maintained Ps | 657 | 657 | 657 | 657 | 657 |
| 2036142 | St Brigid's Ps | 603 | 603 | 603 | 603 | 603 |
| 2036143 | St Oliver Plunkett Ps | 273 | 273 | 273 | 273 | 273 |
| 2036227 | St Pauls Ps, Slievemore | 527 | 527 | 527 | 527 | 527 |
| 2036247 | St Columba's Ps | 175 | 175 | 175 | 175 | 175 |
| 2036259 | Trench Road Ps | 553 | 553 | 553 | 553 | 553 |
| 2036288 | Good Shepherd Ps And Nursery School | 408 | 408 | 408 | 408 | 408 |
| 2036461 | St Theresa's Ps, Lenamore | 487 | 487 | 487 | 487 | 487 |
| 2036465 | Chapel Road Ps | 276 | 276 | 276 | 276 | 276 |
| 2036472 | Holy Family Ps | 640 | 640 | 640 | 640 | 640 |
| 2036473 | St Eithne's Ps | 552 | 552 | 552 | 552 | 552 |
| 2036475 | Longtower Ps | 605 | 605 | 605 | 605 | 605 |
| 2036533 | Hollybush Ps | 396 | 396 | 396 | 396 | 396 |
| 2036555 | St Eugene's Ps | 473 | 473 | 473 | 473 | 261 |
| 2036574 | Bunscoil Cholmille | 243 | 243 | 243 | 196 | 196 |
| 2036581 | St Patricks Ps | 940 | 930 | 930 | 930 | 930 |
| 2046646 | Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir | 116 | 116 | 145 | 145 | 145 |
| 2052035 | Groarty Integrated Ps | 63 | 63 | 63 | 63 | 63 |

| | | Approved Enrolment Numbers | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | 2003/2004 | 2004/2005 | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 |
| 2066558 | Oakgrove Integrated Ps | 400 | 400 | 400 | 400 | 400 |

Controlled School Places in North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to ensure there is adequate provision of controlled school places in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7635/08)

The Minister of Education: Chuir sonraí an Daonaireamh Scoile do Dheireadh Fómhair 2007 in iúl go bhfuil farasbarr acmhainne laistigh de scoileanna rialaithe i dToghlaigh Dhúin Thuaidh.

The School Census data for October 2007 indicated that there is surplus capacity within controlled schools in the North Down Constituency.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that they intend to address over provision through rationalisation and assessments of capacity where new school buildings are being planned.

After-Schools Programmes

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how much funding is available in the Mid-Ulster constituency for after schools programmes. (AQW 7642/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhailíonn an Roinn aon eolas ar shainimeachtaí iarscoile a chuireann scoileanna aonair ar fáil.

The Department does not collect information on specific after school activities offered by individual schools.

The vast majority of grant-aided schools in the north of Ireland have been offering after school programmes for many years and do so through a combination of voluntary effort, school's delegated budgets and parental contributions.

In addition the Extended Schools programme provides a recognised funding stream for the most socially disadvantaged schools and these resources can be used for after school activities. Details of Extended Schools in the Mid-Ulster constituency are attached.

| Extended Schools in the Mid Ulster Constituency | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| DENI Ref | School Name | Eligible/Not Eligible | Ward | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
| 3012267 | Magherafelt Controlled Ps | No Longer Eligible | Town Parks East | 30,475 | 30,245 | 3,702 |
| 3036039 | St Mary's Ps (Glenview) | New School | Lower Glenshane | 0 | 0 | 17,584 |
| 3036562 | Holy Family Ps | No Longer Eligible | Glebe (Magherafelt) | 34,949 | 35,018 | 4,451 |
| 3210090 | Maghera High School | Eligible | Maghera | 18,475 | 17,950 | 12,068 |
| 5012615 | Ballytrea Ps | Eligible | Stewartstown | 14,605 | 14,720 | 9,884 |
| 5012632 | Donaghmore Ps | New School | Donaghmore (Dungannon) | 0 | 0 | 7,112 |
| 5012643 | Stewartstown Ps | New School | Stewartstown | 0 | 0 | 6,160 |
| 5012649 | Coagh Ps | No Longer Eligible | Coagh | 11,385 | 10,695 | 1,449 |
| 5016200 | Queen Elizabeth Ii (Pomeroy) Ps | Eligible | Pomeroy | 6,800 | 5,900 | 5,936 |
| 5032692 | St Mary's Ps | Eligible | Stewartstown | 15,813 | 16,158 | 10,304 |
| 5032699 | St Mary's Ps | Eligible | Dunnamore | 20,815 | 20,384 | 12,614 |
| 5032703 | St Peter's Ps | Eligible | Ardboe | 23,230 | 22,195 | 13,328 |
| 5032713 | Derrychrin Ps | Eligible | Ardboe | 16,071 | 15,381 | 10,094 |
| 5032717 | St Patrick's Ps | New School | Killycolpy | 0 | 0 | 12,824 |
| 5036033 | St Joseph's Ps | New School | Altmore | 0 | 0 | 13,118 |
| 5036047 | St Patrick's Ps | No Longer Eligible | Washing Bay | 25,070 | 24,610 | 2,990 |
| 5036057 | St Malachy's Ps | No Longer Eligible | Money more | 7,705 | 7,935 | 1,254 |
| 5036108 | St Joseph's Ps | Eligible | Dunnamore | 11,615 | 11,730 | 8,736 |
| 5036118 | St Mary's Ps | Eligible | Pomeroy | 22,626 | 21,505 | 12,824 |
| 5036590 | Primate Dixon Ps | Eligible | Coalisland West And Newmills | 34,420 | 34,397 | 20,944 |
| 5046637 | Gaelscoil Ui Neill | Buffer School | Coalisland North | 13,225 | 13,300 | 5,173 |
| 5230192 | St Joseph's High School | Eligible | Coalisland West And Newmills | 34,880 | 33,730 | 20,706 |
| | | | Total | 342,159 | 335,853 | 213,255 |

Source: I school census 2007/08

NB The buffer zone – due to the change in eligibility criteria some previously funded schools may slip below the qualifying criteria one year and then qualify the next. Therefore a “buffer zone” has been created to allow previously funded schools falling a few percentage points below the threshold to be funded for 2 years at a reduced amount, (50%) if eligibility has not been re-established after 2 years, these schools will exit the programme.

Nursery School Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to change the number of nursery school places available in North Down parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7674/08)

The Minister of Education: In relation to the present position, it is too early to say if the number

needs to be revised 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.

Déanfaidh BOLOD monatóireacht leanunach ar an soláthar réamhscoile i dtoghlaigh parlaiminteach Dhúin Thuaidh d'fhonn aghaidh a thabhairt ar ghá ar bith le háiteanna breise réamhscoile má shainaithnítear a leithéid.

The SEELB will continue to monitor pre-school provision in the North Down parliamentary constituency in order to address any need for additional pre-school places if identified.

Nursery School Places in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many nursery school places are currently available in North Down parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 7675/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá 182 áit i naíscoileanna reachtúla agus 286 áit i naí-aonaid atá i gceangal le bunscoileanna reachtúla i dtoghlaigh parlaiminteach Dhúin Thuaidh. Ina theannta sin, tá 291 áit réamhscoile mhaoinithe san earnáil dheonach/phríobháideach.

There are 182 places in statutory nursery schools and 286 places in nursery units attached to statutory primary schools in the North Down parliamentary constituency. In addition, there are 291 funded pre-school places in the voluntary/private sector.

Unauthorised Absences in Schools

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many cases of unauthorised absence by pupils for 10 or more consecutive school days occurred in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 7693/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhailíonn an Roinn an t-eolas atá á iarraidh.

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 pupils' absences, the reasons for the absence 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 and this data was recently published on the Department's website. 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 and each referral will be dealt with according to the individual circumstances.

Vacant Places in Irish-Medium Schools

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister of Education how many vacant school places there are currently in Irish Medium schools.

(AQW 7750/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi láthair tá 768 áit fholamh i scoileanna Gaeilge.

There are currently 768 vacant places in Irish Medium schools.

Saint Cecilia's College in Derry/Londonderry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of progress on the delivery of a new school for Saint Cecilia's College in Derry/Londonderry; and (ii) to detail any delays which have occurred.

(AQW 7766/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé beartaithe go bhfaighfear na foirgnimh nua scoile do Choláiste N. Síle agus do Choláiste N. Muire trí chomhpháirtíocht idir an earnáil phoiblí agus an earnáil phríobháideach.

It is planned that new school buildings for St Cecilia's College and for St Mary's College will be procured through a public private partnership. The Department has worked closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Project Manager to address a number of issues which have arisen during the scrutiny of the Full Business Case (FBC) for the project. This has taken longer than anticipated due to the need to take account of revised value for money guidance and the requirement for further work to be carried out on the FBC. A final version of the FBC was submitted to the department on 10 April. The work will be completed very shortly and the business case will then be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval.

Saint Mary's College in Derry/Londonderry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of progress on the planned new school for Saint Mary's College in Derry/Londonderry; and (ii) to detail any delays which have occurred. (AQW 7768/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé beartaithe go bhfaighfear na foirgnimh nua scoile do Choláiste N. Síle agus do Choláiste N. Muire trí chomhpháirtíocht idir an earnáil phoiblí agus an earnáil phríobháideach.

It is planned that new school buildings for St Cecilia's College and for St Mary's College will be procured through a public private partnership. The Department has worked closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Project Manager to address a number of issues which have arisen during the scrutiny of the Full Business Case (FBC) for the project. This has taken longer than anticipated due to the need to take account of revised value for money guidance and the requirement for further work to be carried out on the FBC. A final version of the FBC was submitted to the department on 10 April. The work will be completed very shortly and the business case will then be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval.

Donaghadee High School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the impact that the possible closure of Donaghadee High School will have on the over subscription of pupil enrolments in the North Down constituency. (AQW 7785/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá fad curtha go dtí 30 Meitheamh leis an gcomhairliúchán ar an Togra Forbartha le hArdcoil Dhomhnach Daoi a dhúnadh. Agus an cinneadh á dhéanamh agam, beidh na fachtóirí ábhartha á chur san áireamh agam, ina theannta sin, an leibhéal soláthar iarbhunioideachais sa cheantar.

The consultation on the Development Proposal to allow for the closure of Donaghadee High School will extend until 30 June. In making my decision on the proposal I will take all relevant factors into account including the level of post-primary provision in the area.

Glastry College

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Glastry College through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories. (AQW 7796/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Nendrum College

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Nendrum College through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories.

(AQW 7798/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo

ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Strangford College

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Strangford College through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories.

(AQW 7806/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in

the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Regent House School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Regent House School through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories. (AQW 7807/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach

ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|----------------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-----------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Movilla High School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Movilla High School through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and to state the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories.

(AQW 7827/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach

ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Bangor Academy

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Bangor Academy through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and to state the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories.

(AQW 7828/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach

ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-----------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many pupils applied for entrance to Bangor Grammar through the Transfer Scheme, and of those pupils, how many were (i) accepted; and (ii) refused; and to state the Transfer Test Grades of those in both categories.
(AQW 7829/08)

The Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, liostáiltear líon na n-iarratas ar áiteanna i ngach

ceann de na scoileanna atá ainmnithe sa tsraith seo ceisteanna, mar aon le líon na n-iarratas briste síos de réir an ghráid a fuarthas sa teist aistrithe. Is féidir an grád a fuair iarratasóirí sa teist aistrithe a oibriú amach ón eolas sin.

The number of applications for places at each of the schools named in this series of questions is listed in the table below, along with the number of admissions broken down by transfer test grade. The transfer test grade obtained by applicants can be deduced from this.

| | Grade A | Grade B1 | Grade B2 | Grade C1 | Grade C2 | Grade D | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| 2008/09 | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm | App/Adm |
| Glastry College | 2/2 | 0/0 | 5/5 | 13/12 | 19/15 | 44/38 | 40/40 | 123/112 |
| Nendrum College | 0/0 | 6/5 | 1/0 | 13/6 | 15/12 | 53/37 | 29/20 | 117/80 |
| Strangford Integrated College | 1/0 | 1/0 | 7/2 | 17/6 | 23/11 | 60/26 | 50/35 | 159/80 |
| Regent House | 183/183 | 32/23 | 16/2 | 12/0 | 5/0 | 9/1 | 1/1 | 258/210 |
| Movilla High School | 0/0 | 0/0 | 2/2 | 7/7 | 7/7 | 28/28 | 39/39 | 83/83 |
| Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College | 0/0 | 1/0 | 13/13 | 35/22 | 37/29 | 133/111 | 81/67 | 300/242 |
| Bangor Grammar School | 75/75 | 24/24 | 19/19 | 22/2 | 17/0 | 12/2 | 4/3 | 173/125 |

Substitute Teachers

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have retired from full-time teaching but are engaged or have been engaged in substitute teaching over the 2007-08 academic year. (AQW 7844/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

NUMBERS OF TEACHERS RETIRED FROM FULL-TIME TEACHING BUT ENGAGED OR HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN SUBSTITUTE TEACHING OVER THE 2007-08 ACADEMIC YEAR.

| Retirement Type | Number of Re-Employments |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Age | 330 |
| Actuarially Reduced | 12 |
| Efficient Discharge | 61 |
| Redundancy | 1,518 |
| Total Number Of Re-Employments | 1,921 |

Pre-School Education Advisory Group Funding

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education why playgroups lose Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) funding when a child leaves to attend reception/primary school during the year. (AQW 7857/08)

The Minister of Education: Faoi Chlár um Fhorbairt na Réamhscolaíochta (PSEEP), meallann naíonraí deonacha méid áirithe in aghaidh gach áit mhaoinithe. Má fhágann páiste naíonra deonach, cuirtear stop leis an mhaoiniú a mheallann an páiste sin, ar an ábhar nach bhfuil sé/sí ag freastal níos mó.

Under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), voluntary pre-school settings attract an amount per funded place. If a child leaves a voluntary pre-school setting, the funding that child attracts stops, as they are no longer in attendance.

Zero-Rated Primary Schools

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education what is the position of Education and Library Boards in relation to primary schools who are zero rated but are still enrolling pre-school children into reception classes. (AQW 7860/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní thugtar nialas mar ráta do pháistí i ranganna fáiltithe nó do ghrúpaí i mbunscoileanna maidir le maoiniú faoi Scéim

Maoinithe na Roinne i gcomhair Bainistíocht Áitiúil ar Scoileanna.

Children in reception classes or groups in primary schools are not zero-rated for funding purposes under the Department's Common Funding Scheme for Local Management of Schools.

Independent Schools Admissions Criteria

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education what measures her Department can take to prevent schools that are operating the Dickson Plan for education from pressing ahead with independent schools admissions criteria, including an academic selective element, in the absence of an agreed way forward on a schools transfer system. (AQW 7867/08)

The Minister of Education: Mura rialaítear socruithe aistrithe don bhliain 2010 agus ina diaidh féachfaidh an Roinn Oideachais le hord agus soiléireacht a thabhairt d'iontrálacha scoileanna trí threoir a thabhairt.

If transfer arrangements for 2010 and beyond are not regulated, the Department of Education will seek to bring order and clarity to school admissions through guidance. This guidance cannot and will not seek to prevent schools from continuing some form of academically selective element within their admissions processes, but it will make clear the issues and risks involved in the operation of independently administered academic selection.

Academic Selection

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the legislative position regarding the legality of (a) academic selection; and (b) the selective elements of the Craigavon based Dickson Plan for education, from that inherited at the restoration of devolution. (AQW 7869/08)

The Minister of Education: Ní dhearnadh aon athruithe ar an reachtaíocht iomchuí ó athbhunaíodh an Tionól.

No changes have been made to the relevant legislation since the restoration of devolution.

Gender of Children Sitting the 11-Plus Exam

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many children, broken down by gender, have taken the eleven plus exam in the South Eastern

Education and Library Board and Belfast Education and Library Board areas in each of the last five years.
(AQW 7876/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached tables.

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR THE NORTH OF IRELAND BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 3,145 | 2,901 | 3,036 | 2,849 | 2,901 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 674 | 689 | 635 | 574 | 645 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 661 | 655 | 643 | 675 | 640 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 625 | 600 | 577 | 598 | 649 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 566 | 583 | 597 | 567 | 641 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 1,955 | 1,952 | 2,014 | 2,116 | 1,942 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 7,626 | 7,380 | 7,502 | 7,379 | 7,418 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 3,019 | 2,992 | 3,009 | 2,817 | 3,236 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 772 | 722 | 674 | 622 | 716 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 686 | 728 | 730 | 661 | 647 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 631 | 661 | 606 | 564 | 692 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 664 | 656 | 674 | 610 | 640 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 2,293 | 2,211 | 2,088 | 2,271 | 1,983 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 8,065 | 7,970 | 7,781 | 7,545 | 7,914 |
| Total number achieving Grade A | 6,164 | 5,893 | 6,045 | 5,666 | 6,137 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 1,446 | 1,411 | 1,309 | 1,196 | 1,361 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 1,347 | 1,383 | 1,373 | 1,336 | 1,287 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 1,256 | 1,261 | 1,183 | 1,162 | 1,341 |
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 1,230 | 1,239 | 1,271 | 1,177 | 1,281 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 4,248 | 4,163 | 4,102 | 4,387 | 3,925 |
| Total number sitting test | 15,691 | 15,350 | 15,283 | 14,924 | 15,332 |

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR SCHOOLS IN THE BELFAST EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 464 | 407 | 412 | 422 | 424 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 92 | 89 | 78 | 80 | 94 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 96 | 100 | 82 | 97 | 84 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 107 | 99 | 75 | 81 | 109 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 93 | 102 | 87 | 82 | 80 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 374 | 362 | 379 | 353 | 379 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 1,226 | 1,159 | 1,113 | 1,115 | 1,170 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 485 | 468 | 432 | 397 | 465 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 124 | 107 | 105 | 80 | 97 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 82 | 120 | 98 | 84 | 88 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 89 | 95 | 96 | 79 | 102 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 106 | 98 | 113 | 97 | 118 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 514 | 454 | 417 | 429 | 392 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 1,400 | 1,342 | 1,261 | 1,166 | 1,262 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number achieving Grade A | 949 | 875 | 844 | 819 | 889 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 216 | 196 | 183 | 160 | 191 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 178 | 220 | 180 | 181 | 172 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 196 | 194 | 171 | 160 | 211 |
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 199 | 200 | 200 | 179 | 198 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 888 | 816 | 796 | 782 | 771 |
| Total number sitting test | 2,626 | 2,501 | 2,374 | 2,281 | 2,432 |

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 809 | 785 | 763 | 757 | 790 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 162 | 161 | 144 | 146 | 165 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 147 | 165 | 154 | 161 | 130 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 155 | 127 | 126 | 151 | 138 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 123 | 126 | 129 | 123 | 160 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 467 | 458 | 491 | 481 | 454 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 1,863 | 1,822 | 1,807 | 1,819 | 1,837 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 766 | 727 | 770 | 753 | 855 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 182 | 183 | 154 | 134 | 177 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 151 | 180 | 170 | 176 | 143 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 158 | 140 | 139 | 145 | 159 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 151 | 156 | 159 | 140 | 116 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 504 | 512 | 503 | 523 | 450 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 1,912 | 1,898 | 1,895 | 1,871 | 1,900 |
| Total number achieving Grade A | 1,575 | 1,512 | 1,533 | 1,510 | 1,645 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 344 | 344 | 298 | 280 | 342 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 298 | 345 | 324 | 337 | 273 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 313 | 267 | 265 | 296 | 297 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 274 | 282 | 288 | 263 | 276 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 971 | 970 | 994 | 1,004 | 904 |
| Total number sitting test | 3,775 | 3,720 | 3,702 | 3,690 | 3,737 |

Gender of Children Sitting the 11-Plus Exam

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many children, broken down by gender, have received an A, B1, B2, C1 or C2 grade, in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) the South Eastern Education and Library Board and Belfast Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 7878/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached tables.

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 3,145 | 2,901 | 3,036 | 2,849 | 2,901 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 674 | 689 | 635 | 574 | 645 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 661 | 655 | 643 | 675 | 640 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 625 | 600 | 577 | 598 | 649 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 566 | 583 | 597 | 567 | 641 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 1,955 | 1,952 | 2,014 | 2,116 | 1,942 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 7,626 | 7,380 | 7,502 | 7,379 | 7,418 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 3,019 | 2,992 | 3,009 | 2,817 | 3,236 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 772 | 722 | 674 | 622 | 716 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 686 | 728 | 730 | 661 | 647 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 631 | 661 | 606 | 564 | 692 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 664 | 656 | 674 | 610 | 640 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 2,293 | 2,211 | 2,088 | 2,271 | 1,983 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 8,065 | 7,970 | 7,781 | 7,545 | 7,914 |
| Total number achieving Grade A | 6,164 | 5,893 | 6,045 | 5,666 | 6,137 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 1,446 | 1,411 | 1,309 | 1,196 | 1,361 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 1,347 | 1,383 | 1,373 | 1,336 | 1,287 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 1,256 | 1,261 | 1,183 | 1,162 | 1,341 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 1,230 | 1,239 | 1,271 | 1,177 | 1,281 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 4,248 | 4,163 | 4,102 | 4,387 | 3,925 |
| Total number sitting test | 15,691 | 15,350 | 15,283 | 14,924 | 15,332 |

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR SCHOOLS IN THE BELFAST EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 464 | 407 | 412 | 422 | 424 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 92 | 89 | 78 | 80 | 94 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 96 | 100 | 82 | 97 | 84 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 107 | 99 | 75 | 81 | 109 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 93 | 102 | 87 | 82 | 80 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 374 | 362 | 379 | 353 | 379 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 1,226 | 1,159 | 1,113 | 1,115 | 1,170 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 485 | 468 | 432 | 397 | 465 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 124 | 107 | 105 | 80 | 97 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 82 | 120 | 98 | 84 | 88 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 89 | 95 | 96 | 79 | 102 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 106 | 98 | 113 | 97 | 118 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 514 | 454 | 417 | 429 | 392 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 1,400 | 1,342 | 1,261 | 1,166 | 1,262 |
| Total number achieving Grade A | 949 | 875 | 844 | 819 | 889 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 216 | 196 | 183 | 160 | 191 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 178 | 220 | 180 | 181 | 172 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 196 | 194 | 171 | 160 | 211 |
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 199 | 200 | 200 | 179 | 198 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 888 | 816 | 796 | 782 | 771 |
| Total number sitting test | 2,626 | 2,501 | 2,374 | 2,281 | 2,432 |

TRANSFER TEST RESULTS FOR SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION & LIBRARY BOARD BY GENDER AND ACADEMIC YEAR 2003/04 TO 2007/08

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of boys achieving Grade A | 809 | 785 | 763 | 757 | 790 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B1 | 162 | 161 | 144 | 146 | 165 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade B2 | 147 | 165 | 154 | 161 | 130 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C1 | 155 | 127 | 126 | 151 | 138 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade C2 | 123 | 126 | 129 | 123 | 160 |
| Number of boys achieving Grade D | 467 | 458 | 491 | 481 | 454 |
| Total number of boys sitting test | 1,863 | 1,822 | 1,807 | 1,819 | 1,837 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade A | 766 | 727 | 770 | 753 | 855 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B1 | 182 | 183 | 154 | 134 | 177 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade B2 | 151 | 180 | 170 | 176 | 143 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C1 | 158 | 140 | 139 | 145 | 159 |
| Number of girls achieving Grade C2 | 151 | 156 | 159 | 140 | 116 |

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of girls achieving Grade D | 504 | 512 | 503 | 523 | 450 |
| Total number of girls sitting test | 1,912 | 1,898 | 1,895 | 1,871 | 1,900 |
| Total number achieving Grade A | 1,575 | 1,512 | 1,533 | 1,510 | 1,645 |
| Total number achieving Grade B1 | 344 | 344 | 298 | 280 | 342 |
| Total number achieving Grade B2 | 298 | 345 | 324 | 337 | 273 |
| Total number achieving Grade C1 | 313 | 267 | 265 | 296 | 297 |
| Total number achieving Grade C2 | 274 | 282 | 288 | 263 | 276 |
| Total number achieving Grade D | 971 | 970 | 994 | 1,004 | 904 |
| Total number sitting test | 3,775 | 3,720 | 3,702 | 3,690 | 3,737 |

Groomsport Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many (i) fully-funded; and (ii) part-funded, nursery places are available for Groomsport Primary School.
(AQW 7967/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Bunscoil Phort an Ghiolla Ghruama druidte ó bhí 31 Lúnasa 2007 ann.

Groomsport Primary School closed with effect from 31 August 2007.

English as a Second Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many school pupils do not have English or Irish as a first language; and what is the first language of these pupils, broken down by Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 7989/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

CHILDREN WITH ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD 2007/08

| Home Language | Belfast | Western | North Eastern | South Eastern | Southern | Total |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------------|---------------|----------|-------|
| Arabic | 23 | 9 | # | 21 | * | 63 |
| Bengali | 22 | 0 | * | 36 | # | 67 |
| Cantonese | 171 | 30 | 70 | 109 | 85 | 465 |
| Chinese | * | * | * | 5 | * | 13 |
| Czech | 0 | * | 5 | * | * | 12 |
| Dutch | * | * | 5 | * | 8 | 19 |
| Filipino | 127 | 31 | 47 | 67 | 42 | 314 |
| French | * | * | * | * | 5 | 13 |
| German | 7 | 7 | 5 | 16 | 5 | 40 |
| Greek | * | * | * | * | 0 | 9 |
| Gujarati | 0 | * | * | 0 | # | 11 |
| Hindi | 28 | 6 | 35 | 18 | 21 | 108 |
| Hungarian | * | 22 | * | * | 14 | 47 |
| Indian (not specified) | * | 7 | 7 | 8 | * | 30 |
| Italian | * | 0 | * | 12 | * | 19 |
| Japanese | 0 | 0 | * | * | 0 | 5 |
| Latvian | 0 | 18 | 8 | 8 | 78 | 112 |
| Lithuanian | 9 | 51 | 44 | 53 | 490 | 647 |
| Malaysian | 14 | 11 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 58 |
| Mandarin | 29 | 8 | 9 | 12 | 14 | 72 |
| Malayalam | * | 6 | * | 12 | 8 | 33 |
| Punjabi | 22 | # | 16 | * | 8 | 55 |
| Pashto | 0 | 0 | * | * | * | 5 |
| Polish | 300 | 288 | 364 | 155 | 743 | 1,850 |
| Portuguese | 10 | * | 23 | * | 371 | 409 |
| Romanian | 17 | * | 8 | * | 7 | 38 |
| Russian | # | * | 9 | 6 | 32 | 55 |

| Home Language | Belfast | Western | North Eastern | South Eastern | Southern | Total |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Slovakian | * | # | 19 | 0 | 28 | 63 |
| Spanish | 6 | # | * | 15 | 10 | 39 |
| Tagalog | 24 | * | 0 | 8 | * | 37 |
| Thai | * | * | 0 | * | * | 9 |
| Turkish | * | * | * | * | * | 11 |
| Urdu | 16 | * | 11 | # | 21 | 60 |
| Other languages | 278 | 119 | 165 | 158 | 154 | 874 |
| Total | 1,136 | 668 | 896 | 770 | 2,192 | 5,662 |

Source: school census

Note: Children with English as an additional language are those children for whom English is not their first language and who have difficulty with English and require support.

‘*’ relates to fewer than 5 pupils.

‘#’ means figure ≥ 5 has been treated under rules of disclosure.

Strangford Integrated College

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education the religious breakdown for new pupils attending Strangford Integrated College in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 8007/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

RELIGION OF YEAR 8 PUPILS ATTENDING STRANGFORD INTEGRATED COLLEGE 2005/06 – 2007/08

| Pupil Religion | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Protestant | 61 | 29 | 39 |
| Catholic | 19 | 20 | 29 |
| Other religions/none/not known | 5 | 41 | 16 |
| Total Year 8 enrolment | 85 | 90 | 84 |

Source: school census

Strangford Integrated College

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education the religious breakdown of pupils attending Strangford Integrated College. (AQW 8008/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

| Pupil Religion | Number of Pupils |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Protestant | 258 |
| Catholic | 125 |
| Other religions/none/not known | 120 |
| Total enrolment | 503 |

Source: school census 2007/08

Streaming School Pupils

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what secondary schools ‘stream’ pupils according to ability at Year 8, and what criteria is this ‘streaming’ based on, broken down by Area Board. (AQW 8038/08)

The Minister of Education: Is ceist í do gach scoil aonair cinneadh ar an dóigh is fearr lena ranganna a eagrú le riar do riachtanais oideachais a ndaltaí. Ní choinnítear taifid de chinntí na scoileanna.

It is a matter for individual schools to decide how to best organise their classes to meet their pupil’s educational needs. No records are kept of the school decisions.

Substitute Teacher Register

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many teachers are on the Substitute Teachers’ Register, broken down by Education and Library Board area. (AQW 8039/08)

The Minister of Education: Is é 7,116 líon na múinteoirí atá cláraithe faoi láthair ar Chlár Múinteoirí Ionaid Thuaisceart Éireann (CMITÉ). Ní choinnítear an t-eolas seo, áfach, i bhformáid ná de réir cheantar Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus bheadh costas díréireach ar aon bheart lena leithéid de mhiondealú a sholáthar.

The number of teachers currently registered on the Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) is 7,116. However, this information is not held or maintained in Education & Library Board area or format and any exercise to provide such a breakdown would result in disproportionate cost.

St Columbanus Integrated College

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education for the religious breakdown of pupils attending St Columbanus Integrated College. (AQW 8074/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl Coláiste N. Colmcille ainmnithe mar scoil imeasctha. Tá sonraí ar chreideamh na ndaltaí atá ag freastal ar an scoil i 2007/08 thíos:

St. Columbanus' College is not designated as an integrated school. The religion of pupils attending the school in 2007/08 is detailed below:

| Pupil Religion | Number of Pupils |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Protestant | 185 |
| Catholic | 248 |
| Other religions/none/not known | 112 |
| Total enrolment | 545 |

Source: school census.

Funding Gap in the Primary and Post-Primary Sectors

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to explain the rationale for the funding gap between the primary and post-primary sectors. (AQO 3952/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Maoiniú Coiteann do scoileanna deartha le roinnt chothrom trédhearcach cistí a bhaint amach i ngach scoil de réir a riachtanais choibhneasta.

Common Funding for schools is designed to achieve an equitable and transparent division of funds across all schools based on their relative level of need.

The common funding formula is made up of a range of factors developed to reflect the main costs associated with the running of a school and the main funding factor within the formula, the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) factor, is driven by pupil numbers.

Pupil numbers are weighted in order to reflect the differing costs to each phase of education in delivering the school curriculum and the differential in per-capita funding between a primary pupil and a post-primary pupil arises largely from this and reflects the greater cost demands which arise for post-primary schools in delivery of the curriculum.

In the primary sector, the arrangements provide for a pupil centred approach with pupils normally taught in one class for all their subjects. The nature of the post-primary curriculum, its mode of delivery and the extent of support arrangements, results in additional

cost in areas such as teaching, equipment and resource materials, specialist facilities and examination fees.

In order to reflect this within the funding formula, AWPU weightings are higher for post-primary pupils and this is the main reason for the differential in the amount of per-pupil funding allocated on average to a primary school as compared to a post-primary school.

This is a complex issue, but I am making more funding available, both within and outside the current formula arrangements.

I have taken on board the views of primary schools and others during the most recent consultation on LMS funding issues, and the change in the primary pupil AWPU weighting from 1.02 to 1.04 in 2008/09 compared to 2007/08, placed over £3.7m more into primary schools.

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. I have also signalled my intentions to increase further the primary AWPU weighting over the next two years of this budget period.

Over the next three years, I have been able to secure additional funding of almost £12 million to help primary school teaching principals and a further £32 million to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum.

Alternative Education Projects

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the benefits of Alternative Education Projects; and to give an assurance that Alternative Education providers will continue to be resourced to deliver their services to young people with complex needs. (AQO 4047/08)

The Minister of Education: Is sa scoil is fearr páistí agus daoine óga a theagasc. Mar sin féin, tá a fhios agam nach bhfóireann socrúchán scoile do gach duine óg agus gur fearr mar sin socrú eile de chineál éigin a chur ar fáil dóibh le riar ar a riachtanais oideachais agus ar a gcuid riachtanas eile.

The best place for children and young people to be educated is at school. I do, recognise however that, for some young people a school placement cannot be sustained and that some form of alternative education provision is necessary to meet their educational and other needs. Responsibility for making provision for these young people rests with the relevant Education and Library Board.

The arrangements for alternative education provision vary across Boards but the majority of places are in settings organised and managed by the Boards. In the Greater Belfast area, there are a number of alternative education projects organised by the community sector.

The Education and Training Inspectorate reports on all forms of alternative education provision – statutory and community based – are generally satisfactory, in terms of the engagement of the young people with beneficial learning and the commitment of staff to meeting their needs. The reports do, however, identify areas for improvement such as greater breadth of curriculum on offer and consistency across Board areas around the criteria for referral, placement and monitoring the actual outcomes for each young person.

My Department does not directly fund alternative education projects. Funding is provided to the Education and Library Boards for alternative education and it is for them to decide how this can be used to best meet the needs of the young people in their area. In meeting the needs of pupils in their area, Boards can consider entering into partnership arrangements with the community sector or to purchase places in existing community based provision.

My Department has been undertaking a review of alternative education. Work is currently in hand to develop a model of provision which will apply across all Board areas and which will be consistent with other emerging policy proposals, in particular the proposals following the review of special educational needs and school improvement. During the course of the Review, my officials and I have met with staff from the statutory and community based sectors. I am aware of their concerns and pay tribute to them for their ongoing high levels of commitment, dedication and support to our most marginalised young people. Our review of alternative education provision has looked at all of the issues and I hope to be in a position to publish our proposals for public consultation in the autumn.

St Colman's Primary School in Newry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to ensure that St Colman's Primary School, Newry, has adequate accommodation for the numbers of pupils in the school. (AQO 4012/08)

The Minister of Education: Fuair mo Roinn iarratas ar chóiríocht bhreise i mí Aibreáin dhá mhíle a seacht.

A request for additional accommodation was received in my department in April 2007. The assessment made at that time was that there was sufficient accommodation for the current enrolment though a deficiency in special needs provision. The department has approved special

needs provision for the school. It is anticipated that the projected intake for September 2008 should be able to be accommodated at the school but I have arranged for departmental officials to visit the school to undertake an assessment of the provision. I visited the school recently and was very impressed by the commitment and dedication of the teachers and pupils.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of Education if she intends to increase the number of languages offered in the primary languages programme in the forthcoming academic year. (AQO 3950/08)

The Minister of Education: Beidh mé ag tabhairt isteach Clár na bPríomh-theangacha le tacaíocht a thabhairt do na bunscoileanna sin ar mian leo Spáinnis nó Gaeilge a chur ar fáil.

I am introducing the Primary Languages Programme this school year to support those primary schools who wish to offer Spanish or Irish. Spanish is a key global language and Irish is the native language of Ireland and an official European language. There has been a high level of interest in the programme and tutors are now beginning to work in schools. It is important that we get these schools off to a good start this school year and into the new school year.

As part of the Budget 2007 outcome, I have secured funding to allow for continuation and expansion of the Programme over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 and in the coming months will be taking decisions on the expansion of the programme in the next school year, including any support for additional languages. I am also expecting recommendations shortly on a languages strategy for the North from the joint University of Ulster-Queen's University Belfast Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. This will include recommendations on introducing languages in primary schools and it will inform thinking on the expansion of the Languages Programme generally in the future.

Asbestos in School Buildings

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education what action she has taken in relation to the identification and removal of asbestos building materials from the school estate. (AQO 4039/08)

The Minister of Education: Chríochnaigh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne suirbhéanna ar scoileanna le suíomh, cineál agus staid na n-ábhar sin a bhfuil aispeist iontu a chinntiú.

Education and Library Boards have completed surveys of schools to determine the location, type and

condition of asbestos containing materials. The risk posed by these materials was also assessed and, where it was considered necessary they have been removed.

Any asbestos containing materials that remain do not pose a sufficient risk to require immediate removal. Boards and other school authorities are responsible for managing asbestos safely and a rolling programme of surveys will continue.

Statements of Special Educational Needs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many pupils are currently awaiting a statement of special educational need. (AQO 4020/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mbord oideachais agus leabharlainne eolas dom faoin líon daltaí a ndearnadh measúnú reachtúil ar a riachtanais speisialta oideachais, faoin líon a measann na Boird ráiteas riachtanas speisialta oideachais a bheith de dhíth orthu, agus faoin líon atá ag fanacht lena ráiteas a bheith réidh. Seo leanas an líon:

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards that the number of pupils who have undergone a statutory assessment of their special educational needs, are considered by the Boards to require a statement of special educational needs, and who are currently awaiting completion of their statement is as follows:-

1. Belfast Education and Library Board - 26
2. North-Eastern Education and Library Board - 13
3. South-Eastern Education and Library Board - 42
4. Southern Education and Library Board - 193
5. Western Education and Library Board - 30

These figures represent those pupils on whom a statutory assessment of their special educational needs has been completed and who are currently awaiting either a proposed or final statement of special education needs.

Teaching and Learning Resources for the Irish Language

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to ensure that teaching and learning resources for the Irish language at KS3, KS4, AS and A2 levels are comparable to those available in other modern languages at those levels. (AQO 4017/08)

The Minister of Education: Cinneann scoileanna na hacmhainní a úsáideann siad le haon réimse den churaclam a sholáthar, lena n-áirítear an Ghaeilge.

Schools determine the resources they use to deliver any area of the curriculum, including Irish. In support of the provision of resources, at Key Stage 3 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. It is intended that this will be provided to schools later this year.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), along with the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment in the South, has produced guidelines for teachers on the education of gifted and talented pupils from Foundation Stage through to A-level. This includes specific guidance to assist teachers in identifying learners who are more able in the use of the Irish language at any age and key characteristics of learners with linguistic ability.

Resources will also be provided to support the teaching of Irish in those primary schools participating in my Primary Languages Programme who have opted for Irish and this will support those continuing with the language at post-primary level.

CCEA provides a range of materials to support teachers and learners taking any GCSE and GCE A-Level course, including Irish. The support that CCEA provides across languages is broadly similar. However, as other languages have a wide range of support materials available for teachers from commercial suppliers, CCEA has produced some additional material for Irish to help compensate for a lack of materials from commercial suppliers to support its revised GCSE and GCE A-Level Irish specifications. This adds to materials currently available via its dedicated Irish micro-site and includes the support packages Cluas, Cluaisín, Translations, matching the AS literature to the textbook Saíocht and commissioning two textbooks for the revised GCSE Irish, which will be taught from September 2009.

I also recently launched Bille na gCeart i Scoileanna: Acmhainn d'Iarbhunscóileanna, the Irish Language version of the Bill of Rights in Schools: A Resource for Post-Primary Schools.

Education Issues

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Education what items will be on the agenda for her next meeting with the Minister for Education and Science; and when the North-South Ministerial Council next meets in education sectoral format. (AQO 4036/08)

The Minister of Education: Bhuaile mé le Batt Ó Cuív, TD, Aire Oideachais agus Eolaíochta sa deisceart ag cruinniú de chuid na Comhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas i bhformáid na hearnála oideachais in

Ardcoil De La Salle, Dún Phádraig, ar an ochtú lá is fiche de mhí Bealtaine.

I met with Batt O’Keeffe, TD, Minister for Education and Science in the south, at the North South Ministerial Council in Education Sectoral format held in De La Salle High School, Downpatrick, on 28 May. We discussed a range of issues including educational underachievement, teacher qualifications and teachers’ superannuation, special education needs and school, youth and teacher exchanges. I wish to pay tribute to the staff and pupils of De La Salle School for hosting the event and to the principals of the other schools who were involved on the day. I also wish to record my thanks to Ministers Batt O’Keeffe and Edwin Poots for their participation.

I am due to meet Batt O’Keeffe again at the next Council meeting in the autumn. As yet, no date or agenda has been set.

Children with Dyslexia

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if a screening test or an observation method has been used to identify the numbers of children with dyslexia. (AQO 3948/08)

The Minister of Education: Dúirt Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mbord oideachais agus leabharlainne liom go moltar do gach scoil teisteanna scagtha agus modhanna breathnaithe a úsáid mar chuid den mheasúnú tosaigh ar pháistí ar féidir leo disléicse a bheith orthu.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards that all schools are encouraged to use both screening tests and observation methods as part of the initial assessment of those children who may have dyslexia. Any child who has been identified as having dyslexia and is receiving support from the Board peripatetic service will have been assessed by an Educational Psychologist.

A psychological assessment examines a child’s cognitive functioning, including verbal, perceptual, information processing and short-term memory abilities. The child’s reading, spelling/writing and mathematical skills would be examined using a mixture of standardised tests, observations and discussions with parents and teachers. Associated difficulties would also be considered.

Educational psychologists also offer schools consultations about a pupil’s individual difficulties prior to formally assessing a pupil if this is required.

Most schools are fully aware of the appropriate observation and assessment methods through appropriate training and will, as a matter of course,

screen their classes for underlying specific learning difficulties.

Funding for Primary Schools

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education what action her Department is taking to increase funding for primary schools to match the level for secondary schools. (AQO 4030/08)

The Minister of Education: Thug mé le fios cheana fein go bhfuil mé tiomanta don mhaoiniú idir daltaí bunscoileanna agus daltaí iarbhunscoileanna a fheabhsú taobh istigh de na hacmhainní críochna atá ar fáil do dhailtaí ag gach leibhéal

I have previously signalled that I am committed to improving the balance of funding between primary and post-primary pupils within the finite resources that are available for pupils at all levels.

However, the different structures associated with these phases of education and in particular, the provision of a wider range of subjects by post-primary schools which results in additional cost in areas such as teaching, materials and equipment, specialist facilities and examination fees; mean that equal funding for a primary pupil and a post-primary pupil is not appropriate.

Nevertheless, I have taken on board the views of primary schools and others during the most recent consultation on LMS funding issues, and the change in the primary pupil AWPU weighting from 1.02 to 1.04 in 2008/09 compared to 2007/08, placed over £3.7m more into primary schools.

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. I have also signalled my intentions to increase further the primary AWPU weighting over the next two years of this budget period.

Over the next three years, I have been able to secure additional funding of almost £12 million to help primary school teaching principals and a further £32 million to support primary schools with the delivery of the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum.

Omagh High School

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Education to outline what action the Western Education and Library

Board is taking to build a replacement school for Omagh High School. (AQO 3947/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá Ardscoil na hÓmaigh ar cheann de chúig scoileanna a thug le fios go bhfuil suim acu sa mholadh le hathshuí go comh-champas nua oideachais ar iarláithreán na hAireachta Cosanta ag Lios an Eallaigh.

Omagh High School is one of five schools which have expressed an interest in the proposal to relocate to a new shared educational campus on the former Ministry of Defence site at Lisanelly. A business case is currently being developed to inform decisions on the acquisition and development of Lisanelly, and the Western Education and Library Board is closely involved in the work. I have visited Lisanelly on two occasions and have seen the potential the site offers. I congratulate the Church representatives and the schools for their efforts in taking the initiative and working together to develop a proposal for a shared educational campus.

Literacy and Numeracy Skills in Schools

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Education, given the most recent report on the literacy and numeracy of pupils, what action her Department is taking to encourage stronger links between pre-school, primary and post-primary schools in the teaching of literacy and numeracy. (AQO 3951/08)

The Minister of Education: Is maith is eol dom chomh luachmhar atá sé naisc idir scoileanna a chothú le múineadh litearthachta agus uimhríochta a fhorbairt.

I fully appreciate the value of encouraging links between schools to develop the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

You will be aware that the Department is currently undertaking a review of its literacy and numeracy strategy, and the promotion of links between schools has been considered as part of this review. The revised strategy, which will issue for consultation very shortly, aims to reflect and build on the work that many excellent and committed teachers are already doing in classrooms across the north, and to ensure that every child in every classroom is receiving that same high quality teaching.

The strategy recognises the important role that performance data can have in supporting assessment for learning. The sharing not just of data, but of information on pupils' achievements, interests and learning styles between pre-schools, primary schools and post-primary schools is an important element in making sure that every child is supported in reaching her or his full potential.

Provision of Education to the Travelling Community

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Education what discussions she has had under the North-South Ministerial Council format in relation to the provision of education to the travelling community. (AQO 4046/08)

The Minister of Education: Tá oideachas pháistí an Lucht Taistil á bhreithniú faoi obair maidir le tearc-ghnóthachtáil oideachais.

The education of children from the Traveller community is being considered within current work relating to educational underachievement.

At a recent meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in education sectoral format, officials from both north and south gave presentations on their work with Traveller children and young people. A discussion followed around attainment and attendance and the need for positive action to improve educational outcomes for this community.

At the same meeting, it was agreed to establish an Educational Underachievement Working Group to be jointly chaired by lead officials in both the Department of Education and Department of Education and Science. Initially the group will consider approaches both north and south to raise overall levels of achievement in education and to tackle underachievement, particularly among more disadvantaged groups, including the Traveller community.

I am establishing a Committee for the Education of Traveller children which will bring together statutory and non statutory sectors in the north and I will ensure that there are members of the Traveller community on the Committee. The Committee will actively work to improve educational outcomes for Traveller children and will work with the National Traveller Monitoring and Advisory Committee in the south of Ireland.

Independent Admissions Criteria in Schools

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education to give her assessment of the legal permissibility of schools operating the Dickson Plan to (a) establish new independent admissions criteria; and (b) to continue with all existing admissions criteria in the absence of an agreed alternative. (AQO 3973/08)

The Minister of Education: Muna féidir creatlach reachtaíochta nua do iontrálacha iarbhunscoile ó Aistriú dhá mhíle a deich a chomhaontú agus a chur i bhfeidhm, beidh Aistriú i ndiaidh dhá mhíle a deich gan rialú.

If a new legislative framework for post-primary school admissions from Transfer 2010 cannot be agreed and implemented, then Transfer from 2010 will be

un-regulated. This means that when school Boards of Governors turn to determining their admissions criteria for 2010 admissions there will be no regulations either specifically permitting or prohibiting their use of any admissions criteria. This will apply to all post-primary schools.

Independent Admissions Criteria in Schools

Mr Neeson asked the Minister of Education what is her assessment of the plans of 31 grammar schools to set up a company to administer a separate selection test. (AQO 4027/08)

The Minister of Education: Níl measúnú agam ar na pleananna seo, nó ní bhfuair mé amharc ró-mhaith orthu.

I do not have an assessment of these plans as I have not seen them in any substantial form. I am aware only of the risks that will be faced by schools that choose to operate their own independent procedures for academic selection. I have stated before – I regard this as a prospect fraught with administrative and litigious perils.

I brought proposals on post-primary transfer to the Executive on May 15, 2008. These proposals offer the prospect of a consensual way forward and include significant and difficult steps on my own part in the interests of reaching agreement. If these proposals can be agreed then we can avoid the danger of un-regulation and support transfer and admissions with the robust legislative framework that this pressured function requires.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Irish-Language Courses

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Irish language courses are run at the Limavady and Coleraine campuses of the Northern Regional College. (AQW 7596/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): There are presently no Irish language courses running at the Limavady campus of the North West Regional College, nor at the Coleraine campus of the Northern Regional College.

HND Fine Art Students at the North West Regional College

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to comment on the availability of top-

up degree courses for HND Fine Art students at the North West Regional College. (AQW 7619/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

There are no top-up degree courses available for HND Fine Art students at the North West Regional College. This is in line with my Department's policy that Further Education Colleges should not normally offer modules at a level beyond year two of a degree course.

New Pay Scale for College Directors

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why the four new bands of pay scale for College Directors were introduced in 2007. (AQW 7799/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Four new pay bands for FE College Directors were introduced in 2007 following the further education college mergers, as the existing highest pay band was inadequate to cope with the salary position of a Director in a college the size of Belfast Metropolitan College, which is considerably larger than the other five new colleges. Directors' pay bands are based on college size in terms of full time equivalent enrolments. Only the two lowest of the four new pay bands are currently in use; the lowest replicates the former highest pay band.

Student Figures in Further Education Colleges

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have (i) started; (ii) been retained; and (iii) qualified from, each of the Further Education Colleges over the last three years. (AQW 7800/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The information requested has been placed in the library.

College Lecturers' Pay Dispute

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provisions each of the sixteen existing and six new Colleges have made in their accounts for the settlement of the College Lecturers' pay dispute. (AQW 7801/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The most recent audited accounts available for the FE Colleges were those at 31 July 2007, which was the final year of the 16 colleges prior to merger to form the current 6 area based colleges. At that date, no separate provision had been created in the

college accounts in anticipation of a settlement of the lecturer's pay dispute. However, a sum of £3,160k had been estimated and included in the accounts in relation to the annual anticipated cost of living increase for that year for academic staff. This equates to an increase in academic staff costs of between 2% and 3% for each college.

Training for Success

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what monitoring is conducted by his Department on the wage levels paid to Training for Success trainees by their employers; if the Department will make payment of training allowances conditional on reasonable wage levels being paid to trainees; and over what timeframe it will address this matter.

(AQO 3989/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department does not currently monitor the level of wages to apprentices. In its operational guidelines for Training for Success, the Department advises that apprentices should be paid the appropriate rate for the job in line with the National Minimum Wage regulations.

The Low Pay Commission, however, has embarked on a review, including the pay of apprentices, and is due to report early next year following consultation. In preparing its response to this consultation the Department will consider the introduction of a minimum wage for apprentices that is linked to funding for training.

St Mary's University College

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why his Department is proposing to cut the Liberal Arts intake for the 2008-09 academic year at St Mary's University College given its success, the proven quality of this qualification, and the number of students from lower social economic backgrounds undertaking this degree.

(AQO 3994/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: At present there are 286 students enrolled on the Liberal Arts course at St. Mary's University College. It is intended that the total enrolment for the next academic year will be 260, a drop of less than 10%. Liberal Arts provision at the College will therefore be 31% of the total student population next year, the same percentage as this year. I am aware that the course has a good track record in attracting those from a lower socio economic background and would hope that such a trend will continue.

Deaf Courses in Strangford

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to provide access for deaf people from the Strangford constituency to classes and courses at local colleges. (AQO 3963/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order Colleges are required to make appropriate adjustments to ensure that all their courses are accessible to students with disabilities, including those with hearing impairments.

My Department provides financial assistance to help Colleges meet their obligations under the Order. This is available through the Further Education funding mechanism and the Additional Support Fund, which assists with the costs of technical and personal support, such as signers.

Colleges operating in the Strangford constituency have been allocated £212,000 during the 2007/08 academic year from the Fund.

Funding to Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges

Mr Burnside asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what method his Department uses to calculate funding to Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges. (AQO 3937/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

To date my Department has determined recurrent funding for the University Colleges, in the main, by applying an inflationary uplift to the previous year's block grant. Since the introduction of variable fees, a part deduction has been made, although, in common with other higher education institutions, the university colleges retain the majority of fee income.

This method does not take account of the outcomes delivered by the University Colleges in terms of student numbers and indeed produces the anomaly that as student numbers fall the level of government funding rises.

My Department is developing a new unit-based fit for purpose funding methodology derived from approaches adopted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Training and Development Agency for Schools, the national body which funds initial teacher education in England.

The new methodology, as well as recognising the specialist character of the two university colleges, links the funding provided more directly to the outcomes delivered in that it is responsive to student numbers.

Third-Sector Organisations

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department adheres to guidance provided by the Treasury on 'Improving Financial Relationships with the Third Sector: Guidance to Funders and Purchasers'; whether it will consider funding for the Ulster People's College, Workers Education Association and the Educational Guidance Service for Adults under this guidance; and what is his assessment on the funding of Third-Sector organisations through grant awards rather than through a procurement exercise. (AQO 3991/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department adheres to the Treasury guidance in seeking best value for money in service delivery. The contract for the provision of adult guidance services in Northern Ireland is currently under review and those with the Ulster People's College and Worker's Education Authority end in August 2008. I believe the supply of services on a competitive tender basis, where realistic alternative options exist, offers best value solutions within the employment and learning fields.

Sectoral Skills Council

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made in reaching sectoral skills agreements with the Sectoral Skills Councils. (AQO 3940/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Of the 25 Sector Skills Councils, to date, 19 have achieved full Sector Skills Agreements. It is likely that a further four will be approved at the next Project Board meeting on 19 June. Work is continuing with the final two Sector Skills Councils and I hope these will be agreed in the autumn.

Literacy Levels of Prisoners

Ms Ni Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he is working with the Northern Ireland Office to increase the literacy levels of prisoners. (AQO 3999/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department works with the Northern Ireland Office in addressing the literacy needs of prisoners. At September 2007, 1,386 prisoners attended courses and 1,150 qualifications were achieved. My Department is participating in a cross-departmental Learning and Skills Forum to provide an integrated approach to raising the skills of offenders.

Further Education Colleges in Tyrone

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he has taken to provide both full-time and part-time places in further education colleges in Fermanagh/South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone; and how these figures compare to figures 5 years ago. (AQO 3925/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As Minister for Employment and Learning I set the strategic direction for the Further Education sector in Northern Ireland. This includes the broad nature of provision to be delivered by Further Education colleges, for example to ensure that the qualifications and skills needs of employers and learners are met. The Department therefore, through the annual College Development Planning process agrees high level curriculum targets with individual colleges. This is for example, in terms of the proportion of their funded provision that should be in Northern Ireland's priority skills areas that should be at Level 2 and Level 3, that should be professional and technical in nature, and that should be based on qualifications that are on the regulated qualifications frameworks. These agreed targets, in turn, determine colleges' funding allocations.

Within this high level strategic direction, it is then the responsibility of individual colleges to determine the nature of the provision to be offered at each of their campuses, including what is delivered on a full-time and a part-time basis. Wherever possible, provision is linked to the level of demand.

Information is not readily available in the format the member has requested. However, the latest available data from the Further Education Statistical Record (FESR) indicates that in 2006/07 there were 5,476 full-time students and 27,498 part-time students from Fermanagh/South Tyrone, Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone enrolled in Further Education compared to 4,741 full-time students and 29,816 part-time students in 2001/02.

A breakdown across the Parliamentary Constituency areas requested is provided in the following Table.

ENROLMENTS IN THE NI FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR FROM THOSE LIVING IN SELECTED PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (1992 BOUNDARIES) 2001/02 AND 2006/07

| Census Parliamentary Constituency | 2001/02 | | | 2006/07 | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| | Full-time | Part-time | Total | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 1,772 | 11,351 | 13,123 | 1,869 | 10,483 | 12,352 |

| | 2001/02 | | | 2006/07 | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Census Parliamentary Constituency | Full-time | Part-time | Total | Full-time | Part-time | Total |
| Mid Ulster | 1,583 | 8,445 | 10,028 | 1,742 | 7,546 | 9,288 |
| West Tyrone | 1,386 | 10,020 | 11,406 | 1,865 | 9,469 | 11,334 |
| Total | 4,741 | 29,816 | 34,557 | 5,476 | 27,498 | 32,974 |

Notes:

- (1) all modes of provision including Higher Education, Government Training, Cost Recovery and Recreational are included in the above figures.
- (2) The figures are calculated based on home postcode of the student.
- (3) 2006/07 is the most recent academic year for which validated figures are available.

Supply of Labour in the Construction Industry

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans his Department has to promote the supply of labour to the construction industry. (AQO 3943/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

As you will be aware, the construction industry in this country is currently facing a partial downturn, particularly in the residential housing market. Nevertheless, the Department will continue to fund training in construction occupations to support the industry according to need highlighted with the Sector Skills Council.

To promote its training provision, the Department will soon be rolling out an extensive marketing campaign and will work with industry sectors, such as construction, to target employers in order to encourage the recruitment and training of apprentices.

The Public Procurement Regulations 2006, Regulation 39, allows for the integration of social considerations within the procurement process. This could include the creation of apprenticeships. The Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel, through the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland, is in the process of developing a draft contractual requirement aimed at the recruitment of apprentices as part of public sector construction contracts.

Training for Success

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what money it has paid to Carter and Carter in relation to Training for Success contracts; and whether the Department has sought

legal advice in relation to action it may take against Carter and Carter for its failure to complete these contracts. (AQO 3990/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I can confirm that Carter and Carter did not receive any monies for services delivered under the Training for Success Contract, and no additional costs were incurred in reallocating these contracts. Consequently, there was no need to initiate legal redress regarding recovery of monies, nor was legal advice sought on these issues.

Further Education Colleges

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to review the arrangements for Further Education colleges to deliver courses at local community level. (AQO 4009/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Colleges deliver a wide range of adult education through their main campuses and in over 700 Community Outreach Centres. The Sector is committed to meeting the learning needs of adults in local communities.

The Department has reviewed colleges' delivery at local community level and has now developed proposals to enable local organisations, under contract to colleges, to support learners taking Further Education courses that will help to prepare them for employment. This will commence, on a pilot basis, in September 2008.

Cost of Oil in Colleges

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his proposals for managing the cost of oil in colleges and other educational institutions; and what additional resources will be made available for capital and revenue costs relating to energy and energy efficiencies. (AQO 3978/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The educational institutions for which my Department has responsibility are either incorporated bodies, or autonomous organisations. As such, they are responsible for managing all aspects of their business, including energy usage, within the resources made available to them by the Department, and any additional income they may earn directly from other sources.

There is an expectation that these educational institutions will operate in a manner which is both sustainable and energy efficient. I, therefore, have no plans to provide additional resources. However, sustainability forms an integral part of

the Department's further education infrastructure projects, and energy efficiency is an important element of sustainability. For example, bidders for such projects must take into account the need to minimise energy consumption both in construction and in use.

In relation to higher education, in August 2007 the Higher Education Funding Council for England launched a directory of online resources for the higher education sector covering areas such as sustainable construction, energy efficiency and environmental management. This initiative, which forms part of a wider sustainable development strategy and action plan for the higher education sector, was supported by my Department. The resources are designed to spread good practice and promote the use of innovative approaches to sustainable development issues.

North West Regional College at Strabane Campus

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what action he is taking to ensure that all sections of the community can avail of further education opportunities provided by the North West Regional College at Strabane Campus.

(AQO 3946/08)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The provision available at the Strabane campus of the North West Regional College is open to all sections of the community. Further Education colleges provide a welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds. Three Colleges have also undertaken pilot programmes in Cultural Diversity and Good Relations, and the lessons of these programmes are now being disseminated across the whole of the Further Education sector.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Employment of 16- to 24-Year-Olds

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of 16-24 year-olds are employed in each parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 7572/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): Labour Force Survey estimates for the percentage of 16 - 24 year olds who were in employment¹ in each parliamentary constituency in 2006 and the associated sampling

error² is shown in the table below. 2006 is the most recent annual period for which this information is available.

EMPLOYMENT RATE OF 16-24 YEAR OLDS BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, 2006

| Parliamentary Constituency Area | Employment Rate | 95% Confidence Interval ³ |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Belfast East | 82% | +/- 15% |
| Belfast North | 58% | +/- 13% |
| Belfast South | 51% | +/- 15% |
| Belfast West | 37% | +/- 17% |
| East Antrim | 68% | +/- 14% |
| East Londonderry | 36% | +/- 13% |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | 55% | +/- 13% |
| Foyle | 36% | +/- 12% |
| Lagan Valley | 56% | +/- 16% |
| Mid Ulster | 51% | +/- 11% |
| Newry & Armagh | 54% | +/- 12% |
| North Antrim | 61% | +/- 12% |
| North Down | 57% | +/- 16% |
| South Antrim | 52% | +/- 15% |
| South Down | 54% | +/- 11% |
| Strangford | 53% | +/- 15% |
| Upper Bann | 48% | +/- 12% |
| West Tyrone | 50% | +/- 12% |
| Northern Ireland | 52% | +/- 3% |

- 1 Variations in employment rates between parliamentary constituency areas also reflect differences in the proportion of 16-24 year olds in each of the other labour market categories, i.e. unemployment, full-time education or another form of economic inactivity.
- 2 Because of the level of disaggregation requested, these estimates are subject to a relatively high degree of sampling error. In line with the Office for National Statistics' policy, these estimates have been published rather than suppressed because they are below an arbitrary threshold level. However, due caution should be exercised in their interpretation.
- 3 The 95% confidence interval provides a range in which the true employment rate would be expected to fall 95% of the time if the sample was drawn repeatedly.

Source: Labour Force Survey, 2006 Annual dataset

Peace II Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what arrangements were put in place for public match funding of successful projects

under Measure 1.1 of the Peace II extension money.
(AQW 7589/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Assistance under the Peace II Extension can be up to 75% of project costs. The assistance can be split on the basis of 62.5% public match funding and 37.5% ERDF. The public match funding for projects in Northern Ireland is provided by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment through its public expenditure allocation. Funding is provided to successful projects through letters of offer which detail the terms and conditions for the payment of funding.

Science Park at Magee Campus

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her has to develop a Science Park at the Magee campus. (AQO 3997/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There are already Science Park facilities at the University of Ulster (UU) Magee Campus provided through the University of Ulster Science Research Parks Ltd (UUSRP). These include the Technology and Software Innovation Centre (TSIC) and a Software Development Centre for companies graduating from the TSIC or ICT based R&D companies seeking to establish a close and specific interaction with the University.

It has always been the intention that the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISP) would extend, in time, to other locations in Northern Ireland. Phase 1 of NISP's development allowed for this. Indeed in 2003, £2m was allocated for investment in the North West (in association with the Ulster University) for the development of the Science Park at Magee and Coleraine. However, following decisions taken by Ulster University that it was unable to proceed with establishing new facilities, the full amount was returned to NISP in August 2005.

It is recognised by both the Science Park and Ulster University that a NISP presence in the North

West could be of mutual advantage and of benefit to the regional economy. The potential for extending the Science Park is therefore kept under review and DETI continues to encourage NISP to bring forward workable and sustainable solutions for the expansion of the Science Park across Northern Ireland.

Bio-Fuels in Fuel Stations

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of bio-fuels that are (i) produced; and (ii) sold at fuel stations.
(AQW 7765/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: HM Revenue and Customs (HRMC) requires all biofuel producers who have produced or expect to produce more than 2500 litres a year to register their premises for fuel duty purposes.

HMRC records indicate that for the quarter January to March 2008 just under 100,000 litres of biofuel production was declared in Northern Ireland.

No information is held on the amount of biofuels currently sold at Northern Ireland fuel stations. There is not necessarily a correlation between the estimated biofuel production figures and the levels sold at fuel stations, as some production may be for own use or for direct sale.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by her Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model.
(AQW 7778/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Information requested is detailed in the following tables.

OWNED CARS

| Make | Model | Engine Size | Fuel Type | Purpose | Fuel Efficiency |
|-----------|------------------|-------------|-----------|--|-----------------------|
| Volvo | V50 SPT Wagon SE | 2.0 | Diesel | Monitoring, field work, field trips, VIP visits, promotion of Geological Survey NI publications and moving of equipment. | 37.2 miles per gallon |
| Landrover | Discovery Jeep | 2.7 V6 | Diesel | Monitoring of abandoned mines by Geological Survey NI | 25.4 miles per gallon |

| Make | Model | Engine Size | Fuel Type | Purpose | Fuel Efficiency |
|---------|---------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Renault | Laguna Estate | 1.8 | Petrol | NI Tourist Board business use | 46 miles per gallon |

LEASED CARS

| Make | Model | Engine Size | Fuel Type | Purpose | Fuel Efficiency |
|-------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Volvo | S80 SE LUX Saloon | 2.4 | Diesel | Chief Executive, Invest NI, travel | 29.5 miles per gallon |

*DETI's NDPBs are: Invest NI, NI Tourist Board, Health and Safety Executive for NI and the General Consumer Council NI.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7780/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, including its *Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), has spent £16,920 on fuel for owned vehicles since devolution. The amount spent on fuel for leased vehicles since devolution is £1,153.

*DETI's NDPBs are: Invest NI, NI Tourist Board, Health and Safety Executive for NI and the General Consumer Council NI.

Renewable Energy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans are in place to facilitate net metering, for those who generate small amounts of renewable energy, to be incorporated into an all-island single electricity market. (AQW 7793/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There has been no change in the position on this matter since my predecessor, Nigel Dodds, responded to the question in December last.

The arrangements in Northern Ireland for the metering of electricity exported and imported by small renewable generators which were in place prior to the introduction of the Single Electricity Market ("SEM") are unaffected by the operation of the new market.

There are no plans to change these arrangements which allow small generators, in the first instance, to use output from their generating station to meet their own consumption needs without reference to a licensed supplier. For any electricity that they export to, or consume from, a licensed supplier is separately recorded by a meter. Payment arrangements for both imports and exports are subject to the supplier's terms and conditions of contract. A specific obligation is

placed on NIE Energy Ltd to offer a regulated 'spill' tariff for small scale generation.

Small scale renewable generators in Northern Ireland also benefit by having access to tradeable Renewables Obligation Certificates (NROCs) under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation in respect of their generation.

Extra Funding for Debt Advisers

Ms Ni Chuilín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will consider providing financial support to independent advice providers in communities to assist and support people who are under pressure as a result of debt problems. (AQW 7881/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is providing funding to Omagh Independent Advice Service and to Housing Rights for the 3 year period 2008/11. This is being channelled through its contract with Citizens Advice to provide a free face to face debt advice service across Northern Ireland. The contract was awarded following a public procurement exercise.

Renewable Energy

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much and what proportion of Northern Ireland-generated energy supplies were derived from renewable sources in (i) 2000; and (ii) 2007. (AQW 7898/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Currently figures on renewables in Northern Ireland relate only to electricity from renewable energy sources. These figures are used to measure progress against our renewables target that, by 2012, 12% of electricity consumption will be from indigenous renewable energy sources.

The figures, like the target, are on the basis of years ending 31 March.

The information requested is shown in the table below:

| | Renewable Generation (GWh) | Proportion of all Supplies (%) |
|---------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2000/01 | 118 | 1.4% |
| 2007/08 | 441 | 5.0% |

Illegally Imported Fuel

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance she has given to petrol retailers seeking to close sites selling illegally imported fuel. (AQW 7899/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Illegal trading of fuels such as smuggled petrol and laundered diesel directly impacts on legitimate businesses and is often conducted without regard for public safety. To help combat this illegal trade HSENI will assist District Councils in their petroleum licensing enforcement role by setting up a Fuel Oils Liaison Unit within HSENI that will collate intelligence on the fuel oil supply chain. This initiative will be supported by a representative Fuel Oils Forum. In addition, HSENI takes every opportunity to work in conjunction with the PSNI and other enforcing agencies to tackle illegal trading in fuels where safety of the public has been put at risk.

Grants for Alternative Energy Sources in Homes

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available for the installation of (i) solar; (ii) geo-thermal; and (iii) wind energy, in domestic properties. (AQW 7920/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Currently the Low Carbon Buildings Programme (LCBP) administered by the Department of Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) offers renewable energy grants to private households in Northern Ireland. The assistance available is outlined below:

- Solar: Solar photovoltaics: Maximum grant of £2,000 per kW of installed capacity, subject to an overall maximum of £2,500 or 50% of the relevant eligible costs, whichever is the lower.
- Solar thermal hot water: Overall maximum grant of £400 or 30% of the relevant eligible costs, whichever is the lower.
- Geo-thermal: Ground source heat pumps: Overall maximum grant of £1,200 or 30% of the relevant eligible costs, whichever is the lower.

- Wind energy: Wind turbines: Overall maximum grant of £900 or 30% of the relevant eligible costs, whichever is lower.

Energy Prices

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the level of strategic policy engagement between her Department and her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, with a view to securing energy at low cost prices. (AQW 7952/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The strategic policy context under which my Department engages with its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland is set out in the All-island Energy Market Development Framework which was developed by the Joint Steering Group and agreed by the Departments' respective Ministers in November 2004. Both Eamon Ryan TD and I recognise the potential to secure mutual benefits, including longer term cost savings from co-operation on energy matters.

Wind Farms

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that wind farms are setting a fair price for their energy production. (AQW 7953/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Issues relating to regulation and price-setting of energy production from wind farms are primarily matters for the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and, with the introduction of the Single Electricity Market (SEM) in November 2007, the newly appointed SEM Committee also has an important statutory role in this regard.

Increasing competitiveness and the associated impact on prices were prime objectives of the introduction of the SEM. In that market, wind farms are currently price-takers and, as such, do not themselves set the price for their energy production. While they and other renewable generators have priority of despatch, they compete on price terms with other generators and this is the key mechanism for ensuring that their production is purchased at a fair price.

Economic Investment Conference

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many on going negotiations are taking place with potential investors, arising out of the Economic Investment Conference. (AQO 4064/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Invest Northern Ireland has followed up with all 150 business delegates at the USNI conference ensuring that all have been thanked for attending and asking for an opportunity to follow up with them in relation to investment opportunities.

To date Invest Northern Ireland has received over 40 expressions of interest in discussing what Northern Ireland can offer. Leslie Morrison, Chief Executive of Invest Northern Ireland, has already completed a conference follow up visit to the US and met with Senior Executives in New York. Meetings have also taken place in London and Dublin.

Invest Northern Ireland is also planning a series of follow up mini round-table events, or “salon events” which are small in size and have worked very effectively as part of the recruitment drive for the conference. These events will include a combination of existing investor CEOs, attendees at the conference, advocates of Northern Ireland, academics, politicians and targeted decision makers in prospect companies. This leverages the ‘influencer effect’ of those who also attended the conference.

We expect that the results, in terms of investment, flowing from the Conference may take some time to come to fruition. Projects can take 18-24 months to complete.

Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment the timescale for the Northern Ireland Health and Safety Executive to undertake its duties under the new Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007. (AQW 8164/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) has been actively enforcing the provisions of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations since they came into operation on 9 July 2007. There was a seamless change on 9 July as these regulations revised and brought together the former Construction (Design and Management) regulations and the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) regulations into a single regulatory package with the key aim of improving clarity and thereby making it easier for all duty holders be they clients, designers or contractors to know what is expected of them.

Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans the Northern Ireland Health and Safety Executive has to focus on the role of the designers in carrying out their duties under the new Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2007, to avoid foreseeable risks.

(AQW 8166/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) has been proactive in raising awareness amongst designers of their duties under the new Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007. This has entailed running seminars and speaking at meetings of professional bodies representing architects and civil engineers. In addition, it has as part of its investigations into major construction safety incidents, some of which have involved the loss of life, closely examined the part played by designers. HSENI also plans to undertake a series of head office visits to confront senior management about their role in managing site health and safety. This will have a focus on design to ensure each project is safe to build, safe to use and safe to maintain.

Promotion of a Healthy Workforce

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work her Department is undertaking with the Health and Safety Executive to incentivise businesses to promote the health of their workforce. (AQO 3956/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is fully supportive of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland in its mission of improving the health and well being of the working age population of Northern Ireland. Under the auspices of the Executive’s long term workplace health strategy “Working for Health”, HSENI has run initiatives aimed at supporting and encouraging businesses to address major causes of work related ill health such as manual handling and stress. It has also worked closely with the Health Promotion Agency to develop a “WorkWell” health promotion toolkit for businesses. In addition, HSENI plans to develop its workplace health activities further by offering from April 2009 new and expanded services which will be funded from the Executive’s Programme for Government’s Budget. These new services will include confidential and free workplace health consultancy for small businesses, focussed health promotional campaigns and a specific drive to address mental health and well being.

Economic Development

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will develop a policy to create a 'Champion of the Economy' with a cross-Departmental remit capable of ensuring that economic development is a priority. (AQO 4024/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Executive has made the economy the top priority in the Programme for Government. As Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Investment, I will do all that I can to help grow the dynamic, innovative economy envisaged in the Programme for Government.

Furthermore, as part of my role as the ETI Minister, I have already chaired the Economic Development Forum. This is an important body that brings together Government and other key stakeholders that have the shared objective of strengthening the local economy.

I therefore do not see any merit in creating additional structures to champion the economy, over-and-above those already in place.

Innovation Voucher Schemes for Small Businesses

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide details of the uptake to date on the innovation voucher scheme for small businesses; and her assessment of the numbers which may apply by the close of the first call on 30 June 2008. (AQO 3932/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Innovation Voucher initiative was launched on the 27 May 2008. The first call for applications opened on the 1st of June.

As at the 5 June, seven applications have been received, with 98 unique users visiting the Innovation Vouchers website. It is very difficult to predict how many applications will be received by the first call closing date of the 30 June. However, Invest NI's target is to issue 50 Innovation Vouchers between June 2008 and March 2009.

Entrepreneurship in Rural Communities

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is promoting and supporting entrepreneurship within rural communities, particularly among marginalised groups. (AQO 3993/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department acknowledges the

distinctive economic development role played by entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of their impact on local and rural communities and areas of economic disadvantage.

The full range of Invest NI support is available to those living in rural areas. In particular, the Start a Business Programme can provide helpful start up support.

Over the three year period to end March 2008, 42% of all the business start ups in Northern Ireland supported via the Start a Business Programme were in rural locations.

Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme also offers a range of assistance to help both new and existing social enterprises to develop and grow into sustainable and viable businesses. Since its launch in September 2006, this programme has been used to assist 80 new social enterprises.

Other Invest NI programmes targeted specifically at youth and women in business have NI wide coverage.

In addition, Invest NI works closely with DARD on a variety of joint events to encourage higher levels of rural entrepreneurship. A brochure targeted at this group, with the title 'A look at opening your business to new prospects,' provides some very useful practical guidance and signposts potential rural entrepreneurs to various sources of professional advice.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the performance and success of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in 2007. (AQO 4032/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Targets for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board which cover 2007 are set out in the Board's Operating Plans for 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and the Corporate Plan 2005-2008. NITB has had considerable success in achieving these challenging targets and the detailed results will be set out in the Board's Annual Report which will be published shortly.

In particular, NITB's promotion and development of the tourism product in Northern Ireland was a key contributor to more than 2.1 million visitors coming to Northern Ireland in 2007, an increase of 6% on the previous year. Significantly, the number of holiday leisure and recreation visits in 2007 rose from 385,000 to 493,000, an increase of 28%.

Although this is a positive performance in a competitive global tourism environment, we have the potential to increase tourism's contribution to the

economy. In particular, we must seek to increase visitor revenue which fell by 1.5% between 2006 and 2007.

I would remind Members that the Executive has set ambitious targets in the Programme for Government, including a target to increase the out of state visitor numbers and spend to 2.5 million and £520 million respectively by 2011.

Support and Development of Small Craft Businesses

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what policies are in place for the support and development of small craft businesses, such as those producing jewellery, ceramics, furniture, textiles and glass. (AQO 3957/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My department acknowledges the significant contribution to the social, economic and cultural fabric of Northern Ireland made by the Craft Sector and the wider Creative Industries in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI has a wide range of programmes available to all SMEs, including small craft businesses, designed to improve productivity, develop export markets and increase their international competitiveness. As an example of this, during the period September 2001 to March 2008, Invest NI offered support to approximately 300 new businesses from the Craft Products and Services Sector under the Start a Business Programme. This will lead to the creation of over 380 new jobs.

Invest NI has also provided support to Crafts Development NI Ltd, the sector-lead body responsible for the development of the design-led contemporary craft and applied arts sector in Northern Ireland, in order to further develop small craft businesses.

My department is also aware that many craft businesses work as successful social economy enterprises. Invest NI has committed, through its corporate plan, to assist the growth of the social economy sector through Invest NI's Social Entrepreneurship Programme. This programme offers a range of assistance to both new and existing social enterprises to grow and develop into sustainable viable businesses.

Business Growth

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her plans to promote business growth in the light of the Varney Reviews. (AQO 3996/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The second Varney review identified removing the barriers to business growth as an essential measure to improve the local economy. As with many of the recommendations, we are already working to achieve this through the actions outlined in the Programme for Government.

DETI remains committed to promoting enterprise locally and attracting Foreign Direct Investment. The Department also continues to support increasing innovation and exports, promote tourism, improve our telecoms infrastructure and promote greater use of renewable energy sources.

These priorities are reflected in the ambitious targets included in the Programme for Government. These include, for example, the creation of 6,500 new jobs from inward investment, 85% of which to provide salaries above the private sector median; promoting 600 new first time exporters; and a target to increase tourism revenue to £520m by 2011.

These, and other initiatives in the Programme for Government, will help place the Northern Ireland economy in a stronger competitive position.

Electricity Supply

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to ensure the overall sustainability of the electricity supply. (AQO 3972/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Northern Ireland is currently heavily dependent on imported fossil fuels. It will require considerable investment in renewable generation and the electricity grid infrastructure if we are to have a more sustainable energy future. A key element will also involve working with neighbouring administrations to fully exploit the opportunities to improve existing security of supply and maximise the use of renewables.

A planned tripartite study with Scotland and the Irish Republic into the feasibility of an off-shore electricity grid network, to exploit wind, wave and tidal energy sources, is one such example.

In addition, the recent cross border Electricity Grid Study indicates that we have the potential to provide up to 42% of electricity from renewable sources, mainly from wind farms. This could significantly improve our energy sustainability, help shelter consumers from global fossil fuel price fluctuations and contribute to meeting UK and EU climate change targets.

DETI is also currently scoping the potential for bioenergy and marine renewable energy to contribute

to more diversified and sustainable energy production in Northern Ireland.

Other areas of work include a joint North/South gas storage study to enhance security of supply and coordination of emergency planning arrangements.

These examples illustrate the measures being taken to ensure security and sustainability of our energy supplies and to provide long term protection for consumers.

Tourism Market

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to develop the short break and city break tourism market. (AQO 3976/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland use TV advertising, press, radio and web promotion to deliver marketing campaigns aimed specifically at the Northern Ireland short break and city break markets.

NITB targets domestic tourists and potential visitors from the Republic of Ireland and Tourism Ireland's extensive marketing campaign targets visitors in key markets such as Great Britain, Mainland Europe and the US.

In addition, NITB works closely with the Northern Ireland tourist accommodation industry to provide attractive short break offers and to inform visitors of things to see and do on short breaks or city breaks.

Twelfth of July Demonstrations

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action is being taken by the tourism agencies, in conjunction with the Orange Order, to promote this year's twelfth of July demonstrations. (AQO 3969/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is working with the Orange Order to help them broaden the appeal of this year's twelfth of July demonstrations. NITB has identified four 'flagship' parades, Belfast, Tandragee, Dromara and Coleraine, as having the most potential to appeal to visitors.

NITB has organised Welcome Host Training for representatives from these parades to help maximise their tourism potential. The parades will also feature on NITB's consumer website.

Tourism Ireland has discussed the portrayal of the twelfth of July demonstrations with the Orange Order, Orangefest and other relevant parties. In addition,

Tourism Ireland has met with the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and attended Loyal Order parades over the last three years. TIL recently presented to representatives of ten District Lodges regarding this year's demonstrations.

Mobile Phone Users in Border Areas

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to remove any disadvantages and extra costs incurred by mobile phone users in border areas. (AQO 3992/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the period 2004 to 2007 my Department, working in conjunction with the then Department of Communications Marine and Natural Resources in the Irish Republic and both Regulators, made significant progress in addressing the issue. This work led to the introduction, by the telecoms companies, of all-island tariffs and special tariff initiatives for phone users which significantly reduced the scale of the problem.

In parallel the issue of mobile roaming was being investigated by the EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media and in August 2007 roaming tariffs across all of Europe were capped which had the effect of reducing the typical costs of a call from as much as £1 per minute to no more than 38p per minute. Whilst welcome for those travelling across Europe, this in itself does not completely solve the inadvertent roaming issue for those living and using mobile phones close to the border and a number of companies have introduced deals for Northern Ireland customers that can reduce these costs further. Significant progress has been made in relation to pricing in what is a privatised and independently regulated industry. If the member has new evidence of a particular problem, this should be passed to the Regulator, OFCOM for consideration.

Tackling Crimes against Business People

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she has taken in conjunction with the PSNI to help tackle crime against business people at work and at home. (AQO 3958/08)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has a representative on the Organised Crime Task Force Working Group and regularly inputs into the work of that body.

The Organised Crime Task Force seeks to advise major financial institutions and cash-in-transit companies on how best to protect staff from tiger

kidnappings. In addition, the NIO, through their Community Safety Unit, provide advice and financial support and works in partnership with other statutory and voluntary agencies to tackle many crime prevention issues, including business crime.

The PSNI also engages with groups such as the Retailers Against Crime Forum to advise retailers and business owners on the steps they can take to prevent tiger kidnaps against them and their employees. PSNI Crime Prevention Officers are available to attend homes and businesses on request to give specific advice

In addition, DETI, through the Trading Standards Service, TSS, seeks to alert businesses to scams and other malpractices that have a detrimental impact on their commercial interests.

Such alerts are provided through the issue of press releases and by the participation of TSS staff in any resultant media interviews.

DETI is also involved, through the Health and Safety Executive, in assisting District Councils in their petroleum licensing enforcement role by setting up both a Fuel Oils Liaison Unit within HSENI and a representative Fuel Oils Forum. In addition HSENI takes every opportunity to work in conjunction with the PSNI and other enforcing agencies to tackle illegal trading in fuels, particularly liquefied petroleum gas, where safety of the public has been put at risk. Illegal trading of fuels, such as smuggled petrol and laundered diesel, directly impacts on legitimate businesses and is often conducted without regard for public safety.

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how many people with disabilities are currently employed by his Department. (AQW 7617/08)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The Department's records show that a total of 102 staff have voluntarily declared a disability. This may, however, not be an accurate reflection of the Departmental position as these figures are based on staff who voluntarily declared a disability during their employment.

MOT Certificates

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles registered in Northern Ireland (i)

must display an MOT certificate; and (ii) are exempt from displaying an MOT certificate. (AQW 7627/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are approximately 589,375 vehicles that were manufactured prior to 2005 and which would therefore require an MOT certificate.

Vehicles tested under the Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 must all display their MOT disc. The legislation does not allow for any exemptions.

MOT Tests

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with Ministers in Westminster and Scotland, in relation to supplying vehicles from Northern Ireland, that have been put through an MOT test in Great Britain, with a disc that can be displayed on the windscreen. (AQW 7629/08)

The Minister of the Environment: No discussions were held with Ministers in Westminster and Scotland. Mandatory display of MOT discs applies only to vehicles tested under the Motor Vehicle Testing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. There is no requirement for a vehicle tested in Great Britain to display a certificate.

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment what the total costs incurred by his Department were as a result of the use of external consultants, including arboriculturalists, for the establishment of Tree Preservation Orders. (AQW 7660/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The total cost incurred by the Department of the Environment as a result of the use of external consultants, including arboriculturalists, for the establishment of Tree Preservation Orders during the financial year 2007/2008, was £410,466.31 (exclusive of VAT). This includes costs for the consultant arboriculturalists and land surveyors.

Radioactivity Monitoring

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what level of radioactivity monitoring is carried out by his Department around the Irish Sea and across Northern Ireland. (AQW 7662/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service has a comprehensive monitoring programme in place to assess the impact of discharges into the Irish Sea on

the Northern Ireland coastline. Samples of seaweed, sediments, fish, nephrops and winkles are collected quarterly and sent for analysis at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences in Lowestoft. The seaweeds are collected in the Ards Peninsula area and at Portrush; the marine life samples are collected where possible from commercial landings at Kilkeel; and the sediment samples are collected from the five marine Loughs. In addition the gamma dose rate in air over inter-tidal sediments is measured in each district council area which has a coastline.

The results from the monitoring programme are published annually in the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics. They are also published in a report entitled 'Radioactivity in Food and the Environment' (the RIFE report) issued by the Food Standards Agency, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the Environment Agency and the Environment and Heritage Service. The results, which are in complete agreement with other UK Agencies and the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, indicate that levels of contamination are negligible in terms of radiological impacts upon our population.

The Food Standards Agency also has a programme of monitoring to demonstrate that any radioactivity present in foods does not compromise food safety and to check that public radiation exposure more generally is within national and international limits. Their results are also published in the RIFE report.

Planning Applications

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment if he will consider inserting provisions into the current neighbourhood notification requirements that would require planning applications to indicate the removal of any trees. (AQW 7698/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Neighbour notification is not a statutory requirement. To help the public become involved in the planning process Planning Service write to people who occupy buildings on land adjoining the application site boundary and which are also within 90 metres of it as detailed in Information Leaflet 3 – Commenting on a Planning Application. In addition, all planning applications are advertised and the application and plans, including all associated information, are made available for public inspection.

I consider these arrangements sufficient to alert the public to the nature of proposals and have no plans at present to review current neighbourhood notification requirements to include an indication of where trees are to be removed.

Homes Near High Voltage Power Lines

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what is his policy on planning applications for homes which are close to high voltage power lines; (ii) how many applications for both private and social homes close to high voltage power lines have been approved since devolution; and (iii) how many applications for both private and social homes close to high voltage power lines have been rejected since devolution. (AQW 7700/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There is no specific policy for the assessment of planning applications in close proximity to high power voltage lines. Overhead transmission lines are owned by Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE). NIE does not usually own land below its transmission and distribution power lines and cannot control development which takes place there. However, NIE advise my Department and developers on operational safe clearances for such proposals. The necessary clearance at a specific location will be dependent on several factors, including the location the line is passing over and the line's construction, design and operating voltage. My Department consults NIE on all individual planning applications on land crossed by existing overhead power lines so they can advise on the particular clearances prevailing.

It is not possible to provide data on the number of applications for both private and social homes close to high voltage power lines that have been approved and rejected since devolution. To provide this information for the years in question could only be done by manual search of all existing files and this would not be available in the time and would incur disproportionate costs.

Chicken Waste Incinerator in Glenavy

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment if he will place a full copy of the planning application for a chicken waste incinerator in Glenavy, recently submitted by Rose Energy, in the Assembly Library. (AQW 7759/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The planning application for a Biomass Fuelled Power Plant at Ballyvannon Road Glenavy was submitted by Rose Energy to the Planning Service Headquarters on 4th June 2008. I will not be making a copy of the planning application available in the Assembly Library however a copy of the planning application and accompanying environmental statement will be available for viewing at the offices of the Planning Service Headquarters, Millennium House, 17-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast and at the Divisional Planning Offices in Downpatrick, Ballymena, Craigavon and Omagh.

Should anyone wish to view the working planning application file then they can do so through the Planning Service open file policy. An appointment is necessary to view the working file and can be made through Planning Service Headquarters where the application is being processed.

Review of Environmental Governance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much the Review of Environmental Governance cost; and how much each of the three authors received for their work on this report. (AQW 7770/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Review of Environmental Governance cost £244,429.

The amounts each of the three authors received for their work on this report were as follows:

- Professor Tom Burke received £31,380
- Professor Sharon Turner received £53,733
- Gordon Bell received £23,948

MOT Tests

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars have undergone an MOT test in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7783/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Details of the number of MOT full tests and retests conducted, on cars, in the last 3 years are included in the following table.

| Year | Full Tests | Retests |
|-------|------------|---------|
| 05/06 | 449,540 | 110,262 |
| 06/07 | 502,976 | 110,599 |
| 07/08 | 520,315 | 113,063 |

MOT Tests

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much money has been brought into his Department through MOT tests in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7784/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The amount of money taken by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (previously the Driver & Vehicle Testing Agency) as part of Department of the Environment through MOT tests carried out in each of the last 3 years has been:

| | |
|---------|----------|
| 2005/06 | £16.005M |
| 2006/07 | £18.451M |

2007/08

£18.918M

Pygmy Shrew Population Numbers

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to estimate (i) the number of (a) shrews; and (b) dormice; and (ii) what action he is taking to increase their habitat and consequently promote growth in the number of owls. (AQW 7824/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no published scientific estimates of the pygmy shrew population in Northern Ireland, however, the species is generally regarded as common and widespread throughout Ireland in all areas of suitable habitat.

There are no dormice in Ireland.

The pygmy shrew is found in practically all habitats where there is heavy ground cover and consequently habitat loss is not regarded as a limiting factor in relation to population abundance or distribution.

Published literature on owl diet suggests that whilst pygmy shrews are a component of the diet, other species such as wood mouse or juvenile brown rat are equally or more important.

Planning Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average time for a planning application to be processed from start to finish. (AQW 7830/08)

The Minister of the Environment: From 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007, there were a total of 23,848 planning application decisions issued. The applications are grouped into major, intermediate and minor categories, depending on the type of development. The median (that is, most appropriate average) length of time these applications took to process from start to finish was:

- Major applications – 32.6 weeks
- Intermediate applications – 40.2 weeks
- Minor applications – 14.0 weeks

Further analysis of processing times is available from the Agency website: http://www.planningni.gov.uk/Corporate_Services/stats/planning-statistics.htm

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what areas of North Down have tree preservation orders placed on them. (AQW 7831/08)

The Minister of the Environment: There are 54 TPOs in place in the North Down area. The sites are as follows:

| Location of Lands |
|---|
| Land south east of 8 Carolhill Drive rear of 51-57 Ballymacconnell Road, Bangor |
| Land adj to 10 Whinney Hill, Holywood |
| Laurelbank Lane, Comber |
| Woodbank, Croft Road, Holywood |
| Adjacent to 11 Whinney Hill, Holywood. |
| Braemar Heights, Holywood |
| Whinney Hill Development, Holywood |
| Seymore Road, Carnlea, Co Down |
| Tree Tops, Whinney Hill, Holywood |
| Killaire House, Bangor |
| Whinney Hill, Holywood |
| Dromkeen House, My Lady's Mile, Holywood |
| PLas Merdyn, Church Road, Holywood |
| Croft House, Croft Road, Holywood |
| Lands at Whinney Hill, Holywood |
| Cultra House, Cultra |
| Land at Glen Road, Craigavad |
| The Beeches, Gransha Road, Bangor |
| Adjoining Fruithill Park, Bangor |
| 2 Circular Road East, Cultra |
| Lands North East of 165 Groomsport Road, Bangor. |
| Land to the rear 63 Station Road, Craigavad, Holywood Craigavad |
| Beechfield Avenue, Conlig, Bangor. |
| Seacourt, Bangor |
| To the rear of 43 Station Road, Craigavad |
| The Rectory, 2 Raglan Road, Bangor |
| Lands to the south of 5, 21, 23 and 25 Carneyhill Seahill |
| 67 Station Road, Craigavad |
| Worcester Avenue, Bangor |
| Lands at St. Columbanus, adjacent to 57 Craigdarragh Road, Helen's Bay. |
| Lands at 83a Victoria Road and 44 Glenview Road, Holywood |
| At 14 Seafront Road, Cultra, Holywood. |
| 159 Groomsport Road, Ballyholme, Bangor. |
| 42 Victoria Road, Holywood |
| Lands at 15 Morningside, Ballyholme, Bangor |
| Land at St Mark's Church of Ireland Church, Holywood Road, Belfast. |

| Location of Lands |
|--|
| 16 Glen Road, Cultra, Holywood, Co Down. |
| Lands at 1 Kathleen Drive, Helen's Bay, Co Down. |
| Land from 20-46 Ballymenoch Road + 19-21 Whinney Hill, Holywood |
| Lands 32 bridge Road, Helens Bay |
| Lands at 18 Ailsa Road, Cultra, Holywood |
| Lands at 27 Clanbrassil Road, Holywood |
| Trees in the grounds of 126 Bangor Road, Holywood |
| Land to the rear of 49 Ballyrobert Road Crawfordsburn |
| Lands at 4 Bennet Wood, Helen's Bay, Co Down. |
| Lands at 73,75 & 77 Victoria Road and to the rear of 22, 24, 26 & 28 Church Avenue, Holywood |
| Lands at Ardavon, 16 Glen Road, Holywood |
| 39 Glen Road, Cultra, Holywood* |
| lands at Ballykillaire Sports Ground, Old Belfast Road, Bangor* |
| 15 Farnham Road, Bangor* |
| Lands at and adjacent to Woodside Cottage, 103 Main Street, Conlig* |
| Lands at Kathleen Avenue, Helen's Bay* |
| 48 Station Road (Cedar Lane), Craigavad, Holywood, Co Down* |
| Land at 8 Killaire Avenue, Ballykillaire, Bangor, Co Down* |

* The final 7 TPOs listed above are provisional orders and are used in situations where the Department considers the trees to be under immediate danger. They take effect immediately on the date specified providing protection for trees. This allows the Department time to consider objections and representations and to consult with Landscape Architects Branch and the Divisional Planning Office. A provisional TPO must be confirmed within 6 months of the date of the order, otherwise the protection afforded to trees expires.

Owl Population

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the number of owls. (AQW 7890/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Three species of Owl can be found in Northern Ireland: Barn Owl, Long-eared Owl and Short-eared Owl.

It is estimated that the Northern Ireland breeding population of Barn Owls has decreased to about 40 pairs, and the population remains fragile and fragmented.

The population of Long-eared Owls in Ireland is between 1,100–3,600 of which it is estimated that there are 300–900 pairs in Northern Ireland.

The Short-eared Owl is a scarce breeding and wintering species. The breeding population is estimated to be in the order of 1-5 pairs.

Planning Applications

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what assurance he can give that the new environmental body will respond within 6 to 8 weeks when contacted about planning applications. (AQW 7891/08)

The Minister of the Environment: From its launch on 1 July, I am setting the Northern Ireland Environment Agency a performance target of responding to a minimum of 75% of planning application consultation requests within 30 working days of receipt.

I am also allocating additional resources to this area during the year with the aim of increasing this target from 2009/10 onwards.

Social Housing in Strangford

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what land has been zoned for social housing in the Strangford constituency. (AQW 7895/08)

The Minister of the Environment: The Draft Ards and Down Plan 2015 Plan did not zone land for social housing as it was at an advanced stage in preparation when the specific requirements of Planning Policy Statement 12, (PPS 12), which places an onus on development plans to make provision for social housing through, for example, the zoning of land for that purpose, became known. Furthermore, a detailed Housing Needs Assessment, which clarified the social housing requirement for Ards Borough, only became available after publication of the Draft Plan.

In order to meet the requirements of the Regional Development Strategy, (RDS), at the time of the Draft Plan, the Department, in consultation with NIHE, zoned land for housing in the Draft Plan and included a specific Policy, (HOU 5), to seek social housing through planning applications on such sites. This approach is in line with PPS 12, which is now under review.

An objection was lodged to the social housing provisions in the Draft Plan and this was heard at the Public Inquiry. The Department is now considering the PAC recommendation on this objection as part of the wider PPS 12 regional policy debate on social housing provision prior to publishing the final Plan, with or without modifications.

Rise in Raptors

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he will initiate a survey to detail the rise in raptors

(birds of prey) and their effect on bird and animal life. (AQW 7897/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland hosts a number of regularly occurring resident species of raptor. These are Hen Harrier, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard and Kestrel. A range of established surveys already cover these species so there is no requirement to initiate a new survey.

Information on the populations of resident raptors present in Northern Ireland supports the view that, with a few exceptions, numbers of these species are either stable or, more typically, declining. Those species which have shown an increase, such as Buzzard and Peregrine Falcon, are typically recovering from historical persecution which dramatically reduced their populations.

Information is available on typical diets of raptors with some of that information specifically available for Northern Ireland. Prey species typically include small song birds, pigeons, waterbirds, rabbits, small mammals and carrion. The Department is not aware of any evidence to suggest that raptors are having a significant impact on other native wildlife.

Most raptor species in Northern Ireland are regarded as Species of Conservation Concern and as such require a variety of measures to ensure their well-being. The Department will continue to undertake and support surveys of raptors in Northern Ireland as a means of monitoring population change and gathering further information on their ecological needs.

Ecclesiastical Exemption

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to review the Ecclesiastical Exemption. (AQW 7919/08)

The Minister of the Environment: A review of ecclesiastical exemption is to be carried out by the Autumn. This follows consideration of the comments received by my Department as part of the public consultation exercise on the revised grant-aid policy, which was launched at the 'Windows of Opportunity' Conference on 20 May 2008. An undertaking was given at that time that a review would be carried out and it will include further assessment of the position taken by Heritage Agencies in the rest of the United Kingdom on this issue.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by his Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model;

(c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7934/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My

Department currently owns 107 cars. These cars are owned by Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA). No cars are leased by my Department.

It is not easily possible to provide accurate information in respect of the fuel efficiency of these cars. As the cars are tax exempt, no fuel efficiency rating is provided on the registration certificate. Furthermore, no data is kept which could be used for a reliable and accurate calculation of such information.

The cars owned by my Department are used for the following purposes:

- (a) To transport DVA enforcement operatives in the course of their duties (Goods / Taxi / Bus Operations including Automatic Number Plate Recognition use) to specified inspections sites throughout NI;
- (b) To be used by DVA to travel to operator premises to conduct required interviews;
- (c) To be used by DVA in a covert enforcement capacity;
- (d) To assist with traffic management;
- (e) To carry DVA enforcement equipment to inspection sites;
- (f) To provide interviewing facilities at the roadside;
- (g) Driving Test Route evaluation and Driver Examiner training;
- (h) On site training of MOT vehicle inspectors; and
- (i) To fulfil the following EHS functions:
 - Attendance at emergency pollution incidents;
 - Inspections at a variety of waste installations;
 - Investigations into illegal dumping;
 - Survey and sampling work;
 - Inspections at country parks, nature reserves and state care monuments; and
 - Towing boats and trailers (i.e. to carry small plant and survey equipment).

Further details of all cars owned by my Department are provided in the table below.

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Subaru | Forester Estate | 1994 | Petrol | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Daily | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1870 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1870 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Isuzu | Trooper | 2999 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Isuzu | Trooper | 2999 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Van | 2496 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Skoda | Fabia | 1390 | Petrol | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Mitsubishi | Shogun Sport | 2477 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Daily | 2300 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | 110 Crewcab | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Crewcab | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Crewcab | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Crewcab | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Ford | Crewcab | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Trafic | 1870 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Trafic | 1870 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2402 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Rigid | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Daily | 2300 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Daily | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | 110 Hardtop | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | 110 Hardtop | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Fiesta Courier | 1754 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2700 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Iveco | Daily | 2800 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Jeep | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Station-wagon | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Renault | Kangoo | 1461 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Nissan | Pick up | 2494 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2499 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Fiesta | 1753 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Discovery | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | 110 Station Wagon | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Nissan | Pick up | 2494 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Nissan | Pick up | 2494 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Landrover | Defender | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Ranger | 2500 | Heavy Oil | i |
| EHS | Ford | Transit | 1998 | Heavy Oil | i |

| Agency | Make | Model | Engine size | Fuel type | Purpose (as listed above) |
|--------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| EHS | Landrover | Station-wagon | 2495 | Heavy Oil | i |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Passat SE TDI | 1968 | Heavy Oil | a, b, c |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Passat SE TDI | 1968 | Heavy Oil | a, b, c |
| DVA | Toyota | Avensis TSPiRiT D-4D | 2231 | Heavy Oil | a, b, c |
| DVA | Ford | Galaxy ZETEC TDCI 6G | 1997 | Heavy Oil | a, b, c |
| DVA | Ford | Galaxy ZETEC TDDI | 1896 | Heavy Oil | a, d |
| DVA | Ford | Galaxy ZETEC TDDI | 1896 | Heavy Oil | a, d |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Crafter CR35 163 LWB | 2461 | Heavy Oil | a, e, f |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Crafter CR35 163 LWB | 2461 | Heavy Oil | a, e, f |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Golf Final Edition | 1598 | Petrol | g |
| DVA | Ford | Sierra LX | 1769 | Petrol | h |
| DVA | Vauxhall | Astra Merit I | 1389 | Petrol | h |
| DVA | Volks-wagen | Sharan SE TDI | 1896 | Heavy Oil | g |

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7935/08)

The Minister of the Environment: Within my Department both the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) operate vehicles in the course of their duties. The amount spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned and (ii) leased by the Department since devolution is set out in the table below.

| | Vehicles owned £ | Vehicles Leased £ |
|-----|---------------------|----------------------|
| EHS | 133,428 | Nil |

| | Vehicles owned £ | Vehicles Leased £ |
|-------|---------------------|----------------------|
| DVA | 11,122 | 1,651 |
| Total | 144,550 | 1,651 |

Rotting Seaweed on the Ards Peninsula

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 6715/08, if the local council would be allowed to control the flies that congregate on rotting seaweed on the Ards peninsula. (AQW 7936/08)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has been working with Ards Borough Council to facilitate beach cleaning on its amenity beaches on the Ards peninsula. This strategic approach is aimed at removing the problem of rotting seaweed whilst maintaining the scientific interest of the Outer Ards Area of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Area.

Should the council have any public health concerns as a result of the flies, it may apply to Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) for consent to resolve this. EHS will assess any such application to determine the likely impact on the designated features and take account of public health considerations.

If emergency actions are required the council may immediately proceed to resolve the public health problem, provided they give details of the emergency actions implemented to EHS as soon as possible.

Commercial Planning Applications

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment the average time to process commercial planning applications in (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) each Divisional Planning Office. (AQW 8015/08)

The Minister of the Environment: From 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007, there were a total of 1,451 decisions issued or withdrawn for commercial planning applications. The applications are grouped into major, intermediate and minor categories, depending on the type of development. The median (that is, the most appropriate average) length of time these applications took to process was:

| Divisions | Major (average number of weeks) | Intermediate (average number of weeks) | Minor (average number of weeks) |
|-----------|--|---|--|
| Ballymena | 24.6 | 19.0 | 19.0 |
| Belfast | 24.4 | 14.8 | 10.8 |

| Divisions | Major (average number of weeks) | Intermediate (average number of weeks) | Minor (average number of weeks) |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|
| Craigavon | 40.4 | 30.6 | 18.2 |
| Downpatrick | 31.2 | 21.2 | 16.6 |
| Headquarters ¹ | 82.6 | N/A | N/A |
| Londonderry | 38.0 | 27.0 | 20.6 |
| Omagh | 29.9 | 26.0 | 26.2 |
| Planning Service | 31.2 | 22.1 | 16.6 |

¹ Headquarters generally only process major applications

Graduated Driver Licensing

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had, or plans to have, with representatives from other countries that operate graduated driver licensing. (AQW 8019/08)

The Minister of the Environment: In developing any new measures aimed at increasing road safety, such as graduated driver licensing (GDL), my Department continues to consider and learn from what works in other parts of the UK, the rest of Europe, and farther afield.

Our forthcoming consultation on GDL, which will issue shortly, has been informed by:

- reviewing the success of road safety measures in other countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where GDL schemes are well established;
- analysing the outcomes of a wide range of research e.g. from TRL, PACTS, European Commission reports from the 'Supreme' project, etc;
- participation at national and international road safety conferences; and
- membership of organisations such as CIECA, the international commission for driver testing authorities, which is active in the fields of road safety and driver testing.

While there are no immediate plans for meetings at this stage, my Department will consider any opportunities that may arise in the future either for officials or for me to engage with relevant authorities both nationally and internationally on road safety issues such as GDL.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Contracts for Consultancy Services

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel 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 6904/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr Dodds): The information requested is provided in the attached table.

| Brief Description of Consultancy Assignment | Company | Value of Contract |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2004/05 | | |
| Advertising Contract Relating to Senior Economist Post | Penna HR Consultancy | 8 |
| CPD Customer Satisfaction Survey | University of Ulster Jordanstown | 5 |
| Study on Domestic Rating | University of Ulster Jordanstown | 16 |
| Total Value of Contracts £'000 | | 29 |
| 2005/06 | | |
| Review of training across the NICS | Peter Small | 13 |
| To facilitate presentation in relation to HR Business Partnering in preparation for restructuring of personnel. | Paul Kearns, Personnel Works Ltd | 1.8 |
| Facilitation of seminar. | RJP Management Consultancy | 2 |
| Change Management Session Facilitation | Hugh Campbell Consultancy | 0.7 |
| Total Value of Contracts £'000 | | 17.5 |
| 2006/07 | | |
| Provision of specialist legal advice not readily available from Departmental Solicitors | Addlershaw Goddard | 3 |
| IT Project Management specialist skills | HFM | 6 |

| Brief Description of Consultancy Assignment | Company | Value of Contract |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Provision of specialist technology and network advice to support the implementation of unique technologies in Workplace 2010 programme | SLA Networks | 32 |
| Completion of Lessons Learned Report for Account NI phase. | Derek Lynn | 4 |
| Provision of NEC Consultancy to review contract documents | Thomas Telford Ltd | 2 |
| Advisory Work on NEC3 Conditions of Contract | Thomas Telford Ltd | 0.8 |
| Independent review of Recommendations and main findings review of HPSS in NI | Prof John Appleby | 12.5 |
| Total Value of Contracts £'000 | | 60.3 |
| 2007/08 | | |
| HR Connect Assignment | Robert James Campton | 3 |
| Balance Scorecard Workshops | Deloitte | 1 |
| Completion of Business Case for Microsoft Enterprise Agreement | Goldblatt McGuigan | 4 |
| Scoping Study report in response to Flooding NI | Kainos | 15 |
| IS Security Consultancy | CESG | 0.2 |
| Web Security Consultancy | Kainos | 13 |
| Web Security Consultancy | Kainos | 7 |
| Independent Accreditation by Construction Excellence NI of maturity of Government Construction clients in embedding and achieving excellence in Construction Initiative | A Blumenthal & CENI | 30 |
| Study into Land Valuation Taxation | University of Ulster, Jordanstown | 5 |
| Survey associated with the rating of domestic vacant properties | University of Ulster, Jordanstown | 3 |
| Total Value of Contracts £'000 | | 81.2 |

Departmental Travel Expenses

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many visits he has made outside Northern Ireland since devolution; (ii) the method and cost of transportation for each trip; and (iii) the type and cost of accommodation for each trip, including details for accompanying officials. (AQW 7299/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In his capacity as Minister for Finance and Personnel, my honourable friend Peter Robinson made 16 trips outside of Northern Ireland on Departmental business since devolution.

Details of the transportation and accommodation for each trip is attached.

The method and cost of transportation for each trip the Minister has made outside Northern Ireland since Devolution.

| Number | Method of Transport | Names of officials | Cost per Person flights | Cost per person Rail | Total Cost |
|--------|---------------------|-------------------------|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Flight | Minister 3 officials | £302.45 £302.45 £302.45 £319.45 | | £1226.80 |
| | Rail | Minister 3 officials | | £46.00 £47.00 2 sing £47.00 2 sing £28.00 | £168.00 |
| 2. | Flight | Minister 2 officials | £218.55 £218.55 £218.55 | | £655.65 |
| | Flight | Minister 2 officials | £1530.65 £1530.65 £1530.65 | | £4591.95 |
| | Rail | Minister 2 officials | | £218.55 £218.55 £218.55 | £655.65 |
| | Flight | official | £795.65 | | £795.65 |
| | Flight | Minister official | £795.65 £795.65 | | £1591.30 |
| 3. | Flight | Minister 3 officials | £325.25 £325.25 £325.25 £325.25 | | £1301.00 |
| 4. | Flight | Minister 4 officials | £319.45 £319.45 £319.45 £302.45 £302.45 | | £1563.25 |

| Number | Method of Transport | Names of officials | Cost per Person flights | Cost per person Rail | Total Cost |
|--------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|------------|
| | Rail | 4 officials | | £46.00 £46.00 £28.00 £28.00 | £148.00 |
| 5. | Rail | Minister 5 officials | | £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £38.00 single £38.00 single | £324.00 |
| | Flight | Minister | £206.35 | | £206.35 |
| 6. | Rail | Minister 7 officials | | £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 £62.00 | £496.00 |
| 7. | Flight | official | £319.45 | | £319.45 |
| | Rail | official | | £46.00 | £46.00 |
| 8. | Flight | Minister (home flight) 3 officials | £156.95 £279.45 £279.45 £279.45 | | £995.30 |
| 9. | Rail | 2 officials | | £62.00 £62.00 | £124.00 |
| 10. | Flight | 4 officials | £307.45 £307.45 £307.45 £307.45 | | £1229.80 |
| | Rail | 4 officials | | £46.00 £46.00 £28.00 £28.00 | £148.00 |
| 11. | No Cost | No Cost | | | |
| 12. | Rail | 3 officials | | £68.69 £68.69 £68.69 | £206.07 |

| Number | Method of Transport | Names of officials | Cost per Person flights | Cost per person Rail | Total Cost |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 13. | Flight | 4 officials | £310.45 £310.45 £310.45 £310.45 | | £1241.80 |
| | Rail | 4 officials | | £28.00 £28.00 £46.00 £46.00 | £148.00 |
| 14. | Flight | Minister 4 officials | £303.35 £303.35 £303.35 £303.35 £303.35 | | £1516.75 |
| | Rail | Minister 4 officials | | £46.00 £46.00 £46.00 £46.00 £46.00 | £230.00 |
| 15. | Flight | official | £310.35 | | £310.35 |
| | Rail | official | | £46.00 | £46.00 |
| 16. | Flight | 2 officials | £310.35 £310.35 | | £620.70 |
| | Rail | 2 officials | | £28.00 £28.00 | £56.00 |
| Total | | | Total Flights- £18,166.10 | Total Rail- £2795.72 | Total Travel- £20,961.82 |

THE TYPE AND COST OF ACCOMMODATION FOR EACH TRIP

| Location – all hotels | Price (Minister, PS and Special Adviser) | Officials | Price |
|-----------------------|--|-----------|---------|
| Heathrow | 381.13 | N/A | 381.13 |
| Washington | 2117.85 | N/A | 2117.85 |
| New York | 980.00 | N/A | 980.00 |
| Cardiff | 465.00 | 114.89 | 579.89 |
| Dublin | 435.34 | 285.61 | 720.95 |
| Dublin | 625.00 | 990.49 | 1615.49 |
| Birmingham | 645.00 | 215.00 | 860.00 |
| Dublin | 554.21 | 231.43 | 785.64 |
| London | 400.00 | - | 400.00 |
| Heathrow | 175.00 | | 175.00 |

| Location – all hotels | Price (Minister, PS and Special Adviser) | Officials | Price |
|-----------------------|--|-----------|---------|
| Dublin | 776.80 | 210.00 | 986.80 |
| London | 340.76 | 434.76 | 775.52 |
| London | 556.66 | 542.16 | 1098.82 |

Overall total for Minister, Private Secretary and Special Adviser: £8,452.75

Overall total for Officials: £3,024.34

Overall total for Accommodation: £11,477.09

Building Control Approvals in Ballymena

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if full building control approvals are in place for 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena.

(AQW 7389/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Information relating to Building Control approvals is not held by the Department, but rather is retained by District Councils. I would direct the Member to Ballymena Borough Council for information on that specific property.

Training for Success Contracts

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if Training For Success (TFS) contracts were awarded to Carter & Carter in 2007 despite the organisation not having arrangements in place to meet the requirements of the TFS tender to provide 'details of all sub-contractors and demonstrate how these arrangements can be delivered'.

(AQW 7717/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

The tender offer received from Carter & Carter provided details of proposed subcontracting and partnership arrangements which the organisation proposed to utilise in order to deliver the services under the Training for Success (TFS) programme if its tender was successful. An assessment panel of representatives from the Department for Employment and Learning assessed the information provided by Carter & Carter against a pre-agreed evaluation model and concluded that these arrangements would successfully deliver the services to the required standards of the TFS programme and that Carter & Carter had demonstrated that these arrangements could be delivered.

Training for Success Contracts

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment was undertaken by the Central Procurement Directorate of the ability of training organisations to undertake Training For Success (TFS) contracts awarded in 2007, in relation to the resources, facilities and equipment of the Training Organisation and to ensure that staff were trained and qualified to deliver TFS frameworks. (AQW 7718/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Central Procurement Directorate is responsible for the management of the procurement process on behalf of its clients to ensure these processes are open, transparent, and legally compliant and deliver value for money. It is the client's responsibility to agree the requirements and the evaluation criteria along with assessment of tenders against its agreed criteria and requirements.

Training for Success Contracts

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps were taken by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to assess the ability of training organisations, with no previous involvement in Northern Ireland, to fulfil Training For Success (TFS) contracts under the tender process for TFS in 2007; and whether providing references is a minimum requirement of the CPD assessment. (AQW 7719/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The ability of all organisations tendering for Training for Success (TFS) contracts was assessed by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) using predetermined criteria, which were published in the invitation to tender. These criteria were:

- Relevant experience of the organisation/partnership in successfully delivering services of a similar nature;
- Organisation/partnership resources in terms of staffing and premises to deliver the provision; and
- Methodology to deliver the services required as detailed in the Terms of Reference.

Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) has no policy of using references as a minimum requirement for tender evaluation.

Training for Success Contracts

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the Central Procurement Directorate, in conducting a tender exercise for the award of Training For Success (TFS) contracts in 2007, awarded a contract to a training organisation when

the organisation had not tendered for the contract, an outcome confirmed to the Committee for Employment and Learning by Belfast Metropolitan College at a TFS Inquiry Evidence session on 8 April 2008. (AQW 7720/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) did not award any Training for Success contracts to any training organisations that did not tender for the contract.

However, in two categories the tenders received did not satisfy the minimum quality standards and in accordance with Procurement Regulations the negotiated tender procedure was used with the original tenderers in those categories, to secure the provision of a service that satisfied the required quality standards.

Training for Success Contracts

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will conduct a review of the procurement exercise in relation to the award of Training For Success (TFS) contracts in 2007, given (i) the failure of the Central Procurement Directorate to undertake rigorous assessment of the capacity of organisations to deliver on contracts, (ii) the awarding of contracts when sub-contracting proposed by training organisations was not in place when the contract was awarded, and (iii) the awarding of contracts to a training organisation when the training organisation had not submitted a tender. (AQW 7721/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not see a need to conduct a formal review of the procurement exercise in relation to the awarding of Training for Success contracts in 2007. Central Procurement Directorate's procurement procedures are quality assured to ISO 9001:2000 standard, which requires a review of the procurement process to be undertaken to identify lessons learnt in the interests of continuous improvement.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7729/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: £84,685.56 has been spent on fuel for vehicles owned by the Department.

The Department has not leased any vehicles since devolution.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many cars are (a) owned; and (b) leased, by the Department, and for each car, its (i) make and model; (ii) engine size; (iii) type of fuel used; (iv) fuel efficiency; and (v) purpose.

(AQW 7732/08)

| Make and Model | No of vehicles | Engine size | Fuel | Efficiency | CO2 | Purpose |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-----|---|
| Skoda Superb | 14 | 1958cc | Diesel | 54 mpg | 169 | Ministerial & senior official Transport |
| Peugeot 607 | 2 | 2179cc | Diesel | 40 mpg | 193 | Ministerial Transport |
| Toyota Prius | 2 | 1497cc | Petrol/Hybrid | 54 mpg | 104 | Transportation of officials |
| Volkswagen Caravelle People Carrier | 1 | 2461 | Diesel | 35.8 | 257 | Transportation of Ministerial and official groups |

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are currently 19 cars owned by the Department of Finance and Personnel. Details on the make and model, engine size, type of fuel used, fuel efficiency and purpose are provided in the attached table.

The Department currently leases no cars.

Use of Aircraft in the Stormont Estate

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if any restrictions on the use of aircraft in the grounds of the Stormont Estate are in place.

(AQW 7832/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is our understanding that the airspace over the Stormont Estate is not restricted. Any private aircraft wishing to land in the Stormont Estate must conform to Civil Aviation Authority protocols and also gain permission from the Estate Management Unit (EMU) within DFP. Landings are normally restricted to military and VIP landings and all must use the designated landing areas.

EMU have had only one request since devolution and this was from the deputy First Minister on Thursday 5th June 2008.

All Landing areas within the Stormont Estate conform to strict RAF standards and have been approved by the RAF for use. Each site has fire extinguishers and is closed off before landing to ensure the safety of both the helicopter and passers-by. During landing EMU staff, equipped with the necessary high visibility clothing, ensure that passers-by cannot get near the landing aircraft. During take off staff ensure the safety of those on the ground by imposing the required cordon round the aircraft.

Use of Aircraft in the Stormont Estate

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if any requests have been received for the landing of aircraft in the grounds of the Stormont Estate since the restoration of devolution.

(AQW 7833/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is our understanding that the airspace over the Stormont Estate is not restricted. Any private aircraft wishing to land in the Stormont Estate must conform to Civil Aviation Authority protocols and also gain permission from the Estate Management Unit (EMU) within DFP. Landings are normally restricted to military and VIP landings and all must use the designated landing areas.

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Use of Aircraft in the Stormont Estate

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what health and safety measures are put in place (i) prior to landing; (ii) during landing and (iii) during take off, of an aircraft in the grounds of the Stormont Estate.

(AQW 7834/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is our understanding that the airspace over the Stormont Estate is not restricted. Any private aircraft wishing to land in the Stormont Estate must conform to Civil Aviation Authority protocols and also gain permission from the Estate Management Unit (EMU) within DFP.

Landings are normally restricted to military and VIP landings and all must use the designated landing areas.

EMU have had only one request since devolution and this was from the deputy First Minister on Thursday 5th June 2008.

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Loans and Mortgages

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will hold discussions with credit and finance companies to ensure they make provision for customers who use townland addresses rather than street addresses when applying for loans and mortgages. (AQW 8036/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department is aware of the difficulties that are being encountered by householders who use townland, rather than street addresses. The naming and numbering of properties, however, is a matter for local authorities. I am willing to consider proposals from relevant local authorities to overcome these difficulties.

Rate Collection Agency

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the elements taken into account by the Rate Collection Agency when assessing the rateable value of a dwelling; if (i) the actual footprint of the property; or (ii) the conversion of a roof space to provide extra rooms, are included; and if these matters are clearly notified to householders by the Rate Collection Agency. (AQW 8046/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The elements taken into account by Land and Property Services (LPS) (incorporating the former Rate Collection Agency) when assessing the rateable value of a dwelling are detailed on the LPS website at www.lpsni.gov.uk. The most important factors are size, location, type (for example, detached, semi-detached, terrace) grade of construction, external repair, existence of garaging, services connected, and site factors which influence value, such as proximity to a waste tip or having a sea view.

- i. The total gross floor area (measured externally) of all habitable space is taken into account rather than the actual footprint of the property.
- ii. The conversion of a roof space to provide extra rooms will increase the gross habitable floor area, and will be taken into account.

All ratepayers are notified in writing of any change to the capital value assessment. In addition, the LPS website provides details of the actual floor area used in the valuation assessment of each domestic property.

Departmental Electrical Equipment

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the number of blackberry devices the Department has purchased since devolution. (AQW 8105/08)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel has purchased 120 blackberry devices since May 2007.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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 (Mr McGimpsey): During each of the past three years my Department has awarded contracts for consultancy services which did not go out to public tender as follows:-

| | |
|---------|----|
| 2005/06 | 36 |
| 2006/07 | 36 |
| 2007/08 | 15 |

A brief description of each contract, alongside its value (expenditure) and to whom the contract was awarded, is recorded within the attached tables.

Information sought for the 2004/05 year is not held centrally and would require a special departmental wide exercise to be commissioned. It was therefore

considered that to collect information for 2004/05 would incur a disproportionate cost.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7562/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following health and social care organisations have operated without profit the following numbers for the indicated service:

| Organisation | Number | Service |
|-------------------------|--------------|---|
| South Eastern Trust | 0845 6032179 | Doctors on Call and District Nursing Out of Hours Lagan Valley Hospital |
| Northern Board | 0845 7626428 | Patient/Client Information Service |
| Northern Trust | 0845 6003111 | Centralized call system to arrange district nursing calls |
| Health Promotion Agency | 0845 6032500 | For members of public to report failure to comply with no smoking legislation |

Average Waiting Times in Accident and Emergency Wards

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the average waiting times are for people to be seen in Accident and Emergency wards, broken down by hospital. (AQW 7628/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6569/08, what plans he has to provide future funding of 'professional training programmes' and 'tailored one-off programmes', referred to in

his answer, for groups such as GPs in the area of dementia. (AQW 7645/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I explained in my earlier answer (AQW 6569/08), improving awareness of dementia will be a key part of the strategy for improving dementia services which is currently being prepared by my Department.

But until the training requirements have been identified and quantified, which will have to be done in conjunction with all the relevant health and social care stakeholders, and until an implementation plan has been agreed, which would include the estimated costs for the training programmes required, I will not be in a position to allocate specific funding for this purpose.

Psychotherapy Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to encourage the provision of psychotherapy in the Health and Social Care Trusts, as part of a bio-psychosocial approach in mental health services in an age-blind way. (AQW 7646/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is currently considering the best way to promote the development of a range of psychological therapies, in order to supplement the psychiatric and pharmacological interventions already available. I am aware that, as the Bamford Review noted, the prevalence of mental health disorders is relatively high in later life, and I will expect these new psychotherapy services, along with all the other interventions currently provided by our mainstream mental health services, to be available to everyone who requires them, solely on the basis of clinical need, and without any ageist basis.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6566/08, to comment on how the need for dementia respite is being met with the additional funding he acquired; and given the recent underspend of £55 million, what his future allocation of funding will be. (AQW 7648/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have made £1.85m available over the next three years to fund additional respite care for people with dementia. This would secure approximately 3,700 bed weeks of respite care, which Trusts would obtain from providers who meet the required standards. However, it is important that

support services are flexible and tailored to the particular circumstances of the person with dementia, and some of this funding could allow individuals with dementia to receive respite within their own homes in the way that best supports their domestic arrangements.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 5630/08, given the recent underspend of £55 million, what his future allocation of funding will be in relation to the 'awareness training' for GPs and other healthcare professionals in the area of pre-senile dementia. (AQW 7649/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Recognition of early onset dementia is an important component of the overall development of dementia awareness. My Department's strategy on improving dementia services will consider how best to deliver early onset awareness training, particularly for GPs, who usually make the initial assessment of the possibility of this condition. However, it will be included as an element of a balanced programme of dementia awareness training for all health and social care stakeholders. And, as I explained in reply to an associated question (AQW/7645/08), until all the training requirements have been identified and quantified, and until a costed implementation plan has been agreed, I will not be in a position to allocate specific funding for this purpose.

Dementia Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3776/08, given the recent underspend of £55 million, what his future allocation of funding will be in relation to dementia care in the context of an increasing elderly population. (AQW 7650/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware that, on current projections, the increasing life expectancy of our population will see a substantial increase in the numbers of people with dementia. However, if borne out, this expected increase will be progressive, not sudden, so I want to see a well thought out and measured approach to this issue. I have begun this process by commissioning the development of a strategy on improving dementia care, in train with the implementation of the Bamford Review recommendations, which will be informed by the experience of all the health and social care stakeholders involved in this area.

As an immediate measure, I have made £1.85m available over the next three years to fund additional respite places for people with dementia.

Services for Individuals at Risk of Self-Harm

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4693/08, and given the recent underspend of £55 million, what his future allocation of funding will be in relation to services for individuals at risk of self-harm. (AQW 7685/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I said in my response to AQW 4693/08, I am very concerned about the level of services for individuals at risk of self harm.

Responsibility for the assessment of the need for these services rests with the Health and Social Services Boards, who commission such provision from the Health and Social Care Trusts or the independent sector. I am encouraging the Boards and Trusts to use some of the additional funds allocated for mental health through the Comprehensive Spending Review for the development of self-harm services over the next 3 years, where such need has been identified.

Overall in 2007-08 DHSSPS under spent against its estimated DEL revenue outcome budget by £55m which is 1.4% of our Budget. This was better than all but one other Department.

The Capital underspend is 1.5% which is an excellent outcome representing good management of the Budget and strong discipline by Trusts. This is significantly better than any other Department.

The main reason for the revenue underspend is that the service has been more successful than expected in increasing the use of generic drugs and reducing drugs expenditure. The spend against the drugs budget was some £20m less than expected. The net underspend against budget for all Health and Social Care (HSC) expenditure was £29.3m (or 1%) and arose as a result of delays in recruitment of staff and/or opening of new facilities.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were admitted to each hospital with clostridium difficile in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2008. (AQW 7686/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available. For Trusts, the information available for this time period through the mandatory surveillance

scheme for *Clostridium difficile* is the total number of patients aged 65 years and over from whom a diarrhoeal specimen tested positive for *C. difficile* toxin during the relevant time period. It has not been possible to identify how many of these patients were admitted to hospital with *C. difficile*.

Childhood Leukaemia

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the incidence of

childhood leukaemia over the last ten years, broken down by (i) health board area; and (ii) age group.

(AQW 7703/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The tables below detail the number of incidences of childhood leukaemia in Northern Ireland overall by health board area and age group over the last ten years. Incidences of all Leukaemia (ICD-10 C91-C95) and Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia (ICD-10 C91 only) are detailed.

TABLE 1: INCIDENCE OF CHILDHOOD LEUKAEMIA IN NI, FOR THE YEARS 1996-2005 INCLUSIVE

| Age bands | Eastern Health Board | | Northern Health Board | | Southern Health Board | | Western Health Board | |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | All Leukaemia | Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia | All Leukaemia | Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia | All Leukaemia | Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia | All Leukaemia | Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia |
| 0 to 4 | 26 | 17 | 16 | 11 | 17 | 14 | 14 | 12 |
| 5 to 9 | 18 | 14 | 14 | 14 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| 10 to 14 | 11 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 6 | <5 |

Notes:

1. To protect the anonymity of individuals, where cells contain less than 5 incidences, they are labelled as "<5".
2. Childhood includes any patient that is under 15 years of age.
3. Acute Lymphoid Leukaemia is the most common form of Leukaemia and also has the worst survival rate.

This information was provided by the NI Cancer Registry and is the most up-to-date available.

Doctor-On-Call Service in the Ards Borough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the doctor-on-call service in the Ards Borough will be reduced to one vehicle; and why the availability hours of this service are only from 11pm to 1pm the following afternoon.

(AQW 7706/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust GP Out of Hours Service, having consulted with GP representatives, have made a number of minor operational changes to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness during the hours after 10pm, when the call volumes to the service are significantly lower.

The Trust has made a slight adjustment to the number of doctors working from the out of hours centre after 10pm each evening. However, the hours of cover and number of vehicles available for home visits has remained unchanged - there are also doctors on standby to cover contingencies. Furthermore, the Trust has reinvested the savings arising from these operational changes to increase the number of doctors available during busier times in the out of hours period, for example weekend mornings and public holidays.

There will be no reduction in services for patients within the Ards Borough area who will continue to receive telephone advice from a doctor (65% of patients contacting the service are managed in this manner), the opportunity to attend a doctor at the Out of Hours Centre at Ards Hospital (24% of patients) or, where appropriate, a home visit (11% of patients) during the Out of Hours period.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will monitor the impact of these minor operational changes to ensure they continue to provide a high quality, safe, effective and efficient service to patients.

In the last two years, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust GP Out of Hours Service (formerly known as Doctor on Call) has conducted 9602 consultations for patients in the BT22 postcode area and 28203 consultations for patients in the BT23 area.

Doctor-On-Call Service in the Ards Borough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have used the doctor-on-call service in the Ards Borough over the last two years.

(AQW 7708/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust GP Out of Hours Service, having consulted with GP representatives, have made a number of minor operational changes to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness during the hours after 10pm, when the call volumes to the service are significantly lower.

The Trust has made a slight adjustment to the number of doctors working from the out of hours centre after 10pm each evening. However, the hours of cover and number of vehicles available for home visits has remained unchanged - there are also doctors on standby to cover contingencies. Furthermore, the Trust has reinvested the savings arising from these operational changes to increase the number of doctors available during busier times in the out of hours period, for example weekend mornings and public holidays.

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Doctor-On-Call Service in the Ards Borough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the out of hours doctor-on-call service at the Ards hospital has been reduced by one hour for each vehicle. (AQW 7709/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust GP Out of Hours Service, having consulted with GP representatives, have made a number of minor operational changes to improve efficiency and cost effectiveness during the hours after 10pm, when the call volumes to the service are significantly lower.

The Trust has made a slight adjustment to the number of doctors working from the out of hours centre after 10pm each evening. However, the hours of cover and number of vehicles available for home visits has remained unchanged - there are also doctors

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Rehabilitation Services to Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the continuing professional development of staff providing rehabilitation services to blind and partially sighted people. (AQW 7711/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Continuous professional development of rehabilitation workers includes:

- (a) regional arrangements that identify and provide a minimum of two specifically tailored training programmes each year for staff providing rehabilitation services to blind and partially-sighted people;
- (b) access to in-service training opportunities, based on individual learning needs, to enhance knowledge and skills in working with adults or children in need;
- (c) a new regional Sensory Impairment Training Strategy is currently being developed.

Homes Near High Voltage Power Lines

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any reports or evidence which indicate that homes built within 60 metres of high voltage power lines pose health risks for residents of such homes. (AQW 7713/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2004, the National Radiological Protection Board (now the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency) recommended the adoption in the UK of guidelines from the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection for limiting exposures to Extremely Low Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields (ELF EMFs). This was backed up by a thorough review of the relevant scientific evidence. This advice remains extant and is couched in terms of time weighted average levels of electric and magnetic field rather than distance from any particular appliance or installation.

The evidence to date suggests that in general there are no adverse effects on the health of the population of the UK caused by exposure to ELF EMFs below the guideline levels.

Health Professionals in the North-West

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent resignations from Altnagelvin Hospital and the lack of dentistry care in the North West, what measures his Department employs to attract and retain high-calibre health professionals to the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7714/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and retention of staff is a matter for individual Health and Social Care Trusts, taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources. The Western HSC Trust has advised that work has begun on the recruitment process to fill the recently vacated consultant posts at Altnagelvin.

My Department does not have responsibility for the recruitment and retention of staff at Trust level, but has a role in ensuring that sufficient suitably qualified and trained staff are available to meet the overall regional needs of the health and personal social services.

To help maintain a supply of suitably qualified staff, 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. Work is also underway with the 4 HSC Boards to develop a tender to recruit additional dentists in areas where patients are experiencing problems in accessing health service dentists, which includes areas in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. It is hoped to tender for these additional dentists during the summer of 2008.

Training levels and the supply and demand for all health professionals are monitored as part of the

Department's ongoing programme of Workforce Planning reviews.

Agenda for Change

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there will be consistency in banding and consequent pay levels for all employees who carry out the same roles and responsibilities, including all homecare manager positions, under the Agenda for Change process in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7715/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes, under the Agenda for Change arrangements there will be consistency in pay for those who carry out jobs that have the same level of responsibility. In the Northern Health and Social Care Trust all jobs were assigned to an Agenda for Change pay band based on the information contained in the job descriptions, personnel specifications and comments sheets completed by the individual staff members. The difference in the grading of homecare managers reflects the different responsibilities in each job and confirms that comparisons made solely on job titles or perceived responsibilities are not reliable.

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his reasons for the possible closure of the Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital, given the recent media reports that the system is already under huge strain. (AQW 7723/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The proposed transfer of inpatient obstetrics from Lagan Valley Hospital is one part of a range of proposals submitted by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to achieve 3% efficiency targets per annum across the comprehensive spending review (CSR) period in line with Executive agreement.

This particular proposal is consistent with my Department's strategy for the development of acute hospital services in Northern Ireland Developing Better Services, which set out requirements for safe maternity services and indicated that there would be nine consultant-led maternity units located in acute hospitals. Lagan Valley Hospital was identified as a local hospital and would not be expected to provide consultant-led maternity services in the longer term.

I will not be making decisions on the South Eastern Trust's proposals for the future of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital until the implications for

patients, staff and the wider health system are clearly established.

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on the residents of Craigavon and West Belfast if the Lagan Valley Hospital were to close its Maternity Unit. (AQW 7724/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would expect Boards and Trusts to fully assess the impact of any proposed changes to the current provision of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital before I take any decision.

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the concerns expressed by representatives of the Royal College of Midwives and the Chair of the Regional Group of Maternity Liaison Committees, in relation to any possible change in the status of the Lagan Valley Hospital Maternity Unit. (AQW 7725/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not received any direct representations from the Royal College of Midwives or the Chair of the Regional Group of Maternity Liaison Committees about the maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital, although I am aware of concerns expressed by them in the media.

As I have indicated previously, ensuring safe and effective maternity services is one of my key priorities and I will not be making decisions on the future provision of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital until the implications for patients, staff and the wider health system are clearly established.

Planned Caesarean Sections

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many planned caesarean sections were carried out at each maternity unit, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7726/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the number of planned caesarean sections that were carried out in each maternity unit in Northern Ireland in the last three calendar years.

| Hospital | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Altnagelvin | 288 | 284 | 363 |
| Antrim | 337 | 400 | 383 |
| Causeway | 142 | 127 | 139 |
| Craigavon Area | 486 | 525 | 648 |
| Daisy Hill | 243 | 250 | 268 |
| Erne | 172 | 153 | 208 |
| Lagan Valley | 73 | 74 | 77 |
| Mater | 177 | 156 | 171 |
| Mid-Ulster | 43 | 60 | 0 |
| Royal Jubilee Maternity Service | 852 | 855 | 961 |
| Ulster | 258 | 250 | 288 |
| Northern Ireland | 3071 | 3134 | 3506 |

Source: Child Health System

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his assessment of the additional expenditure that would be incurred through the expansion of the maternity units at Craigavon Area Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital, in comparison to the savings to be made through the proposed closure of Lagan Valley Hospital Maternity Unit. (AQW 7727/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ensuring safe and effective maternity services to the population of Northern Ireland is one of my key priorities. I would expect Boards and Trusts to assess the financial implications of any proposed changes to the current provision of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital before I take any decision.

However decisions on the future provision of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital will not be based on financial considerations alone. The quality and safety of care to be provided to mothers and their babies will be overriding factor.

Ambulance Station at John Street in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to replace the ambulances in the Ambulance Station at John Street, Newtownards. (AQW 7737/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have made available some £14.5 million for capital funding to modernise the

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) fleet, estate, equipment and IT infrastructure during the Comprehensive Spending Review period to 2011. NIAS has advised me that it plans to spend £10.4 million of this amount on its fleet replacement programme subject, of course, to the submission and appropriate approval of business cases to support the expenditure.

NIAS's fleet is managed as a regional resource and the programme of replacement will take account of local factors specific to Newtownards Ambulance Station such as the age and condition of its existing vehicles.

Front Line Children's Services

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the outcome of the discussions with Playboard in relation to front line children's services. (AQW 7738/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: DHSSPS involvement for the support of afterschool provision with regard to Children and Young People's 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 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.

While I do not consider that these projects come under my area of responsibility, I am not prepared to see them abandoned as they play a valuable role in helping to support children and their families. I have therefore decided that I will extend this funding from 30 June 2008 until the end of this calendar year. I understand that discussions will be on-going in relation to where departmental responsibility for childcare and these projects lie.

This arrangement will give the after school projects time to plan for their future.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the reasons for the delay in the ambulance attending the emergency request at 77 Portaferry Road, Cloughy, on 24 December 2007. (AQW 7739/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the answer I gave to AQW 6964/2008, I stated that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) received an emergency call for this address on 25 December 2007. It has now been brought to my attention by NIAS that the

call was indeed received on 24 December 2007 and I apologise to the member for any inconvenience caused by this error. However, in all other aspects, the details of my previous answer remain the same.

Free Prescriptions

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many free prescriptions have been processed in the last three years. (AQW 7746/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The numbers of prescription items dispensed free of charge for the last three years are detailed below. These figures comprise prescription items dispensed to people who hold a prepayment certificate and to those who are exempt from paying. It is not possible to provide separate figures.

| Year | Prescriptions Exempt |
|------|----------------------|
| 2007 | 28,978,576 |
| 2006 | 27,506,634 |
| 2005 | 26,334,169 |

Prozac Prescriptions

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many prescriptions have been issued for Prozac; and (ii) how much this has cost the Health Service, in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 7757/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is only available for the last eight years.

| Year | Prozac Prescriptions | Cost |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 2000 | 105348 | £2,732,917.09 |
| 2001 | 47909 | £1,328,108.98 |
| 2002 | 29,286 | £701,096.00 |
| 2003 | 23,961 | £612,554.59 |
| 2004 | 20,110 | £537,967.00 |
| 2005 | 13,780 | £403,052.70 |
| 2006 | 8756 | £275,142.29 |
| 2007 | 5290 | £161,924.00 |
| Totals | 254,440 | £6,752,762.65 |

The main reasons for the decrease in the number and cost of prescriptions for Prozac since 2000 are the introduction and increased prescribing of the generic

versions of the drug. It should not be taken from this that the need for drugs such as Prozac has diminished over the period detailed above.

Stomach Stapling Operations

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many obesity related stomach stapling operations have been performed in each of the last five years; and how much it has cost the Health Service to carry out these operations.
(AQW 7758/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Over the last five years from 2002/2003 to 2006/2007 there have been less than five obesity related stomach stapling operations, also known as bariatric surgery, carried out in Northern Ireland.

Total expenditure on obesity related stomach stapling operations for the past five years, is not available.

Cremation Fees

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to remove fees for the release of a body for cremation.
(AQW 7762/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to my previous answer to AQW 7185/08.

Prosecutions for Selling Tobacco to Underage Customers

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling tobacco products to underage customers in each year since 2005, broken down by district council area; and to detail the fines issued in each case.
(AQW 7763/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Details of prosecutions for sales of tobacco products to underage customers in each year since 2005, broken down by district council and the fines imposed, are shown in the following table.

| Council | Prosecutions 2005 | Fines 2005 | Prosecutions 2006 | Fines 2006 | Prosecutions 2007 | Fines 2007 |
|---------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| Belfast | - | - | 1 | £300 | - | - |

| Council | Prosecutions 2005 | Fines 2005 | Prosecutions 2006 | Fines 2006 | Prosecutions 2007 | Fines 2007 |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
| Craigavon | 2 | £150 & £250 | - | - | - | - |
| Ballymena | 1 | £200 | - | - | - | - |
| Cookstown | 3 | £150, £200 & £300 | - | - | - | - |

My Department funded the appointment of 12 additional environmental health officers in 2007/08 to help councils enforce smoke-free legislation. Funding is ongoing and is now linked to enhanced enforcement activity in relation to underage sales.

Figures available so far for 2008 show that Belfast City Council has taken 1 prosecution with the retailer fined £50. Magherafelt District Council has taken 7 prosecutions with 2 retailers fined £100 each, 3 fined £250 each and 2 given conditional discharges. In addition, a further 14 prosecutions are under consideration by councils.

Maternity Units

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the maximum number of women that could be accommodated at any one time in each of the maternity units.
(AQW 7772/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total number of beds in maternity units in Northern Ireland is 410. Consequently, the number of women that can be accommodated at any one time in each of the maternity units in N. Ireland is as follows:

| Maternity Unit | Maximum numbers |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Royal Jubilee Maternity Service | 88 |
| Mater Hospital | 22 |
| Altnagelvin Area Hospital | 45 |
| Erne Hospital | 34 |
| Antrim Area Hospital | 58 |
| Causeway Hospital | 27 |
| Ulster Hospital | 39 |
| Lagan Valley Hospital | 19 |
| Craigavon Area Hospital | 51 |

| Maternity Unit | Maximum numbers |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Daisy Hill Hospital | 27 |

These numbers are inclusive of antenatal, postnatal and labour beds. Capacity is calculated by using information such as bed numbers, case mix, interventions and length of stay. Consequently, capacity can change as clinical practice changes.

Maternity Units

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints were received at each of the maternity units in 2006-2007.

(AQW 7773/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of complaints received by each of the maternity units in the period 1 April 2006 – 31 March 2007 is as follows:

| Maternity Unit | Number of complaints |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Antrim Area Hospital | 7 |
| Mid Ulster Hospital | 3 |
| Causeway Hospital | 8 |
| Ulster Hospital | 12 |
| Lagan Valley | 5 |
| Altnagelvin Area Hospital | 12 |
| Erne Hospital | 3 |
| Craigavon Area Hospital | 30 |
| Daisy Hill Hospital | 16 |
| Royal Jubilee Maternity Service | 21 |
| Mater Hospital | 0 |
| Total | 117 |

Births in Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many births there were at Daisy Hill hospital in each of the last five years; and what is the maximum number of births the maternity unit could accommodate in a year.

(AQW 7774/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of births at Daisy Hill Hospital in each of the last five financial years is given in the table below.

| Year | Number of Births |
|---------|------------------|
| 2003/04 | 1,820 |
| 2004/05 | 1,931 |
| 2005/06 | 1,908 |
| 2006/07 | 2,010 |
| 2007/08 | 2,200 |

Source: Child Health System.

Information on the maximum number of births the maternity unit could accommodate in a year is unavailable.

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria he will use when making a decision on the possible closure of the maternity unit at Lagan Valley Hospital.

(AQW 7775/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The proposed transfer of inpatient obstetrics from Lagan Valley Hospital is one part of a range of proposals submitted by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to achieve 3% efficiency targets per annum across the comprehensive spending review (CSR) period in line with Executive agreement.

This particular proposal is consistent with my Department's strategy for the development of acute hospital services in Northern Ireland Developing Better Services, which set out requirements for safe maternity services and indicated that there would be nine consultant-led maternity units located in acute hospitals. Lagan Valley Hospital was identified as a local hospital and would not be expected to provide consultant-led maternity services in the longer term.

I will not be making decisions on the South Eastern Trust's proposals for the future of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital until all the implications for patients, staff and the wider health system are clearly established.

Maternity Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a decision will be made on the future of the Lagan Valley Hospital maternity unit.

(AQW 7776/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I will not be making decisions on the South Eastern Trust's proposal to transfer inpatient obstetric services from Lagan Valley Hospital until all the implications for patients, staff and the wider health system are clearly established.

Respite Care

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people aged 18 and over currently receive respite services in care homes primarily intended for use by older people in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 7802/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested.

Respite Care

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many of the 400 young people on waiting lists for respite care, indicated in July 2007, have now reached the age of 18 and must now avail of adult services; and to provide an update on the figures provided in July 2007 for respite services for young people.

(AQW 7803/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

The figure of 400, quoted in the Assembly in 2007 was an estimated figure provided as part of a larger piece of work carried out to give a snapshot of respite services at that point in time.

Respite Care

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many young people aged 18 and over are currently on waiting lists for respite care in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 7804/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available centrally on the number of young people aged 18 and over waiting for respite care in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas.

Respite Care

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much additional funding he allocated for respite care for young people with special needs for the financial years 2007-08 and 2008-09; and how many additional places does this represent.

(AQW 7805/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to detail the specific

additional expenditure spent on respite in 2007/08 as this information is not held centrally.

I have secured £7m from the Comprehensive Spending Review for learning disability services in 2008/09. Some of this funding will be used to provide an additional 50 new or enhanced respite packages for people with learning difficulties. This will provide respite for a minimum of 200 people.

A further £1m has been secured in 2008/09 for physical and sensory disability services and part of this funding will be used to provide an additional 50 new or enhanced respite packages for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities and their carers/families.

These additional respite packages will benefit children, young people and adults. It is not possible to provide separate information for each of these groups.

Smear Test Results

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how long it should take for smear test results to be received.

(AQW 7889/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Cervical Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is currently subject to a clinical standard which states that 80% of women should have received their results of a smear in writing within 4 weeks, with 100% receiving results within 6 weeks.

Removal of Administrative Posts

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many administrative posts are to be removed in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area, broken down by (i) senior manager level; and (ii) all other posts.

(AQW 7940/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Final figures are not available at this point in time.

Patient Notes in Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patient notes have been lost or mislaid in Altnagelvin Hospital in each of the last three years.

(AQW 7941/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held.

Departmental Underspend

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services will be affected as a result of a £54.8 million underspend by his Department. (AQW 7942/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My objective is to ensure that all available resources are fully spent in the most efficient and effective way possible.

While underspending was not contained within the 1% target this year, I am pleased to note that our underspend of 1.4% was better than all but one other Department. The Health and Social Care bodies have again shown that they can maintain financial discipline, achieve breakeven, deliver on challenging targets and provide services more efficiently.

The main reason for the revenue underspend falling outside the 1% target is that the service has been more successful than expected in increasing the use of generic drugs and reducing drugs expenditure. The spend against the drugs budget was some £20m less than expected. I welcome this reduction in prescription costs but would have wished to have had an earlier indication of the success.

This has limited impact on services, as needs were simply met more economically. Even if identified in the last monitoring round, the underspending would have been returned to DFP for redistribution across all departments.

Departmental Underspend

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons for a £54.8 million underspend by his Department. (AQW 7943/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The objective for all Departments is to avoid overspend and to keep revenue underspends to within 1%. Overall in 2007-08 DHSSPS under spent against its estimated DEL revenue outcome budget by £54.8m which is 1.4% of our Budget.

There are a number of factors which have contributed to this underspend and two areas account for almost 90% of the total underspend.

The prescription drugs budget was underspent by some £20m which is just over one third of the total 2007/08 underspend and is due to of the Health Service being more successful than expected in increasing the use of generic drugs and therefore reducing drugs expenditure. While I would have liked to have kept the underspend within the target

of 1%, I welcome the reduction in the expenditure on prescription drugs.

The second area is an underspend of £29.3m on the Health and Social Care (HSC) budget, which represents about 1% of the total allocated budget. This has arisen mainly because of delays in the recruitment of staff and opening of new facilities.

The remaining 10% of the total underspend is associated with underspends in the ring fenced areas of pharmaceutical remuneration, HSC training and the GP contract which have been partially offset by an overspend on the amount required to provide for future clinical negligence claims.

Departmental Underspend

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address high underspends within his Department. (AQW 7944/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not have high underspends compared to other Departments. The objective for all Departments is to keep revenue underspends to within 1%. Overall in 2007-08 DHSSPS under spent against its estimated DEL revenue outcome budget by £55m which is 1.4% of our Budget. This was better than all but one other Department.

The Capital underspend is 1.5% which is an excellent outcome representing good management of the Budget and strong discipline by Trusts. This is significantly better than any other Department.

There is of course room for improvement and, for 2008-09 I have strengthened the performance management arrangements for HSC bodies - setting a PfA target for a minimum of 90% of new service development monies to be spent as intended in the CSR. Budget holders have also been advised that they should return any easements early in the year so that they can be re-utilised for other priorities in health and social care.

Osteoporosis Sufferers

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 7401/08, to confirm what alternative treatment, other than Alendronate, is available for osteoporosis sufferers in the Health Service. (AQW 7994/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Drug interventions for osteoporosis may include calcium and vitamin D supplements bisphosphonates, strontium ranelate, raloxifene,

calcitonin and parathyroid hormone. Alendronate belongs to the group of drugs called bisphosphonates. If a patient has not tolerated the first one tried, an alternative bisphosphonate may be prescribed. If these are unsuitable, patients may be considered for other drug treatments, as recommended by their GP/healthcare professional in consultation with the patient and based upon the best evidence available.

Internal and Home Transfer of Patients

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide statistical information on the frequency of internal and home transfer of patients in the (i) Northern Health Board area; and (ii) Altnagelvin Hospital site, by (a) intensive care vehicles; and (b) patient care service vehicles, which are stationed at Omagh, in each of the last 6 months. (AQW 8029/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) provides patient transport, such as inter-hospital transfers or hospital discharges, using patient care service (PCS) or intermediate care service (ICS) vehicles. PCS vehicles normally transport patients who are mobile while ICS vehicles transport patients with mobility difficulties or who need clinical intervention, such as oxygen therapy, but not paramedical care.

The table below shows inter-hospital transfers and discharges in the Northern Health and Social Services Board (NHSSB) area and from Altnagelvin Hospital carried out by NIAS's PCS and ICS vehicles based in Omagh during the period ended 31 May 2008. NIAS's records do not differentiate between PCS and ICS vehicle activity.

NHSSB

| | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Total |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Discharges | 0 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 3 | 20 |
| Inter-hospital transfers | 5 | 4 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 26 |

ALTNAGELVIN HOSPITAL

| | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Total |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Discharge | 6 | 21 | 12 | 13 | 4 | 14 | 70 |
| Inter-hospital transfers | 25 | 31 | 26 | 15 | 15 | 17 | 129 |

GP Surgery in Trillick Enterprise Centre

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the assessment of potential premises for a GP surgery in Trillick Enterprise Centre has concluded; what is the outcome of this assessment; and to confirm whether the Trillick surgery will be operational in early 2009. (AQW 8103/08)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Officials in the Western Health and Social Services Board have advised that the planning application for the proposed premises has been submitted to Omagh District Council for the conversion of the building at the rear of the Trillick Enterprise Centre and subject to the planning permission being granted, the Board expect that the premises would be operational early in 2009.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

M1/Westlink Road Improvement Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the M1/Westlink Road Improvement scheme. (AQW 7552/08)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that the M1/Westlink Improvement Scheme is progressing well. The contracted completion date remains as August 2009, however, the contractor is currently ahead of programme.

You will be aware that the new underpass and slip roads at the Grosvenor Road junction have been completed and were opened to the public in March 2008.

The new pedestrian footbridge erected over the Westlink, at the Roden Street junction, also opened to the public in March 2008, while the segregated busway between Broadway and Roden Street is on target for completion later this month, with alterations to Roden Street/Mulhouse Road junction with Westlink expected to be completed this summer.

The improvement works at Stockman's Lane junction have been completed and the new road layout was opened to the public in May 2008. These works include the construction of two new bridges to carry the M1 over Stockman's Lane and the roundabout at this junction widened to create three circulating lanes. New traffic lights, including a pedestrian phase, making it safer for pedestrians to cross the junction between Stockman's Lane and Kennedy Way, have been installed and switched on.

The construction of the new Broadway underpass is expected to be completed this summer while the new Roundabout, and the on/off slip roads to connect the roundabout with the M1 and Westlink, are expected to be completed by spring 2009.

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, his Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7563/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The following 0845 telephone numbers are operated by, or on behalf of, the Department of Regional Development. There are no 0870 numbers operated by, or on behalf of, the Department.

| 0845 Number | Service |
|---|--|
| Travelwise Information Line - 0845 378 0908 | Roads Service's Travelwise initiative, launched in October 2003 to promote greater use of sustainable transport, operates a public information line. |
| Pay and Display Machine Fault Line – 0845 603 9337 | Operated by NCP Services Ltd on behalf of Roads Service - in connection with the provision of parking enforcement services |
| Roads Service Car-Parks, Customer Services – 0845 050 7080 | Operated by NCP Services Ltd on behalf of Roads Service - in connection with the provision of parking enforcement services |
| Penalty Charge Notice, Telephone Payment Line – 0845 260 6100 | Operated by Roads Service in connection with the provision of parking enforcement services. |
| Door to Door Transport Scheme – 0845 608 5555 | Operated by Chambers Coach Hire Limited on behalf of Ports & Public Transport Division in connection with Door to Door Transport |
| Concessionary fares Applications – 0845 600 0049 | Operated by Translink on behalf of Ports & Public Transport Division in connection with the provision of concessionary fares. |
| Waterline – 0845 744 0088 | Operated by Water Service in connection with operational contact and complaints. |
| Water Billing – 0845 877 0030 | Operated by Water Service in connection with non domestic bill payments, queries and complaints. |

All of the telephone numbers are charged at local rate and there is no profit generated for either

the Department of Regional Development or the operators.

Northern Ireland Water also provides two 0800 (free phone) numbers for

- Customers with Hearing Difficulties
- Leakline – customers reporting leaks

Water Meters

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it will cost a consumer to purchase a water meter outright. (AQW 7576/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there is no provision, under the current non-domestic metering and charging policy, for a customer to purchase a water meter outright from the water company.

In respect of domestic metering and household payments the Executive has not yet decided on a methodology by which payments will be made.

Water Meters

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development how much a water meter will cost; and the rent per year associated with its installation. (AQW 7578/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the cost of a water meter to the company is approximately £25 (excluding installation costs). Northern Ireland Water has also advised that a customer cannot pay for a water meter to be installed. If a water meter is installed on a customer's supply by Northern Ireland Water as part of the ongoing metering programme, the company will bear the cost of the meter and the installation work. The company also bears the maintenance cost of the meter. However, these costs are recovered from metered customers through the calculation of metered charges in the annual price tariff setting process.

As I explained in response to (AQW 7576/08) the Executive has not yet decided on a methodology by which domestic household payments will be made.

Traffic Signal Installations for the Visually Impaired

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 6940/08, what plans his Department has to increase (i) the number; and (ii) the percentage, of traffic signal

installations with facilities for the visually impaired in Northern Division. (AQW 7611/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that, within Northern Division, all new traffic signal installations include facilities for the visually impaired. With the exception of a small number of rural traffic signals, an upgrading programme is ongoing to provide facilities for the visually impaired, on all of the remaining traffic signals that do not currently have this facility.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development if the directors of Northern Ireland Water will be offered bonuses. (AQW 7671/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: In view of the seriousness of the cost reapportionment issue I asked the Chairman and Board of NI Water to consider what action should be taken including whether it would be appropriate for the Directors of the company to be paid bonuses for 2007-08.

The Board has now recommended that Directors should not be paid bonuses for 2007-08.

Sight Lines on A and B Class Country Roads

Rev Dr Robert Coulter asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the statutory minimum distance required for sight lines on A class and B class country roads. (AQW 7672/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that determination of the distance required for sight lines is made in accordance with standards contained within 'Volume 6 Road Geometry Section 2 – Junctions' of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, or Planning Policy Statement 3 "Development Control: Roads Considerations" (PPS3), which refers to the Department's guidelines for vehicular accesses and Development Control Advice Note 15 - 2nd edition, "Vehicle Access Standards".

The guidelines and standards, including distances required for sightlines are set in relation to road category, traffic volumes, traffic speed limits and perceived danger levels on both the priority road and adjoining minor road.

Taking account of the relaxations or departures from standard that Roads Service can accept, as well as the various factors required in assessing the minimum distances for sight lines, it is difficult to give an exact minimum distance without knowledge

of all the facts at any given location. In view of this I would suggest that the Member contacts the Divisional Roads Service Manager, Jim Beattie, County Hall, Castlerock Road, Coleraine, BT51 3HS for further guidance for a specific location.

Use of Biofuels in Public Transport Vehicles

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of public transport vehicles use bio fuels; and what plans his Department has to expand their use. (AQW 7696/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The procurement of fuel is an operational matter for public transport providers. From April of this year following extensive trials in 2007, Translink, the major provider of public transport services, has operated its entire bus fleet using a blend of 5% bio-fuel and 95% ultra low sulphur diesel.

Translink continue to closely monitor the future availability and sustainability of alternative blends of bio- fuel and diesel in conjunction with normal commercial considerations in the formulation of its fuel policy.

Bloody Bridge in Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the Bloody Bridge, Newcastle, is a strategic and public access point to the Mourne, if he will consider introducing a reduced speed limit and improved infrastructure at this location. (AQW 7697/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that an inspection of the carriageway in the vicinity of the Bloody Bridge indicates that it does not meet the necessary criteria for the introduction of a reduced speed limit.

The road infrastructure has also been inspected and is considered to be free of any major defects and overall in an acceptable condition.

Replacement of Old Street Lighting

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what the criteria is for the replacement of old street lighting. (AQW 7699/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am advised by my Department's Roads Service that the main criterion for the replacement of old street lighting is that the system has reached the end of its useful life, usually 25-30 years. This is generally

because the equipment has become obsolete or uneconomical to maintain.

Additional factors, such as the scheduling of other works, for example footway reconstruction, may influence the timing of street lighting renewal.

Roads Services in South Down

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the budget roads services in the South Down constituency, for the year 2008-09. (AQW 7702/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service develops its annual work programmes covering the development and maintenance of the network on a Council by Council basis. As you will be aware, the South Down constituency comprises part of Newry and Mourne, Banbridge and Down District Councils thus making it very difficult to produce figures on a constituency basis.

That said, I have recently announced the 2008/09 roads capital and maintenance investment figures for each of the three District Councils, in question, totalling £15.1 million. Using a pro rata calculation based on the percentage of each Council area, which also lies within the South Down constituency, it is estimated that approximately £10 million of this total investment will be spent within the South Down Constituency.

Departmental Car Parks

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all car parks remaining in his Department's ownership. (AQW 7722/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Details of car parks in my Department's ownership are provided by divisional area in the tables below.

SOUTHERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|----------|-------------------------|
| Ardglass | Quay Street |
| Armagh | Court House |
| Armagh | Lonsdale Road |
| Armagh | Friary Road West |
| Armagh | Ex Surgery Car Park |
| Armagh | Dobbin Street Lane |
| Armagh | Linenhall Street (Part) |
| Armagh | Friary Road East |

| Town | Location |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Armagh | Mall West (Part) |
| Ballyhalbert | Harbour Road |
| Ballyhalbert | Portavogie Road |
| Ballynahinch | Windmill Street |
| Ballynahinch | Antrim Road |
| Ballynahinch | Lisburn Street (NS) |
| Ballynahinch | Lisburn Street (SS) |
| Ballywalter | Springvale Road |
| Banbridge | Kenlis Court |
| Banbridge | Commercial Road |
| Banbridge | Downshire Place (Free) |
| Banbridge | Bridge Street |
| Banbridge | Townsend Street |
| Banbridge | Church Square |
| Banbridge | Downshire Road |
| Banbridge | Kenlis Street |
| Banbridge | Downshire Place (Paid) |
| Cloghy | Main Road |
| Clough | Clough Roundabout |
| Comber | Glen Link |
| Comber | Castle Street / Bridge Street |
| Comber | Killinchy Street |
| Comber | Newtownards Road |
| Crossgar | The Square |
| Donaghadee | Templepatrick Car Park |
| Donaghadee | Railway Street |
| Downpatrick | Mount Crescent |
| Downpatrick | Scotch Street |
| Downpatrick | Market Street |
| Downpatrick | Irish Street |
| Downpatrick | Church Street |
| Downpatrick | Meadowlands |
| Dromore | Gallows Street |
| Dromore | Meeting Street |
| Dromore | Cross Lane 1 |
| Dromore | Cross Lane 2 |
| Gilford | Castle Hill |
| Keady | Cow Fair |
| Keady | Glen Road |

| Town | Location |
|-----------|--------------------|
| Keady | Kinelowen Street |
| Kilkeel | Bridge Street |
| Kilkeel | Harbour Road |
| Kilkeel | Newry Street |
| Kilkeel | Ben Crom |
| Kircubbin | Shore Road |
| Kircubbin | The Green |
| Lurgan | Blacks Court |
| Lurgan | Moores Lane 1 |
| Lurgan | Moores Lane 2 |
| Lurgan | Moores Lane 3 |
| Lurgan | Alexandra Square 1 |
| Lurgan | Alexandra Square 2 |
| Lurgan | Castle Lane |
| Lurgan | Lough Road |
| Lurgan | Fosters Place |
| Lurgan | High Street |
| Lurgan | Wesley Place |
| Lurgan | Waring Street 1 |
| Lurgan | Waring Street 2 |
| Lurgan | Waring Street 3 |
| Lurgan | Robert Street |
| Millisle | Ballywalter Road |
| Millisle | Moss Road |
| Millisle | Ballywhiskin |
| Newcastle | Causeway Road |
| Newcastle | Shimna Road |
| Newry | Lower Water Street |
| Newry | Canal Bank 1 |
| Newry | Canal Bank 2 |
| Newry | Canal Bank 3 |
| Newry | Monaghan Street |
| Newry | River Street |
| Newry | New Street |
| Newry | Kilmorey Street |
| Newry | Bridge Street |
| Newry | Downshire Road |
| Newry | Basin Walk |
| Newry | Edward Street |

| Town | Location |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Newry | Mill Street |
| Newtownards | Old Cross Street West |
| Newtownards | Old Cross Street East |
| Newtownards | Upper Court Street |
| Newtownards | Mill Street |
| Newtownards | West Street |
| Newtownards | Ann Street |
| Newtownards | Talbot Street |
| Newtownards | South Street |
| Newtownards | South Street / Court Street |
| Newtownards | Mill St Gasworks South |
| Newtownards | Mill St Gasworks North |
| Newtownards | Kennel Lane |
| Portadown | River Bank |
| Portadown | Magowan Buildings (Free) |
| Portadown | Castle Street |
| Portadown | Foundry Street |
| Portadown | Fair Green |
| Portadown | Marley Street |
| Portadown | Meadow Lane West |
| Portadown | Magowan Buildings (Paid) |
| Portadown | Meadow Lane East |
| Portadown | William Street |
| Portadown | Wilson Street |
| Portadown | West Street |
| Portaferry | The Square |
| Portaferry | Meeting House Street |
| Rathfriland | Castle Street |
| Rathfriland | Downpatrick Street |
| Rostrevor | The Square |
| Saintfield | Downpatrick Street |
| Tandragee | Sinton Park |
| Warrenpoint | The Square |
| Warrenpoint | East Street |
| Warrenpoint | Kings Lane |
| Warrenpoint | Mary Street |
| Warrenpoint | Newry Street |

EASTERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Belfast | Charlotte Street |
| Belfast | Corporation Square |
| Belfast | Corporation Street |
| Belfast | Dunbar Street |
| Belfast | Exchange Street |
| Belfast | Frederick Street |
| Belfast | Hope Street North |
| Belfast | Kent Street |
| Belfast | Little Donegall Street |
| Belfast | Little Victoria Street |
| Belfast | Eastside (Middlepath Street) |
| Belfast | Northside |
| Belfast | Station Street |
| Belfast | York Street.1 (Lancaster Street) |
| Belfast | York Street.2 (Great Georges Street) |
| Belfast | Andersonstown Road |
| Belfast | Ashdale Street |
| Belfast | Dundela Crescent |
| Belfast | Grampian Street |
| Belfast | Madison Avenue East |
| Belfast | Marlborough Avenue |
| Belfast | Northumberland Street |
| Belfast | Parkgate Avenue |
| Belfast | Ravenscroft Avenue |
| Belfast | Sandown Road |
| Belfast | Shaws Bridge |
| Belfast | Wandsworth Road |
| Belfast | Westminster Avenue (East Side) |
| Belfast | Westminster Avenue (West Side) |
| Belfast | Westminster Avenue North |
| Belfast | Whitla Street |
| Lisburn | Antrim Street |
| Lisburn | Barrack Street |
| Lisburn | Governors Road |
| Lisburn | Laganbank Road |
| Lisburn | Longstone Street |
| Lisburn | Queens Road |
| Lisburn | Smithfield Square |

| Town | Location |
|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Lisburn | Benson Street |
| Lisburn | Quay Street |
| Lisburn | Saintfield Road. Roundabout |
| Lisburn | Union Bridge |
| Ballyclare | Harrier Way (Paid) |
| Ballyclare | Harrier Way (Free) |
| Carrickfergus | High Street |
| Carrickfergus | Lancastrian Street |
| Carrickfergus | St. Brides Street |
| Bangor | Abbey Street East |
| Bangor | Abbey Street West |
| Bangor | Bingham Lane |
| Bangor | Castle Street |
| Bangor | Clifton Road |
| Bangor | Holborn Avenue |
| Bangor | Mills Road |
| Bangor | The Vennel |
| Bangor | Central Avenue |
| Bangor | Dufferin Avenue |
| Bangor | Newtownards Road/Church Street |
| Holywood | Church Road |
| Holywood | Hibernia Street North |
| Holywood | Hibernia Street South |
| Glengormley | Beverley Road |
| Glengormley | Farmley Road |
| Whiteabbey | Shore Road |
| Whiteabbey | Whiteabbey Village |
| Dunmurray | Glenburn Road |
| Hillsborough | Ballynahinch Street |
| Moira | Main Street |
| Groomsport | Springwell Drive |

WESTERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Cookstown | Burn Road |
| Cookstown | Loy Street |
| Cookstown | Orritor Road |
| Cookstown | UnionPlace |
| Clogher | Main Street |

| Town | Location |
|----------------|--|
| Coalisland | Cornmill |
| Coalisland | Lineside |
| Dungannon | Castle Hill |
| Dungannon | Perry Street West |
| Dungannon | Perry Street East |
| Dungannon | Scotch Street North |
| Dungannon | Scotch Street South |
| Fivemiletown | Edfield Road |
| Fivemiletown | The Commons |
| Ballinamallard | Main Street |
| Enniskillen | Castle Park |
| Enniskillen | Derrychara Road |
| Enniskillen | Down Street/Market Street/Cross Street |
| Enniskillen | Eden Street |
| Enniskillen | Head Street |
| Enniskillen | Hollyhill Link |
| Enniskillen | Quay Lane North |
| Enniskillen | Quay Lane South |
| Enniskillen | Queen Street |
| Enniskillen | Shore Road East |
| Enniskillen | Wellington Place |
| Enniskillen | Gaol Square |
| Irvinestown | Brownhill |
| Irvinestown | Kesh Road |
| Kesh | Railway Street |
| Lisnaskea | New Bridge Road |
| Lisnaskea | Fair Green (Upper Tier only) |
| Lisnaskea | Old Quarry |
| Maguiresbridge | Tattinderry Road |
| Tempo | The Diamond |
| Carrickmore | Main Street |
| Dromore | Drumquin Road |
| Dromore | Main Street |
| Fintona | Main Street |
| Fintona | Town Centre |
| Omagh | Brook Street |
| Omagh | Campsie Road |
| Omagh | Castle Street |
| Omagh | Church Street North |

| Town | Location |
|----------------|--|
| Omagh | Church Street South |
| Omagh | Cunningham Terrace |
| Omagh | Drumragh Avenue |
| Omagh | Foundry Lane |
| Omagh | JohnstonPark |
| Omagh | Market Place |
| Omagh | Market Street |
| Omagh | New Brighton Terrace |
| Omagh | Old Mountfield Road |
| Castledawson | Castledawson Road |
| Castledawson | Hillhead Road |
| Maghera | St. Lurach's Road |
| Magherafelt | King Street |
| Magherafelt | Rainey Street |
| Magherafelt | Central (off King Street) |
| Magherafelt | Union Road |
| Magherafelt | Union Road (Free) |
| Castledearg | Albert Street |
| Castledearg | Meetinghouse Lane |
| Castledearg | William Street |
| Castledearg | Priests Lane |
| Dunnamanagh | Berryhill Road |
| Newtownstewart | Townhall Street West |
| Strabane | Bowling Green |
| Strabane | Butcher Street |
| Strabane | Canal Basin (Dock Street) |
| Strabane | Lower Main Street North |
| Strabane | Lower Main Street South |
| Strabane | Mill Street |
| Strabane | Railway Street (John Wesley Street) |
| Strabane | Upper Main Street |
| Strabane | Canal Basin (North) |

NORTHERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Ballycastle | Ann Street |
| Ballycastle | Castle Street |
| Ballycastle | Fairhill Street |
| Ballykelly | Glenhead Road |

| Town | Location |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Ballykelly | Main Street |
| Bushmills | Main Street |
| Coleraine | Abbey Street |
| Coleraine | Long Commons |
| Coleraine | Milburn Road |
| Coleraine | Railway Place |
| Coleraine | Railway Road |
| Coleraine | Terrace Row |
| Coleraine | Waterside |
| Garvagh | Bridge Street |
| Kilrea | Bridge Street |
| Limavady | Connell Street |
| Limavady | Central |
| Limavady | Main Street |
| Limavady | Protestant Street |
| Limavady | Ballyclose Street |
| Limavady | Bus Station |
| Limavady | Rathmore Road |
| Limavady | Limavady By-pass |
| Portrush | Dunluce Avenue |
| Portrush | Harbour Road |
| Portrush | Landsdown Crescent |
| Portstewart | Convention Avenue |
| Portstewart | Diamond |
| Portstewart | Lever Road |
| Antrim | Central |
| Antrim | Railway Street |
| Antrim | Castle Street |
| Antrim | Dublin Road |
| Antrim | Dunsilly |
| Randalstown | John Street |
| Randalstown | Portglenone Road |
| Randalstown | Ballygrooby |
| Templepatrick | Paradise Walk Roundabout |
| Toome | Drumderg Roundabout |
| Ballymena | Ballymoney Road |
| Ballymena | Church Street 1 |
| Ballymena | Church Street 2 |
| Ballymena | Church Street 3 |

| Town | Location |
|------------|---------------------------------|
| Ballymena | Broughshane Street 1 |
| Ballymena | Broughshane Street 2 |
| Ballymena | Town Centre Multi-storey |
| Ballymena | Harryville |
| Ballymena | Mount Street 1 |
| Ballymena | Mount Street 2 (Park St) |
| Ballymena | Ballee |
| Ahoghill | Ahoghill |
| Galgorm | Galgorm (including Raphael Way) |
| Ballymoney | Castle Street |
| Ballymoney | Church Street |
| Ballymoney | Cockpit Brae East |
| Ballymoney | Cockpit Brae West |
| Ballymoney | Dervock Road |
| Ballymoney | Gate End |
| Ballymoney | Townhead Street South |
| Ballymoney | Townhead Street North |
| Ballymoney | Seymour Street |
| Larne | Agnew Street |
| Larne | Circular Road West |
| Larne | Fairhill |
| Larne | Narrow Gauge Road |
| Larne | Bridge Street |
| Larne | Circular Road East |
| Larne | Exchange Road |
| Larne | High Street |
| Larne | Inver |
| Larne | Ramp |
| Larne | Riverdale |
| Derry | Altnagelvin |
| Derry | Alfred Street |
| Derry | Carlisle Road |
| Derry | Claudy Market Yard |
| Derry | Foyle Road |
| Derry | Queens Quay North |
| Derry | Queens Quay South |
| Derry | Railway Yard Carpark |
| Derry | Simpsons Brae |
| Derry | Shantallow |

| Town | Location |
|-------|------------------|
| Derry | Spencer Road |
| Derry | Strand Road |
| Derry | Victoria Market* |
| Derry | William Street |

* Closed at present for drainage works.

My Department also provides parking facilities in off-street car parks which are leased. Details of the leased car parks are provided in the tables below.

EASTERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Belfast | Bankmore Street |
| Belfast | Cromac Street |
| Belfast | Smithfield |
| Ballyclare | Market Square |
| Carrickfergus | Joymount |
| Whitehead | Balmoral Avenue |

WESTERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|-------------|------------------|
| Lisnaskea | New Bridge Road |
| Lisnaskea | Fair Green |
| Enniskillen | Shore Road West |
| Dungannon | Anne Street East |
| Dungannon | Anne Street East |

NORTHERN DIVISION

| Town | Location |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| Derry | Masonic / Bishop Street |
| Derry | Society Street |
| Derry | Foyle Road |
| Coleraine | Terrace Row |
| Portstewart | Convention Avenue |

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain why Northern Ireland Water was called away from Loughries to Holywood on 24 April 2008, leaving residents without water for a longer period of time than anticipated. (AQW 7740/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that in the

case of an unexpected event that disrupts a customer's water supply, it aims to turn the water back on within 12 hours of knowing about the problem.

At 3.00pm on 24 April 2008 a report was received of a burst water main at Bowtown Road, Newtownards (Loughries). At that time, Northern Ireland Water staff were already repairing a burst water main at Holywood Road, Newtownards and moved temporarily to the incident at Bowtown Road to assess the situation. Repairs to the water main at Bowtown Road were completed at 11.30pm and the water supply was restored well within the 12 hour standard of service Northern Ireland Water aims to provide.

Park-and-Ride Schemes

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQO 3815/08, if these criteria will be applied to seasonal park and ride schemes in tourist towns such as Newcastle, to help alleviate traffic congestion. (AQW 7764/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service advises that Park & Ride schemes are generally introduced for large cities, where the daily traffic queues caused by congestion are lengthy enough to persuade some travellers to park their car on the periphery of a town or city and make the remaining journey by bus or rail.

To provide new car parking facilities on the periphery of tourist areas would present very many difficulties, including land acquisition, planning permission, environmental considerations and cost. In addition, the success of a Park & Ride site is dependant upon the level of bus priority provided to allow buses to bypass traffic queues.

Having specific regard to the provision of Park & Ride facilities in Newcastle, I am advised that there is limited opportunity to provide bus priority on the main approaches to Newcastle, particularly on the Dundrum Road. In these circumstances, and bearing in mind the limited time period (July and August), where such a scheme could be beneficial, there are no plans to introduce a Park & Ride scheme at this time.

Free Travel to Companions of People with Disabilities

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is being given to the extension of free travel to companions of people with disabilities, as they are an essential part of travel requirements. (AQW 7789/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Extending concessionary travel to companions of people with disabilities was one of the options considered in a recent review of the Concessionary Fares Scheme. I did not pursue that option when bidding for resources as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review as I considered that there were higher priorities, including extending free travel to a wider range of people with disabilities. In the event my bid for resources to extend to more disabled people was not successful.

Roundabout on the A505 at Killyclogher in Omagh

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider the construction of a roundabout on the A505 at the intersection of the Farmhill Road and Old Mountfield Road at Killyclogher, Omagh. (AQW 7821/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has identified a number of options to improve the A505 intersection with the Farmhill Road and Old Mountfield Road, one of which is a roundabout.

When a preferred option has been selected, it will be considered for inclusion in a future programme of Local Transport & Safety Measures.

Illegal Parking in Lurgan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department has taken to address the problem of illegal parking in Lurgan. (AQW 7848/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The responsibility for enforcing on-street parking restrictions transferred, from the PSNI, to my Department's Roads Service on 30 October 2006. NCP Services Ltd (NCP) was appointed by Roads Service, to provide the new parking enforcement service.

Our core service hours for enforcement are 07.30-18.30 Monday to Saturday, with a reduced level of enforcement on Sundays and during evenings. Lurgan has two Traffic Attendants (TAs) deployed during the core service hours, with enforcement at other times being carried out by mobile patrols. TAs also enforce the parking restrictions in Roads Service's off-street charged car parks. This ensures that spaces remain accessible to all customers, which helps support the commercial viability and sustainability of the town centre. In the 12-month period 1 April 2007 to 31

March 2008, a total of 2,691 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were issued in Lurgan.

To date Roads Service, in conjunction with NCP, has been concentrating on providing an effective enforcement strategy during the core service hours, as this is when the majority of illegal parking occurs. We will continue to monitor the situation at all other times, to ensure that a suitable level of enforcement is provided to deter those motorists that continue to park illegally.

New Bus Station in Banbridge

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development when Translink will be in a position to submit an economic appraisal to his Department for a new bus station in Banbridge. (AQW 7851/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink submitted an Economic Appraisal to the Department three years ago but approval was not granted due to problems surrounding the acquisition of land at the preferred site for the new bus station.

Discussions are ongoing to resolve the land issue and in the meantime Translink are preparing a new Economic Appraisal which they hope to submit to the Department in the autumn. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of the land issues, the Department will consider the Economic Appraisal when it is received.

Millennium Way in Lurgan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development if plans to extend Millennium Way in Lurgan will be one of the projects carried out as part of the £109 million set aside to complete the Non-Strategic Major Improvements, incorporating the schemes identified in the Sub-Regional Transport Plan. (AQW 7854/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: As you have indicated the recently published Investment Delivery Plan for Roads over the next 10 years identifies funds totalling £109 million specifically "... to complete the Non Strategic Major Improvements incorporating the schemes identified in the Sub-Regional Transport Plan".

While I would confirm that the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road extension of Millennium Way will be included among the schemes considered for inclusion in this particular programme of work, there are many competing demands for these substantial, but limited, resources and priorities have still to be determined. For that reason alternative funding options have not been ruled out and at a recent meeting with representatives of Lurgan Forward on 1 May 2008 I

suggested that it would be helpful if it explored the possibility of developer contribution to this scheme.

Dualling of the A26 Between Ballymena and Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the dualling of the A26 between Ballymena and Ballymoney. (AQW 7863/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is progressing plans for the provision of a 7km stretch of dual carriageway on the A26 between Glarryford crossroads and the junction with the A44 Drones Road (- the Ballycastle Fork).

A detailed assessment of the five route corridors under consideration is ongoing and the second stage of the three-stage assessment process is expected to be completed shortly. This process will conclude with the selection of a preferred route, which I would hope to be in a position to announce a within the next few weeks.

Ballymoney Railway Station

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on work to upgrade Ballymoney Railway Station in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act and Translink's New Rail Vision. (AQW 7864/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: Work to upgrade Ballymoney Railway Stations is progressing well with the majority of the work now complete. There were some delays to the resurfacing of the platforms and it is now expected that the outstanding work will be finished by the end of August this year.

Exemptions from Water Bills

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans for exempting churches from future water bills. (AQW 7868/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive agreed with the Independent Water Review Panel's recommendation that billing for water and sewerage services should be extended to all non-domestic properties from 1st April 2008. The Executive decided to phase this in over a two year period with customers paying half of the full bill in 2008/09 and the full amount from 2009/10.

Places of worship are classed as non-domestic premises and Northern Ireland Water's policy is to install water meters for billing purposes on all

properties that are not used exclusively for domestic purposes. These properties include charities and other non-profit organisations such as churches and schools. Prior to the recent extension of non-domestic payments, the company was already billing some 1,200 church properties.

The Panel in its Strand 2 report concluded that everyone should contribute towards water and sewerage services.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by his Department; what is the (a) make; (b) model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7932/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development does not currently own or lease any cars.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7933/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has spent a total of £2,288,230.13 on fuel for vehicles since devolution. The total quoted represents invoices paid in the period 8 May 2007 to 10 June 2008. My Department does not lease any vehicles.

Irish-Language Scheme

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what costs he has estimated that his Department would incur with the implementation of an Irish-language scheme. (AQW 7957/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have not estimated any costs regarding the implementation of an Irish-language scheme in my Department.

Car-Parking Spaces in Saintfield

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment has been made of the need for additional car-parking spaces in Saintfield; and what plans he has to increase the current number. (AQW 8016/08)

The Minister for Regional Development:

My Department's Roads Service has a car park in Downpatrick Street, Saintfield, with 66 free spaces and there are 185 free, on-street parking spaces, dispersed throughout the town.

I can advise that a parking survey within Saintfield was carried out on Saturday 8 September 2007, between 8.00 a.m and 4.30 p.m. This survey revealed that peak occupancy occurred at 12.00 noon, when the on-street spaces reached 80% occupancy, while the car park reached 73%.

This would indicate that there is some spare capacity for parking demand in Saintfield, therefore, Roads Service has no plans to provide additional car parking spaces at present.

Low Water Pressure in Broughderg, County Tyrone

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department will take to address the issue of low water pressure to homes on Keerin Road, Broughderg, Co. Tyrone. (AQW 8115/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is aware that some residents in the Broughderg area are experiencing low water pressure and work is currently ongoing to improve the water infrastructure in both the Moyola and Lough Fea distribution systems. Work has already commenced on site in the Broughderg area and is expected to be completed by September 2008.

This work aims to reduce the risk of interruptions to the water supply in the Magherafelt and Cookstown areas and should lead to an improvement in water pressure to homes in Keerin Road, Broughderg.

Management Structure and Gender Breakdown of Road Service Staff

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) management structure and areas of responsibility within the Roads Service; and (ii) religious and gender breakdown of the Roads

Service personnel deployed at each regional office.
(AQW 8198/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: With regard to the first part of the question, Roads Service is managed by a Board, headed by a Chief Executive and supported by five Directors. Their roles and responsibilities can be found on the Roads Service internet site at Roads Service Board | Roads Service Northern Ireland. A copy has been placed in the library.

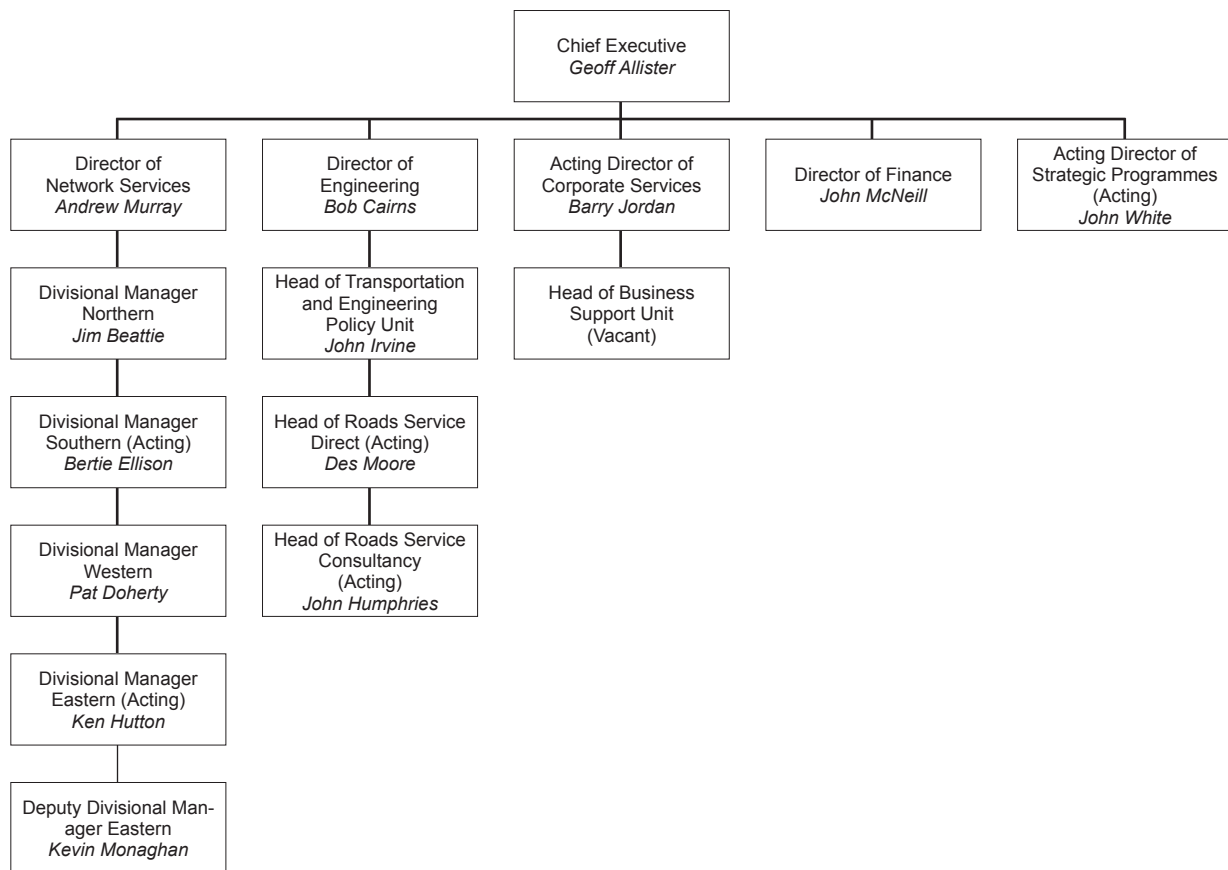
Roads Service has its headquarters in Belfast and has four divisional offices in Belfast, Coleraine, Craigavon and Omagh, each headed by a Divisional Roads Manager. Each division is divided into a number of sections which generally correspond to District Council areas. These divisions oversee the planning, ordering and payment of network services through Roads Service Consultancy, Roads Service Direct and the private sector. They also provide the Agency's main interface with customers.

Roads Service Direct, the Agency's contractor business unit, is centred in Ballymena with staff based at various locations throughout the North. They carry out a wide range of activities varying from patching roads to sea-defence work. They also respond to emergency calls dealing with eventualities such as flooding and the aftermath of road traffic collisions. Throughout the winter they operate on a rota standby basis to treat roads for ice and snow when weather conditions require it. Their operational staff are supported by vehicle workshop staff who maintain the Agency's large fleet of vehicles and plant.

The Roads Service Consultancy, based in Downpatrick, is a single business unit covering all of the North and is responsible for managing the Agency's engineering activities such as design and contract supervision.

The Agency's Transportation and Engineering Policy Unit is based at its headquarters and is responsible for developing and overseeing the implementation of policies, procedures and standards to support the operational needs of the divisions. It also manages the Agency's parking enforcement service.

Roads Service current organisational structure is shown on the following page.



With regard to the second part of your question, I must advise that it would be a breach of the Department's statutory duty as an employer to comment on the religious affiliation of staff. The gender breakdown for each of the Agency's eight main business areas is provided in the table below.

| Business Area | Female | Male |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Eastern Division | 47 | 204 |
| Western Division | 54 | 123 |
| Northern Division | 35 | 133 |
| Southern Division | 52 | 126 |
| Roads Service Direct | 57 | 127 |
| Roads Service Consultancy | 61 | 281 |
| Transport & Engineering Policy Unit | 40 | 50 |
| Roads Service Headquarters | 60 | 90 |
| Total | 406 | 1134 |

Rapid Transit System for Belfast

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development if the Colin area of West Belfast will be included in any rapid transit system for Belfast. (AQW 8205/08)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department published the Strategic Outline Case for a pilot Rapid Transit system on 8 April 2008 which included route options for a West Belfast Rapid Transit line. One of these proposed routes links into the Colin area. The results indicate that this route would attract significant patronage, however, there is limited road space available to create dedicated lanes for Rapid Transit. The report concluded that the best performing route for West Belfast is along the Springfield Road to Glenmonagh. My Department is consulting key stakeholders before I take decisions on the preferred technology and initial pilot routes. Dependant on the success of the pilot routes I would hope to be able to extend rapid transit to serve more communities.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Phone Numbers

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to list all 0845 and 0870 telephone numbers operated by, or on behalf of, her Department and its agencies; and the profit made on the lines in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7564/08)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): My department including the Social Security Agency currently operates a total of eight 0845 telephone numbers and these are listed below. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive also operates three 0844 telephone numbers which perform a similar function to 0845 numbers and are included in the list. No profit is made from telephone lines offered to customers by my Department. There are no 0870 numbers operated by or on behalf of my Department.

| Number | Owner | Purpose |
|-------------------|--|--|
| 0845 601 8821 | The Pension Service | Pension Service Enquiry Line |
| 0845 359 0017 | Compensation Recovery Unit | Debt Recovery Initiative |
| 0845 358 0027 | Debt Centre NI | Debt Recovery Initiative |
| 0845 603 9475 | Debt Centre NI | Debt Recovery Initiative Text Phone |
| 0845 605 2020 | DHSS&PS | Benefit Leaflet Information Service |
| 0845 713 9896 | Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division | NI Helpline (old scheme i.e. child maintenance cases calculated before March 2003) |
| 0845 608 0022 | Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division | NI Helpline (new scheme i.e. child maintenance cases calculated after March 2003 or general enquiry) |
| 0845 610 7400-739 | Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division | For use by clients as required to a range of extensions |
| 0844 892 0900 | Northern Ireland Housing Executive | Main number |
| 0844 892 0901 | Northern Ireland Housing Executive | Emergency repairs after hours service |
| 0844 890 0902 | Northern Ireland Housing Executive | Housing Benefit Enquiries |

Housing Improvement Schemes in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the status of all improvement schemes that (i) are forthcoming; and (ii) may be postponed or discontinued by the Housing Executive in North Down. (AQW 7579/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has plans to undertake 33 improvement schemes including over 3,000 properties

in North Down over the period 2007/08 to 2010/11. I have arranged for a table detailing the schemes to be placed in the Assembly Library.

The Housing Executive does not plan to postpone or discontinue any improvement schemes. However, the actual start date for any scheme included within the programme is subject to the availability of finance and estimated start dates may be subject to change.

Social Housing in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how the additional resources that her Department received in the budget and monitoring rounds will impact on providing more social housing in North Down. (AQW 7580/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The social housing programme is formulated on the basis of need rather than geographical area and is subject to land availability. Funding is therefore allocated through the programme taking these criteria into account. The additional funding will mean that significantly more new housing can be provided both in North Down and throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

North Belfast Community Action Unit

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development what plans are in place to continue the work undertaken by the North Belfast Community Action Unit beyond March 2009. (AQW 7594/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The North Belfast Community Action Unit is responsible for the development of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park site and the Community Empowerment Partnerships Programme.

The development of the Gaol/Girdwood site is expected to take a number of years and the unit is committed to this work programme. The Community Empowerment Partnerships work was initiated in 2002. An evaluation of this programme will be carried out shortly to determine effectiveness, requirements for services and appropriate delivery mechanisms.

Decisions on continuing aspects of the Unit's work will be determined following the evaluation and in consultation with my Ministerial colleagues in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.

Meadow Park in Newtownards

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development why 3 bungalows in Meadow Park,

Newtownards, have been vacant for 6 months, given the demand for social housing. (AQW 7600/08)

The Minister for Social Development: 18 Meadow Park has been vacant since October 2007. A new kitchen was installed in December 2007. The property was then burgled requiring further repairs and the installation of another kitchen. Work is now complete. The property will now be offered for rent.

21 Meadow Park has been vacant since December 2007. A new kitchen was installed in March 2008. Further repairs were also required to bring the property up to an acceptable standard. A contractor is currently completing these remedial works. The property will be available for allocation before the end of June 2008.

25 Meadow Park became vacant in October 2007. A new kitchen was installed in March 2008. Further repairs were also completed to bring the property up to an acceptable standard. The property was re-let on 2 June.

Housing Association Homes in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties owned by housing associations in the North Down constituency, broken down by district council area. (AQW 7606/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is not readily available by constituency. However, I can say that in North Down District Council area, at March 2007, housing associations owned 1,018 units of accommodation.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to raise the fuel poverty threshold, in light of the increase in oil, gas and electricity prices. (AQW 7616/08)

The Minister for Social Development: There is a nationally recognised definition of fuel poverty. A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a defined level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use. Using this definition, fuel poverty stands at 34% as indicated by the 2006 House Condition Survey. In this time of rising fuel prices, it is important to ensure that Government funding targets those most in need. I have established a Fuel Poverty Taskforce to advise me how this might best be achieved. The Task Force 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 most in need.

Increase in Fuel Costs

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development, given the impact of increases in fuel costs, especially on low income families, if she will call on HM Treasury to use the wind fall gains from VAT to ease fuel bills. (AQW 7621/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Northern Ireland's relationship with HM Treasury is managed by the Finance Minister. However, I have recently written to James Purnell MP, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, requesting a meeting to discuss a number of issues, including the potential for using the VAT 'windfall' to assist those most vulnerable to the impact of fuel poverty and rising fuel prices.

Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been spent on discretionary Housing Benefit payments to tenants with a history of anti-social behaviour in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7631/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is not readily available. Discretionary Housing Payments are payable only to tenants in the private rented sector. While the Housing Executive can instigate proceedings against tenants in the private rented sector, the police or local councils are more likely to have taken action against such tenants. The Housing Executive does not record information regarding such activity by other statutory agencies or bodies.

Discretionary Housing Benefit Payments

Mr S Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development how many tenants with a history of anti-social behaviour have been awarded discretionary payments of Housing Benefit, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7632/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is not readily available. Discretionary Housing Payments are payable only to tenants in the private rented sector. While the Housing Executive can instigate proceedings against tenants in the private rented sector, the police or local councils are more likely to have taken action against such tenants. The Housing Executive does not record information regarding such activity by other statutory agencies or bodies.

Homes Near High Voltage Power Lines

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what criteria exist for the construction of homes close to high power voltage lines; (ii) how many social homes have been built within 60 metres of high power voltage lines in each of the last 3 years; and (iii) has any study been commissioned to assess the health impact upon residents of homes built close to high power voltage lines. (AQW 7716/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department of Environment and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have advised that there are no specific criteria for the assessment of planning applications in close proximity to high power voltage lines and the evidence to date suggests that in general there are no adverse effects on the health of the population caused by exposure to Extremely Low Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields (ELF EMFs) below the international guideline levels adopted in the UK.

No record is kept of the number of new social homes built within 60 metres of high power voltage lines.

Social Housing in North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what land is available in the North Down constituency for social housing. (AQW 7753/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department holds no land for social housing in North Down, however, the Housing Executive has land at Rathgill and South Circular Road, Bangor; Strand Avenue, Holywood and Glenbrook, Newtownards.

Age Concern and Free Rural Transport

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what financial assistance her Department gives to Age Concern to provide free rural transport. (AQW 7756/08)

The Minister for Social Development: My department does not give any assistance to Age Concern to provide free rural transport. The issue of rural transport in Northern Ireland is primarily a matter of concern for the Department for Regional Development.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many cars are currently (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by her Department; what is the (a) make; (b)

model; (c) engine size; (d) fuel type; and (e) purpose, of each of these cars; and what the fuel efficiency is of each model. (AQW 7777/08)

The Minister for Social Development:

The Department owns or leases a total of four vehicles, which are used for a range of functions including conducting surveillance on benefit fraud investigations, the transport of business equipment and personnel and supporting operations and maintenance of the river banks within the Lagan river impoundment.

| Type of vehicle | Car | Van | Car | MPV |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---------------|---------------|
| Owned / Leased | Leased | Leased | Owned | Owned |
| Make | Ford | Vauxhall | Audi | Land Rover |
| Model | Focus | Combo | A6 | Defender 110 |
| Engine size | 1600cc | 1300cc | 2496cc | 2495cc |
| Fuel type | Petrol | Diesel | Diesel | Diesel |
| Fuel Efficiency Miles per gallon | Fuel Consumption: Urban - 32.6 Extra Urban - 51.6 Combined - 42.4 | Not available in this format from the vehicle owner's manual | 28 mpg | 28 mpg |

Disability Living Allowance Security Directorate

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why the Disability Living Allowance Security Directorate would call on an applicant without pre-notice, and complete a new Disability Living Allowance application form, when an application had already been completed and agreed. (AQW 7809/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Levels of fraud and error in benefits are measured on a regular basis through the Benefit Review process. This involves reviews, which are carried out by the Social Security Agency on a random selection of benefit cases including Disability Living Allowance applications and are selected by Social Welfare Statistics & Consultancy Branch.

As part of the process, un-notified home visits are carried out by Agency staff who all carry official identification and introduce themselves on arrival at the customer's home. A structured benefit

questionnaire is then completed with the customer to check for any incorrectness. The results are used to report the Agency's performance against the fraud and error targets.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development what consultation has taken place with (i) Executive colleagues; (ii) local councils; (iii) local development offices; (iv) private sector; and (v) the community and voluntary sector, in relation to the transfer of Neighbourhood Renewal functions to Local Government. (AQW 7845/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Significant consultation has been held on the transfer of Urban Regeneration, including Neighbourhood Renewal, functions to Local Government. This formed part of the Review of Public Administration proposals of the Direct Rule Administration, which were the subject of a detailed public consultation process in 2005, involving the public, private and voluntary sectors and political representatives. Departmental officials briefed both political parties and the Local Government Taskforce, which comprised elected members nominated by NILGA, on the detail of the functions proposed for transfer. Officials also addressed the NILGA conference in February 2007 on the subject.

Following the restoration of devolved Government, the Executive endorsed the previous Administration's decision to transfer urban regeneration functions, including Neighbourhood Renewal. This was detailed in the Emerging Findings report published on 19 October 2007. This was followed by a process of stakeholder engagement which provided the opportunity for representatives from councils and other organisations to engage in discussions on the initial proposals at both regional and sub regional events. Stakeholders also had the option of making their views known in writing. The proposals on the transfer of functions to local government were debated in the Assembly and finally announced on 31 March 2008.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how many meetings of the Ministerial Subgroup on Neighbourhood Renewal have (i) been scheduled; and (ii) taken place, since May 8 2007. (AQW 7846/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Since 8 May 2007, 3 meetings have been scheduled. One meeting took place on 9 August 2007. Two further

meetings were postponed to allow Departments time to provide clarity and certitude about their willingness and capacity to support Neighbourhood Action Plans. A further meeting of the Ministerial Group is planned for 28 July.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development how many times she has tabled Neighbourhood Renewal as an agenda item at meetings of the Executive. (AQW 7847/08)

The Minister for Social Development: To secure commitment to the Neighbourhood Renewal strategy, I wrote to Ministerial colleagues in January highlighting the cross cutting nature of the strategy and seeking their commitment. Responses were received from all Ministers confirmed their support and commitment to working across Government to deliver meaningful improvements in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Should a significant decision be required in relation to Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy I will formally table an appropriate paper at Executive.

Examining Medical Practitioners

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the basis on which an Examining Medical Practitioner can overrule the patient's General Practitioner or Consultant and declare that person fit for work. (AQW 7861/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The legislation provides for the question of whether a person is capable or incapable of work to be determined in accordance with the personal capability assessment. The determination is made by a decision maker after considering all the available evidence relating to the person's incapacity, including the account given by the person on their questionnaire, information provided by the person's own doctor or specialist, and expert medical advice from a Medical Support Services doctor who is specially trained in assessing the effects a condition has on a person's functional ability.

Urban Development Grant Scheme

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on work by her Department to access funding for the two projects from Ballymoney included in the pilot Urban Development Grant scheme. (AQW 7865/08)

The Minister for Social Development: One of the Ballymoney projects is still subject to the appraisal process and additional information has been requested. The second project has been appraised but funding can only be confirmed when the budget position in the latest in-year monitoring round is finalised by the Executive. I would expect this to be confirmed within the next month.

Housing Executive Home Improvement Grants

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many households have been awarded a Housing Executive home improvement grant in (i) Ballycastle; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Ballymoney, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 7866/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of households that have been awarded a Housing Executive home improvement grant in the relevant District Council areas is as follows:-

| District Council | 2005/2006 | 2006/2007 | 2007/2008 |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Moyle | 47 | 38 | 33 |
| Ballymena | 67 | 95 | 62 |
| Ballymoney | 46 | 55 | 56 |

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what consultations she has had with (i) local councils; (ii) community and voluntary groups; and (iii) other stakeholders, in relation to transferring responsibility for Neighbourhood Renewal to local councils. (AQW 7871/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Significant consultation has been held on the transfer of Urban Regeneration, including Neighbourhood Renewal, functions to Local Government. This formed part of the Review of Public Administration proposals of the Direct Rule Administration, which were the subject of a detailed public consultation process in 2005, involving the public, private and voluntary sectors and political representatives. Departmental officials briefed both political parties and the Local Government Taskforce, which comprised elected members nominated by NILGA, on the detail of the functions proposed for transfer. Officials also addressed the NILGA conference in February 2007 on the subject.

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decision to transfer urban regeneration functions, including Neighbourhood Renewal. This was detailed in the Emerging Findings report published on 19 October 2007. This was followed by a process of stakeholder engagement which provided the opportunity for representatives from councils and other organisations to engage in discussions on the initial proposals at both regional and sub regional events. Stakeholders also had the option of making their views known in writing. The proposals on the transfer of functions to local government were debated in the Assembly and finally announced on 31 March 2008.

Extra Funding for Debt Advisors

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if she has considered funding independent advice and support services in local communities, to assist people facing debt problems. (AQW 7880/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Through the Community Support Programme which is delivered by local councils my Department provides over £5 million of funding of which £1 million is ring fenced specifically for providing front line advice services. One of the key services provided by advice agencies is advice and representation on all matters regarding debt issues.

Additionally Minister Foster from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Industry contributes £400,000 directly to the Citizens Advice Bureaux specifically for debt advice.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many projects will be funded through Neighbourhood Renewal from August 2008 in Belfast. (AQW 7882/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of projects which will be funded from August 2008 will only be known when a full assessment has been completed. This work is currently underway.

Tours of Crumlin Road Jail

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development if she will consider offering free tours of Crumlin Road Jail to school children and senior citizens' groups. (AQW 7883/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Tours of Crumlin Road Gaol are free to all school children and senior citizens' groups, as well as students and the unemployed.

Gambling

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what types of gambling are classed as illegal gambling. (AQW 7918/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Gambling activities in Northern Ireland (other than the National Lottery) are regulated by the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and its associated subordinate legislation.

The legal status of any gambling activity may only be authoritatively determined by a court.

Departmental Vehicles

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has spent on fuel for vehicles (i) owned; and (ii) leased, by the Department since devolution. (AQW 7931/08)

The Minister for Social Development: From devolution on 8 May 2007 to date, my Department has incurred expenditure on fuel totalling £4,769. This was made up of:

- £3,053 for vehicles owned, and
- £1,716 for vehicles leased.

Social Security Social Fund

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when the Social Security Social Fund will be funded to accommodate people receiving income support who cannot afford to replace household items; and (ii) how many second stage appeals within the Social Security Social Fund in the Strabane and Omagh areas have been successful in the last three years. (AQW 7986/08)

The Minister for Social Development: (i) The Social Fund currently makes provision for the payment of Budgeting Loans to people in receipt of Income Support, income based Jobseeker's Allowance or Pension Credit. These loans which are interest free are designed to help spread the cost of essential items over a more manageable period of time and can be used to purchase items such as furniture and household equipment.

(ii) The table below sets out the number of applicants who have received an additional award (either full or partial) as a result of a review carried out by the Office of the Social Fund Commissioner in each of the last 3 years, within the Strabane and Omagh areas.

| Year | Strabane – Successful Level 2 Appeals | Omagh – Successful Level 2 Appeals |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| April 2005 – March 2006 | 12 | 4 |
| April 2006 – March 2007 | 4 | 11 |
| April 2007 – March 2008 | 10 | 14 |

Village Urban Renewal Area in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development if Kitchener Street in the Village area, South Belfast, is included in the recent proposals for regeneration/demolition. (AQW 8012/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Kitchener Street is included in the proposals for regeneration/demolition.

Village Urban Renewal Area in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how sitting tenants or homeowners, in properties which will be vested as part of the regeneration of the Village area, South Belfast, are to be accommodated in terms of (i) property value; (ii) compensation; and (iii) re-housing in the area. (AQW 8013/08)

The Minister for Social Development: Homeowners affected by vesting are entitled to the market value of their property at the date of vesting, plus Home Loss and Disturbance payments. Home Loss payments are made to home owners who are in legal ownership of the property at the date of vesting. Homeowners are also entitled to a Disturbance payment provided they were in legal possession of the property at the time when the Notice of Application for a Vesting Order was made. Homeowners who choose to be re-housed in social housing will be placed on the waiting list for their area(s) and will be awarded priority status following vesting.

Tenants who supply documentary proof that they lived in the property for at least a year before they moved are entitled to a Home Loss payment and also a Disturbance payment. Tenants wishing to remain in the area may be entitled to social housing under the normal eligibility criteria.

Smartwater Project

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for a summary of the overall aims of the 'Smartwater' project being undertaken by the Housing Executive in Crumlin; (ii) what activities took

place the week beginning 9 June 2008 as part of the 'Smartwater' project (iii) how many households have had any of their contents marked with 'Smartwater' to date and (iv) what possessions or other household items were marked with 'Smartwater' in the various properties which have been visited to date.
(AQW 8034/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The aim of the 'Smartwater' project is to evaluate the use of Smartwater in preventing burglaries in the Crumlin area and in doing so, seek to address the fear of crime within the community, particularly amongst the elderly and vulnerable.

On 9 June, the second Smartwater presentation to councillors took place at Antrim Civic Centre. It involved training those likely to apply Smartwater and packing of kit for initial delivery. The areas to be covered were mapped and a strategy for roll out and Smartwater street signage agreed. Neighbourhood Watch delivered the first one hundred advice leaflets to residents and 16 new PSNI recruits were given Smartwater training.

On 11 June, a briefing for Community Officers, Neighbourhood Watch and the Housing Executive was held at Crumlin Police Station. Products were delivered at the launch at Lakeview. A further 37 leaflets were delivered.

The target is to deliver the Smartwater product to 1000 homes within the next year. There is no information available on exactly what has been marked by residents.

Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development when the Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review into Jobs and Benefits Accommodation commenced; and whether this occurred prior to, during or after private sector tenders were invited for a replacement site for the new Jobs & Benefits Office in Strabane.
(AQW 8127/08)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review commenced in January 2006. This occurred prior to the invitation for private sector tenders for a replacement site for the new Jobs & Benefits Office in Strabane which took place in April 2006.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Private Members' Bills

Mr Weir asked the Assembly Commission if any Private Members' Bills have been introduced or proposed within the Assembly between January 2001 and December 2007 on the issue of high hedges or Leylandii.
(AQW 6161/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): There have been no Private Members Bills of the type referred to introduced or formally proposed within the Assembly for the above period.

Security Review

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission for the costs associated with the implementation of the review of security; and for the proposed annual running costs.
(AQW 7472/08)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission: Following a significant security incident in November 2006 the Assembly Commission initiated a major review of security at Parliament Buildings, carried out by independent security specialists, with the aim of ensuring that Parliament Buildings is a safe environment for the public, MLAs and staff. The Assembly Commission accepted a number of recommendations arising from that review, leading to the recent installation of additional security arrangements.

In implementing the recommendations the Assembly Commission sought to balance legitimate security concerns against the use of public funds and the Commission's aim of increasing public engagement with the Assembly. The construction work on the physical changes was project managed on behalf of the Assembly Commission by the Properties Division - part of the Department of Finance and Personnel. Full costs have not yet been finalised as accounts are still being received and agreed. However current estimated costs are:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Search Facility | £34,674 |
| Building works | £41,740 |
| Associated services | £97,855 |
| Railings / gates / fences | £146,621 |
| PA system upgrade | £31,979 |
| X-ray equipment | £123,000 |
| PSNI presence | £181,190.37 |

The annual running costs are estimated to be as follows:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Search Facility | £1200 -1400 |
| PSNI presence | £396K – year 1 |
| PA system | £1,200-1,400 |
| X-ray equipment | £5,625 – year 1 |

Telecommunications Aerials

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to erect additional telecommunications aerials to ensure that all mobile phone networks are covered. (AQW 7591/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission: In 2007 the Assembly Commission tasked Building Management Branch with investigating improving the mobile phone coverage within Parliament Buildings. This followed reports of poor mobile phone coverage from all building users. Areas which were identified as having particularly poor signal strength were the Basement restaurant and the Press bar.

Building Management Branch approached the mobile phone suppliers listed on the OGC Framework; Orange, O2, Vodafone and T Mobile, with a view to them improving the signal for their respective networks. Following these meetings Vodafone and O2 installed signal boosters within Parliament Buildings, with work commencing in the summer of 2007. This has resulted in a marked improvement in the signal strength on these networks in all areas including the Press bar and Basement restaurant.

Unfortunately T Mobile and Orange have not yet taken up the offer of installing aerials; however it is hoped they may consider doing so in the future.

Assistant Assembly Clerk Recruitment Exercise

Mr Cree asked the Assembly Commission, following the recent Assistant Assembly Clerk recruitment exercise, (i) how much the recruitment exercise cost; (ii) how many posts needed to be filled; and (iii) how many candidates were successful. (AQW 7665/08)

The Representative of the Assembly

Commission:

- (i) The cost of the recruitment exercise was £34,815 (summary attached). Staff costs have been estimated.

- (ii) There are 31 vacancies at this level and
(iii) 11 candidates were recommended by the interview panels as suitable for appointment. Two candidates have subsequently withdrawn from the competition.

ASSISTANT ASSEMBLY CLERK RECRUITMENT COMPETITION (PB/001/07) COSTS (ROUNDED)

| Area | Cost |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| Staff Salaries (estimated) | £17, 850 |
| Advertising | £ 4,659 |
| Test Papers and administration | £10,162 |
| Postage and Stationery (estimated) | £ 750 |
| Accommodation – tests & Interviews | £ 1,361 |
| Hospitality | £ 33 |
| Total | £34,815 |

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