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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 5 October 2009

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Independent Review of Economic Development Policy in Northern Ireland (DETI/Invest NI)

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that she wishes to make a statement regarding the independent review of economic development policy in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I wish to make a statement on my intention to launch a short period of consultation on the report of the independent review of economic development policy, which was published last week.

Members will be aware that I invited Professor Barnett, the vice chancellor of the University of Ulster, to chair the review into whether the existing Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI policies, programmes and resources are contributing optimally to the delivery of the productivity goal in the Programme for Government. I thank Professor Barnett and his review panel for the time and effort that they put into producing their detailed and wide-ranging report.

The panel made a total of 58 recommendations. In summary, it recommends that there is a need to promote a much greater emphasis on supporting innovation as well as research and development; a need to provide greater autonomy for Invest Northern Ireland in order for that organisation to be more responsive and flexible in supporting companies; a need to improve the way that economic policy is developed and co-ordinated in the public sector; and a need to re-examine the way that we assess performance, in particular the tendency to examine each individual decision rather than adopting a broader portfolio-based approach.

The report outlines a number of recommendations in other areas of government that help to deliver on the Programme for Government productivity goal. Those

include important areas such as skills, infrastructure and planning.

It is clear that the panel put a huge effort into addressing those highly significant and complex issues. Its conclusions and recommendations will require the most careful consideration, which is why I will not be jumping to a conclusion on the report's analysis and recommendations. I was exceptionally disappointed, but perhaps not surprised, by some of the sensationalist coverage that followed the immediate aftermath of the launch of the report last week. Much of that was at odds with the balanced tone of the report, and, I believe, misrepresented the findings and conclusions of the report.

That coverage was in marked contrast to the mature and balanced discussion that took place during Question Time in the Chamber last week. Following that lead, I urge everyone to give the report the mature reflection that it needs and deserves.

The panel's analysis and recommendations will prove a valuable stimulus for a thoughtful and wide-ranging consideration of what needs to be done to grow the economy. However, there is also an urgent need for action, which is why I am announcing today that there will be a short, six-week period of public consultation on the report, ending on Monday 16 November. Responses should be sent to the strategic planning division in my Department, and further details can be found in the covering letter that accompanies the commencement of the public consultation exercise.

My objective is to balance the need to draw in views with the need to reach timely conclusions and to initiate purposeful actions on the report and its recommendations. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I thank the Minister for her statement and echo some of the comments that she made on the sensationalist approach to the report by some members of the press, though not all.

The report is a substantial and complex piece of work, and the implementation of its recommendations will require all of government to work together. As the Minister rightly said, the report will require most careful consideration and mature reflection. However, she also referred to the urgent need for action. With that in mind, what consideration have the Minister and her Department given to the involvement of other Departments and agencies in the development of proposals for action on the findings of the report and to the estimated timescale for bringing those proposals to the House for implementation?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for his comments and his question.

The report has been shared with my ministerial colleagues — it was sent to them on the same day that I received it. It is important to take the views of colleagues at high level, initially and later on, on how the report could impact on their Departments. Although the review's terms of reference only covered the policies of DETI and Invest Northern Ireland on the economy, the point is well made in the report that there are many other Departments that contribute to the success or otherwise of the Northern Ireland economy. The main thrust of the report is about raising the productivity of the Northern Ireland economy, and Barnett points to a wide range of areas that do not fall under the remit of DETI. Therefore, there will need to be engagement between me and my Executive colleagues.

I wanted the consultation to last six weeks, and no longer, because there is a need to gather the views of representatives from the business community and other stakeholders before I hold my discussions with ministerial colleagues. This piece of work will engage all my colleagues, which is why I intend to take it to the Executive shortly after the consultation finishes.

Mr Hamilton: I welcome the proposal in the report to merge the Minister's Department with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), or at least elements of that Department that are economically focused and facing. That proposal will be widely welcomed by the business sector and the community at large. If the proposal finds favour in the Executive, how can it be taken forward so that we receive the benefits of it that are underscored in the report?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It will come as no surprise that I welcome the proposal to merge DETI and DEL so that there is a single Department of the economy. That proposal was welcomed by the business community, which is reflected in the evidence that its representatives gave to the review. However, that is not just a matter for my Department; as the Member knows, it will have to go to the Executive. Although I can take a view on the matter, the Executive will have to come to a view on it and take it forward. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which the Member sits on, will probably also have a role.

However, it is something that I welcome and that I am sure will come up for discussion after the consultation.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for her statement. Given some of the criticisms in the review of the performance of Invest NI — to which the Minister referred in her statement — does Invest NI not need to be made more accountable rather than given more autonomy?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I do not accept that at all, and that is certainly not the finding of the Barnett review, which clearly says that

Invest Northern Ireland should be given more autonomy to allow it to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of the business community and those seeking to invest in Northern Ireland. The Member's assertion is not borne out by the evidence and is not in the review.

The review is balanced in many ways, not least in its assessment of the work of Invest Northern Ireland. It highlights areas of good performance, and, yes, it does contain criticism. However, there is not much point in me asking such a panel to carry out a review if it gives me only good news. I wanted constructive criticism, which is very much in the review, and I welcome that. I hope that we can have a mature debate on how we deal with that criticism and move the discussion forward.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her statement. It is good to have that review; there is a lot in it. At this early stage, a lot more thought is needed before we come up with broad questions on the way forward. However, one thing did catch my eye: 55% of total programme costs for selective financial assistance was spent on expanding businesses rather than growing new ones. Is the Minister happy with that emphasis?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There is a good deal about selective financial assistance in the review, particularly in relation to "dead weight", which involves giving money to a company that later says that it was going to expand anyway. However, that is not known when dealing with a company up front, and therein lies the difficulty. When you are dealing with someone across the table who says that unless you give me assistance, I will take these jobs elsewhere or not expand, do you take the risk and decide not to help the company with those jobs, or do you step back and give it the money?

That is an issue that will come up again and again, and the Member is right to point it out. However, selective financial assistance is on a timeline, and that also gives us difficulties from a European perspective. I am pleased to see that the review provides suggestions about how we can argue with Europe to keep some of that selective financial assistance, because we still need that help in Northern Ireland.

Productivity versus jobs, and lower-paid jobs, is an issue with which the Assembly will have to come to grips. I said it last week, and I will say it again: should we continue to bring low-value jobs to a constituency, even though I know that Members very much welcome those jobs in their constituencies? The review clearly says that we should emphasise innovation and research and development and that low-paid jobs should be able to find their own way. That is a big decision for the Assembly and for Invest Northern Ireland and is for Members to look to in respect of their constituencies.

Mr Neeson: I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the publication of the review, particularly in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). One recommendation is that SMEs should be integrated into the supply chains of large companies. How does the Minister react to that? Secondly, Professor Barnett and his team will appear before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment this week. Is six weeks long enough for the consultation?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will answer the second question first. Yes, a six-week period is long enough I do not want to be accused of paralysis, apart from anything else. Government are always accused of taking in reports and allowing them to sit and not acting on them.

I was determined that that would not happen with this report, because it contains many good points. Some recommendations will take longer to implement, but we can act on others now. In fact, Invest Northern Ireland is already carrying out actions that have much synergy with the report's recommendations.

12.15pm

I was pleased to see a section on small businesses in the panel's report, because part of the criticism that I continually hear about Invest Northern Ireland is that it has a client base that it does not go beyond. The report talks about doing away with the emphasis on client companies, and I welcome that as it will allow Invest Northern Ireland to engage with companies that it otherwise would not have dealt with, particularly small businesses.

I am pleased with how Invest Northern Ireland has been working on some bigger contracts to bring in smaller companies and allow them access, which goes back to the public procurement issue. For instance, Invest Northern Ireland is working with the team in the south west hospital to bring in small contractors and allow them access to the work. Moreover, it allowed small contractors to bid for work in Bombardier recently. We can do a lot for small businesses that has not been done to date. I welcome that.

Mr Storey: I welcome the fact that the Minister has launched the consultation. She mentioned small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the core of constituencies such as mine, especially in places such as Ballymoney and Ballycastle. What will be the implications of the report beyond the confines of Belfast and Londonderry? There is much concentration on issues around those two cities, but spreading the benefits of the economy is surely an essential component in all parts of Northern Ireland, especially rural areas such as those in the Minister's constituency.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It will not surprise the Member to learn that I want Invest Northern Ireland to operate in places other than

Belfast and Londonderry. It is important that coverage spans Northern Ireland. When I took up my ministerial post last year, I visited each Invest Northern Ireland office in Northern Ireland to encourage them to, as the Member says, engage locally with councils, Chambers of Commerce and small businesses. The report has validated that notion and encourages us to look beyond the client company base.

As the Member knows, more than 80% of companies in Northern Ireland are SMEs, and, therefore, a huge number of people are employed in such businesses. As the Member said, they are the backbone of the economy in Northern Ireland. I welcome that part of the report and look forward to taking it on.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her statement. Does she share my view that Invest Northern Ireland has been strangled in many ways since its birth by petty bureaucratic accountability rather than enjoying the meaningful accountability that it needs? Is the Minister aware that, at the outset, Invest Northern Ireland was intended to be fairly autonomous but that somewhere along the way, it became strangled by the Department? How does she intend to reverse that position and give Invest Northern Ireland the space, freedom and autonomy to do the job that is required of it?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member is right: a large section of the report mentions governance. Governance issues between DETI and Invest Northern Ireland are very good in so far as there are a lot of them. There needs to be greater clarity about their respective roles and responsibilities on economic policy. In other words, DETI sets the economic policy, and Invest Northern Ireland has a role that is flexible and responsive, but realising that it spends public money and must be accountable for that expenditure. That is absolutely right and should continue to be the case.

The Member might recall that in my first meeting with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I raised the issue of risk and the fact that Invest Northern Ireland should be allowed flexibility. Instead of focusing on one investment announcement, we should consider investments in a portfolio manner and consider several investments together. Then, if one investment fails and nine are successful, it would be a good story.

I must emphasise that that approach is not, as some commentators have suggested, a way of allowing Invest Northern Ireland to waste government money — not at all. It allows it to be more flexible, as a regional development agency, and to get those high-productivity jobs that we so desperately need in Northern Ireland. I welcome that; I hope that it encourages Members to debate the issue in the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and in the House to try to strike a balance between good governance and the need to be flexible.

Dr Farry: I welcome the Minister's statement. Will the Minister confirm that, in determining a way forward, governance structural issues are secondary and that the primary challenge is to increase productivity in Northern Ireland? Will she expand on that and talk about the challenge of moving from an economy that competes on the basis of low costs to one that is based on skills and quality? Selective financial assistance, which is based on attracting people in with grants, is not sustainable in the longer term.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is interesting that the Member should make that point. It is the same point that I made to a potential Indian investor when I was in India. That investor asked about tax breaks and corporate tax rules in Northern Ireland. I answered by saying that investors need to look at Northern Ireland in a holistic sense, taking account of our skills and our standard of living. We must acknowledge that real estate here is a lot better value for money than that in competing areas, such as London, Edinburgh, Dublin or Cardiff. From that perspective, investment in Northern Ireland is attractive, but we must encourage investors to look at it as a whole.

The Member is right when he says that governance issues are longer-term considerations than programme and policy issues, which we can deal with quickly. That is why I wanted a short consultation that would allow us to get on with things. Invest Northern Ireland is already dealing with some of those issues, particularly in the area of innovation and research and development. The Member may know about a new research and development programme that was launched last December. That has been welcomed by the business community in Northern Ireland. We need to intensify those programmes, after which we can make progress on the discussion about governance.

Mr O'Loan: I congratulate the Minister for commissioning the report, and I welcome its contents. I agree with her comments about the media response, some of which was hysterical and did not do justice to the good work that Invest Northern Ireland has done, as well as noting the improvements that need to be made.

The report made a recommendation on improving the way in which economic policy is developed and co-ordinated in the public sector. Does the Minister agree that, instead of the three economic policy units that we have — one in her Department, one in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and one in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) — it would be desirable to have a single unit, which would be concentrated in her Department? We could readily achieve that; it would be much easier than uniting two whole Departments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I ask the Minister to respond, I remind Members to check that their mobile

phones are off. Not only do they disturb every other Member, they affect the recording equipment in the Chamber.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member has made that point in the Chamber on a number of occasions. It will come as no surprise to him that the section of the report that deals with core economic functions is in line with his thinking on this issue. That is why it makes a point about a single Department of the economy and a single, permanent subcommittee, which I, as the Minister, would chair. It also mentions the running-down of the Economic Development Forum (EDF), and that has not been discussed much. That, in itself, is a significant suggestion, but it has remained largely under the radar; I am not sure why that has been the case.

There is a need to consider having a focused policy for the economy. The economy is the centre of our Programme for Government and is our number one priority. Therefore, all policies that flow from the Programme for Government should be focused on that goal. We must streamline our approach in that regard; that is one of the governance issues that Mr Farry mentioned that will take a little longer to put into practice. However, I am keen to follow up on it.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the report and the accelerated consultation period of six weeks, which I feel to be appropriate. I look forward to the day when Invest NI is much more than a Belfast-based agency. In fact, I look forward to the day when it is not just a south- and east-Belfast-based agency, and extends not just across the North but into north and west Belfast.

I return to the point made by my colleague Mr O'Loan. Is it not the case that, on the Government side of economic policy, too many cooks spoil the broth? The head of the Civil Service told the SDLP earlier this year that the responsibilities of the economic policy unit in OFMDFM are recession, economic response and co-ordination of economic policy under the Programme for Government. Does the Minister agree that that is duplication of effort, and that those economic policy responsibilities and economic policy units should only be part of her office?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: That was a good try by the Member to get me to confirm that. The economy is a priority across government, as I said in response to his colleague the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It does not only affect my Department. I accept that there is a lot in the report that highlights the need to have a focus.

I will bring the results of the consultation to the Executive for a full discussion on that focus, as well as other issues. The Member can look forward to what I will have to say after I have had that discussion. He is

right in saying that there is a need for a focus in economic policy, and we will see how that comes out after the consultation.

Mr McFarland: I thank the Minister for her statement, and welcome the report. Invest NI was set up as an amalgamation of IDB and LEDU, with a view to getting away from the idea of LEDU being a poor relation. In October 2002, IDB and LEDU were dissolved, and Invest NI unfortunately ended up going towards the old IDB system.

Does the Minister recognise that this is an opportunity to refocus Invest NI into an organisation seen by small businesses as being fair to them? Will the Minister examine the way in which the Belfast Harbour Commissioners were dealt with? In a previous mandate, there was a similar argument about whether they should be given economic independence and allowed to float. As she will see, they have done extremely well out of that freedom.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am happy to consider other examples of how organisations have been dealt with by the Government, and I will take on board the Member's comments about the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

In the early days of Invest NI, there was more of an emphasis in getting foreign direct investment (FDI). That was done to try to raise productivity, but it cannot be done in isolation from the indigenous firms in Northern Ireland. I realise that, and judging from my conversations with its representatives, so does Invest NI. I hope that smaller companies will feel a lot more comfortable dealing with Invest NI. Invest NI has been doing more in that space over the past two to three years, particularly in some of its programmes. Earlier this year, I launched the 'Go for It' programme, a growth accelerator programme. Work in that field is ongoing. I accept that there probably should be more work in that field, and I will talk to the chief executive of Invest NI about that in the very near future.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. I apologise to the Minister for not being here at the beginning of her statement. I was signing a petition outside.

I thank the Minister for her statement, and acknowledge that she set up the review into Invest NI. My opinion is that the Minister got more than just constructive criticism from its findings. As the report shows, almost £1 billion of public money was wasted. Almost one third of assistance went to only 10 companies.

The Minister is exceptionally disappointed at the media coverage, and that is something that Declan O'Loan and the SDLP seem to share with her. Does the Minister not realise that, if ever there was an issue of public confidence for the business community, this is it?

12.30 pm

The review was a damning indictment of Invest NI. Invest NI rents out empty buildings in my constituency of Foyle, which makes a contribution to the north-west. Will the Minister take a more robust view of the findings of the report rather than simply leaving it to the consultation? That consultation is appreciated, but people want to hear that the Minister will deal with the recommendations in a robust way. They want Invest NI to have a better working relationship with small and medium-sized enterprises and the entire business community, rather than for it to deal with only a small number of companies.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I will deal with the recommendations, but I will certainly not deal with the nonsense that the Member has just talked about £1 billion being wasted. Some £4.5 billion of investment came on the back of that £1 billion, so it was not wasted. Is the Member going to turn that investment away? Is she going to turn away the 28,000 jobs that came from Invest Northern Ireland? Is she going to turn away the 15,000 jobs that were sustained, particularly in manufacturing companies? I am disappointed with the Member's comments, because I thought that we would have a mature debate about the report. It is a balanced report, and I urge the Member to read it if she has not already had the opportunity to do so. The report highlights areas of good performance and calls for improvements in other areas. The panel recognises many areas in which Invest NI has performed well and pointed out areas in which there is a need for change. I do not know what sort of message —

Ms Anderson: Scandalous.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has rightly asked the question, but the Member must allow the Minister to answer that question.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Member spoke about Invest NI's concentration on the 10 largest companies, but those companies employ 14,500 people. Is the Member saying that we should ignore those companies, or is she saying that we should help them to increase Northern Ireland's productivity? That is what I want to do with those companies and, indeed, with all companies. I already said that there is a need to deal more proactively with smaller companies in the communities in Northern Ireland. I will do that, but I will not take what I have had from the Member today, which is simply not true.

The Member knows how hard Invest Northern Ireland works on issues in her constituency, particularly the jobs at Stream. I am disappointed with the Member's comments about Invest Northern Ireland, given that it is doing everything that it can to bring work to that company in Londonderry. I will deal with the recommendations

based on what is in the report and not on what others would like me to think is in the report.

Mr Spratt: I apologise for not being here for the start of the Minister's statement. The report contains some radical recommendations. Did the panel fully consider the views of the business community during its deliberations?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The board had a good ongoing consultation relationship with the business community. The panel comprised some experienced businessmen, something which the press seems to have overlooked. The panel also frequently bounced ideas about the recommendations off a practitioners' panel. I am pleased to say that the panel has spoken to and engaged with the business community and that it will continue to do that during the consultation period.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement, and I welcome the approach to the consultation. Consultation and, indeed, consultation within a short time span is important. We must send the message that Executive Ministers can address such issues.

I wish to express my disappointment about one matter. The report is supported by extensive research and consultation, so would this consultation not have benefited from the Minister's commentary on the report's recommendations? That would have shortened the consultation process. The report will have to be brought back to the Executive and the Assembly, and it seems that, at this stage, we are over-consulting on a printed document. The Minister's comments would have added substantially to the value of the public consultation. The Minister may wish to comment on that.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I imagine that anyone listening to the debate will hear my comments and know my feelings on a wide range of issues. However, I am not going to be prescriptive; I want to hear what others have to say about the report. As I said, the report contains a lot of information, and, if Members wish to speak to me about any aspect of it before the close of the consultation period, I will make myself available. However, it is important to have a short consultation period to take on board views from the business community and other stakeholders.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on her statement.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Employment Bill

Extension of Committee Stage

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 9 November 2009, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Employment Bill [NIA Bill 9/08].

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion is self-explanatory. The Employment Bill had its Second Stage on 30 June 2009 and was referred to the Committee on 1 July. The Bill has eight clauses and two schedules, which Members discussed at Second Stage. Some of the Bill's provisions will amend the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 1981, which enhances the Department's powers to investigate and prosecute serious offences by unscrupulous employment agencies. It also provides for amendments to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 and the Industrial Relations Order 1992.

At its meeting on 16 September, the Committee agreed to ask for an extension to Committee Stage purely because the Assembly and society are looking at the possibility of a swine flu pandemic, and Committee members are concerned that we will not be able to reach a quorum. We know that the Bill is important. The Committee has been working closely with the Department on the Bill, and we want to ensure that an extension of Committee Stage is available if needed. We are determined that the extension will be used only if other issues emerge that are beyond our control. I ask the Assembly to support the Committee's request for an extension of Committee Stage, which we will use wisely.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 9 November 2009, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Employment Bill [NIA Bill 9/08].

Housing (Amendment) Bill

Extension of Committee Stage

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

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 1 December 2009, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 7/08].

The Housing (Amendment) Bill had its Second Stage on 23 June 2009. As part of Committee Stage, the Committee for Social Development received more than 40 written responses and heard oral evidence from 10 key stakeholder organisations. Committee members have indicated that they very much approve of a number of the Bill's provisions; for example, they have welcomed a statutory requirement on the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy and provide related advice. Despite Members wishing to see that part of the legislation move forward, the Committee asks for a little extra time to consider related issues such as eligibility for homelessness assistance and contentious issues such as the proposed changes to the definition of a house in multiple occupation.

To allow sufficient time for the Committee to consider the views that were expressed and to compile its report on the Bill, I ask the House to support the brief extension of the Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill to 1 December 2009.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 1 December 2009, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 7/08].

Forestry Bill

Extension of Committee Stage

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Elliott): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 2 March 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Forestry Bill [NIA Bill 11/08].

On behalf of the Committee, I seek the approval of the House for an extension to the Bill's Committee Stage. To many Members, the deadline may seem generous, but I assure the House that the Committee gave the matter considerable thought before deciding on 2 March 2010 as a realistic target. If the Committee can complete its formal scrutiny of the proposed Bill sooner, it will, of course, do so.

Committee staff and officials from the Department have met already to discuss the logistics of progressing the Bill, and that contact will continue throughout the process. The chief executive of the Forest Service has discussed the length of the extension with the Committee Clerk and has agreed to it. As the Committee is not permitted to return to the House to ask for a second extension, it is essential to get deliberations right in the first instance.

Given that the current legislation is more than 50 years old, the Committee welcomes the opportunity to scrutinise it. Members will recall, however, that great concern was expressed that the Bill does not go far enough in respect of the social, economic and environmental benefits that could be accrued. Stakeholders have been continuing to contact the Committee almost daily. It is, therefore, right for the Committee to give stakeholders' views appropriate consideration.

The consideration of a Bill at Committee Stage involves several logistical issues. The Committee must consult on the Bill, as must the Department, and a public notice to that effect will be placed this week. In contrast to the Department, however, the Committee must also consider any written responses, decide which witnesses to call and hear their evidence. In addition, it must examine the Bill clause by clause before producing a draft report. The Committee intends to issue that report to the Department for consideration, after which it must be printed before being laid in the Business Office and, ultimately, considered by the House.

Given the importance of the Bill, the Committee feels strongly that all those stages cannot be completed within the period defined in Standing Order 33(2), particularly as the Assembly will be in recess for part of that period. Given the amount of consideration that is required, the length of the extension is realistic.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 2 March 2010, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Forestry Bill [NIA Bill 11/08].

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Grammar School Entrance Tests

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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech.

Mr B McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly requests that the Minister of Education establishes a statutory framework for the grammar school entrance tests, effective from the beginning of the academic year 2010-11; and recommends that this statutory framework should remain in place until the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment devises, pilots and introduces literacy and numeracy tests compatible with the curriculum, alongside a robust pupil profile, allowing academic criteria to have a role in the post-primary transfer process.

Undoubtedly, some Members will be reflecting on the fact that today's debate is the fifth on the subject. Given all the excitement outside at the Prime Minister's arrival for discussions on policing and justice and the speculation on how the deputy First Minister and First Minister are getting on and on how the issues can be resolved and whether there will be an election, Members may wonder whether the debate is relevant. However, in my opinion, this is the issue that the people of Northern Ireland are talking about. When we go out and meet people in our constituencies, they say that this is the issue that they are concerned about.

12.45 pm

It is no surprise that the 'Belfast Telegraph' has launched a petition that urges all of us to come together and find a solution because, put simply, the situation at which we have arrived is the worst of all possible worlds. It satisfies no one, it puts huge stress on children and it takes an awful lot of time away from teachers and headmasters, who, others will argue, could be doing something else. In addressing this issue, one could consider having a rant and a rave. I have been known to do such things in the past. However, we are now at the stage at which we need considered reflection about what we can do to find a way forward for our children and the people of Northern Ireland.

I want to highlight the fact that we agree on many issues. Although I am happy for people to take issue with what I say, we share the common objectives of trying to tackle educational underachievement. We want to increase social mobility, and we want people who are from not-so-favourable backgrounds to be

better educated, get better jobs and be better paid. Let us lift everybody up. We want to eradicate poverty, which is one of the key issues facing this Administration. Education is the only enduring competitive advantage. We want to prepare our young people for their futures and for an economy that is, of course, uncertain. The only certainty that we can give them is the basis on which to compete.

We also have a common understanding of how we could address those issues and of what it takes to make that a reality. There is consensus on the basis of early intervention, even in the pre-primary sector. There is consensus in the House on the importance of primary school education and the critical role of good teaching. We have some of the best teachers in the world; we certainly have excellent teacher training colleges. We agree about the huge impact of head teachers as the overarching people who are responsible for improving standards and giving our young people the future that they deserve. I do not think that anybody here will disagree about the importance of parental support. What a difference that makes to children in making their way through life.

In addition, we agree on the need for change. If there is one certainty in this world, it is that change will happen. We also agree on academic excellence. We want our young people to do as well as possible. We support extended schools. All of us agree on the importance of the STEM subjects. We recognise the importance of language skills and the benefits of learning communities.

Members will highlight different issues. On the diversity of provision, there are people in this House who will argue for the Irish-medium sector. There are those who will argue for the integrated sector. Others will argue for faith-based schools, and there are also people who will argue for some form of academies. That shows that one size does not fit all. It is most important that we find a way of giving our young people the best start in life. Of course, that will require some form of area-based planning, whereby we try to accommodate all of those issues.

We recognise all of that. We are together, and we agree that we should try to find a way forward. At the risk of agreeing all day, we even agree on where the challenges lie. We agree that there is a challenge in respect of empty desks. We agree that falling rolls will put severe pressure on the financing of some of our schools. We understand the difficulties of maintaining and funding small rural schools, which make up a significant proportion of our school estate.

We acknowledge the strain on our head teachers, which is due to excessive bureaucracy, red tape and overheads and which detracts from their ability to do the job that they want to do. We agree about the iniquity

of funding delays that lead to schools not being built on time, and we know about the financing challenges. I guess that we even agree about maximising autonomy where possible at school level, if that is a school's wish.

So where does the problem lie? If we agree on all those issues, why is it not possible to get together and resolve them? The Ulster Unionist Party has identified four issues, which it puts on the table in the hope that the House will consider them and resolve to address them. There is a difference of opinion about cause and effect. In the past, the Minister has argued that the 11-plus, transfer test or whatever terminology one wishes to use causes social inequalities and that it is iniquitous and unfair. There are other arguments, not least of which is that the tests do not create inequalities, rather, they reflect inequalities.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: If the Member is brief.

Mr D Bradley: I notice the growing warmth in the relationship between the Member's party and the Tory Party. Consequently, does the Member agree with the Tory skills spokesperson, David Willetts, who said:

"academic selection entrenches advantage, it does not spread it"?

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful to Mr Bradley for bringing that matter up. In fact, I rather hoped to engender some warmth between the UUP and the SDLP, because these are devolved matters that we must discuss and find a solution to.

Mr D Bradley: So you do not agree with him.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I only have a certain amount of time — 10 minutes — so I cannot deal with barracking. If Members want a solution, instead of making cheap party-political points, they should consider the reality of the situation that faces our children and their role in tackling it.

Some people are not being represented. Parents who want to send their children to particular schools are not finding support in this House. The Minister says that my party is resisting change, but nothing could be further from the truth. We know that change is essential; we embrace and welcome it, and we want to see it. I want to tell the Minister that we are all free to change our minds and choose a different future; some of us may even want to choose a different past. I look to the Minister to see whether she is prepared to engage in finding a solution to this problem, because, if she is, she will find that the people of Northern Ireland will welcome it with open arms.

I hear people speak about an equality issue. Everybody wants equality, which is a word like "justice". Everybody wants justice. Equality is a meaningless term unless it is further defined. Equality for whom? Equality in what? What is it that those people want to achieve? We are seeking equity. At the end of the day,

the UUP's fundamental position is that parental choice is the bedrock of all democracy. We do not like the iniquity of our children having to do five separate tests. Those who wanted to get rid of the 11-plus seem to have ended up with two tests. That cannot be the way forward. Those who want to keep the existing system need to ensure that it is regulated —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: The UUP motion helps to do that, so I urge Members to support it.

Mr Lunn: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "Education" and insert

"instructs the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment to complete, pilot and introduce a literacy and numeracy test based on the revised curriculum to be available to all schools in time for the 2010-2011 academic year, to be used alongside pupil profiles as one of the criteria for post-primary transfer, for one year only pending an agreed solution following inter-party talks."

I listened with interest to the proposer of the motion speak to the motion for about the last 60 seconds of his speech; the rest seemed to be a wide-ranging review of the education system in Northern Ireland. Unusually, I find that I agree with much of what he said. I agree that it is the fifth time that we have discussed this matter, and that this remains the main issue that we face on the doorstep, if we perhaps leave aside the economy. The most important issue is not policing and justice. This is much more important to parents.

The Member spoke about social mobility, and I agree with the various points that he raised. However, the motion is not about that: it is about trying to legitimise the breakaway actions of the AQE and the grammar schools. If I were involved in that movement, I would be glad to see legal cover created by the Department of Education to protect me and my actions. However, I am not involved in that, and as the AQE has sown so shall it reap. I can well imagine the Minister's response to that request.

The motion also seeks to extend indefinitely the system of academic selection. People can dress it up whatever way they like, but the motion calls for the present grammar school tests to be legitimised and extended for another year, while the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment comes up with an ongoing test. The Alliance Party proposed that on the fourth occasion on which this matter was debated, in March. We proposed that such a situation should be allowed to exist for two years, to give a chance for the various parties and interests involved to hold further concentrated talks to try to do something about the mess that we find ourselves in. That suggestion was not taken up by the Minister or her party. For various reasons, it was taken up by other parties represented in the Chamber but not because they supported the Alliance Party's thinking on the issue.

The Assembly has been down this road so many times that the outcome of today's debate is entirely predictable. The Ulster Unionist Party's motion will probably be agreed to because it has the support of the two main unionist parties. The Alliance Party's amendment, which merely seeks to reinforce what it put forward in March, will certainly fail. Neither of those decisions will be in any way binding on the Department or the Minister. I am sure that the Minister will not change her position, and I do not see why she should in the present circumstances. By way of response, we will probably hear from the Minister of Education a speech very similar to that which she gave during the last couple of debates on this subject. The Minister shares the characteristic of Mrs Thatcher in that she is "not for turning". I do not expect her to turn now.

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

The way forward on this subject is not through private Members' motions. I hesitate to call them irrelevant, but that is really what they are. They will change nothing. Last week and the week before, the 'Belfast Telegraph' has drummed up support for its "Sort it Out" campaign. The Alliance Party has called for all-party talks, and Mr McCrea also supported that idea. Every party represented in the Chamber has expressed an interest in all-party talks. I do not mean that the Education Committee should set aside time to talk about this. The Committee does not have time to spend on this. However, individual spokespersons, in a different forum, with support from senior party figures, could make time and try to do something about this. It is the only way forward.

Sinn Féin is not keen on participating in such talks. However, I plead with that party, if not the Minister or Department, to participate. I do not see what harm it would do to its cause by coming to the table and putting its case along with the other parties. I encourage Sinn Féin to think again about that.

We often hear about the needs of the children. Mr McCrea referred to that eloquently today, and this is all about the needs of the children. As usual, the children are being left aside in this debate. This year's P7s are going through a process that is disgraceful. The impasse should never have got to this point.

One point of view is to blame the Minister's intransigence; another is to blame the actions of the AQE and the grammar schools. We can blame whomever we want, but we have a situation in which kids of a tender age are being put through the process, and that is simply not right.

1.00 pm

Children in P7 are being asked to sit variable tests in varying venues that are strange to them, probably on Saturdays. There is a question of whether their families can afford for them to be coached or prepared for those tests. Clearly, families with money will be able to

afford such coaching; those without money will not. I fail to see where the equality is in that. The situation is putting enormous pressure on primary-school teachers and, in particular, head teachers, who are under pressure from the Department not to permit coaching and from parents to do exactly the opposite. I expect that most of them will serve the needs of the pupils, and, from their point of view, I cannot blame them. When Members say that it is "all about the children", it has a hollow ring, because this is the fifth time in a couple of years that we are debating the issue, and we are no further forward.

Various bodies speak against academic selection; certainly, the Alliance Party is in that section of society, as are most of the teaching unions, the Churches, and academic professionals. I cannot identify many bodies or, numerically, many people who still want to cling to an outdated system.

I want to read from a resolution passed by the Belfast Synod of the Methodist Church in Ireland, which I expect that the spokesperson has received in the past few days. It states:

"It is the opinion of the Synod that the current impasse regarding the method of transfer from primary to secondary schools is a national disgrace. The Synod also is of a clear mind that the division and labelling of children as academic and non-academic at the age of 11 is erroneous, outmoded and self-defeating. It is the view of the Synod that much excellent research carried out through the years, not least in Craigavon."

The Dickson plan that operates there is the example to work on. When the Committee for Education visited Craigavon and the Dickson plan was explained to it, it found favour with, I think, every party, not necessarily to simply accept it as is, but as a terrific model to work forward. However, it has been ignored.

The resolution continues that the:

"Synod remains deeply concerned that the present system of transfer has resulted in an appalling poverty of aspiration among many sections of our community, with the consequential waste of latent skills and talents, these remaining untapped."

The word "synod" could be replaced with unions, teaching professionals, various political parties, and, I believe, no matter what the polls say, the majority of parents.

Here we are again on the merry-go-round. I am glad that Mr Basil McCrea gave us a reasoned explanation of his party's thinking, rather than a rant. However, nothing has changed. The Ulster Unionist Party wants to reinstate and extend academic selection; society and the world have moved on. For that reason, I propose the amendment, with no expectation that it will be accepted. We will be opposing the motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education (Mr Storey): Following on from the comments of Mr Lunn, who is a member of the Committee, I assure him and the House that the Committee for Education took time to consider this particular issue. I want to place on

the record, as the Committee's Chairperson, the consideration that the Committee gave to what it saw as a very important issue and, of course, to the concerns that were raised with it about an unregulated system.

On 20 February this year, the Committee for Education agreed that I, as Chairperson of the Committee, should write to the Minister to request that she reconsider the use of the CCEA-commissioned test as an interim compromise arrangement, with no conditions attached. The Committee's letter, which is on the Assembly website, highlighted that there were concerns across the board that an unregulated system of transfer was not the preferred option. At that time, the Schools Transfer Option for Pupils (STOP) group of primary 6 parents petitioned the Committee and the Minister to the effect that an unregulated system of transfer was the least desirable outcome for children, parents and schools, and that the only immediate solution was for the Minister of Education to reinstate an interim CCEA exam to be adopted by all schools that proposed to introduce their own exam.

At the time, the Committee also highlighted to the Minister that the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education, the Catholic Heads Association and the Governing Bodies Association had recently made it clear that they were concerned by an unregulated system of transfer, and stated that some interim solution using the test commissioned from CCEA was necessary to allow time to develop a properly regulated transfer system. The Minister came to a Committee meeting on 10 March 2009, however, and, shortly after her arrival, said:

"There will not be a CCEA test."

I recall the Minister using similar words on 24 March 2009, when responding to an Alliance motion, which has been referred to. She said:

"The train has left the station. Transfer 2010 is departmental policy". [*Official Report, Vol 39, No 5, p253, col 2*].

To end my comments as Chairperson of the Committee for Education, it is right to inform the House that the Education Committee received a delegation from all five teachers' unions at a meeting on 17 June at which they expressed their grave concerns in relation to transfer 2010 arrangements and called for agreement on the transfer process.

I will use the time that I have remaining to speak as a private Member, and I will be as brief as I can, given the time that has been allotted to me.

We require a lot longer to deal with this issue. I agree with what Basil McCrea said: the most important issue facing Northern Ireland is not the devolution of policing and justice; it is the need to maintain and protect an educational system for the future of which all of us can be proud.

We have a Minister who has consistently refused to change. I could almost write her speech. She will talk about how many times the DUP has refused to discuss the issue at Executive meetings, and she will go over the same rhetoric as she always does. I remind Members that almost 13,000 parents in this country have decided that, for the best interests of their child, he or she will go to a school that sets an entrance test. They have made that choice because there are parents, professionals and educationalists in society who believe in the merit of having academic assessment.

I will be fair and honest and admit that there are also people — even those whom I have met over time — who say that there is no justification for having academic criteria for selection purposes. However, the reality is that Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, the Assembly's first Education Minister, and Caitríona Ruane, the second, have refused to listen to what people are saying.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: That is the reality. It is unfortunate that Members have only five minutes in which to speak on an issue that is of such importance.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education: I assure the Minister that if she thinks that this issue is over and done with, she has another thing coming.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member had five minutes and 14 seconds in which to speak.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the proposer of the motion said, this is the fifth time that the House has debated academic selection. I am not sure how many of those five debates have been proposed by the Ulster Unionist Party in an attempt to hold on to a system that has failed so many children in the past. That system protects a select number of children, and to hell with the rest.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: Is it a point of order?

Mr Storey: No. Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes.

Mr Storey: Members from the opposition have repeatedly referred to the issue of failure and the fact that that failure is proven. Indeed, the Minister has made the same point in her official statements. However, there is no empirical evidence that clearly demonstrates a link between transfer and underachievement. Where is the evidence?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please moderate her language?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I remind him that Sinn Féin is not the opposition; it is part of a coalition Government.

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that no child will be disadvantaged and that no child will be left behind while others are nurtured to achieve. It wants to ensure that every child in the education system receives all the support that he or she needs to achieve his or her best. It appears from the UUP's contribution that that party is totally ignoring society's position on academic selection. The mentality and sentiment behind its motion appears to be one of burying its head in the sand.

I recently met with a number of primary-school principals, and the mood among primary-school principals and teachers is one of wanting to get on with the new system. They support the direction of travel that the Minister has presented in transfer 2010. Furthermore, they want to get on with teaching the curriculum, so that all children will be prepared to enter the next level of education, having been taught right to the end of primary 7, without the interference of having to teach according to the requirements of a test. Primary schools are happy to be divorced from the selection process, and it is time for the Ulster Unionist Party to wake up and realise that.

The motion refers to the establishment of a statutory framework, and its proposer discussed the various areas on which we have agreement. I remind him that the Minister agreed to commission a test for three years, on a phasing-out basis, as a compromise way forward. However, despite numerous engagements throughout the education sector and the tabling of those proposals at the Executive, the parties refused to discuss them. That left a need for decisive action, and decisive action was taken.

Mr A Maginness: The fact that the Minister envisaged, quite rightly, a temporary testing period and then withdrew that suggestion gave rise to a non-regulated system, which has caused great anxiety to many parents. Does the Member agree that the Minister made a mistake in doing that and that she should have persevered with that approach to get through the transition period?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I do not agree with him. When the Minister put that compromise proposal — it was a clear compromise — on the table, she gave it a definitive end date. It was a three-year period in which to phase out testing. That proposal would have allowed people time to adjust, but there was no agreement on it.

Everyone would prefer a regulated system, but, as there was no agreement on the compromise proposals, we had to move forward, and the Minister had to publish her transfer 2010 guidance, which, if followed

by all schools, will create a more effective and fair system of post-primary transfer. When that guidance is coupled with the other changes in education, such as area-based planning and the entitlement framework, the future looks bright for all children in the education system. In its tenure in the Department of Education, Sinn Féin will ensure that no child is disadvantaged.

The Alliance Party's amendment calls for the introduction of a test for one year. I listened very carefully to the proposer of that amendment, and it is a genuine attempt at a constructive way forward. However, it ignores the political reality that, to date, there has been no agreement between the parties and that they are entrenched in their positions.

Mervyn Storey said that he could predict what the Minister would say at the conclusion of today's debate and that what she would say would be all rhetoric. However, there is rhetoric across the board, because all Members will say the same things that we have heard so many times before.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: No. I am just about to finish.

1.15 pm

The Alliance Party's amendment says that a CCEA test will allow for a solution following inter-party talks. However, that has been tried and tested and has failed. Numerous attempts have been made to move forward and seek agreement with Executive colleagues, but they are unwilling to look at that. We need an education system that is fit for purpose and fit for the twenty-first century, based on meeting the needs of all children in a fair, open and transparent manner. The vast majority of schools support the Minister's position. Sinn Féin will not be deterred in what it has to do and it will be opposing the motion and the amendment.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is well known that the SDLP sees academic selection as educationally unsound and socially unacceptable. However, we realise that movement from one system to another cannot be done overnight and requires a planned and structured transition so that parents, teachers, pupils and schools know the various steps involved.

Mr Storey: Will the Member clarify something that has been confusing me for a long time? I am not hard to confuse, but how does the Member marry what he has already said with the grammar schools in his constituency in the city of Newry, which he knows well? Has he now bought into the vision of the bishops, which is to bring those schools under their control if they get their way with the ESA Bill? We will come to that debate very soon. Where does the Member stand in relation to those schools that have a very defined

grammar ethos? Has he dumped them because it is politically convenient to do so?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions should be short and to the point. Members have only five minutes in which to speak.

Mr D Bradley: Of course I value the contribution to education made by all the schools in my constituency, both selective and non-selective. However, many selective schools now realise that their position is untenable in the future and are beginning to make arrangements to admit a wider range of ability. That will happen not overnight but gradually, and I welcome that very much.

As I was saying before Mr Storey intervened, the non-binding guidelines from the Minister have created difficulties for both primary and post-primary schools. Already, I see evidence that accommodation addresses are being used to help pupils to get into some non-selective schools rather than others. That situation will only get worse, and it will add to the pressure on schools that have to police that situation.

The Minister and her colleagues abolished the 11-plus, but they did so without any clear and planned process of transition. Our duty as politicians is to protect children from an unregulated system and to ensure that their needs are met through a planned process of transition. A firm and acceptable solution will be found only when all parties agree on a long-term vision for the future of education in the North.

As Basil McCrea pointed out, there is already agreement on major issues, and we must take the further step. The SDLP wants an education system, based on fairness and equality, that guarantees parental choice. It wants to see high academic standards maintained in schools. Patterns of investment in education need to be reassessed, and massive investment must be made to raise standards in all schools. Reform of our education system takes time. The argument should not only be about deciding how our children transfer from primary school, it should involve long-term investment and significant restructuring of our whole education system to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

We need to ensure that pupils leaving school do so with qualifications in the subjects that our economy needs, and which will be the basis for the skills needed to create the wealth that will improve the lives of all our citizens. The context for change is education reform, yet area-based planning has not been developed to the extent needed, and, although local learning communities have done good work, there is much that needs to be done.

In March, the SDLP put forward sensible proposals to avoid imminent chaos and to provide certainty for primary-7 pupils. Had our proposals been supported,

the current confusion and stresses for pupils and parents could have been avoided. The educator-led group that we proposed would not be tasked with finding a short-term solution; it would be asked to assess all available solutions for achieving compromise in the context of long-term development of our education system, taking into account the future needs and demands that will be placed on our schools. Such a solution would give us a framework for the future delivery of an education system that is based on non-selective transfer and achieving excellence for all.

The four main Churches backed a proposal similar to ours. We still believe that it is the only sensible solution to have been proposed, and we urge parties to back our proposals. We also encourage them to outline their proposals for a way forward —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: — on the basis of all-party talks to break the deadlock.

We ask the Alliance Party to clarify its amendment.

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

Mr D Bradley: Will it mean that all schools use a transfer test? Will any school be allowed to select its full intake by testing?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry: the Member's time is up.

Mr D Bradley: If we receive answers to those questions —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Miss Michelle McIlveen.

Mr D Bradley: — we will consider supporting the amendment.

Miss McIlveen: One would think that we would have learned by now that the Minister is operating on the “Caitríona knows best” principle, despite the will of Members, schools, both controlled and Catholic maintained, and the people. I am not in the business of defending the Ulster Unionist Party, which is fit to defend itself, but perhaps it is not the Members who tabled the motion who have their heads in the sand, but the Minister.

Despite this being the fifth occasion on which we have debated transfer, any debate on this vital subject should always be welcomed and should not be dismissed, as it keeps the issue firmly on the agenda. It has not gone away, and it is imperative that the Minister is constantly reminded of that.

We have told the Minister of our wish for parental choice, and that we want a three-year interim CCEA-run transfer test. We have even reminded her of the position of the Catholic maintained schools that have opted for the unregulated test. Now, we are in a position where children have signed up to it and are ready to sit

those unregulated tests. As I, and others, have said before, it is not the chaos that some had predicted, but it is far from ideal. I have always been of the view that a permanent solution needs to be reached regarding post-primary transfer, but that solution requires the wishes of those who want to retain academic selection to be respected.

Mr Lunn was unable to quantify the people who wish to retain academic selection in Northern Ireland, but today there are approximately 13,000 children signed up and ready to sit the transfer test this autumn.

Mr Storey: Does the Member also accept that the Minister repeatedly talks about a minority — I am sure that we will hear it today — and states that she will not be held to ransom by that minority? She makes derogatory comments about the grammar sector. Does the Member agree with me that that sector educates 42% of children in post-primary schools? That is certainly a lot more pupils than are educated in the Irish-medium sector, which is on the decline, despite what the Minister tells us.

Miss McIlveen: I agree with the comments made by Mr Storey. That statistic should set the alarm bells ringing with the Minister that her vision is not shared by a sizeable proportion of this year's cohort. It tells me that parents want equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome. Equality of opportunity brings out the best, whereas equality of outcome suppresses it.

As Basil McCrea said, we found ourselves in the middle of a campaign by a regional newspaper asking us to find a solution. It is unfortunate that the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ has used such emotive headlines urging us to “sort out transfer chaos”, but it is good that it has decided to keep the matter in the public domain. Sadly, the newspaper has not been brave enough to express a viewpoint or to point the finger of blame where it truly belongs: it decided to tar all Members with the same brush.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Miss McIlveen: No, I do not have much time.

The majority of Members are willing to discuss the subject in a logical and measured manner. However, one party is not willing to sort out the issue. That party is burdened by ideological dogma, and it is the one party that did not sign the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ petition. That tells us everything that we need to know about the political will that is needed to obtain a resolution.

The DUP has sought to be constructive in its contributions to the debate on academic selection. We believe that a solution can be obtained if political dogma is left at the door. If the criticisms that were made about the old 11-plus test were dealt with, a way could surely be found to resolve matters.

I have sympathy with the Alliance Party amendment, because inter-party talks and, ultimately, agreement, are the only way forward. However, it is up to the Minister to set aside her prejudices, and, for the good of parents, pupils and the education system in general, to provide a greater degree of stability and certainty by allowing a CCEA-regulated test in the interim. On previous occasions, the Minister has made it clear that such a test is possible. It would be a sign of goodwill and of a willingness to seek consensus on her part if she were to take the next logical step and announce the introduction of a CCEA-regulated test for 2010-2011.

The absence of any movement on the Minister's part will signal that she does not care what anyone thinks, believes or wants and that she is happy for the current situation to continue. She has talked about seeking consensus. Now is the time for her to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

I have concerns about the motion and the amendment regarding the role of pupil profiling. However, I support the motion as it stands.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wonder whether I will get my name in the 'Belfast Telegraph' if I mention it. Some people have no self-respect.

I am surprised that the SDLP criticised the Ulster Unionist Party motion, because the SDLP tabled a similar motion on the no-day-named list, calling for the reintroduction of a test. That is a mistake —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not. I will let the Member in later.

The Alliance Party amendment is well meaning. The difficulty with the entire debate is that people who are well meaning and who wish to be constructive are being used. They are being used by a very effective lobby that comes from certain grammar schools. The top-level, elitist grammar schools are using all their influence, whether through the media or through the Chamber, to lobby for the return of the 11-plus.

The issue is not about introducing a CCEA test for one, two or three years; it is about bringing back the 11-plus. The debate has been going on not only for the past 18 months or since the time when Martin McGuinness was the Minister of Education but for 50 years. For 50 years, there has been a strong lobby and an educational argument in favour of removing selection at age 11. However, on every occasion that selection was about to be removed, the grammar schools got an eleventh-hour reprieve and the 11-plus was saved. I have lost count of the number of people over the years who told me that they would be the last to sit the 11-plus. There was always another year after that, another year after that, and so on. Listen to this: there will not be another one. The 11-plus is gone, and it will not return.

Mr Storey: If what the Member is saying is the case, then we are to assume that the Minister will not budge or bend to lobbies. What budging and bending did the Minister do to the Catholic bishops during the summer in relation to control of their schools, which they felt that they would lose? Will the Member provide detail of that lobbying and how successful it was?

Mr O'Dowd: When the Member comes to discuss the Education Bill, to which that matter refers, I will be more than happy to discuss the issue. He will realise that issues around control of schools affect all sectors not only the Catholic Church.

1.30 pm

I will return to the subject of the debate. The other part of the motion that disturbs me is pupil profiling. Mr McCrea and the Ulster Unionist Party tell us that they have been out talking to sectors, parents and teachers. Obviously, they have not talked to primary school teachers. Again and again, the primary school sector has said that it will not be involved in pupil profiling. Therefore, from where will pupil profiling come? That matter has been ruled out already; not just by the Minister and Sinn Féin, but by the teachers who would be involved in that process.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: A number of people have asked me to give way.

There is a chance for a new beginning for education. Those well-meaning groups and parties in the Assembly need to focus on that. Although it comes naturally in the cut and thrust of political debate, they must remove their political bias and look at the end goal. There is an opportunity to move education forward. Such well-meaning motions and amendments only give succour to the grammar school sector. Attention must be focused on the small number of grammar schools that have insisted that they will continue with academic selection.

It has been claimed that 12,000 to 13,000 pupils are prepared to sit the test. There has been some double-counting. However, regardless of how many sit the test, it has not been mentioned that, of those, say, 12,000 pupils, 5,000 will be told that they are not wanted by those schools. They will be told that they have failed. For those children, a wee letter will drop onto the mat that will tell them that they are failures at 10 years of age. Does the Assembly want that situation to continue?

Will education be an event or a process? Sinn Féin believes that it is a process. Therefore, let us focus on where attention is needed: on that small group of grammar schools which, in the past, used its influence in the corridors of powers to ensure that change did not come. It is now time to stand up to them and say that

change has come, the 11-plus is gone and will not return. Those schools need to realise that.

The rest of society has moved on. The Catholic maintained sector has said that it will remove academic selection within two years. That is progress, and it shows that the process is moving. I have no doubt that there will be resistance to that. However, as regards the entitlement framework, area planning and all that goes with it, schools that sit out on their own will no longer be able to survive. They will not be able to provide the wide range of courses that is required to produce the talent and skills that are needed in the twenty-first century economy.

Therefore, the ball is rolling down the hill. Change is here. Let us stop throwing lifelines to the grammar school sector. Let us not be dissuaded by the latest editorial in one of the Belfast morning newspapers, which has been pro-selection all along. Let us stand up to them and say that, after 50 years, the game is up. It is over. There will be no more selection; no more testing children at 10 and 11 years of age. Let us move forward to an education system that brings the best outcomes for all children.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr O'Dowd: I will leave it there. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I am finished.

Mr McCallister: As other Members said, the debate is the fifth that the Assembly has had on post-primary transfer. The Ulster Unionist Party has tabled three of those motions, which reflects its desire to find a solution to the current impasse. That solution must be found in order to bring relief to teachers, parents and children throughout the entire education system.

My party is realistic about what is needed to achieve a sustainable solution that is in children's genuine interests. For that reason, although I recognise the logic behind the Alliance Party's amendment, I cannot support it. The amendment will create another sunset clause, which will block long-term agreement. I understand that, at present, the Alliance Party supports sunset clauses. Such clauses do not make for good government or for good long-term solutions.

It is strange that the Alliance Party tabled the amendment when, in proposing it, Mr Lunn said what a big waste of time the whole thing is anyway. Despite that, he was able to speak about it for 10 minutes.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I will, briefly.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way.

I ask Mr McCallister to reflect that the motivation behind our amendment is a call for all-party talks, that those talks must be without prejudice, and that the Ulster Unionist Party's motion directs the outcome of any talks towards a preordained outcome. If we are to engage genuinely with Sinn Féin in particular, we must bring that party to the table, and we must be able to discuss all the issues and be open to the direction in which such talks may go.

Mr McCallister: Mr Lunn did not make any of that clear; I did not catch that from his opening remarks.

The motion is to give us a breathing space to get a solution from all the parties.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way; he is probably the only Member who gives way to me.

Does the Member agree that people are not listening to the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party is saying that it is prepared for change; that it agrees with many of the points that Members have made about the transitional nature of the way forward; and that it wants to find common ground for a common solution?

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to my honourable friend for his intervention. Members across the House made those points. There is broad agreement on some of the issues and on building a future for the education system. People want an education system that meets the needs of all children and reflects what parents want. Nobody objects to that.

The difficulty is that the Minister is going ahead with her view regardless of whether there is agreement. Her view does not recognise the fact that Northern Ireland has a coalition Government with a power-sharing Executive, because the Minister's view excludes completely any form of power sharing and the idea of building a shared future. The Minister is not listening to any other parties in the Assembly. She has chosen to ignore the majority of parties in the Assembly — the SDLP, the Alliance Party, the DUP and my party — and a significant proportion of the population of Northern Ireland. Her view does not take into account power sharing or a shared future. We must find a common way through our difficulties.

The Minister's course of action does not interfere merely with the sensibilities of politicians; it is having a real effect. Several Members, including Mr Lunn, Mr Storey and Basil McCrea, said that education is the top issue that parents want sorted out. Parents regard that issue as much higher up the political agenda than policing and justice, yet it is not being addressed.

Across Northern Ireland, parents, children and teachers are preparing themselves for a very uncertain, chaotic and potentially damaging year. Children aged 10 and 11 now face multiple transfer tests to determine their future, and no one is quite sure how an unregulated

system will pan out. The current situation is in no one's interest.

There is a definite pattern in the Minister's policies. Most educationalists are moving towards a demand-led education system that takes into consideration the different needs of children, parents and teachers and which will reflect abilities, beliefs and ethos. However, the Minister seems to be moving in the opposite direction to a one-size-fits-all centrally controlled and overly bureaucratic educational system that does not reflect the world that we live in, either economically or socially.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr McCallister: I support the motion.

Mrs M Bradley: As my colleague Dominic Bradley is the party spokesperson for education, I have no intention of reiterating the valid points that he made. However, I feel that it is incumbent on all of us to work together to solve this problem. We should not be put off by the souring of a political romance that was kept buoyant by the political pundits and an insatiable media thirst.

Over the past week, I was saddened to read some of the comments from local people and, not least, those of journalists who are tarring us all with the one brush. Headlines and media reports tell of mass confusion; parties dithering over talks to end the logjam; politicians playing party politics with the education system of Northern Ireland; and, worst of all, the issue having gone right to the Assembly Floor and the message still having not got through.

I assure the House that the SDLP is not dithering. We want to see an end to this fiasco. However, it is unhelpful for the Minister and her party to simply reiterate that a decision has been made and that is that. If the stance of the DUP and Sinn Féin in education is anything to go by, we can only assume that political agendas are their priority, not the 13,700 children who are being forced to sit not one but as many as five tests to gain a grammar school place.

No matter what the Minister thinks, the decision should at least have been properly discussed with the parents and teachers of those children. As we have heard from the Minister, one size does not fit all. Where the education of a child is concerned, decisions that are made are very private and pressured and are not taken lightly. Ramming through transfer 2010, with nothing to replace it, has disadvantaged many children. I refer to children who have academic ability but, because their parents cannot afford to pay the fees for some of the selection tests, are being left behind.

We have heard all about the 'Every School a Good School' policy, but the Minister is obviously not listening to the people of Northern Ireland. Parents are

totally disillusioned; they cannot even tell their children how this is going to work out for them. It is a parent's duty to be able to console their child and explain the road ahead. However, this process has left everyone frustrated and confused. Parents and teachers alike are feeling let down and very resentful.

Huge pressure is being placed on teachers and principals to coach the children who want to sit the entrance tests, yet the Department states that they cannot do that. Thus, we have another strained relationship between teachers and parents.

Educational reform is all very well when there is an equitable and beneficial proposal for change. I am sorry to say that I see neither in the midst of this fiasco. Let this year be the only year that children, parents and principals are confused and generally distrusting of this place and its proposals for a better system. I ask the Minister, "Better for whom?"

I urge the Minister to show the compassion that she tells us she has for the children of Northern Ireland and sit down with all the parties represented in the House, as well as the appropriate educationalists, and settle the situation once and for all. The Minister can do that, and I urge her to please take that step.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have always stated my preferences for a new, regulated system of transfer from primary to post-primary education that will ensure that all children can access the high-quality education to which they are entitled as a right. The motion, however, offers no prospects of such a system. Although it is predictably vague, the motion demands a statutory framework for academic entrance tests to be put in place while the CCEA devises a slightly different testing regime to facilitate the use of academic admissions criteria by grammar schools.

Tá sé i gceist ag an rún seo roghnú acadúil státurraithe agus teist aistrithe a thabhairt isteach arís go buan. Tá an rún seo ag éileamh orainn fillleadh ar chóras teipthe na teiste aistrithe. Deirim go soiléir arís: tá an teist aistrithe imithe, agus ní bheidh sí ag teacht ar ais ar bhealach ar bith.

The motion seeks the permanent reinstatement of state-sponsored academic selection and a permanent 11-plus. The motion demands a return to the failed 11-plus system. Let me be absolutely clear and unambiguous: the 11-plus is gone. The 11-plus is not coming back in any shape or form. The motion demonstrates extreme naivety and a total failure to recognise the changing realities in our education system.

The proposers of the motion believe that, somehow, we can develop an acceptable and less traumatic version of the 11-plus. I want to be absolutely clear: there is no acceptable way of designating the majority

of our children as failures. There is no acceptable form of academic rejection.

1.45 pm

The motion implicitly demands that the past should continue unchanged into the future and demonstrates a totally closed mindset by denying that there should even be a debate about the future of post-primary transfer. It denies the presence of any demand for change. It denies the fact that there was consultation on transfer 2010 guidance. We received 3,195 responses, of which 95% supported change. It denies the fact that the number of children entered for entrance tests may show, for the first time, that the majority of parents have rejected academic selection.

Through the motion, those in favour of the old system demand that everybody else falls into line with them. The proposers of the motion appear to have their hands over their eyes and ears, which is no basis for making decisions on the future of our education system and on how we meet the needs of our children. In contrast to that approach, I spent two years developing compromise proposals and repeatedly sought engagement on them. However, as with the content of the motion, the response to those proposals was a refusal to consider anything but the status quo and a refusal to discuss any change.

Tá géarghá le díospóireacht dhearfach agus fócas ar an todhchaí, ach caithfidh muid níos mó ná mian aineolach filleadh ar an am atá thart a bheith againn má tá an díospóireacht sin le bheith againn.

A constructive debate and focus on the future is urgently needed, but that needs to be more than an ill-informed desire to return to the past. Our future system of post-primary transfer must be seen as an integral and important part of a wider reform agenda. A focus on the future must consider the need to ensure that half our children do not leave school without five good GCSEs, including English and maths or Irish and maths, depending on the language through which children are learning.

There has been much inequality and injustice in 2008-09 and in previous years. The most recent figures profiling our grammar school population show that the rate at which a low-income or free-school-meal-entitled child gets a grammar school place is one in 18. The rate for other children is one in two. It is important that we deliver an undistorted and revised curriculum to nine- and 10-year-old children that is welcomed and valued by our primary schools. I applaud many of our primary schools for standing up for the rights of children.

The process of post-primary transfer cannot be viewed in isolation. We must also help to deliver on curriculum reform not only in respect of the revised curriculum but the entitlement framework. I seriously doubt that the proposers of the motion understand or

even consider the social and economic needs of our young people. We cannot slavishly continue with an outdated and discredited model of post-primary education that envisages two crudely separated routes: the academic and the sub-academic.

Our education system needs to serve our children and produce young people with diverse and flexible skills. We cannot accept a system that suppresses opportunity for those who are less well off and demoralises up to two thirds of our children every year. We cannot continue to waste up to two years of each child's primary education because of a crude and educationally unsound child-sorting process.

The 11-plus system is a failed system. Academic selection is a failed system. Any education system that judges even one child to be a failure at the age of 11 is wrong, unjust and indefensible. Every stage in a child's education is important. The way in which we move children from one stage in their education to another is equally important, but it is only one part of the jigsaw that will result in the total reform of our education system. My vision is to elevate our education system from one that is admired for the successes of only its highest achievers to one in which all children have the opportunity and support to be high achievers based on their unique talents and abilities, academic and otherwise.

Níl aon áit don roghnú acadúil ná don diúltú sa chóras sin.

There is no place in that system for academic selection and rejection. The proposers of the motion and those who support them seem unable to grasp that change is taking place and will leave them behind. We already know that denominational grammar schools intend to abandon academic selection in the next few years. The number of children entering this year's entrance test shows that parental opinion is moving in exactly the same direction. In a short time, academic selection will be a fringe activity, sustained only if entrance tests survive the many dangers that accompany them. Within view is a critical point when the significant majority of parents will feel that they do not need to put their child through the agonies of entrance testing in order to secure the high-quality post-primary provision to which they are entitled.

D'fhoilsigh mé an leagan deiridh den treoir ar aistriú 2010 ar 5 Meitheamh 2009. Is é aistriú 2010 an beartas atá ag mo Roinn d'aistriú páistí ón mbunscoil go dtí an iarbhunscoil.

I published the final version of the transfer 2010 guidance on 25 June. Transfer 2010 is my Department's policy for the transfer of children from primary to post-primary schools. I consulted widely on that policy earlier this year, and, by the closing date, I had received 3,195 responses, the majority of which supported the position set out in the guidance. The guidance, if

followed, will deliver an effective and fair system of post-primary transfer. It will also deliver a system of post-primary transfer that helps to answer the wider and desperately urgent reform agenda, embracing demographic decline and school sustainability, the delivery of the entitlement framework and under-achievement.

The guidance strongly recommends that schools should not use academic admissions criteria. I have urged grammar schools to follow that recommendation, both on equality grounds and because of the risks of dysfunction. I have warned that any entrance test operating outside the guidance is, I believe, a legal minefield.

The amendment tabled by members of the Alliance Party would put in place a test for one year pending a solution arrived at through inter-party talks. Although I welcome that attempt to be constructive, it is, nonetheless, a naive attempt. I have already brought forward compromise proposals that would have resulted in a transition test for three years, supported by a legislative framework. Other parties would not even discuss those proposals. I will not introduce an official test for even one year without a legislative framework first being in place.

That brings us back to where we are today, with a lack of willingness on the part of others to even discuss a compromise. There will, therefore, be no return to the failed system of academic selection. The 11-plus is gone; it is not coming back. The new arrangements are now in place; they will not be reversed.

Bhí deis ag an gCoiste Feidhmiúcháin ar thrí ócáid le dhá bhliain anuas plé a dhéanamh ar na socrúithe don aistriú agus le teacht ar chomhsheasamh ar an gceist. D'iarr mé an díospóireacht sin trí huaire, agus chuir an DUP bac ar an díospóireacht sin trí huaire

The Executive had three opportunities over the past two years to discuss and come to an agreed position on transfer arrangements. Three times I asked for that discussion; three times the discussion was blocked by the DUP. As Education Minister, I could not accept ongoing uncertainty and deadlock. The debate is now closed. The policy of the Department of Education is that transfer should not involve academic testing.

The small number of schools which have broken away from the education system need to rethink their position, and they need to put the interests of children before their perceived institutional self-interest. Academic selection is educationally unsound; it does not meet the needs of a modern society; it generates and sustains inequality; and it has no place in our education system.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party has been accused by most parties of being well-meaning. People have the

greatest sympathy for our amendment. Obviously, we accept the charge of being well-meaning.

The flipside of that coin is that we have been accused of being naive in our approach to trying to reach agreement. Our approach is extremely hard-nosed and realistic. Given the status quo, no one can be proud of our current post-primary transfer system. It is not a sustainable long-term way forward. Society needs leadership, and we are showing leadership, not naivety.

In the Chamber, there is a clear difference of opinion about the way forward on post-primary transfer. There is a range of views among parties and, indeed, within parties about which model offers the best way forward. In a sense, that is not what today's debate is about. Our amendment is based on two points. First, an interim measure is needed to see us through the anarchy of an unregulated system that is the worst possible outcome for our society. Secondly, parties need to come together and discuss the way forward without prejudice.

The difference between our amendment and the Ulster Unionist Party motion is that the motion will, in a sense, legitimise the grammar school lobby's breakaway on testing. That is wrong and should not have happened. It is counterproductive.

Mr Storey: The Member refers to a "breakaway" and uses the term "legitimise". We are talking about legal reality. I know that the party opposite has a problem with law and order and complying with the law, but schools are entitled, under the law, to set tests. That must be the basis on which we move forward. It is dismissive to label lobbies as breakaways and subsequently ignore them.

Dr Farry: They are making a solo run. We support a single framework for post-primary transfer throughout Northern Ireland into which all schools fit. It is not productive for schools or sectors to do their own thing.

The Ulster Unionist motion prejudices the outcome of any talks. Although that party claims to support talks, it is counterproductive to have a preordained solution. By contrast, our amendment is open-ended, and we accept the need for discussions. In particular, if Sinn Féin comes to the table, it should know that those discussions will be without prejudice and that all views will be taken into account. To date, Sinn Féin is the only party that has failed to support the 'Belfast Telegraph' campaign and the notion of interim tests.

Mr O'Dowd: All-party talks are one thing, but our party will not allow the editorial staff of any news organisation to dictate our policy and timetable.

Dr Farry: I remember the days when Sinn Féin used to campaign at elections by demanding all-party talks. We have moved on. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that all Members will agree that, in school, children are not allowed to shout across the classroom. The same rule applies in here.

Dr Farry: I recognise that no party will allow editorial policy to determine its stance. However, I believe that it is in Sinn Féin's interests to come to the table to discuss the matter with other parties. The fact that Sinn Féin picked the education portfolio has put it in a powerful position. However, its view is out of line with the vast majority in our society. Moreover, for Sinn Féin to claim that it has got rid of the 11-plus is not a sustainable argument. It is also washing its hands of a situation in which academic selection is continuing in an unregulated manner and causing the risk of even greater inequality entering the system. Students and parents will experience more stress, and students will sit even more exams. That cannot be right.

I will respond to some of the comments that have been made during the debate. Dominic Bradley sought clarification of our amendment. I assure him that it is about making an interim test available to schools as part of a range of different selection criteria.

Such a test would not be compulsory, nor would it be the only way open to schools to proceed. However, it should be part of a menu, as an interim measure, that would get us over the hurdle as an alternative to an unregulated system, which is the worst possible outcome.

2.00 pm

I will follow up on a point that was made by Michelle McIlveen about the numbers of people who are signing up for the entrance tests as proof of the interest from parents. I have to urge caution about reading too much into what parents are doing. Some parents may well support academic selection, while others may have got the message that they will not get their child into a particular school if he or she does not sit those tests. It is not out of choice that they are doing so; it is out of fear. It is important that we recognise the range of motivations that parents have.

Our amendment is geared towards trying to find consensus in the House on the way forward. I urge parties to unite behind it and to send out, for once, a united message on this issue to parents and children.

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

Mr B McCrea: It is interesting to hear the views of others. I attempted to get involved in some of the discussions, but, sadly, that was not possible. Frankly, that shows what is wrong with the entire process.

We brought forward our proposals with good intent, but some Members simply did not listen to what we had to say. Had they listened, they could have taken a view as to whether they agreed or disagreed. Instead, in pursuit of their own petty, party political process,

they chose to have a rant on their own terms. The proposals that we brought forward are not against change; we want change. We are prepared to see change happen and we are prepared to work with anybody and everybody to achieve it. However, as SDLP colleagues said, we simply cannot achieve such a magnitude of change in one year. Such a degree of change requires planning, consensus and genuine consultation, not just papers that are put out to encourage Sinn Féin Members to write in. Such change must genuinely address the concerns of the people of Northern Ireland, and there are different views on all the issues.

I was disappointed in the language that was used by the Alliance Party's contributors to the debate. Dr Farry said that they were bringing forward their proposals with good intent. However, Mr Lunn, who proposed the amendment, seemed to be saying that no one will back it, but here it is anyway. The use of words such as "breakaway" does not appear to be egalitarian. The use of phrases such as "needing protection from the law" sends out a certain message, as does talking about the wrongs of the process. That does not suggest that the Alliance Party is entering the discussions without preconditions or without taking a particular position.

I have not engaged previously with the Alliance Party on this issue, but it seems to be riding two horses. On the one hand, it says that it is strong and wants to achieve things, but on the other hand, its Members have a go at the Minister and say that she cannot do away with entrance tests without having an alternative. That is a confused, incoherent and incomplete message. The Alliance Party seems to be saying that its position on the tests is pretty close to what others want to do, but that they should go on for only one year. That position serves only to transfer the pain to the children in P6, P5 and P4. Sunset clauses, whether on policing and justice or on education, do not work. We need something to keep us going until we can all agree to come up with something different. That was a deeply disappointing contribution from a party that seems to have a paucity of ideas about how to move forward.

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: The answer is no.

We share the concerns expressed by SDLP colleagues, and Mr O'Dowd, on certain issues. Our position is not prescriptive.

I was struck by Mary Bradley's contribution in particular; I hope that she does not mind me singling her out. She said that education is a "private and pressured decision" and that the Minister's attempt to ram transfer 2010 through is at the bottom of all that is

wrong in this debate. Quite simply, the Minister of Education is not listening.

Some Members mentioned the 'Belfast Telegraph'. Indeed, Michelle McIlveen said that it is a pity about some of the headlines that have appeared. I could agree; however, the reason for having the debate is to show the people of Northern Ireland why we cannot reach a consensus, why we cannot get round a table and sort this out, and why we are failing to reach agreement.

Mr Storey: The Minister referred repeatedly to responses to transfer 2010. However, her party organised those responses. Mr O'Dowd referred earlier to double counting, but they double counted the responses to the Department. Therefore, it was a fix. That is the only reason why the Minister could stand up and say that she had responses in favour of transfer 2010.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Member for his intervention. The point is well made and well reiterated.

I have attempted, on behalf of my colleagues and my party, to table a motion that would encourage genuine debate. Instead, I have been met with people who heckle from a sedentary position, who will not take interventions, who will not engage with the issue —

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: The answer is no. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: If we are serious about resolving the situation, it will take change, and it will require the Minister to change. Change is not something that comes easily to the Minister. I have seen no change in her demeanour, speeches, or in the way that she comes forward. She will not engage with anybody; she gets Mr O'Dowd to do that.

At the risk of proving that the Minister is entirely predictable, I prepared some notes. Sadly, I do not think that I have to change any of them, because I knew what was going to be said. I want to make it absolutely clear that her strategy to try to paint parties on this side of the House as parties that will not change is absolutely wrong. She is wrong in that, she is wrong in her educational strategy, and she is wrong in the way that she misjudges the people of Northern Ireland. The failure of this Department of Education is down to her and to her alone.

On this issue, we will change. We recognise the need for change. Changes are necessary because demographics are shifting. In finding an acceptable way forward, we have not argued for the retention of the 11-plus. We have not said that we want to go back to that system. Instead, we have said that some form of academic credentials must be used. We are open to those professionals who wish to give us advice. I have been accused of being naive, although I have been

accused of worse. However, I am not sure on what basis a tennis professional makes that accusation.

I have been through the Northern Ireland education system. I have studied the STEM subjects. I have the qualifications, and I come from a family that valued the opportunities that were available for me to get them. In looking around this House, I see nothing but disappointment. The people of Northern Ireland have said repeatedly that we must find a solution. Issues were agreed at St Andrews, and although I was not party to the discussions that took place, it is clear that academic selection was one such issue and that an agreement was reached on it.

You have torn up that agreement for your own selfish political ideals. There is room for compromise, and there is a way forward. Even now, it is not too late.

My SDLP colleagues asked for clarification on the Alliance Party amendment because they may be minded to support it. I say to those Members that the issue is about finding some time and about giving us some space. I will put on the record, and I will say on behalf of the party, that I promise that we will engage seriously to try to find an acceptable solution. It is not the way forward to stick with a totally unregulated system that, according to the Minister, is full of legal minefields and puts stress and strain on children and parents.

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

Mr B McCrea: If the amendment falls, which I expect that it will, I ask the SDLP to support the motion.

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

Mr B McCrea: The only difference between the motion and the amendment is that the motion does not contain a one-year sunset clause.

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

Mr B McCrea: I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The school bell has gone.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 20; Noes 64.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr PJ Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs Hanna, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCarthy, Mr McGlone, Mr Neeson, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Farry and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Armstrong, Mr Boylan, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Ms Gildernew, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mrs McGill, Miss McIlveen, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms Purvis, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mr B McCrea.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The result is unclear. The Question will be put again after Question Time. In the meantime, Members may take their ease.

2.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

SPEAKER'S BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: Order. As we move to questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Members may be aware of today's visit to Parliament Buildings by the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP, and guests. They have taken their seats in the Gallery, and they are very welcome to the Northern Ireland Assembly this afternoon. On behalf the Assembly, I extend my warmest welcome to our distinguished guests.

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998: Teachers' Exemption

1. **Mr Storey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Equality Commission has made a recommendation to their Department to bring forward a legislative amendment to remove the teachers' exemption from the fair employment and treatment legislation. (AQO 135/10)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): The Equality Commission's recommendation to narrow the scope of the teachers' exception in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 is one of six recommendations for equality legislation reform that the commission made to the Department.

For Members' benefit, I will briefly outline the scope of the other five recommendations. It should be noted that the commission's recommendations are not ranked in any order of priority. First, age discrimination legislation should be extended to protect people from unjustified age discrimination outside the workplace. Secondly, race relations legislation should be amended to ensure that protection from discrimination on the grounds of colour and nationality is afforded the same level of protection as on other racial grounds. Thirdly, sex discrimination legislation should be amended to prohibit unlawful discrimination by public authorities when exercising their public functions. Fourthly, disability discrimination legislation should be amended to secure greater protection for disabled people. Fifthly and finally, the monitoring requirements under fair employment legislation should be extended to include the collection of information on nationality and ethnic origin.

I shall now return to the Equality Commission's recommendation for the teachers' exception in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998. As Members may be aware, in effect, the exception allows schools to lawfully discriminate on grounds of religious belief in the appointment of teachers in schools. It also means that teachers' employers are not required to monitor the religious composition of their employees or those who apply for such positions.

The Equality Commission recommends a two-stage approach to the removal of the teachers' exception. First, it recommends that the exception is removed with respect to the recruitment of teachers in secondary-level schools. The second part of the commission's

recommendation is that early consideration be given to whether the exception should also be removed with respect to primary-level schools.

The teachers' exception is a sensitive issue, and I wish to make it clear that no decision has been taken on the recommendation to remove it with respect to the recruitment of teachers in secondary-level schools. Indeed, any decision by a Minister to amend or completely remove that exception will require Executive approval, because the Minister of Education is responsible for teacher recruitment policy.

Mr Storey: I am disappointed that the deputy First Minister, unlike his colleague the Minister of Education, cannot come to the House and tell Members about his commitment to equality. It seems that he is only committed to partial equality. Given the repeated claims about equality made by the deputy First Minister's party, what assurances can he give Members that, if the education and skills authority (ESA) were to be established, Protestant teachers in Northern Ireland will be treated fairly and with equity and that the discrimination that already exists as a result of the exemption will be abolished once and for all?

The deputy First Minister: As the Member will no doubt be aware, on 23 July, the junior Ministers met a delegation from the Equality Commission to discuss its proposals to reform equality legislation. The delegation included the Equality Commission's chief commissioner, Bob Collins, and its chief executive, Evelyn Collins. I understand that that meeting was very positive. However, it was pointed out to the Equality Commission that we would need to carefully consider how its raft of proposals for legislative reform could be taken forward.

As I have said, the teachers' exception is a sensitive issue. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The deputy First Minister: Any proposal to amend or remove the exception will draw strong responses — both from those opposed to it and those who support it. In view of this, we must move cautiously on this matter. Members should note that the Department of Education will shortly commence a review of recruitment opportunities in the teaching sector. Officials will work closely with the relevant stakeholders, including the Equality Commission, and it would be prudent for us to await the outcome of that review before taking any decisions about the future of the teachers' exception. Clearly, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Education must liaise closely on this matter.

The Member should not be concerned about my commitment to equality, or that of my party. Our commitment is absolute, but some situations of a historical nature have to be dealt with. Many of them were in place prior to devolution and our taking office.

It is now our responsibility to deal with them. I have outlined the methodology by which we will approach it and I hope that we can see it resolved.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is it not the case that those exemptions were made largely at the behest of the Protestant Churches, which sought to ensure that the ethos of Protestant schools that transferred, and succeeding schools, would be protected?

The deputy First Minister: We all know that the teachers' exemption was allowed so that Catholic maintained schools could insist that any teachers whom they recruited held a certificate in religious education.

The vast majority of primary schools and some post-primary schools insist on a certificate in religious studies. The Department of Education's proposed review of recruitment opportunities in the teaching sector will specifically consider issues in relation to the certificate. The review will seek to estimate the proportion of those vacancies for which a certificate in religious studies is likely to be an eligibility criterion. It will identify the routes by which teachers may obtain a certificate, either as part of initial teacher education or subsequently, and it will also seek to identify any barriers to obtaining a certificate that could give rise to inequality. That is a pointer in the direction of the contributions made by both Members who spoke in the last few minutes.

The new education and skills authority will be the single body responsible for employing teachers. However, responsibility for drawing up the requirements for particular posts will rest with boards of governors in schools. Even if the teachers' exemption were to be removed, a board of governors could legitimately view possession of a certificate in religious education to be a requirement for certain posts.

It is a mistake for Members to sectarianise discussion of these highly sensitive issues. We must deal with the legacy that we have been handed. Given the opportunity, many people would change things done in the past. However, we have to deal with the outcome of the past. Members must recognise that this is an issue on which strong views are held on either side of the argument. As always in such matters, the secret is to find a solution. I hope that we can do that.

Mr K Robinson: I notice how closely the deputy First Minister sticks to the script.

With schools increasingly sharing facilities, buildings and teaching staff in local partnerships, has not the ability of certain schools to use religious criteria in the appointment of teachers become an anachronism?

The deputy First Minister: I certainly represent my own views on how we move forward. When I was Minister of Education, I was a strong supporter of

integrated education and of all education sectors. I recognised that our education system was going to change and that it faced huge challenges, not simply in response to economic forces, but in recognition of the practical sense that it makes to increase sharing among schools. Inevitably, that brings about a situation where consideration has to be given to the removal of obstacles to ensuring that all teachers have a level playing field. That is important, and the Member's point is well made.

We have to move forward with the agreed processes to resolve that. The Department of Education will conduct its review in the next while, on the other side of which I hope that we will see a solution that is acceptable to all.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

3. **Dr Farry** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps are being taken to resolve political differences relating to the strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration to enable an agreed consultation document to be released as soon as possible.

(AQO 137/10)

5. **Ms Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the public service agreement and the objectives which provide the context for the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

(AQO 139/10)

The deputy First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 5 together.

The draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration was originally to be brought forward before the end of last year. That and subsequent commitments on timing were made in good faith; it was our expectation that they would be met. However, it was not possible to meet that date. Reaching agreement on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy remains one of the top policy priorities of OFMDFM.

Our commitment in the Programme for Government under PSA 7 is:

“Making peoples’ lives better: Drive a programme across Government to reduce poverty and address inequality and disadvantage”.

It includes a number of actions under objective 5, which is to:

“Promote equality and the enforcement of rights”.

We are determined to honour those, including the implementation of a programme of cohesion and integration for a shared and better future for all.

The CSI strategy is important, and we will continue to work at it until we have honoured that pledge. While

we continue to work intensively towards an agreed strategy that will benefit all our people now and over the longer term, work to promote community relations and good race relations has continued over the past two years, led and supported by the First Minister, me and the whole ministerial team.

Let me repeat: there are many examples of that commitment. We have invested £29 million in good relations work in the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period to build a shared and better future; that is not insubstantial. Additionally, we provide match funding to EU funding under the Peace III programme. As the Department accountable for three of the programme's priorities, we are strategically placed to ensure co-ordination of activities at the local level. Junior Ministers continue to chair the north Belfast working group, focusing on interface issues in Belfast and across the North. We have spent £500,000 this summer on resourcing work on the summer interventions programme. Overall, since devolution in 2007, we have spent £1.5 million on that intervention work.

In our district councils' community relations programme, we have spent £4,372,000 since May 2007 and have committed a further £2,759,000 this financial year. In Coleraine, we have been working proactively with our key partners, both statutory and non-statutory, following the killing of Mr Kevin McDaid in May, and we have provided an additional £23,000 to Coleraine Borough Council for diversionary work on top of the £86,000 awarded to it for good relations activities. Junior Ministers have met our key partners twice as part of our ongoing commitment to the area. Similarly, in Craigavon, the junior Ministers have been chairing meetings with all our key partners on the issues and tensions there that we have seen recently on our TV screens. We are supporting and facilitating diversionary work on a multi-agency basis.

Flags monitoring has been undertaken on our behalf by the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University since 2006. The last survey will be conducted at the end of this month, and we expect to receive the report by the end of this year.

Dr Farry: I thank the deputy First Minister for his detailed answer. What specific actions are the First Minister and he taking to address the outstanding gaps, in order that we can have a draft strategy? In particular, given that I am led to understand that it is one of the areas of dispute, can the deputy First Minister give the House an assurance that there is no contradiction whatsoever between the concepts of equality and good relations and a shared future, and that, indeed, developing both in tandem is to the benefit of the entire community?

The deputy First Minister: I agree with the Member's last statement. From our perspective, in recent weeks, we have had people stating their position

in the public domain on how that should be taken forward. That is old news. What we must do now is recognise the importance of the work of getting our officials together and facing up to the challenges that clearly exist as a result of the inability to agree a way forward thus far. I will not stand here and recite all the difficulties, because that in itself could exacerbate the situation, and I have no intention of doing that.

As we move forward, it is important to ensure that our officials are working on the issue, and I can confirm that we have officials working on a draft of the strategy paper, to address my and the First Minister's concerns. We are both committed to resolving the issue as soon as possible. It will not be easy, but the effort has to be made. With goodwill on all sides of the House — not only from the First Minister and me — we can get to where, I think, all of us want to be.

2.45 pm

Ms Anderson: Go raibh mile maith agat. In the context of cohesion, sharing and integration, does the joint First Minister believe that recent comments by Members, including a Minister from the party of the First Minister, Peter Trimble — or Peter Robinson, I should say — stating that they would not attend a service in a Catholic church —

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to quickly come to her question, please.

Ms Anderson: Some Members have said that they would not attend a service in a Catholic church and that they oppose a visit by the Pope. Does the Minister agree that such comments have no place in a modern society in which we are trying to establish a shared and better future that was signed up to by Executive Ministers in the Programme for Government?

The deputy First Minister: Although I stand by the rights of Members to hold personal religious views, those views must be consistent with our role as public representatives, and we can give no cover to sectarian beliefs or actions. It is a serious mistake for Members to, on their websites, describe the Pope as the Antichrist and to say that the Pope is not welcome here. Many across society were shocked at those comments and hold no truck with them whatsoever.

Mr Shannon: In his response to an earlier question, the deputy First Minister mentioned community relations at council level. How can community relations at council level be developed? Can they be developed on the budget that the deputy First Minister mentioned, which I think was £4.5 million? Should that budget be enhanced to allow the central community relations unit the opportunity to do more at council level?

The deputy First Minister: People have a huge responsibility at council level to contribute to the lessening of tensions in our society. All of us, regardless of what party we come from, what position we hold or what authority we have on district councils, have a huge responsibility to work with each other in a joined-up way to ensure that the messages that go out from councils and elected representatives make it clear that hate crime of any description — sectarian or racist — is totally and absolutely unacceptable.

We have given substantial funding to the councils, and our ongoing reviews of those situations make it incumbent upon us to recognise the importance of dealing with the issue in such a fashion that will see a return for the money that is spent, because it is citizens' money. The announcement of funds for projects in different parts of the North, whether it be Coleraine, Craigavon, the Derry area or the north-west, is money well spent. However, it is well spent only if political leaders are prepared to lead. The fact that we have uninterruptedly come together in the House over the past two years sends a message to people that it is only by working together in a spirit of co-operation that we can hope to resolve the problems that exist.

There are problems in many different council areas, but none of them will be resolved without the goodwill and commitment of locally elected representatives. I am not pointing the finger at any particular party. All of us, as elected representatives, have a responsibility to work together, and that is happening in many parts of the North.

Mr Attwood: On the radio this morning, the deputy First Minister's party leader called for the canonisation of the deputy First Minister. Does the deputy First Minister care to respond to those comments, given the fact that canonisation normally follows one's death and does not occur during one's lifetime?

With respect to cohesion, sharing and integration, does the deputy First Minister agree that his personal exchanges with the First Minister in recent weeks and the various insults and putdowns that have passed between them are anything but evidence of a shared society and a shared approach —

Mr Speaker: Is the Member coming to the end of his question?

Mr Attwood: I am. Furthermore, does he agree that those exchanges are very bad examples to set for the people of Northern Ireland?

The deputy First Minister: I must say that I was a little concerned when I heard the call for my canonisation — *[Laughter.]* Not only did Gerry say it once, he said it twice, and I told him when I met him at 9.00 am today that he was totally out of order, as one can only be canonised by the Catholic Church after one has died.

Mr McLaughlin: He did not have to work with the DUP. *[Laughter.]*

The deputy First Minister: Obviously, people will have watched with interest what has happened over the past couple of weeks. I will not disguise the difficulties that exist, but I will not labour those difficulties either. Instead, we must recognise the enormous achievements of putting together the Assembly and the Executive given the different allegiances.

The First Minister and I are well able to stand up for ourselves, but I do not want to be in a confrontational situation with anyone regarding how we take the process forward. Our duty to ensure that policing and justice powers are transferred is a responsibility to deliver for our citizens; not for Catholics, republicans or nationalists, but for everyone. Establishing a policing service that commands the greatest allegiance in our society is one of the most important things that we can do over the coming weeks and months, and that will be good for everyone. A policing service that has the overwhelming support of the community will be more efficient and effective as we face down the criminals, gangsters and drug pushers who try to take advantage of the fact that in some parts of the North, they believe that they can survive.

I have watched the activities of the protest groups, even though they are only micro-groups, that have grown up recently. Indeed, I was walking along my street just a few weeks ago and witnessed two adults and a child handing out anti-Sinn Féin leaflets, and my driver pointed out that one of the adults had been convicted of drug dealing eight years before. Furthermore, when one looks closely at those who burst into district policing partnership meetings, in Derry or in other parts of the North, it is evident that some elements in those groups are gangsters and criminals who wish to use the issue of policing to destroy everything that has been built up in the past number of years.

Therefore, there are huge challenges ahead, and the First Minister and I have a responsibility to lead in a positive and constructive fashion. I am determined to do that.

Policing and Justice Powers: Budget

4. **Mr McNarry** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the budget transfer required from Whitehall to operate devolved policing and justice powers. (AQO 138/10)

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the negotiations with HM Government in relation to the financing of any future devolved policing and justice powers. (AQO 140/10)

The deputy First Minister: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will take questions 4 and 6 together.

Preparations for the devolution of policing and justice powers have progressed in line with the process paper, which the First Minister and I made public following our attendance at the Assembly and Executive Review Committee meeting of 18 November 2008. One of the essential steps identified in that paper was the need for a satisfactory conclusion to financial discussions involving the First Minister and me, the NIO, the Treasury and the Prime Minister.

Over the course of the past 10 months, the First Minister and I have met with senior Whitehall Ministers on a number of occasions to discuss financing issues in relation to the devolution of policing and justice powers. Those talks intensified recently when the First Minister and I met the Prime Minister on 16 September 2009 and 21 September 2009 in London and on 23 September 2009 in New York. Members will be aware that each of the parties met with Gordon Brown earlier today, and I believe that others will be meeting him later. The First Minister and I will meet him together in Stormont Castle immediately after Question Time.

In addition, officials from OFMDFM and the Department of Finance and Personnel have engaged in detailed and lengthy discussions with Whitehall Departments, including the Treasury, the NIO and the Court Service, to establish the financial implications of devolution.

A series of meetings has also been held with front line policing and justice agencies to examine the pressures that they will face in delivering services in the coming years.

Substantial progress has been made in identifying the pressures that a Department of justice would face in this comprehensive spending review and beyond. However, those issues have not yet been fully resolved, and further ministerial discussions are planned. Consequently, it would be premature and inappropriate to comment on the funding details at this time.

The First Minister and I remain firmly of the view that devolution should be accompanied by adequate resources to meet the challenge of those new responsibilities and to deal with financial pressures. We also believe that a locally accountable Minister would be better placed to set priorities and manage the policing and justice budget than a Minister based in London.

Mr McNarry: I accept that the Minister cannot divulge figures, and I appreciate that negotiations are ongoing, even as we speak. Nevertheless, will he say whether the agreed final settlement will be based on a final sum for an agreed period and how long that period will be likely to last? What contingency elements will be built in or guaranteed to be made

available to counter an upsurge of violence from dissidents, or whatever one wants to call them? Will all the negotiated sums be fully proofed against efficiency savings imposed by the Treasury?

The deputy First Minister: Members will be aware that we are at a very sensitive stage regarding the way forward. The First Minister and I will go back to talk to Gordon Brown, and he indicated at our meeting this morning that he might need to see us during the coming days. We are talking about huge sums of money: hundreds of millions of pounds.

Mr McNarry: Will you not tell us what they are?

Mr Speaker: Order.

The deputy First Minister: I will tell you what they are: they are for hearing loss, legal aid, equal pay and a range of other issues. We want to ensure that we have a policing service that is supported by a Department of justice that has the essential funding required to make it fit for purpose. The issue that we have been discussing recently has brought us to a point where Gordon Brown has made it clear, at the meeting that I have just left, that he wants to ensure that the issue of finance does not block the process from moving forward. He is saying that he will not fail, and we are going to keep him to his commitments.

We are concerned about some issues. It is vital that the centre of excellence for the emergency services — the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police Service — is commenced as quickly as possible, and not just because it is in my constituency. That, in itself, sends a powerful message to people about how we will move forward. We have raised that issue and a whole range of others during our discussions.

I am taking the British Prime Minister at his word. He is saying that this process — this negotiation — will not fail on account of the funding issues. After meeting with him today, I believe what he says: the process will not fall down because the British Government do not recognise the importance of funding the requirements that we have identified to enable us to move forward.

Obviously, we are in the mouth of the next British general election, and I do not know what Government will be returned: it will be either a Labour Government or a Conservative Government. I noted with interest this morning that David Cameron made it clear that he is prepared to honour whatever agreement Gordon Brown makes. However, I remind Members that when Peter Robinson and I, along with Ian Paisley, Gerry Adams, Mark Durkan and Reg Empey, went to Downing Street prior to the establishment of these institutions, the British Government walked out to the microphones and told the world's media that the Budget for the next 10 years in the North would amount to almost £60 billion and that that was ring-

fenced and guaranteed. Have we learnt a bitter lesson since then?

Mr McNarry: Have you?

The deputy First Minister: We all have. We all recognise that, no matter what agreements we make as a result of our negotiations with this British Prime Minister, we are dealing with a British Government that could, at any time, cut any aspect of our Budget through the Barnett formula. That is an occupational hazard that we have to live with. Our job as politicians is to fight that battle. Obviously, the negotiation that we are involved in is not one that will just tide us over for the next number of months; it will take us right through the next comprehensive spending review.

3.00 pm

Mr Hamilton: Can the deputy confirm that he is not yet in a position to recommend the acceptance of any financial package that is currently on offer and that further negotiation is required to secure the adequate resources that he spoke of?

The deputy First Minister: First of all, I am not "the deputy". I am the deputy First Minister in a Department where there is equality between the First Minister and myself, and don't you ever forget it. *[Interruption.]* Secondly, as we move forward, we do so on the basis that everybody in the House wants the process to work. I was very interested to hear Lord Trimble during the last couple of hours, telling the Ulster Unionist Party to get on with it, as he sauntered down — I do not think it was on a yacht, but it was on a punt of some description — towards the Conservative Party conference. The Ulster Unionist Party would be well advised to heed his advice.

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

ENVIRONMENT

PPS 5

1. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an update on draft PPS 5. (AQO 150/10)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): My Department is still awaiting the outcome of the judicial challenge to draft PPS 5, which was heard in the High Court in January 2009.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members who are leaving should do so quietly.

The Minister of the Environment: I have finished my response, but in case it was not heard I will give it again. My Department is still awaiting the outcome of

the judicial challenge to draft PPS 5, which was heard in the High Court in January 2009.

Mr Savage: The absence of a robust planning policy statement governing retail and town centres is putting our town centres at risk. Minister Campbell announced a review of PPS 5 in 2000, and the draft PPS was published in 2006. Can the Minister explain why, some 29 months later, the review and the new PPS 5 have not yet been adopted?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. I could almost be as tetchy as the deputy First Minister in my response on this issue, because it irritates me greatly that the judicial challenge has been sitting with the High Court since January this year and that developers would take this House to court on the issue for their own pecuniary interests against the interests of the wider public in Northern Ireland. The PPS 5 document is ready to go. It will help to secure our town centres, and it is repulsive that developers would challenge that document purely for their own personal gain against the public interest.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's answer so far. I also find it unacceptable that developers would take such action on such an important issue. Does the Minister agree with me that the delay due to the legal proceedings has put town centres, especially local businesses, in danger?

The Minister of the Environment: I absolutely agree. Town centres are being put at risk, and jobs are being lost. Although it may suit some individuals to carry out such actions, and I have no control over how courts do things, I wish that a decision could be made as quickly as possible so that we can move on, whatever decision the court makes.

Mr O'Loan: Does the Minister agree with me that multinational companies have enormous economic power and that policy must therefore aim at ensuring a level playing field? Will he therefore ensure that draft PPS 5, when it emerges, will protect local independent business and, in particular, will minimise the obstacles to new local businesses starting up?

The Minister of the Environment: That is the idea behind PPS 5. However, it must always be recognised that, in a democratic state, we cannot control who chooses to invest or where that investment is made. We must make our region as attractive to investors as possible, and I want to do that through how I deal with planning. I will encourage a process that is quick, efficient and fair.

Waste Repatriation

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment when the repatriation of waste to the Republic of Ireland is due to commence. (AQO 151/10)

The Minister of the Environment: The first meeting in the process to let a contract under compulsory EU procurement rules took place in Dublin on 8 September 2009. Dublin City Council has the lead responsibility for procurement under the framework agreement. The next meeting will take place on 7 October. The procurement process will take at least three to four months, and work will commence as soon as possible after a contractor has been selected.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Why has it taken so long to reach this point, and what has the Environment Agency done to stop the illegal activity that is involved?

The Minister of the Environment: During direct rule, the response was too slow, and the issue was ignored for many years. As an MLA with a particular interest in the matter, I wrote to the then Minister with responsibility for the environment, Angela Smith, and received an unsatisfactory response. Eventually, I had to take the case to the European Commission, which demanded that the Republic of Ireland Government respond to it. As a result of the actions of the European Commission, the Republic of Ireland authorities have to take back the waste and deal with it under due process. I will seek to move the matter forward as quickly as possible. I trust that the sites can be restored to the way that they should have been; they should not have been allowed to have been damaged in the way that they have been.

Mr Gallagher: Is the Minister aware that, on 29 June 2009, his predecessor as Minister of the Environment told me in a written answer that the tender process would take between three and four months? Given that the current Minister is using the same form of words that was used at the end of June, will a specific date for the commencement of work be issued after the contract is put in place?

The Minister of the Environment: I trust that a date will be given. When one is working with another body, one can work only at its speed. Ultimately, we need an agreement with Dublin City Council on the issue. Meetings have taken place, and, as I said, another meeting will take place later this week. If full agreement is reached at that meeting, the procurement process will take three to four months from then. In the event of procrastination, the entire process will take longer. I implore everyone to get the business done this week and to resolve the situation in a way that is satisfactory to all.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for those answers. Does he have up-to-date figures on the estimated cost of repatriating the waste? Have any criminal prosecutions been made as a result of the matter?

The Minister of the Environment: There is a site at Slattinagh and one at Trillick. The cost to the Department of the remediation work is around £600,000. That is 20% of the overall cost of the remediation and excavation work. Dublin City Council and the Republic of Ireland authorities will be responsible for the entire cost of dealing with that waste and for 80% of the cost of excavation and remediation. The cost is a serious issue.

Since January 2009, the Environment Agency has overseen 27 successful prosecutions, which have included one suspended prison sentence and almost £120,000 in fines against illegal waste offenders. Trained and accredited financial investigators make use of greater powers that are available to them through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and have obtained confiscation orders that total more than £1 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

High Hedges Legislation

4. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the timescale for the introduction of the high hedges legislation. (AQO 153/10)

11. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of the Environment when he plans to introduce legislation on high hedges and clean neighbourhoods. (AQO 160/10)

The Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 11 together.

I have already announced that I intend to bring forward separate Bills on high hedges and clean neighbourhoods within the current legislative programme. The precise timetable will depend on political co-operation in the Executive and the Assembly. I am hopeful that the legislation can be in place by the time that the new councils are formed in 2011.

Mr Irwin: Will such legislation cover all types of trees and hedges?

The Minister of the Environment: The legislation will cover mainly the fast growing, evergreen types of hedges, although it will not be exclusive. It will also cover other types of trees and hedges that can cause nuisance. Its main focus will be evergreen trees; for example, leylandii such as the Castlewellan Gold.

Mrs Long: What preparatory work will the Minister do with local government, so that when that much-welcomed legislation is passed, councils are ready to act on it? Many people have waited for a long time for

that legislation. They are grateful that it will be introduced.

The Minister of the Environment: Now is an appropriate time to legislate. New councils are being formed that will have greater responsibilities as a result of legislation that will be put through the House. The Department will put the matter out for public consultation. Obviously, local government will give its response.

Should the legislation be enacted, councils would not act as negotiators in disputes; rather, they would be required to investigate complaints and to reach decisions on whether a hedge adversely affects a complainant's reasonable enjoyment of his or her property. If a complaint is upheld, the council would serve a notice on the hedge's owner, which would require him or her to reduce the size of a hedge within a specified deadline. Failure to do so would be an offence.

That is what happens in England. I suspect that the Department will replicate that closely. However, if there are any means to do it better, the Department is happy to look at them and to listen to any suggestions that might come from local government, in particular.

Mr K Robinson: Did I hear the word "consultation" in the middle of that response? The Minister's illustrious predecessors went to consultation on at least two occasions. That is one reason why the problem has dragged on for so long. I am delighted to hear that the matter of disputes between neighbours could be resolved through the legislation. Will the matter be put out to consultation again?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes; my intention is to consult on the matter. I will take it to the Executive and then to consultation. Hopefully, with the will and support of the Assembly and the Executive, consultation will move forward as quickly as possible, and legislation will be brought to the House. Some people have suggested that that should be done quickly. If the House co-operates with me and it wants the legislative process to be the fastest possible, the House will find that the Minister will also co-operate. Therefore, I look forward to help from the members of the Environment Committee who have spoken about the issue to ensure that the measures are delivered quickly.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister develop that legislation alongside clean neighbourhoods legislation? Is there any thinking on that issue? The SDLP has lobbied the Department on that issue for some time. It would be interesting to hear what cognisance or recognition there is of that suggestion, which would give local councils stronger powers to deal with environmental issues.

The Minister of the Environment: I will take the clean neighbourhoods legislation forward separately. I do not want to blur the issues. There will be two

separate pieces of legislation. Departmental officials are already working on both aspects of legislation. The Member is quite correct: the SDLP has lobbied on the issue. I am glad that, at last, that party has been useful for something.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 5 and 6 have been withdrawn.

3.15 pm

Plastic Bag Levy

7. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment if he plans to introduce a levy on plastic bags. (AQO 156/10)

The Minister of the Environment: I do not have any immediate plans to introduce a levy on plastic bags.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I note that the Minister said that he does not have any plans to introduce a levy. However, will he outline how he intends to address the issue in the future? Does he wish to introduce a levy, or is he categorically refusing to address the issue in the future?

The Minister of the Environment: I used the word “immediate” deliberately, because we first need to identify how successful we have been in reducing the number of plastic bags. Since the voluntary approach was announced in July, there has been a 38% reduction in plastic bags in Northern Ireland. That does not compare favourably with the rest of the UK, in which there has been a 48% reduction. However, supermarket sales in Northern Ireland have gone up. That is good news and is largely to do with the fact that people from the South are coming to Northern Ireland to buy goods. It is, therefore, harder to reduce the amount of bags in a rising market.

The option of doing away with plastic bags altogether raises other issues. First, in the Republic, there has been a larger take-up of plastic bin bags. Therefore, people are not using plastic shopping bags, but they are replacing them with a different type of plastic bag. Secondly, the potential use of paper bags is a problem because they are heavier and their production has more of an environmental impact. Therefore, the issue is not just as straightforward as doing away with all plastic bags.

Nonetheless, we have been successful thus far in reducing the number of plastic bags by 38%. I want to keep the pressure on supermarkets and, indeed, smaller shops, because they have work to do to reduce the percentage further. I will make a decision later, once the voluntary approach has been carried out fully.

Mr T Clarke: I ask that the Minister does not make a rash decision about the price of plastic bags, because last week the media were very interested in the fact

that I spent £2 on plastic bags for my office last year, and I do not want to increase that cost to the taxpayer.

The Minister of the Environment: If you lived in the Republic of Ireland — you do not, and I suspect that, like me, you never will — you would have had to pay 44 cents a bag. That is not a lot of money to many people; however, to those living on the breadline it is. Therefore, I do not want to impose a levy that will hurt people in a struggling sector when we can introduce a successful voluntary approach instead. The 38% reduction is a success story, but we need to go further. We wish to push that figure up, but if we cannot do that, we will look at introducing a tax on plastic bags.

Mr P J Bradley: Does the Minister agree that a levy on plastic bags would discourage their use, lead to the use of more environmentally friendly options and reduce the total amount of domestic waste?

The Minister of the Environment: In my response to Mr McCartney’s question, I tried to explain that there are no easy solutions and that no solution is purely environmentally positive. All of the solutions have negative connotations. Although we want to discourage the use and the multiplicity of plastic bags, there is a good success story to be sold and told. Lots of people now buy the reusable bags for life. I encourage more people to use them, and I encourage shops to be more reluctant to give plastic bags to customers. I will indicate to shopkeepers that I expect that to be the case. The levy is the stick, but let us continue to use the carrot to see whether we can get the outcome that we are looking for. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to switch off mobile phones.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: As it is now about four months since the Minister raised the issue of a plastic bag levy, will he detail the expected amount of money such a levy would raise? Does he agree that any money thus raised should be spent on green issues in local areas?

The Minister of the Environment: I have not investigated the amount of money that a plastic bag levy would raise. I would be looking to use such a levy as a deterrent, not as a tax-raising measure. Our party is a party of low taxation, and it is one that allows people to spend their money as they wish. It is also in favour of the Government providing services that are fit for purpose. Therefore, I am not looking for a tax-raising measure; I am looking for and we are working towards the best environmental outcome.

Planning Decisions

8. **Mrs M Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment what assurance he can give that the reformed planning policy will contain a strong

governance framework to ensure that, where one political party dominates a given council, this party will not have undue influence over planning decisions. (AQO 157/10)

The Minister of the Environment: The draft local government reorganisation Bill, which my Department is in the process of taking forward, will facilitate the majority of local government reform proposals. The Bill will make provision for the governance arrangements that will apply to the new councils. Those will include the introduction of a system of checks and balances in each council to allow the call-in of a decision. The criteria for call-in will cover procedural matters and any issue that relates to the protection of political minorities. Legislation will state the triggers that are required for the implementation of call-in and how matters will be decided.

The Bill will provide for a new ethical standards system for local government. That will include a mandatory code of conduct for elected representatives of district councils, with associated processes for investigating and adjudicating on alleged breaches of the code. Appropriate governance arrangements and codes of conduct will be essential in the post-RPA planning system, not only to provide assurances to the public that the system is open, fair and transparent and that decisions are made in accordance with all relevant considerations but to protect councillors and planning officers. Planning officials will continue to work with NILGA and DOE local government colleagues through the RPA implementation of structures on those issues.

Mrs M Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he be working with the transition committees to develop those governance standards and safeguards? Does he agree that, by failing to introduce a governance framework, he is leaving the planning system open to abuse?

The Minister of the Environment: I am very happy to work with the transition committees, and I intend to visit each of them. Two weeks ago, I started in the north-west, visiting the transition committee of Coleraine Borough Council, Limavady Borough Council, Moyle District Council and Ballymoney Borough Council. That committee is working well and is doing good work in the circumstances in which it finds itself.

We are setting up a regional transition committee that will have representatives from all the main political parties. We are working very closely with the strategic leadership board, another meeting of which will take place next week. That all demonstrates that a very strong train of thought exists between the Department and local government on identifying the best solutions for going forward.

I do not think that public representatives are any more likely or, indeed, any less likely than people in the public service to accept bungs or bribes. It does not reflect well if we are suggesting that public representatives are of that ilk. Across the parties, I have found that public representatives are, by and large, there to serve the public. Although there is always potential for a rotten apple to be in the barrel, that is the exception as opposed to the rule.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that regardless of which party runs which council, planning policies will have been laid down and agreed and that the Minister and his Department will expect councils to abide solely by those policies?

The Minister of the Environment: Absolutely. However, planning policy is not a perfect science. Building control is an engineering process that demands that, for example, a flight of stairs run at a certain gradient with so many centimetres between each step. Planning is more judgemental. There will be very clear cases in which planning applications are refused. In such cases, a councillor saying that they have known the applicant's family for 30 years and that they are great people in the neighbourhood will not be a good enough reason to challenge the decision. That is not a planning reason. If a councillor does not have a planning reason with which to challenge the planning officer's recommendation, that officer's decision or recommendation will stand. Councillors are the decision-makers, but they will have to make their decisions on the basis of prevailing planning policy.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Environment Committee, of which I am a member, has no problem working with the Minister if he wants to legislate in a hurry, especially legislation that deals with clean neighbourhoods and high hedges.

Does the Minister have sufficient resources to fully implement the recommendations in the review of public administration, such as those on planning reform?

The Minister of the Environment: All of this is a continual process. For example, last week the Executive were considering the allocation of additional resources to deal with swine flu. There are always challenges and difficulties. We are moving forward and have the ability to continue to move forward apace; there is no reason to stop.

I intend to ensure that the funding follows the function and that there is no separation of the funding from the function; that is, I will ensure that the Department does not keep a portion of the money for a different purpose, leaving local councils to carry the burden. If the Department gives local councils work to do, it should give them the money that it is getting to carry out that work.

Irish Hare

9. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister of the Environment what protection will be given to the Irish hare in the review of the Wildlife Order. (AQO 158/10)

The Minister of the Environment: The review of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 considered statutory protection for the Irish hare in the longer term. The consultation exercise demonstrated that the existing protection in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 was satisfactory because, as a game species, the Irish hare is protected each year during the close season for hunting. There was also agreement from respondents that efforts to maintain and restore a suitable habitat offers the best means of achieving long-term sustainability of the Irish hare population. That is the approach that I propose to pursue.

Mr Burns: Does the Minister intend to keep funding the Irish hare population study at Queen's University after 2010?

The Minister of the Environment: I cannot make a decision until I see the outcome of the study and see how the figures are faring. The Irish hare is an animal that is worthy of our concern. It is worth continually looking at the population of the Irish hare to ensure that it is not just maintained but actually grows. Many of the actions that are being carried out through the countryside management scheme will increase the habitat of the Irish hare and could have a much more positive impact than anything else that we do.

Permitted Development

10. **Dr W McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to allow minor works to be categorised as 'permitted development' to reduce costs and speed up the backlog in the planning system. (AQO 159/10)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department will shortly bring forward three public consultation exercises that will seek views on proposals to extend permitted development rights for development within the curtilage of a dwelling house; introduce new permitted development rights for small-scale renewable energy development; and extend rights for a number of other development types, including agriculture, industry, commerce and retail, community and leisure and utilities and minerals. It is anticipated that the proposed changes will significantly reduce the number of planning applications required for a minor development. The consultation period will run until January 2010.

Dr W McCrea: What specific proposals does the Minister have for introducing changes to non-householder permitted development?

The Minister of the Environment: We are looking at policies on microgeneration for situations in which people are engaged in developing small-scale renewable-energy technologies, including micro wind turbines, heat pumps, biomass plants and solar panels for both householder and non-householder use. We are looking at opportunities in agriculture, such as products made from produce grown on farms, farm shops that sell local produce and storage and distribution uses. We are also looking at industrial warehouse development for extensions of premises by up to 1000 sq m and of free-standing buildings by up to 100 sq m; quarry development for plant or machinery associated with an existing quarry; new buildings up to 1000 sq m; and the development required for health, safety and welfare, such as the provision of chemical toilets and hygiene facilities for staff, safety structures and temporary structures for shelter. In commercial development, shop extensions of up to 50 sq m are being considered, as is the construction of stores for trolleys and bins. In offices, extensions of up to 50 sq m are being considered. That covers a wide range.

I have put together a file of papers that will be going to the Committee for the Environment. It is five inches thick and will involve a lot of reading by the Committee staff before they can advise members. I look forward to the consultation and the results of it.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been grouped, and Question 12 has been withdrawn.

PPS 21

13. **Mr Brolly** asked the Minister of the Environment when the final version of PPS 21 will be presented. (AQO 162/10)

The Minister of the Environment: I will discuss the finalisation of PPS 21 with the Executive subcommittee on the review of rural planning policy. The final version will be in place after it has been agreed by the Executive.

Mr Brolly: Is the Minister aware of the concern among not only rural dwellers but developers about the delay in bringing the final version of PPS 21 to the House?

The Minister of the Environment: I am sure that the Member will be delighted to learn that last week the subcommittee agreed to the proposals going forward to the Executive, and I will put a paper to the Executive in the very near future. I trust that all the parties on the Executive will come to a swift conclusion on this matter, and that we have agreement to move forward for all those whom we represent in rural communities.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Grammar School Entrance Tests

place until the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment devises, pilots and introduces literacy and numeracy tests compatible with the curriculum, alongside a robust pupil profile, allowing academic criteria to have a role in the post-primary transfer process.

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly requests that the Minister of Education establishes a statutory framework for the grammar school entrance tests, effective from the beginning of the academic year 2010-11; and recommends that this statutory framework should remain in place until the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment devises, pilots and introduces literacy and numeracy tests compatible with the curriculum, alongside a robust pupil profile, allowing academic criteria to have a role in the post-primary transfer process. — *[Mr B McCrea.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: The House will return to the business before Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 43; Noes 41.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCallister and Mr B McCrea.

NOES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr W Clarke, Dr Deeny, Mr Doherty, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs Hanna, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Neeson, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Boylan and Mrs McGill.

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly requests that the Minister of Education establishes a statutory framework for the grammar school entrance tests, effective from the beginning of the academic year 2010-11; and recommends that this statutory framework should remain in

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Migrant Workers

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is the motion on migrant workers. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. *[Interruption.]*

If Members are leaving, they should do so quietly.

The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lo: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the economic, social and cultural contributions from migrant workers; and calls on the Executive to review the migrant workers strategy and to re-establish the Racial Equality Forum to consider further support for immigrants.

The UK was one of the three original states that opened their labour markets to the eight accession countries from eastern Europe in the wake of the EU expansion in 2004. As a result, after decades of negative migration — more people leaving than coming in — Northern Ireland suddenly faced an influx of thousands of migrant workers to fill vacancies arising from our skills and labour shortages. However, statistics have shown that numbers of migrants are decreasing, due, in part, to the economic downturn but also to a natural decline in the supply of workers, which is not inexhaustible, the opening up of labour markets in other parts of the UK and unfavourable exchange rates.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) estimated that, at the end of 2008, there were 30,000 migrants from the A8 countries in Northern Ireland, comprising around 5% of its workforce. The majority of the migrant workers live in Belfast, Dungannon, Craigavon and the Newry and Mourne areas and have jobs in administration, manufacturing, food processing, hospitality and construction. Research from the European Commission and the UK shows that migrant workers have had a generally positive impact on the economy.

3.45 pm

I was a member of the promoting social inclusion working group on race, which became the Racial Equality Forum, whose aim was to formulate, implement and monitor the racial equality strategy that was eventually published in 2005. Since 2006, the forum has not met once, and the strategy has been dead in the water, awaiting publication of the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

The most productive outcome of the forum has been the migrant workers strategy, which was produced by

its thematic subgroup and has now reached the end of its stipulated lifespan of three years. That strategy requires a review, but there is no forum to determine its future.

The Department for Employment and Learning has lead responsibility for implementing the strategy's action plans, together with other subgroup members from statutory and voluntary agencies, all of whom should be complimented on achieving many of the set targets. There is now a range of information packs and materials on websites to provide migrant workers with a better understanding of their employment rights and available services. The Equality Commission has also produced guidance for employers who hire migrants. There is better employment inspection and enforcement to protect migrant workers and prevent exploitation, particularly with the imminent passing of the Employment Bill to strengthen employment agency law and the investigatory powers of the Department for Employment and Learning.

However, the strategy has so far been focused totally on economic issues. It is essential that it considers the wider integration and social needs of migrant workers from EU and non-EU countries. The voluntary sector has reported a high percentage of destitution among the migrant community because of the economic downturn and the problem of their having no recourse to public funds.

The rights and entitlements available to migrant workers vary a great deal under the Home Office points scheme depending on whether the person is from a long-standing EU country, the A8 accession states, the more recent A2 countries or elsewhere. A8 nationals must register with the Home Office workers' registration scheme when they arrive and find work in the UK to get the right to reside and to access in-work social security benefits, such as tax credits and housing benefit. However, if they lose that job within the first year — for example, because of the seasonal nature of the work — and cannot find alternative employment within 30 days, the right-to-reside status is lost. Generally, they are not asked to leave the UK, but they cannot access unemployment benefit and are no longer entitled to access public housing.

Many migrant workers do not have a lot of savings and, when they lose employment, the consequences can be dire. At a time when they most need help, the safety net is not there. Those from outside the European Economic Area who hold work permits are also in a tenuous position, at risk of being exploited or made unexpectedly redundant or becoming undocumented for reasons beyond their control.

It can be extremely difficult to transfer a permit to a new employer, and that has created a rights vacuum. The Republic of Ireland recently addressed that issue

by introducing a bridging visa scheme that provided a four-month buffer for people who find themselves in that situation. I dealt with such a case in my constituency, and it would have been hugely positive and helpful to know that a temporary safety net existed for someone who may have already been subjected to mistreatment or exploitation.

The voluntary housing sector and church groups often try to provide some assistance. The Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland reported that 955 foreign nationals sought shelter between June 2008 and June 2009 and that 619 of those people were accommodated.

A2 nationals from Bulgaria and Romania face even more restrictions. They are either self-employed or recruited under a work permit scheme, and the jobs that they fill must be proven not to have attracted any local applicants. They have no recourse to public funds and, therefore, are not entitled to emergency housing. That was the case with the Roma families who were intimidated out of their homes in south Belfast last June. In Craigavon, Roma families and children have had difficulties in registering with GPs. Both the Law Centre and the Human Rights Commission have advocated a government support fund that could be accessed by voluntary organisations on a grant-aid basis to provide accommodation, support and other assistance for migrant workers who face destitution.

The Executive must consider the scope of the gaps in welfare provision and fill them through greater flexibility in statutory and voluntary services in crisis situations. In Scotland, nationals from A8 member states have the same rights to housing and homelessness assistance as nationals from long-standing EEA states. The Home Office is proposing to extend the workers' registration scheme for another two years. The Executive should oppose that proposal, because it discriminates against A2 and A8 nationals.

There is also a great need to help new migrant communities to build their capacity to provide self-help and advocacy for their community and to network with the wider community. I call on OFMDFM to re-establish the Racial Equality Forum; to review the strategy; and to allow the thematic subgroup to extend its actions to meet the wider social and integration needs of migrant communities.

Mr Buchanan: The motion calls on the Assembly to note the economic, social and cultural contributions made by migrant workers in Northern Ireland. That is something that we can all associate ourselves with. We all witness the valuable contributions that have been and continue to be made by migrant workers in various employment sectors. It must be recognised that some of those jobs would have fallen off the ladder had it not been for the migrant workforce that took those jobs

and ensured the economic viability of small and medium-sized enterprises by keeping industrial costs to a minimum.

During the economic boom, migrant workers were vital in filling Northern Ireland's skills gap, especially in the construction industry, which was one of the largest growing sectors. The industrious base of migrant workers helped to facilitate the expansion of the services sector by taking on posts that would otherwise have been difficult to fill. We can see the contribution that migrant workers make right across our Departments, whether Health, Agriculture or any other Department.

It is important to note that, between May 2004 and June 2007, there was an influx of some 25,600 applications to work in Northern Ireland from foreign nationals from eight different countries. That equates to 24 applications per thousand of Northern Ireland's working-age population. That is much higher than the UK average, which was 18 applications for each 1,000 people of working age.

The increase in the number of migrant workers has created various difficulties with employment rights, the minimum wage, maternity leave, holidays and so on. I know that the Committee for Employment and Learning fought extremely hard for migrant workers' employment rights to be respected. The Committee also engaged with other organisations, including Citizens Advice, to publicise those rights more widely in migrant workers' languages. Those workers were being exploited badly and abused by unscrupulous employers.

As part of the migrant workers strategy and in the light of the difficulties that such workers were facing because of the activities of gangmasters, in October 2007, the Department for Employment and Learning appointed an inspector to ensure compliance with the regulations governing employment agencies, with a second inspector being appointed in June 2008. The most recent figures up to November 2008 show that 80 inspections have been carried out. Further loopholes will be closed when the Employment Bill, which has been agreed, as drafted, by the Committee, goes through the House. The Bill will allow for DEL inspectors and Revenue and Customs minimum wage compliance officers to share data. Migrant workers have also been exploited in that regard.

The motion calls for the re-establishment of the Racial Equality Forum. That body has been lying dormant for some time, and I am not so sure that its re-establishment could be justified or be shown to the best use of financial resources. I wonder whether any work that the body might carry out would be a duplication of the work that has been done already by the Equality Commission and all the individual migrant

workers' welfare groups, which engage continually with the various Departments. I ask the Minister to first give serious consideration to the work that the commission and the other groups have done, otherwise we could end up with a plethora of bureaucratic duplication. That is not what we want; rather, we want to ensure that we have in place something that works.

We must face reality. As a result of the recession, a number of migrant workers have returned to their own countries. A practical and sensitive approach must be taken to calls for jobs to be retained for our own local workers. Although we are aware of the immense contribution that migrant workers make, nevertheless, in the middle of a recession and in the face of increased unemployment, we must get our priorities right in securing employment for our local people.

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

Mr Buchanan: We must encourage more of our economically inactive people into the workplace and equip industry with the necessary skills and incentives.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the motion. Unfortunately, the exploitation of migrant workers is very much a reality in our society. That exploitation manifests itself in a wide variety of situations in which workers are taken advantage of and denied their rights under domestic and EU law. Exploitation can range from discriminatory practice in pay and conditions to forced labour. Such exploitation is particularly prominent in sectors that are poorly regulated. Many of the staff affected are domestic workers, cleaners and restaurant and hotel staff.

Migrant workers here are exploited and abused routinely. They are paid poor wages and denied basic rights and entitlements such as sick pay, holiday pay, overtime and rates of pay equivalent to those for other staff. That is why there was support among migrant workers for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development's decision to retain the Agricultural Wages Board. The issue does not affect only migrant workers; the exploitation of agency workers, migrant or not, is also on the increase. More and more employers are using agency workers to avoid the responsibility to comply with established terms and conditions.

I highlight that because it is a pressing issue in my constituency, where employees of Stream International, most of whom work for agencies, face redundancy and have virtually no compensation to which they can look forward.

4.00 pm

Four years ago, the shocking story of Oksana Sukhanova from Ukraine illustrated the full horror that migrant workers experience here. She was 23 years old

when she was found freezing on the streets of Coleraine during the Christmas period in 2004. She lost both legs to frostbite. Oksana had been employed by a factory in Rasharkin but became homeless when it laid her off. The company did nothing wrong and met its few legal obligations, but Oksana was thrown out into the cold. We must ask ourselves what that says about us as a society. What does it say about the lack of legal protection for migrant workers?

Sinn Féin has always stood shoulder to shoulder with the workers and will continue to do so. That is why we support the motion. It is also why Sinn Féin's 'Rights and Respect' document, which was launched a couple of weeks ago, proposes the establishment of a multi-agency partnership between indigenous, multi-ethnic, and migrant workers' communities to embed further in society a culture of rights and respect and the celebration of diversity.

It would be remiss of me not to address two related issues. Whatever political ideology one supports, it becomes irrelevant when minority ethnic and migrant workers need legislative protection, such as could be provided within the framework of a robust bill of rights. We are also under the obligation, through a single equality Bill, to put in place an equality framework that looks to the future of a developing and increasingly complex society, and we have the power to do so.

At present, the North has a fragmented array of legislative instruments that apply different standards of protection to the various strands of society that face discrimination. That fragmentation has proved difficult and confusing. It is often costly for individuals, particularly migrant workers who seek to assert their rights, but also employers and service providers who seek to understand and observe their legal obligations.

Sinn Féin endorses the motion's call for the re-establishment of the Racial Equality Forum and a review of the migrant workers strategy. Sinn Féin also recognises the contribution that migrant workers have made to communities. They are not, as some suggest, spongers. I find some of the comments that have been made about migrant workers disturbing. They did not come here to live on benefits or to steal other people's jobs. In fact, the figures from DSD show that the vast majority of migrant workers register for National Insurance numbers — when they are permitted to do so by their employers. They are intent on making an honest living and contributing to society. Their contribution should be recognised, respected and cherished, not abused or exploited.

For all the reasons that I outlined, and for many more besides, Sinn Féin supports the motion.

Mr Elliott: I thank Anna Lo for tabling the motion. As Dungannon is part of my constituency, I am aware that migrant workers are important to that area and to

its industrial base. For many years, the large influx of migrant workers has been important to industry there. Migrant workers also help to fill the skills gap in the Province's Health Service, and I am pleased that many of them have a high skills base.

I know about many of the frustrations being experienced because many migrant workers visit my constituency office in Dungannon. I am only too willing to try to help in any way that I can, but sometimes that is difficult. As it can be tricky to get to the bottom of many issues, it is not easy to overcome them. Therefore, there needs to be a one-stop shop to try to give those migrant workers the assistance that is clearly needed, whether that be in revenue services, basic translation services or, indeed, in other services, such as education and health.

There are rights and responsibilities for everyone concerned. Economists, businesspeople and employers recognise the importance of those workers' skills. They recognise that those people have something huge to offer society in Northern Ireland, which is evidenced by a number of those individuals who move up the promotional ranks very quickly in businesses in our community.

Local people in the areas in which migrant workers live have a responsibility to accept those workers and to allow them to live, with respect and dignity, in a peaceful society. Migrant workers also have responsibilities: they need to recognise and accept local cultures and traditions in the areas in which they live. To be blunt: all the issues that I have highlighted often garner diverse opinions among the locals and the migrant workers. That sometimes brings conflict, which is a huge difficulty. Often, the workplace is the best place for migrant workers to be.

There is an educational process that must be taken up by the communities and by the migrant workers. Otherwise, if we are not careful, we will have constant conflict, which could become the new sectarianism of Northern Ireland, in which the traditions of locals and migrants will be pitched against each other instead of the old Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions. It is important that, in areas that have large numbers of migrant workers, there is an educational process. In Dungannon, good work is being undertaken in areas such as Cunninghams Lane, where locals and migrant workers integrate well. That is helped by the positive attitude of local communities.

Until we have that co-operation and support from one another, we will have conflict, which there has been in certain areas. Migrant workers should be respected, but, equally, migrant workers should respect local people and local traditions.

Mrs Hanna: I thank Anna Lo for tabling the motion because it is important that we recognise the contribution

that migrant workers make to life in Northern Ireland in relation to our economy, society and culture.

The SDLP believes that all migrant workers, like all citizens, are entitled to civil rights and the protection of interests. The Human Rights Commission has defined those rights in advice guides for migrant workers. I find those documents useful in my constituency office in South Belfast, a constituency in which a considerable number of migrant workers live. Many come to my office for advice on a range of issues, including housing, employment, education and social protection.

However, the rights of migrant workers are complicated within the law. At times, the law is unclear, especially when EU law meets domestic law. Migrant workers pay tax and National Insurance and should, therefore, expect to receive their entitlements to services and support. Most, but not all, migrant workers do. It is essential that migrant workers are made fully aware of the administration that is required to ensure their entitlements should they become redundant.

Many migrant workers end up jobless, particularly A8 nationals, such as those who are from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Further clarification is needed for those whose status is often unclear. It is unclear what support is available to those who are unable to work but who have been deemed economically inactive; for example, pregnant women. Further clarity is required.

There is a particular problem with foreign women who get pregnant while they are employed in Northern Ireland. Many of them end up jobless, homeless and in a women's refuge, so there needs to be far more clarity and transparency to enable them to access services, as, indeed, there must be for professionals who work with migrant workers, particularly those in social services.

The summer was a bleak time in South Belfast, when, as we all remember, the Roma families in Belgravia Avenue and Wellesley Avenue were attacked. That situation generated such negative publicity that it is essential that it does not happen again. Again, it was about the clarity of those people's status and entitlement.

Communities such as ours definitely and desperately need diversity. We need new thinking and ideas to enable us to open up to the rest of the world. The Poles, with around 40,000 people in Northern Ireland, make up the largest number of migrant workers. There are about 15,000 Lithuanians and 10,000 Slovaks. It is important that those migrant workers' needs are met. Therefore, in light of recent events, the migrant workers strategy must be looked at again, and the Racial Equality Forum must be re-established. I hope that the Executive will agree.

The Department for Employment and Learning published 'Attitudes to Migrant Workers: Results from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey', and it would be an understatement to say that the results were mixed. Members who have read the report will know that 49% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that migrant workers are generally good for the local economy. However, 45% of respondents felt that migrant workers take jobs from people who were born in Northern Ireland. In addition, 59% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that migrant workers are harder-working than local workers, but 63% of respondents felt that the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland puts a strain on services. The public's attitude to migrant workers is at best ambivalent, so we need to work on providing good civic education.

The SDLP is keen for the UK Government to sign up to the UN Migrant Workers' Convention, the main aim of which is to foster respect for migrant workers' human rights. Migrant workers are not just workers, they are human beings, and the convention does not create new rights for them. It aims to guarantee equality of treatment and the same working conditions for migrants as nationals.

All visitors to our country, long- and short-term, must be treated with respect and signposted to the help, support and advice that they require. The SDLP has broad humanitarian intentions towards migrant workers, who have chosen to come to our country to work hard in order to make a life for themselves and their families. They contribute to the economy and to the community in general, and they have become as much a part of the country as any national citizen.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw her remarks to a close.

Mrs Hanna: Therefore, they are entitled to the same rights and dignity.

Mr Hilditch: I also support the motion, as most right-thinking and decent people would. I think that everybody in society recognises the economic, social and cultural contributions that migrant workers have made.

I thank Ms Lo for tabling the motion, which does not give me any great cause for concern. However, I need to be a little more convinced that re-establishing the Racial Equality Forum to provide further support for migrants would help to eradicate the problems that surround the issue. We do not wish to create a vacuum that can be filled by the unscrupulous.

I know from first-hand experience that migrant workers have had a positive impact on our economy and make a valuable contribution. They fill vital jobs in healthcare services, the hotel and catering industry and many more hard-to-fill vacancies. My personal circumstances meant that, in the past year, I had to

visit a local hospital to complete a procedure. The theatre was completely filled with Filipino doctors and nurses, and there is no doubt in my mind that I would still be on a lengthy waiting list if the hospital had not employed those people. Furthermore, in my constituency, a large car electronic components factory is a major employer, and it would not be there if it were not for migrant workers. That company also provides support and jobs for local people.

Many recruitment agencies rely on foreign immigrants to fill urgent daily work placements. That is because people have arrived in Northern Ireland solely to look for work. They register as temporary workers with agencies and are available for short-term positions, and they can turn up at very short notice.

For many of our local unemployed, it is not financially viable to accept temporary placements, involving a day here and a day there. That would mean that they would have to arrange childcare, and their benefits would be interrupted. Sometimes, because of family commitments, they are unable to travel to work at only a few hours' notice. A void has been filled by migrant workers, who are very welcome.

We are extremely concerned at the rise of unemployment figures in Northern Ireland. Since the economic downturn, the annual increases in unemployment have been extreme. The latest figures reveal that there are around 49,000 people in Northern Ireland without employment. That is totally unacceptable. Those people, too, should be given every opportunity to avail themselves of jobs, and they are worthy of further support from the Executive.

Internal and global migration have been economic realities for a long time and we have no issue with today's global economy, the flow of labour around the world market, or the fact that people want to improve their living standards. That is why the rights of these folks must be seriously considered. Nevertheless, we have an unemployment crisis that also needs to be addressed urgently. For that reason alone, I urge the Executive to provide further support for migrant workers, who are present throughout our communities. I have no hesitation in supporting the motion.

Mr A Maskey: I also support the motion. I thank the Members who tabled it and who have enabled us to express our support for its sentiments.

There are three parts to the motion. First, it acknowledges the contribution of people from many different communities who have come here as migrant workers. Secondly, it requests a review of the migrant workers strategy, and we support that. The third element is a request for the re-establishment of the Racial Equality Forum.

I represent South Belfast, which is one of the most demographically diverse constituencies. A manifestation

of the richness of that diversity, and a recent addition to our physical landscape, is the Chinese Welfare Association's centre on the Ormeau Road. That is a great addition to the local community. However, that facility was not easily won by the local Chinese community, and I commend the members of that community who have come here, generation after generation, in various waves of immigration. Many of them are now members of the indigenous population. They have brought an additional richness to the local community. By dint of their hard work, their contribution and the respect that they have gained, we now have that centre: a physical manifestation of their presence. That is to be warmly commended.

4.15 pm

All Members who have spoken so far have testified that they have come into contact, through local constituency offices, the Health Service or many of the other sectors in which they are engaged, with people from different backgrounds, nationalities and countries, all of whom have made massive, important and positive contributions not only to our local economy, but to local cultural and community life. That has enriched us all.

As Carmel Hanna has said, in the past few months we have had some difficulties in South Belfast that have brought shame on the constituency and on society as a whole. I do not wish to detract from what she has said. Unfortunately, not for nothing was South Belfast called by some a capital of the world for race problems. However, that is not to minimise the tremendous work that is ongoing in that area by many individuals.

I look forward to hearing the Minister speak on the migrant workers strategy shortly. A number of commitments were made, and there have been improvements in monitoring and regulation. However, some of the statistics are quite scary. A lot of migrant workers are employed by agencies. Across the island of Ireland, there are about 600 employment agencies for a population of three million people. In Poland, at the other end of the scale, there are fewer than 800 agencies for a working population of 40 million. The potential for difficulties arises when such a large scale is involved.

I support the motion, from the point of view of our local experience and against a backdrop in which the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recorded, in May, its continuing concern at what it described as the de facto discrimination experienced by many people, particularly those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups and communities. The UN Committee's report went on to cite people who are disadvantaged workers, and, unfortunately, many migrant workers fall into that category.

The third element of the motion concerns the re-establishment of the Racial Equality Forum. Having

been a member of the all-party working group on black and ethnic minority communities, I know that there were always arguments about whether the forum was a good or bad thing. I consider it to be a good thing, because it is one more way of bringing in people who have direct experience and who are key stakeholders. It is important that their voices are heard and that government institutions work for all the communities contained in the sentiment of the motion. Therefore, on that basis, and given what Members have said during the debate, I support the motion in its entirety.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I state at the outset my support for the right of migrant workers to come to Northern Ireland for employment and to do so without fear of racial attack.

A number of unsavoury incidents and attacks on migrant workers have been reported in the press recently. There have also been inter-racial attacks, including some very serious incidents. One such incident occurred in my constituency recently, in which an employer who tried to stop a disturbance between two groups was driven over by a car belonging to one of the groups. His legs were broken and he was very seriously injured. I can think of instances in recent months in which migrant workers have been subjected to abuse by a small, narrow-minded minority in the community. Everyone in their right mind condemns such activity.

As the motion suggests, migrant workers have, indeed, contributed to the economic, social and cultural growth of our Province. They have filled employment gaps and provided a boost to our skills base, for instance, in the manufacturing sector and the construction industry. No one can deny the contribution that has been made. That has also been the case across the United Kingdom. Since the terrible tragedy in which cockle pickers died in Morecambe Bay in 2004, the Government have done much to improve the rights and prospects of migrant workers and to safeguard them through the Gangmasters Licensing Authority and the stringent requirements that it brings with it.

Ms Lo argues that in the print media today words come easy in condemning attacks, and that she wishes to see delivery and implementation. I agree that it is easy to say the right thing. However, one must not forget that Northern Ireland is emerging from its own long period of inter-community strife. I argue that with respect to today's attitudes towards migrant workers and people of different races, Northern Ireland is by no means a horror story. There have been some unsavoury incidents. However, on the whole, our people, our employers, and our local and regional authorities have welcomed migrant workers. As a local councillor, I know that my local authority has been particularly proactive in accommodating and improving prospects for migrant workers through a number of schemes

spread across the full spectrum of nationalities and that the feedback has been positive.

I ask whether we need the return of another forum when many facets of administration are already delivering their own initiatives for improving the prospects of migrant workers.

Mr Gallagher: I commend Anna Lo and Naomi Long for proposing the motion. It focuses our attention on the increase in the number of migrant workers who have come to this part of the country, particularly over the past decade. That has presented us all with many challenges to our approach to accepting difference. Most migrant workers make a positive contribution to our economy, but I will return to that issue later.

It is a great pity that more work has not been done on 'A Shared Future' and the triennial action plan in particular, which would have put in place a strategy on racial integration. We all understand how important it is to have a strategy for such important work.

Without a strategy, there is a vacuum, and that can work in a couple of ways. First, the statutory services and voluntary organisations, which work to promote racial integration and to help migrant workers to settle into the local community, are at a loss as to what direction they should be taking.

Secondly, the problem with a vacuum, as Members know, is that it is sometimes filled by people who like to stir up hatred, and we have seen that manifest itself in racial attacks that have been carried out in most, if not all, the constituencies of Northern Ireland. I am sure that Members will agree that the actions of the small number of people who engage in such activities are reprehensible and bring disgrace on us all.

There are significant numbers of migrant workers in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, particularly in Dungannon and Enniskillen, and they engage in various activities; in Dungannon, they are involved in food processing in particular, and, in Fermanagh, construction and engineering. Many of our significant Indian community are involved in health work. However, in the absence of a strategy from OFMDFM, the councils in that constituency, as is the case with councils everywhere else, are doing tremendous work in focusing attention on tolerance and in promoting cultural activities in which many of the new workers in those parts of the constituency actively engage. I commend all those who promote that work, because it is often left to the councils and non-statutory organisations to look after such matters as benefit entitlement and employment rights.

Much good work is being done in delivering those programmes, which further good relations and which are beneficial to migrant workers. However, much of the help is on a stop-go basis, because, in the absence of a strategy, funding often comes from peace programmes. At this time, when we are waiting for Peace III

applications to be dealt with, the organisations involved in the delivery of such programmes feel that their future is uncertain. That is why the triennial action plan needs to be looked at again by OFMDFM. The strategy needs to be put in place, and it must be supported by sufficient resources to ensure that the programmes work effectively.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion. There is no doubt that migrant workers can and do integrate well and that the service that they provide in many areas of the Province is beneficial.

4.30 pm

I declare an interest as a member of Ards Borough Council, which recently agreed to hold English language classes for Polish workers in the Ards borough through the South Eastern Regional College. No doubt the Minister will also mention that. Research carried out in the Ards borough has shown that the number of Polish workers has increased significantly, with many working in industries there, and the problem of speaking English has been identified as the main training need for those migrant workers. That need was identified and, through those language classes, it was responded to.

As there was no direct contact between Ards Borough Council and the large Polish community in that area — although there was contact with the Lithuanian community — it was agreed to put on a 12-week class of two hours each week through the South Eastern Regional College. The council's good relations budget was used to help to fund the classes, and it had the full backing of the Ards Intercultural Forum. There are also plans to replicate the courses in Comber and Portavogie, where there are also large numbers of Polish workers.

Tha raisin fer this wus that fer tha real cumin tha tither o' migrant woarkers intae oor cummunitees, ther haes tae be tiem aside fer takkin things iver tae heft tae git aa' troo unnerstaunin. Aa' wus at tha lanch o' tha Oardinary Leevs exhibitshun at Stormoont fer migrant woarkers, whuch showed tha impoartin an vital roul they play in oor modrin society.

Aa' hae aften visited Poalish groups an ither migrant woarkers leevin in tha Airdes area, whau left Englan an whau noo wroucht in Huddleston Engineerin' an in tha fish factories an they aw play an impoartin pert in oor woarkforce.

The reason for the classes is that for the real integration of migrant workers into our communities, good communication is required to enable true understanding to develop. I attended the launch of the Ordinary Lives exhibition at Stormont for migrant workers, which underlined the fact that those workers play a vital role in our modern society.

I have often visited groups of Polish and other migrant workers living in Ballywalter, who left England and who work locally in Huddleston Engineering and in the fish factories and who are an important part of our workforce. They have integrated into society, they pay their taxes like everyone else and they add their culture and language to the brogues of the Ards Peninsula. There, Ulster Scots is mingled with Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian, and the message has gone out that we must reach out to all our European neighbours now living in the Province. I am not sure whether there is anywhere else in the Province where one will find those languages mixing with Ulster Scots, but it is found in my neck of the woods because all the migrant workers there are learning to speak it. That adds to the multicultural society here and to the smiles and the humour, which are infectious.

There was an initiative by the citizens advice bureau called the imagine project for migrant workers. Following the receipt of a £83,000 grant, the citizens advice bureau brought together all the government bodies that support migrant workers in the Londonderry room in Newtownards Town Hall, and a large number of migrant workers living in the Ards borough, from places such as Lithuania, Latvia and Poland attended. They were young men and women who were eager for work, and some of those whom I spoke to lived in Portaferry, Killinchy and Ards and worked as tilers, bricklayers, in the local restaurants and for Willowbrook Foods. They were just ordinary folk from foreign lands doing hard work in local factories and on the fishing boats. The need for English-language classes was top of the agenda, and I am sure that the Minister will want to raise the fact that the local South Eastern Regional College responded to that need.

Society has recognised that there are a great many ethnic minorities in the Ards borough that contribute to society, create employment and interrelate with everyone. There are a large number of migrant workers across the Ards area working in farms and factories. The work is hard, but they work hard and do well, and their hard work is recognised.

There is no doubt that some of the old division lines still exist in the Province, and some new division lines have appeared with the increase in migrant workers and new prejudices rising to the fore. However, much work has been done in the community to combat that, and I extend my congratulations to the community workers who have worked so hard to ensure that all are included in their schemes and who, in some cases, go as far as arranging cooking lessons to help the migrant workers to get used to our food.

I believe in all the projects that are taking place in my constituency, which are essential. I support those projects, as they enable men and women from all countries to come here and make their contribution,

pay their taxes and enhance our country. It appears that a great system is already in operation, certainly in my constituency, and I congratulate all those who are involved in that work.

I support the motion, I support the spirit of the motion, and I appreciate the role that those who work in our country play.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion, and I thank Members who spoke on these increasingly important matters.

The motion covers a broad range of issues concerning not only migrant workers but migrants generally. New communities in our society are very welcome for the economic benefits, skills, new ideas and fresh perspectives that they bring. Evidence suggests that migrants fill skills shortages and do jobs that indigenous people are reluctant to do in times of economic growth. It has been pointed out in the past that, as Members have said, our Health Service would probably come to a stop overnight without the many internationally recruited nurses and doctors. Without them, it would not be possible to deliver vital front line services.

In their Programme for Government, the Executive committed to deliver:

“a peaceful, fair and prosperous society ... with respect for the rule of law”.

Furthermore, the Executive agreed to drive a programme across Government to reduce poverty and address inequality and disadvantage in order to make people's lives better — PSA target 7. The commitment of objective 5 under PSA target 7 is to promote equality and the enforcement of rights, including the commitment to implement a racial equality strategy. In delivering that for all the people here, we need to take into account the enormous changes that have occurred over the past few years. Growing diversity is a sign of our modernity and the progress that we have made. It also offers us a unique, exciting and never-to-be-repeated opportunity to change the way in which people living here have viewed one another for too long.

Because of migration, it is no longer possible to talk, as so many have, of the two communities in Northern Ireland; there are many communities now, each with different faiths, beliefs, cultures and interests. That growing diversity has transformed our cultural paradigm, and we must approach the future with a new perspective.

That growing diversity can have a genuinely leavening effect on a society that has long been frozen into a two-traditions divide, and it has the potential to act as a powerful lever on the old attitudes to difference that have maintained that divide. Put simply, the growing richness of our diverse society in Northern

Ireland has the power to help healing. Government and the public sector have a central role to play in facilitating and encouraging integration between minority ethnic people and indigenous communities.

However, we cannot address the challenges alone. Local action will be the cornerstone of that work; real change will take place at local level, and we are all partners in building a better future. Migrant workers are boosting our economy and making great contributions to our social and cultural lives. Just as they are learning about our cultures and traditions, there is much that we can learn from theirs.

The motion calls for a review of the three-year-old migrant workers strategy. It was recognised in 2005, after the number of migrant workers arriving in Northern Ireland had increased dramatically following the accession of the eight countries into the European Union, that migrant worker issues were significant and that a co-ordinated approach needed to be adopted. In June 2006, the Racial Equality Forum established the migrant workers thematic subgroup. That subgroup of about 40 members, including most Northern Ireland Departments, relevant UK Departments and other key organisations, and which is chaired by my Department, developed a draft strategy and action plan that were endorsed by the Executive in June 2008. Both documents are reviewed annually. The last annual review was completed in March this year, and the revised documents were published on my Department's website.

The action plan identifies four key strands of required action, on which significant progress has been made. One of the main purposes of the employment, inspection and enforcement strand is to enhance cohesion and the sharing of information among enforcement bodies, something that is often overlooked.

Some of the recent successes with regard to violations of the national minimum wage and recovery of money for individuals have happened as a result of joint working between Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority and my Department's employment agency inspectorate. I anticipate that there will be an even greater degree of lawful information exchange facilitated through provisions contained in the new Employment Bill, which is at Committee Stage. The Bill will seek to enhance the Department's powers of investigation into private recruitment companies to ensure that the most vulnerable workers, including migrants, are not exploited by unscrupulous agencies. In taking forward the information strand in the strategy, member organisations have produced guides and leaflets that are available in various languages.

The information working subgroup, led by the racial equality unit in OFMDFM, is considering proposals for the effective collation of core data to enhance consistency and to allow the development of an

effective signposting tool for all relevant organisations and individuals. The 'Northern Ireland Direct' website could act as a portal for that information.

A pivotal need existed for the developing best practice strand, as organisations had produced, or were in the process of producing, high-quality material and models through on-the-ground initiatives. Thirteen key best practice principles have been developed, against which potential new best-practice information, services and systems should be designed and existing samples assessed. A welcome pack template has been created, which aims at achieving consistency in the range of topics covered at central and local level. Separate guidelines on the use of interpreters and translation have been produced.

At present, a framework for migrant worker awareness training for staff is in the final stages of completion, and guidelines on organising events for, or to include, migrant workers are almost complete. Work has started on the final topic: foreign qualifications equivalents.

The fourth and final strand relates to research and data gathering. As inward migration for employment purposes on any substantial scale was a recent phenomenon, little research had been carried out, and data systems had not been designed to fully capture information on the topic. Questions on public attitudes to, and perceptions of, migrant workers, which were raised by Mrs Hanna and others, were included in the 'Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey' in 2007 and 2008. The results were published in my Department's 'Labour Market Bulletin'. That was repeated in 2009, and the results will be published on my Department's website.

Two pieces of research on the experiences of migrant workers in Northern Ireland and the economic labour market and skills impact of migrant workers here were commissioned. Detailed reports of the findings of both are expected to be published shortly and should inform future policy.

I will now turn to the review of the migrant workers strategy. The strategy contains terms of reference for the thematic subgroup, which include a requirement for its work to be reviewed after three full years of operation, and an assessment of the need to continue its operation to be made by the Racial Equality Forum, taking account of the views of the subgroup itself. I want to consider the way forward very carefully, bearing in mind the achievements of the subgroup and the nature of the tasks that continue to need to be addressed.

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister have instructed OFMDFM officials to reconvene the Racial Equality Forum as soon as possible. I expect that to take place in November. OFMDFM officials will now consult the sector to agree appropriate

membership and structures for the forum and to develop a suitable work programme. When those deliberations have been completed and a work programme agreed, OFMDFM officials will reconvene the forum.

I will now turn to provision for more support for immigrants. The crucial role played by minority ethnic groups is recognised and valued. OFMDFM has awarded more than £1 million under the minority ethnic development fund to 27 organisations here for the financial year 2009-2010. The funding package represents a further increase of 10% to minority ethnic groups on top of the increase announced last year, which will mean more organisations spread across society here will be funded to do the hard work that needs to be done. We recognise, of course, that that work cannot be left to the voluntary sector alone. Immigration is not a transferred matter, and responsibility for policy issues remains with the Westminster Government. Although sometimes we are constrained by UK-wide legislation, OFMDFM is determined to examine what support can be given to people facing a genuine crisis.

I will now turn to some of the issues raised during the debate. Alex Maskey said that the Chinese community centre was a hard-won achievement. I point out that £250,000 of funding was provided by OFMDFM toward that centre, which illustrates a level of commitment. With regard to the rights of vulnerable workers, I remind the House of the vulnerable workers' helpline, which was a key recommendation of the recent GB vulnerable workers forum report. That helpline went live in May 2009; it is based in GB but answers calls from Northern Ireland on the national minimum wage and on gangmasters licensing. Queries from Northern Ireland regarding other enforceable rights such as health and safety, working time, employment agency standards and the agricultural minimum wage are signposted by the helpline to appropriate agencies here.

4.45 pm

Martina Anderson asked about the unfortunate issue of the Ukrainian woman Oksana Sukhanova. The Ulster Unionist Party lobbied Downing Street to prevent her deportation back to Ukraine, but, unfortunately, events overtook us.

Carmel Hanna referred to signing the International Convention on Migrant Workers. That is a matter for the UK Government, but it is worth noting that no migrant-importing countries have, so far, signed up to the convention. That is a significant piece of information.

Anna Lo said that there is no safety net for migrant workers. That is a matter of UK Government policy, which is set down in legislation by the Home Office. However, following experience from Scotland, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has sponsored the Law Centre to arrange a seminar for

January 2010 that will explore whether, inside the Home Office's legislative framework, some of the gaps in the safety net can be blocked.

The Northern Ireland Racial Equality Forum is being reconvened, and the thematic subgroup of that forum is still functioning. The question of the review remains. As I said, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is very active on a range of issues.

Some people have been unhappy — and no one could feel otherwise — about the image that Northern Ireland displayed to the world during the summer. Tom Elliott, William Irwin and other Members referred to those incidents, which cannot be swept under the carpet. The issue requires a co-ordinated approach, not only across Departments, but across society in general. Everyone has to play a role, including local authorities and the voluntary and community sector. Employers have a role, and the Government have a role. Although we cannot be responsible for the actions of every person in the community, we have a duty to establish the right tone and the right framework in which action can be taken.

Recent events have shown the need for Departments and relevant statutory bodies to provide co-ordinated and effective leadership and responses on those issues. Therefore, officials from OFMDFM have recently taken part in a multi-agency review on the response to the attacks on, for example, the Roma families. The review, which is being led by Belfast City Council, will produce a series of recommendations that will help to inform the response to similar scenarios, should they arise in future.

Therefore, significant progress has been made. We cannot enter in to any complacency, because we know that certain groups of people have their own agendas. Everyone must behave responsibly, and I believe that the Government are doing so. The actions that OFMDFM has proposed will have a positive effect. However, the failure to deal with the issues around a shared future casts a certain pall over the matter. I believe that the problems that arise from that will not inhibit the actions that OFMDFM has promised.

My Department will continue to be active on the issue. The enactment of the Employment Bill, which is before the House, will be another contribution. We will continue to lead the thematic subgroup of the Racial Equality Forum and ensure that, as far as possible, we are in a position to implement policies, subject to the availability of resources.

Mrs Long: I thank all Members who participated in the debate. Traditionally, Ireland has been a country of emigration rather than of immigration. For that reason, people here have found it difficult to come to terms with the notion of inward migration. We are much more used to waving people off from these shores than

to welcoming them to our part of the world. From that perspective, how we deal with those important issues presents a challenge for us all.

During the past few weeks, I attended a conference at which the former Scottish First Minister Jack McConnell talked about how Scotland's Government aimed to grow its economy. He said that because they had made economic growth a priority, they accepted that they had to reverse the decline in population. The population had to grow. He said that there are two ways of doing that: first, attract emigrants back; secondly, attract new people to come to live in Scotland. He focused on how that had successfully reversed Scotland's population decline.

That is also the case in the South. About one quarter of the working-age population is made up of people who, at some stage, lived outside the state because they were either born elsewhere or went abroad to work. Most people would reflect that that one quarter or one fifth of the population in the South represents some of the people who have been the drivers of its economic regeneration.

It is important to recognise that the matter is not just about having hands to do work: it is about having minds to think new thoughts and people to challenge how we do business. All those factors contribute to change and economic growth.

Although people may be migrant workers, their contribution is way beyond what they do in the workplace and their economic contribution. They bring cultural, artistic and social wealth and generate new ideas and challenges for change. That is healthy if society is to transform and move forward. On all those fronts, migration is positive. It is not, however, always sold as positive because, like all change, it brings challenges. People focus more on the challenge and less on the end product.

People are not simply economic units; they are individuals who have hopes and aspirations, with families and futures. Therefore, when migrant workers choose Northern Ireland, often, they are also deciding that they want to make a long-term contribution to our society. Therefore, it is not simply the case, as it was in the past, that people move from one country to another simply to go where there is work. In many cases, people make the choice that they want to make Northern Ireland their home for the long term.

That is hugely welcome. However, Northern Ireland needs to prepare for that change; it needs to be ready to support communities and local people as migrants move to Northern Ireland so that that can be a success.

The economic downturn has brought a change in the flow of workers to Northern Ireland. Indeed, some Members said that there has been a flow out of Northern Ireland by certain communities. In many countries,

that is not entirely the case. Much depends on the economic circumstances in people's home countries and where they believe their future is best placed.

That leads to certain challenges when people lose their jobs. Some Members, such as Martina Anderson and Anna Lo, talked about people who lose their jobs and are left without a temporary safety net, nowhere to go until they can find another job, and, often, no time to make big, life-changing decisions. When their visas and employment have run out, their choice is either to leave or to become illegal immigrants. Something needs to be done that will, at least, give people breathing space, in the same way that each of us wants, to make decisions about their lives.

Anna Lo mentioned the bridging visa scheme in the Republic of Ireland, which provides a temporary safety net. Of course, the Minister pointed out that immigration issues are dealt with at Westminster. I am heartened to hear that the Executive are engaged on those issues and are looking at how the Assembly can use its legislative powers to fill those gaps locally without breaching Westminster legislation.

During recent months, economic changes have resulted in people's vulnerability becoming more acute. One day, someone will have a job; the following day, he or she will not. Often, people live a hand-to-mouth existence.

We have also seen the differences in status among different classes of EU immigration being exposed in a way in which we had not previously. Members mentioned the differences between A8 nationals and A2 nationals from different accession states. Those two groups comprise a hugely complex mix of different people with different rights and responsibilities. Welfare gaps exist, and that issue needs to be looked at. We need a coherent, compassionate and financially sustainable solution to those challenges. That requires a review of how we do business, and that is what the motion calls for.

We also have to recognise the fact that the Racial Equality Forum has a role to play in addressing many of those issues. Alex Maskey said that people who have direct experience must be given a voice at the table. It is hugely important that we do that, because the picture is changing constantly. If we measure the level of immigration at a given point in time, we would see a very different picture of how communities are constituted and how people flow in and out, compared to that which we would see if we measured it again in a few months' time. Therefore, it is important that there are people at the table who can bring their experience to bear.

Thomas Buchanan said that he recognised the fact that there are employment rights issues and minimum wage abuses, and that migrant workers need to be

protected from those. He also said that many of the people who come to Northern Ireland in very vulnerable circumstances are not only exploited by local employers and landlords, but gatekeepers and gangmasters who bring them here and who seek to profiteer from their misery.

In responding to the debate, the Minister said that he wants additional powers to investigate employment agencies, and that is a welcome development. It is important that there is transparency in how people are dealt with to ensure that the minimum-age requirements that apply to everyone else in society also apply to those who come here.

A number of Members made reference to the situation of the Roma families. That situation raised issues about how the host community copes with immigration, as well as huge issues about the moral responsibility that we have for the people who live in overcrowded conditions, who are clearly not on the minimum wage, and who are really struggling on the margins of society. That presents a challenge not just to those who throw a rock through a window, but to the rest of us, particularly elected representatives who have a responsibility to try to direct how society works.

Like the Minister, David Hilditch questioned the need for the Racial Equality Forum and said that he was concerned about the risk of duplication. I do not think that there is a risk of duplication. We need a forum to drive forward a lot of the work and to co-ordinate actions. Many Members mentioned the fact that good work is happening in the areas concerned. However, the problem is a lack of co-ordination.

I will come to the issue of the CSI strategy later, because many Members would be surprised and disappointed if I did not. I will get there eventually.

We need to be aware of the impact of the recession. Some people may leave of their own volition and chose to return home. That is fine, and that is their choice. However, I was slightly concerned by the fact that some Members talked about local jobs for local people. When times get difficult and when the competition for resources becomes more acute, there is a tendency for people to blame all their woes on those who are from outside Northern Ireland. We must be conscious of that. During a recession, we need to be clear about our legal obligations, so that people are dealt with fairly, and about our moral obligations, so that people are treated with respect and dignity.

The Minister for Employment and Learning:
Will the Member give way?

Mrs Long: Normally I would, but I cannot because my time is almost up.

I wish to tie up those last few points in relation to the CSI strategy. A number of Members talked about the good work that is going on. Jim Shannon talked about the issue of language integration and about how important it is that people can speak the language so that they are able to access services and protect their rights. A number of other Members, including Tommy Gallagher, spoke about how we deal generally with the fear of difference. We need a more coherent strategy to deal with all those issues. We must find a way of dealing with differences in Northern Ireland that is more constructive than the way in which we have dealt with our traditional differences.

Many people from this part of the world have family members who emigrated overseas to make a new life for themselves. We should be very proud that the tide has now turned and that people see this as a place where they wish to make a life for themselves. However, we must take responsibility for the fact that we need to support those people in doing that.

5.00 pm

I thank the Minister for his comments, and I wish to highlight the work that he is doing on foreign qualification equivalents. There are often skills shortages, and many of the people who come to work here have the skills that we need but struggle to get placed because of problems with their qualifications. Those people are working well below their capacity. I would like to see that addressed, and I welcome the Minister's indications that he will do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the economic, social and cultural contributions from migrant workers; and calls on the Executive to review the migrant workers strategy and to re-establish the Racial Equality Forum to consider further support for immigrants.

Adjourned at 5.02 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 6 October 2009

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Rates (Amendment) Bill

Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that, under Standing Order 37(2), the Further Consideration Stage of a Bill is restricted to debating any further amendments tabled to the Bill. No amendments have been tabled, so there is no opportunity to discuss the Rates (Amendment) Bill today. Members will, of course, be able to have a full debate at Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Protestant Students

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

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Members in whose names the motion is tabled are not present. What is your ruling?

Mr Speaker: Members who table motions have a responsibility to be in the House to move them. I will move on to the next item of business.

Mr Easton, I take it that you have an explanation for the House as to why you were not in your place to move the motion.

Mr Easton: I apologise to the House, but I was in the middle of a radio interview that went on longer than I had anticipated.

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member says, but I must tell him and the whole House that his first responsibility is to the House. I intend to move on to the next item of business.

I warned the whole House quite a while ago that, if Ministers or Members are not in their place to move the business of the House or private Members' business, that business will fall; and this morning the motion fell. It is no fault of the House that that has happened. However, Members need to know their responsibility to the House and to the business of the House.

The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on investment in social housing. I ask the House to take its ease for a few seconds until we move to the next item of business.

Social Housing

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

Mr O’Loan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the particular impact on the housing construction industry of the current economic downturn; further notes the recent research by the University of Ulster that investment in social housing would have a multiplier effect on job creation; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make moneys available to invest in a programme of new build social housing across Northern Ireland.

I am very pleased to propose the motion. Members can approach the matter in two ways: we can score points against one another — we have done plenty of that — or we can have a constructive debate. We can recognise that there is a real and large problem here for us all. We need a long-term, joint approach by all parties to social housing and investment in social housing. That is what the public is looking to the Assembly to provide.

A good place to start would be Sir John Semple’s ‘Review into Affordable Housing’, which was issued in spring 2007. He said that a target for social housing completions — he emphasised “completions” — should be set at 2,000 per annum expressed as 10,000 over the next five years. The review said that a firm funding commitment needed to be put in place by government to achieve that.

That was in direct rule days. The review goes on to say:

“Significant economic, social and environmental imperatives exist that cause me to recommend in the strongest possible terms that, should an elected Assembly be restored ... it and its Executive should make amendment to the planning and housing systems a priority”.

To be fair to the Executive, it did that, although its target figures fall short of Semple’s estimate of need. They also fall short of Housing Executive estimates of need. The Housing Executive, in its ‘Northern Ireland Housing Market: Review and Perspectives 2009-2012’, which was published this year, says:

“There is an annual requirement for at least 3,000 additional new social dwellings for the period 2009-12”.

The need is clear. There are about 40,000 applicants on the waiting list, half of whom are in urgent housing need. In one year, about 9,000 households are deemed homeless. Be clear, therefore: even if the Executive target is met, it is by no means obvious that we will have resolved our problem. I have concern about how the Executive target is expressed. The public service agreement plans to ensure the provision of 10,000

social and affordable houses by 2013. There is no distinct figure for social housing alone. Perhaps that is why DFP claims that achievement of the target is still on track, even though last year’s milestone of 1,500 houses was not achieved. It was 364 houses short. In the current financial environment, there is clearly a real difficulty in even meeting the Executive target. I hardly need to repeat the effects of the collapse in sales of Housing Executive houses and other DSD property. The budget is now seriously short.

This year, the Minister has given priority to the newbuild programme, at the cost of other housing elements, particularly improvement grants. The essential problem remains. I hardly need to emphasise the arguments in favour of investment in social housing. In summary, the house-building sector has taken the strongest hit in the current downturn, and there is no faster way to prime the economy than investing in houses. House-building is labour-intensive, and for every 10 jobs that are created directly another seven will be created indirectly. Those are the conclusions of the University of Ulster report, and land, materials and labour all offer good value for money at present.

The Northern Ireland Housing Council recently published a report entitled ‘Bridging the Gaps’, which was issued after it held a convention on the issue of how to bridge the gap between what funding is needed and what funding is available. It is a serious and valuable report that has not yet received the attention that it deserves. It refers to a funding deficit of £200 million in the next two years, and the shortfall over the 10-year investment strategy to 2018 is £1 billion. We all know that finding money will be even more difficult from 2011 onwards.

The Housing Council says that the waiting list for housing is growing annually and is at its highest level since the 1970s. It believes that the current model, which is based on public subsidy and receipts, is no longer sustainable, and it says that the use of developer contributions, although still a viable policy in the medium term, is not realistic at present. It proposes a number of measures for discussion, including stock transfer; new governance arrangements for the Housing Executive; permitting the Housing Executive to borrow; and examining how the Housing Executive could become self-financing. It suggests ways to enhance the role of the private rented sector.

The Minister for Social Development supports the Housing Council’s view that there is a clear need to change the way that social housing is funded. Similarly, the Housing Executive has said that we need to examine additional funding provision and more innovative options to allow private finance to contribute. Among other ideas, the SDLP has proposed

the restructuring of Housing Executive debt and the sale and leaseback of the Housing Executive headquarters.

The problem presents a stark challenge to the Assembly. I call for all parties to adopt a long-term, joint approach. The ideas put forward by the Housing Council and others will need a lot of analysis and research, and we need a frank debate. At a more strategic level, we may need a new housing strategy. First and foremost, we need recognition that this is a shared problem, and I hope that such an acceptance will emerge during today's debate. Our task is to put social housing on a sound long-term footing.

Mr Hamilton: Although it may not sound like it, I might find some accord with the proposer's comments during my contribution. It is a pity that his comments about innovative and futuristic measures and looking at the social housing strategy in Northern Ireland have been bound up in one of the most juvenile types of motion that we can face in the Chamber: the identification of a problem and a call for more resources. The Member knows fine well that, even in the best of times, the resources available to the Executive are limited. That is a particularly acute problem at the moment.

Nobody will deny that there is a serious need for social housing across Northern Ireland that affects many thousands of people. There is a grave need for social housing across Northern Ireland, as those of us who do constituency work every week know. However, the issue is so serious that simply demanding more money will no longer suffice.

10.45 am

Recent history shows that the Executive, in totality, agreed that the development of more social housing was one of their priorities, and they set ambitious newbuild goals and targets. That is to be welcomed, and we encourage the Minister for Social Development to make progress on achieving those targets as swiftly as possible. Clearly, she feels that there are pressures on her budget. That is understandable, but all Ministers are facing pressures on their budgets.

Those pressures and problems have not gone unnoticed or unrecognised by the Minister's Executive colleagues. Over the past two and a half years, the Minister has received reallocations to her budget of approximately £160 million from the monitoring rounds. That is not, in difficult times and with limited amounts of money to play with, an insubstantial amount.

The call for more moneys is, in part, based on the new Bible and the new religion of the Smyth and Bailey report. Although I do not deny the importance to the construction sector of building new social houses — that is self-evident — some of the elements of the Smyth and Bailey report are questionable. The fact that they use five-year-old figures from Scotland

to illustrate their argument about the multiplier effect is dated and, therefore, somewhat questionable.

It is absolutely questionable to talk about the non-economic benefits of social housing, using homelessness as a barometer and juxtaposing social housing with public transport and road development. The report shows that social housing has an effect on homelessness that is greater by a factor of 10 to one than that of public transport. If we remove homelessness from the figures in the report, public transport scores higher in the overall assessment. We cannot build a case for social housing on the basis of the Smyth and Bailey report.

Mr O'Loan mentioned the Northern Ireland Housing Council's report, 'Bridging the Gaps'. That leads me to concur with many of the points that he made. There is now a growing need — if we have a crisis, as we supposedly do in social housing — to do things differently. We must change; we cannot do things as we have always done them and expect the problem to be resolved. In particular, in the current increasingly challenging economic environment, we must find a much more sustainable way of financing social housing than we have at present.

I accept the points that Mr O'Loan made about the current funding model; therefore, we have to look at things differently. The Northern Ireland Housing Council's report contains many ideas that are worth reviewing. Perhaps, at a later stage, the Assembly could consider the suggestion that we need an independent assessment of social housing delivery in Northern Ireland so that it is put on a much firmer foundation.

There are many ideas and models of good practice in the UK and Ireland for delivering social housing, such as stock transfer — there is a pilot stock transfer programme in place in Londonderry. There are opportunities to get the private sector involved. The thorny subject of rent convergence was mentioned in the Northern Ireland Housing Council's report. There is a range of subjects to consider, but time does not permit me to explore them. A fuller debate is needed, outside the Chamber as well as inside, on how we can better deliver social housing in future and finance it in a sustainable way in what are increasingly challenging economic times.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion. Mr O'Loan and Mr Hamilton made worthwhile comments not only about the direction of the debate but about what we do afterwards. That is where the challenge lies. Sinn Féin supports the motion, and we agree that there is a deficit in the social housing budget. However, our support is conditional. Simon Hamilton laid out some of those conditions when he talked about considering other

ways of addressing the massive problem of social and affordable housing.

In July, £20 million of extra funding for social housing was announced. At the time, the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, stated:

“The £20 million for housing is a boost both for tenants and for the local construction sector. As well as ensuring that tenants receive much needed maintenance to their homes, local maintenance contractors will be able to sustain around 800 jobs in the construction sector.”

In these times, the prospect of 800 jobs for the construction industry would be supported by every Member of the House as it would create a lifeline for an industry, which, like many others, has experienced hardship.

Declan O’Loan touched on issues in the Smyth and Bailey report. For every 10 jobs created by expanding the social housing programme, a further seven jobs will be sustained elsewhere in the economy. That is grand, but the questions that I have rattling around concern where those jobs will be created and who will get them.

We have previously discussed the economic impact on our communities, which is something that we see in our constituency offices practically on a daily basis and certainly on a weekly basis. There is also the issue of apprenticeships, particularly for young people. If a programme such as this is a way of improving that situation, it has to be welcomed.

I am not point-scoring, but procurement guidelines need to be discussed, as does the issue of tackling long-term unemployment. Communities, particularly those that have rarely seen the benefits of investment, need to see social outcomes too. I represent one such community. Eight hundred jobs could be created through the proposed social housing development programme, and working-class areas have the right to expect to see these jobs and apprenticeships.

My other concerns are about the tables in the Smyth and Bailey report that are referred to as the “Framework for Impact Assessment Screening” and “Weighting Issues”: that is “w-e-i-g-h-t-i-n-g”. I thought that those tables made for interesting reading, although I must confess that I had to read them three or four times before I got a handle on them. I hope that someone from the SDLP can address my concern: what is the connection between those tables and the proposed removal of ring-fencing by DSD from the social housing guidelines? I am concerned because this is about addressing need; it is about 800 jobs in the construction sector and houses built for people most in need. Ring-fencing is a protective measure, particularly for areas such as north and west Belfast and indeed the north-west. The editorial in the ‘North Belfast News’ on 26 September stated:

“According to the Housing Executive’s own statistics, by the year 2012, 95 per cent of those on the waiting list for housing in North Belfast will be Catholic.”

That is totally unacceptable.

I have a copy of a report by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that I will be happy to place in the Library. The committee, in May, stated that it was concerned about the chronic shortage of housing. It said that it was particularly concerned about the lack of social housing in disadvantaged areas. I will skip through a lot of what is said, but it says that there is massive concern about people with disabilities, particularly in Scotland, and Catholic families in North Belfast, in spite of financial resources provided and other measures taken.

I understand that there is a need for a wider debate, and it probably would be better if it happens outside the Chamber. I support the need to create more jobs in the construction industry.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member draw her remarks to a close?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will. However, we cannot have examples such as that highlighted in POS magazine, in which over £1 million was spent on six houses. That is not value for money. That does not help the construction industry, and it does not address the social housing debate.

Mr McNarry: The motion does not specify how much money the Minister should make available, nor does it say what funding a programme of newbuild social housing entails. Members will recall that, in August, the Ulster Unionists published an excellent document called ‘Putting Things Right’. We followed up the August document with a detailed part two continuation in September. I commend both publications to the House, and I reiterate our demand for an honest debate to concentrate our minds on our deepening economic difficulties.

We also included a new convention for the Assembly. Any party that proposes additional spending commitments, as the SDLP does in this motion, should identify how and where the money can be found to fund those proposals. Rather than to stand accused of grandstanding — I am not making that accusation — it would be useful for the SDLP to address the cost implications of its proposals.

I want to record the genuine and deep distress about the disproportionate impact that the economic downturn has had on the construction sector in Northern Ireland. In the past year, the lion’s share of the increased redundancies has come in the construction sector. Unemployment has doubled since this time last year, and it is set to rise further before any expected improvement.

In the last quarter, 1,580 jobs have been lost in construction. Indeed, official figures underestimate the impact because they do not take account of self-employment, which is the norm for many trades in the building sector, particularly in my Strangford constituency. Official figures also do not take account of underemployment and short-time working, which is widespread across the construction sector. It should be remembered that short-time working means less pay.

A great deal more could have been done to soften the blow and minimise the damage to the construction sector. I do not hesitate in placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of our past Ministers of Finance and Personnel, whose inactivity has become almost legendary. In failing to address their budgetary black hole, even though I warned them about it more than a year ago, they have created a situation in which unemployment in the construction sector has been maximised.

Time and time again, we have said that the Programme for Government should have been re-prioritised and based on the concept of job creation and job protection in the real-world financial climate rather than on an aspiration that is well past its sell-by date. I wonder just how many Government building programmes — for example, on schools and roads — have been kicked down the line into next year and beyond to cover the black hole that, until recently, Ministers of Finance and Personnel would not admit existed.

Recently published research shows how social housing can have a multiplier effect on job creation. Like many others, I was impressed by the University of Ulster paper that is referred to in the motion. It states that house-building created more jobs than any other form of capital investment and, indeed, that for every 10 jobs created by building social housing seven jobs will be created or sustained elsewhere in the Northern Ireland economy. The one standout sentence with regard to that report is:

“The world has changed in the time since the Executive agreed a budget. Other governments have responded to these changes by channelling additional resources into house building.”

The University of Ulster paper supports the case that my colleagues and I have been making for months. The world has changed in the time since the Executive agreed the Budget, and that sums up how the Executive and the Department of Finance and Personnel have stood still.

I welcome the ideas that are emerging from today's debate, but we need to have a further debate that is larger, more localised and more embracing. We need to ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to at least try to act where his predecessors failed to act. We need to think outside the box to unlock Northern Ireland's potential, and we need to have the debate that has been

requested. Perhaps the Minister of Finance and Personnel will come to terms with the situation that he has inherited and move to restore confidence in the social housing sector.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McNarry: I am now finished.

Dr Farry: The Alliance Party supports the motion. However, I want to comment on it and, indeed, on some of the problems that Members have already identified. At the outset, it is worth placing the matter in its wider context. Investment in social housing has been a key element of the responses of many Governments, around the world and close to home, to the economic downturn that we are all suffering.

If we look to our own UK Government's response to the downturn, we can see that something like £500 million has been invested in social housing in England and Wales. Indeed, our counterparts in Scotland have also gone down that road. However, we in Northern Ireland have not. Instead, we have taken an approach — and it is entirely within the Executive's remit to do so — that is essentially about cutting the costs that businesses and individuals face. That may be a very good way of sparking demand as far as expenditure is concerned; however, it misses two important points.

11.00 am

First, we are missing the opportunity to make the necessary investments in our infrastructure, including in our housing stock. Secondly, we are missing the opportunity to rebalance our economy and to change existing structural weaknesses fundamentally. When we come out of recession, as some day we surely will, our economy will still have those weaknesses because we have not taken advantage of increased spending.

In so far as we recognise what has happened elsewhere in these islands to encourage an uplift in spending, we must also recognise that, by global standards, the fiscal stimulus in the UK has been quite small. A debate is ongoing about how quickly that stimulus should be taken off the table. The Labour Party seems to be more willing to keep some lag in spending, while the Conservative Party, which is having its party conference this week, seems determined to introduce cuts as quickly as possible.

I certainly recognise the argument that the multiplier effect of investment in social housing would get people back into the workforce, but there is another aspect of investment in social housing that has not been touched on. Investment in energy efficiency, both in businesses and homes, is perhaps the most effective — indeed, cost-effective — way to tackle climate change. There is a substantial body of evidence, including the often-quoted Stern review report, to show that, pound

for pound, investment in energy efficiency is the most effective way to deliver change and to reduce our carbon emissions.

Although I recognise the merits of the motion, I am concerned about a number of aspects of it. I share Mr McNarry's concern about the lack of detail on where the money for investment would come from. Having noted that common ground, I must also say that although Mr McNarry may praise his own documents that look at the state of our finances in Northern Ireland, they essentially point to his version of the problem. I have not come across any proposal, in any shape or form, from the Ulster Unionist Party that outlines how to close the black hole that Mr McNarry has indentified. The gap exists, but no proposals have been made on how to close it. The Member may wish to continue to point out the problems that we face, but it would be nice to hear a proposal or two.

Mr McNarry: Does he want me to do the Finance Minister's job?

Mr O'Loan: Does the Member accept that the SDLP has put forward substantial proposals to raise money, which it would then ask to be spent constructively?

Mr Speaker: Dr Farry will have an extra minute of speaking time.

Dr Farry: I intended to mention Mr O'Loan's comments, but let me first respond to the comment that Mr McNarry made from a sedentary position. I dread the day that the Ulster Unionist Party takes over the finance portfolio, particularly in the light of the approach to cuts that its Conservative Party partners seem intent on inflicting on all of us. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr Farry: I certainly acknowledge that the SDLP has put forward proposals to raise revenue. However, the SDLP needs to reflect on the accuracy and sustainability of a number of those proposals. That party must make a choice. It is extremely clear in saying that it has a manifesto commitment to having no water charges in Northern Ireland. Its commitment is absolute; it will not support water charges in any shape or form or under any circumstance. That is fair enough, but the consequence is that there will be a loss of revenue in Northern Ireland. Water services are not funded out of our block grant, so we have to take that money out ourselves. Therefore, choices must be made. The SDLP should, perhaps, reflect on the situation: it is demanding more money for social housing at the same time as resisting the introduction of water charges in any shape or form. Something may have to give. In outlining its approach to social housing, the SDLP quotes economists. I recognise that the economic advice is sound —

Mr Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Dr Farry: However, the SDLP should recognise that the same economists also point out the financial challenges that face the Assembly, including facing up to water charges.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome today's debate, the more so as it presents an opportunity, as Mr Hamilton said, to discuss the bigger picture. Many issues should be debated in a full consideration of housing.

Construction and house-building in the public sector has, undoubtedly, reached something of a crisis point. The building industry creates much direct employment, and associated employment, a point that was highlighted earlier. More than 8,000 jobs in the Northern Ireland construction sector have been lost or are under threat as a result of the credit crunch, not to mention the difficulties with apprenticeships that the Assembly is also looking at.

Investment in building more social housing will stimulate jobs in a way that no other capital investment can. Evidence suggests that the refurbishment of existing housing stock may be at least as labour-intensive as the construction of newbuilds.

An expansion of the activity in social housing would represent better value for money than many other types of intervention. There is also a practical need to support the construction sector, as it will retain skills and employment in Northern Ireland, rather than individuals having to migrate to where work is available. I recognise the plight of those who are self-employed in the industry, as highlighted by Mr McNarry.

It is imperative that the Department for Social Development and the Minister act as soon as possible. Her Department must come up with innovative ways of funding new social housing and improving existing housing. Mr Hamilton raised some of those matters.

Mr F McCann: This morning's debate concentrates on the provision of social housing. However, in looking at social housing, we have to look at the entire housing sector. Many people in other parts of the housing sector, including maintenance and adapted living, have lost their jobs. If this goes on the way that it is going, more jobs may be lost in that sector than in the newbuild sector.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Hilditch: I share the Member's sentiments. Those matters have been the subject of previous debates in the House, and I appreciate that they remain on the table

Investment in housing will tackle deprivation and fuel poverty, and it will take the pressure off other

Departments' budgets. It also has the potential to relieve housing stress, child poverty and homelessness.

Earlier this year, Clanmil Housing secured some £15 million from a European investment bank to deliver three new social housing projects across Belfast. It is the only one of 36 registered housing associations successfully to access that type of funding. Together, the three schemes will deliver somewhere in the region of 240 new homes to those in greatest housing need. I urge the Minister to look at ways to encourage the other housing associations to avail themselves of similar funds, grants or schemes. The Department must be proactive and lead from the front on such matters.

It is, perhaps, unfair of the Department to request more money time and time again from the Department of Finance. The Department for Social Development received £20 million in the June monitoring round in extra funding for social housing and maintenance. Other Departments had bids turned down and, therefore, had to adjust their spending. The Department for Social Development must act accordingly. The Department must make much more effort to deliver better housing and think outside the box. I strongly support Mr Hamilton's suggestion of an independent review to ascertain the best way forward, because a number of housing issues in Northern Ireland remain outstanding.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will also vote in favour of the motion, but I have some difficulty in endorsing it wholeheartedly. The last phrase of the motion is indicative of the SDLP's perennial approach of transferring responsibility. There is significant agreement in the House on this issue.

There are many issues in this House on which the parties predictably fall out, but there is quite a remarkable amount of consensus in relation to housing. However, I do not see that consensus being built upon or exploited.

The quarterly monitoring round process demonstrates that Ministers are prepared to stand back in favour of addressing the deficit in social housing and making more resources available. That is in a context of finite financial resources and the ability of the Minister of Finance, particularly in straitened economic circumstances, to find additional resources. In itself, attempting to squeeze out efficiencies is not a sustainable process; one does get to the point at which the direct impact on front line services is inescapable and unavoidable. In those circumstances, even with what I regard as a very genuine commitment to addressing the question of social housing, we will get to the point at which Ministers feel that their programmes and departmental priorities are not just

under significant pressure — because they all are — but in significant jeopardy.

It would be better if the SDLP adopted a less confrontational approach in relation to this issue. Simply demanding more resources begs the question of where we find the resources and whether we do it in an arbitrary fashion. That squanders the understanding, goodwill and commitment that is quite obviously present among the political parties and across the Executive table.

Mr A Maginness: I listened very carefully to the Member's remarks in relation to funding for housing. The Department of Finance and Personnel needs to be creative in relation to how it approaches this issue. One of the most creative ways of putting housing on a sound financial footing would be to provide the Housing Executive with additional borrowing powers. In Britain, local authorities currently have what is called prudential borrowing powers. That is a creative approach, but the Department of Finance and Personnel is particularly lacking in creative thought in relation to financing.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Member for those comments. In a sense, they illustrate the point that I am making. There are creative opportunities. There is also a challenge for us all and for the Finance Minister to address the question of whether the very significant resources in the Department, which are programme budgetary items, can nonetheless be applied in these circumstances. It is very often evident that the Minister for Social Development is looking for money for the housing budget while the Minister of Finance and Personnel has unspent budgetary resource. Rather than having an argument about it —

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sorry for interrupting the Member in his flow, but does he agree that the significant resources in the Minister for Social Development's budget need to be managed better? We saw the whole fiasco around the surrender of millions of pounds. Equally, in relation to the first intervention, the whole issue of tax-varying powers was raised in this House previously. I am not sure whether the SDLP supported that proposal, but the comments that followed during the debate lead me to think otherwise. Does the Member care to comment?

Mr McLaughlin: I do, because I made that proposition. I was disappointed that people did not consider the full implications of it. The fact of the matter is that every member of the Executive has the same view: the overall budget resources that are available to meet the needs of a society that is emerging from conflict, and to address years of underfunding in relation to the social infrastructure,

were not there to begin with. There were very significant negotiations with the Treasury and the British Government to try and inject further funding. However, out of it all, people recognise that every Department faces a budget deficit.

Social housing is an example of an issue that has wider strategic significance in our efforts to make devolution work and to be better than direct rule. Therefore, in order to address it, Ministers should consider the benefits of getting around a table and negotiating with party representatives.

11.15 am

Mr Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McLaughlin: The Minister for Social Development should attempt to establish consensus before Executive meetings, rather than simply demanding more money to build houses. That does not address the problem.

Mr Craig: I have a feeling of déjà vu when we come to this subject; we seem to debate it time and time again. The simple truth is that the Finance Department cannot issue blank cheques. Although I support the motion — I would love to see more social housing built in Northern Ireland — I share Finance Committee members' concerns that it makes no provision for finance and that it has no bottom line. I repeat: blank cheques, quite rightly, cannot be issued. The Executive have a process whereby Departments, rightly or wrongly, get their share of the limited Northern Ireland Budget.

I share some Members' concerns about how the Department for Social Development manages money, and I have raised those in the House and in the Committee for Social Development. The downturn in the economy has caused a huge problem in the private housing sector and an even bigger problem in the public housing sector. Cash flow for building public sector houses is slowly but surely dwindling; it lags behind that for the private sector, and over the next few years, that situation will get worse.

However, such a situation also brings opportunities. For instance, no one in the House believes that the price of land, which was the issue two years ago, is the issue today. It is no longer the issue, and anyone who believes that the Department will be paying the same price for building land that it paid two years ago is living in cloud cuckoo land. The Department is getting land at a fraction of its previous cost. Therefore, the downturn has opened up certain opportunities.

The Government could exploit those opportunities, although not necessarily directly. The Conservative Party has stated openly that tax revenues will dwindle drastically. Considering who may be in

Government within a year, those reduced revenues will lead to problems for the housing sector and for every Department in this country. Therefore, massive opportunities exist for the Department for Social Development.

I listened with care to the opening remarks in the debate, and I agree fundamentally with one issue that was raised. We should review how the housing strategy in Northern Ireland is delivered. Things have changed so fundamentally that a review must take place. Such a review could afford the Department an opportunity to give more freedom to housing associations to self-finance some public housing builds. The Clanmil Housing Association was mentioned, and it has been successful in getting private finance to deliver social housing in Northern Ireland. Do we need to take some of the economic shackles off such associations and allow them to get on with the job without intervening with public finance? Do other opportunities exist that need to be exploited?

Over the past few years, the Minister has put together other action plans for the rating of vacant properties, in an attempt to provide the owners with an incentive to rent them out. At what stage are those plans? Have they progressed? Are they dead in the water? That is why there is merit in reviewing the whole strategy.

I agree that the Programme for Government, with respect to housing, needs to be put on a sounder footing. The Minister should not be pouring an inordinate part of her budget into newbuild at the expense of repairs to existing housing. If that policy continues, it will create a disaster in public housing in the near future.

Mr Armstrong: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. There is a serious problem with the Department for Social Development's budget, as there is with the entire Northern Ireland Budget. The problem is that many spending plans have been based on securing capital receipts. However, due to the ongoing recession, those receipts have not materialised.

In addition, there is serious mismanagement and denial of problems by successive DUP Finance Ministers and spokespersons. Problems ought to have been tackled when they emerged; tackling them now makes the achievement of positive outcomes extremely difficult.

I appreciate the arguments put forward by the SDLP. There is clear evidence that increased investment in housing construction will boost the economy, especially through creating employment in the construction sector.

The Minister is struggling to meet her Programme for Government targets of creating social and

affordable housing, and increasing investment there will help many vulnerable people. However we must approach the issue in full recognition of the problems facing the Executive. The Finance Minister has already outlined cuts in the region of £370 million that do not factor in the effects of swine flu or the equal pay claim.

In such circumstances, according priority to social housing will be a difficult and bold decision; but the Executive must debate it. An open and honest debate, based on all the facts and figures, is essential, and it has been lacking to date. For Northern Ireland to emerge from the recession in a strong position, the Executive must outline a coherent vision of public spending that will give confidence to business and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Members who have spoken already. I agree with some of their points and disagree with others.

We are in difficult and trying economic times. Local businesses are experiencing great difficulties, and unemployment is rising. One of the industries hardest hit is construction, and one of the simplest ways of getting it off its knees, or even getting its face out of the mud, is by applying a stimulus to the housing market. Some Members have said that too much money is going into housing; others have raised other objections. I do not understand some of those objections. Some have also said that there is enough money going into the construction of social housing, if only it were properly managed. That is completely false. During the past couple of years, management of the housing budget has been comparable to the miracle of the loaves and fishes: money has been stretched to achieve far beyond what we thought it had the potential to achieve. Fundamentally, not enough money is being invested in housing development, whether it is in new housing or in the renovation and repair of existing houses.

The Department for Social Development is facing a unique problem in that its mainstream programmes, outlined and planned over a number of years, have been massively undermined by a shortfall in expected capital receipts. No other Department has been undermined in that way. The facts, as distinct from the speculation, are as follows: there was a shortfall of £80 million in 2008-09; there is a shortfall of £100 million this year, and a shortfall of £100 million is expected next year. Those shortfalls represent gaps between what is required to meet the demands, needs and plans and what is available.

Executive support and assistance for the DSD budget have been inadequate and patchy. For the record, some help was given in September 2008. However, three months later, in December 2008, there was a smash-and-grab raid in which the Executive

removed £30 million that had been released for housing from the DSD budget. In February 2009, the DSD was allowed to transfer some other moneys into housing. In June 2009, £20 million was transferred to housing, but that was done under strict conditions and with a focus on special needs and circumstances. As I understand it, the Executive plan to cut the DSD housing budget further.

To my mind, the situation with social housing is a bit like the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The housing budget has been managed well recently because, despite there being a shortfall of £80 million last year — the equivalent of building 800 new homes — the DSD managed to build only 350 fewer than that; it squeezed enough money from its existing budget to build 450 homes that were not budgeted for. That was a fair achievement. This year, in spite of the £100 million shortfall — the equivalent of 1,000 homes — the Housing Executive and the DSD are on course to meet a target of 1,750 newbuild homes, unless, of course, their kitty is robbed in the meantime.

The work that has been done is very cost-effective. To meet the demand across all communities, geographically, socially and in every other way, the budget is being managed cost-effectively. We are getting good value for money. Members referred to land. One of the ways in which that good value for money is being achieved is that, in many cases, the Housing Executive is not buying land on which to build houses but is using up spare land that it has had on its books for some time. Therefore, because land does not have to be bought, all the money can be used to build new houses.

An unprecedented amount of money is being spent on renovations. In addition to that, the Minister has protected —

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Dr McDonnell: The Minister has protected vulnerable people from cutbacks, when those have to be made.

I support the motion fully. We must unite around it. The detail can be put in place later, but let us first agree on the principle.

Mr F McCann: A chairde agus a Cheann Comhairle, I support the motion, although I have some concerns about the SDLP's assumptions.

Sinn Féin has always supported a proper newbuild programme. At Committee level, our group has supported the Minister and her Department when additional resources have been requested, as have all members of the Committee for Social Development. We realise that housing is a cross-cutting issue. There is an impact on the health, education and quality of life

of those who do not have a home. We argue that all aspects of housing are underfunded. The SDLP motion refers to a recent report by the Ulster University that states that the development of a proper social housing programme has a multiplier effect on employment. That is true, but it can be said of any sector.

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

The fact remains that the major impact on the construction industry was not the collapse of the social housing market but that of the private housing market. In 2006-07, 95% of all houses built were for the private housing market; in 2007-08, that figure was 90%. Of the 6,356 housing starts in 2008-09, 5,493 were started for the private market; there were 863 starts in the social housing sector. I wonder how many of those were paper starts. More than 300 homes in the social housing programme were not built and were carried over into 2009-2010. Therefore, the remainder of them must have been built for the private market originally and bought from private developers.

When Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he stated that one way in which to kick-start the economy and to create jobs is to upgrade the present housing stock. However, the Minister for Social Development has gone in the opposite direction; she has suspended most grants, and that will put many people on the dole.

11.30 am

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member talked about buying off-the-shelf housing from developers, and about that being factored into the housing figures. Does the Member agree that a substantial amount of public money has been spent on buying houses off the shelf that have not been up to standard; that additional public money has had to be spent on bringing them up to the Housing Executive's standard; and that that is not a good way of managing the budget for social housing development?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has one extra minute in which to speak.

Mr F McCann: I agree with the Member. Some housing associations that I have spoken to say that they may have to spend —

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: I am sorry; I am running out of time.

Several months ago, we heard from a group that represents 900 small builders that they are being put out of business by the Minister's policy. We heard also from the Egan contractors, who were disappointed that commitments given by the Housing Executive were being gone back on. Those contractors informed us that they were about to shed jobs. Roughly 1,000 people are employed in the Egan sector, but that

number does not include those who rely on the custom of the sector for survival.

We agree that additional resources should be given to housing, but we are also concerned at the way in which the present budget is being run and the impact that it is having on existing housing stock in the private and social sectors. The Housing Executive admits that it is unlikely to meet the target of bringing all houses up to a particular standard by 2010. Perhaps the Minister will explain whether the Housing Executive will reach the new target date of 2014, given the suspension of much of the grants programme.

The Housing Executive set itself a target of making 3,200 external maintenance improvements, but it completed 2,105, which is a shortfall of 1,095. It also set itself a target of 4,500 kitchen replacements, but it achieved 2,566, which is a shortfall of 1,934. Furthermore, it set itself a target of 3,150 multi-element heating installations and other works, but it achieved 2,064, which is a shortfall of 1,086. Much of the failure to achieve targets was due to budget restrictions.

A statement that was released recently by the Housing Executive shows that we will not fare much better in the programme for the coming year. The Housing Executive usually issues 7,000 grants to help homeowners, but that will be cut to only 2,000. All group repair schemes have been put on hold, and discretionary grants that are not already in the system will not be approved. The statement goes on to say that £157.25 million has been allocated to newbuild. In normal times, we would commend the Minister for her commitment, but we are not in normal times. The Minister cannot continue to rob other parts of her budget to put into newbuild, no matter how commendable that may seem.

The Minister also needs to explain why many of the 1,500 houses that the Housing Executive has lying empty for use in decanting for major works have been brought into use to house those who are homeless. Furthermore, she needs to explain what happened to the report that she was to bring regarding the almost £1 billion of land owned by her Department and the Housing Executive, some of which is in areas of high demand. It is not always about selling land, but about using it strategically to gain houses.

When will we realise any houses from the developer contribution, which has provided thousands of units in Britain and the South? We lack resources for all aspects of housing, but we also lack a strategy to deal with the problem.

The SDLP should not continue to accuse people of attacking its Minister. We criticise where criticism is warranted. The SDLP should look at its record of attacking other Ministers in the House. When all is

said and done, we will support the motion, and we ask the Minister of Finance to look favourably towards providing additional resources for housing and to ensure that it is spent wisely, not on only one element of the housing sector.

Lord Morrow: The motion is a lot of humbug. There is no sincerity about tackling a real problem and a real issue. I have listened carefully to what some of the Members have said, and, to put it mildly, it is an absolute farce.

I listened to Billy Armstrong trot out comments about how evil the Finance Ministers of the past were and how they had fallen far short of the mark. Dr Farry is the only Member to come to the debate with a degree of honesty and sincerity; he attempted to set out before the House the real issues, and he put the challenge to the Ulster Unionists and to the SDLP, who proposed the motion. However, none of the Members of those parties who have spoken has taken up that challenge.

I listened to Mr McNarry, who told the House that if everyone had listened to him long ago, we not be in the current predicament. He has told the world at large that there is a “black hole” in the Budget and that, had the Executive taken the appropriate action long ago, we would not be facing this predicament. That is another lot of nonsense, which the House has come to expect from that quarter on a regular basis.

Mr A Maginness: The Member referred to Mr McNarry’s claims of there being a “black hole” in the Budget, but surely Mr McNarry is correct to the extent that the denials made by the previous Finance Minister, Mr Dodds — who came to the House on a number of occasions and denied that there was any problem with the Budget or the Executive’s finance — were based on a false premise and that there is a very serious black hole in those finances?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute in which to speak.

Lord Morrow: I do not accept that at all. In fairness to Mr Maginness, he normally brings some light to debates in the House, but he has also missed the mark. It seems that the Member is being influenced by a tendency to gang up, which is unfortunate, given that the issue of social housing should have the full support of all Members of the House. Some of us find the insincerity being spewed out today so contemptible that it is very difficult to listen to. However, despite the fact that the DUP has many reservations about the motion and the sincerity behind it, it will not divide the House on it.

We are in the midst of a severe economic downturn. Previously, the Housing Executive has, quite rightly, relied on house sales to stimulate its budget and its house-build programme, and that factor has not been properly and fully taken into account. Rather than the

Assembly uniting as one body to deal with the serious issue of housing, with over 20,000 people on the housing waiting list, it is divided. Furthermore, the Minister for Social Development seems to be oblivious to the whole issue and does not want to take any advice on board. Rent arrears are spiralling out of control, houses have been purchased under the SPED scheme, and what has the Minister done about those issues? The sad fact is that she has done little or nothing, and we are moving further into a housing crisis on a daily basis.

When the Minister for Social Development was appointed, I believed that she had the heart for the job. As district councillors, we served on different bodies in the past, and I thought that her social intuitions would have steered her to strongly tackle those issues. However, to date we have seen no movement and there has been no effort by her Department to stand up and be counted. Instead, she has taken the facile approach of trying to blame everyone else, rather than admitting where the blame lies, fair and square.

I appeal to the SDLP to stop and think what it is doing when tabling motions such as the one before the House. In proposing such motions, it is making the job more difficult and is depressing those who have been on the housing waiting list for years. However, that party still believes that it is, in some way, attempting to address social issues.

Mr G Robinson: Just last week, I received a response from the Minister for Social Development regarding the renovations of dwellings for pensioners and disabled people in Coleraine, which is in my constituency.

Although I appreciate the Minister’s budgetary difficulties, her response informed me of yet another setback for that long-planned renovation scheme, and there is no starting date for the project. What are the additional moneys awarded to DSD from the spending rounds being spent on? They are not being spent on objective 1 in the PSA 12 delivery document.

There is another example in Limavady in my constituency, where another much-needed renovation scheme has no start date. I am sure that the Minister remembers her visit to that area last year and can recall the deprivation. Therefore, there is an urgent need for that project to begin. Those are just two examples from one constituency, and I am sure that Members can recount similar delays from their constituencies. That fails to meet objective 2 of PSA 12.

There is also the crisis in the availability of suitable housing. I call the situation a crisis because of the numerous enquiries for assistance that my office receives every week, and I am sure that other Members are in a similar situation. There are not enough public-sector homes available for tenants. The Minister has

the unenviable task of addressing that situation, and there are two ways in which that can be done: newbuild or renovation of property, with newbuild being the long-term preferred way forward. The Minister has had significant financial help from successive Finance Ministers through the spending rounds to address the problems on her plate.

The reliance on the sale of public-sector homes has been a major factor that has led to the Minister's current budgetary problem. In previous years, there was a predictable number of sales. However, the current economic downturn has led to a crash in the volume of house sales and, therefore, a depletion in her spending power. That economic downturn is not the fault of the Finance Minister, but the result of poor planning by the Minister and her predecessors, and has impacted heavily on the desired newbuild targets of the Minister.

It is essential that, in future, the same budgetary problems do not beset DSD. It must develop a way forward that will eliminate many of the mistakes that have been made, and that can be done only by an independent review of social housing in Northern Ireland. It must be a truly independent review, with DSD providing information and awaiting the results of the inquiry's findings rather than its having the responsibility of carrying out the review. As a result, the people of Northern Ireland would have confidence in the review and its findings.

Mrs M Bradley: I am disappointed that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will not be in the Chamber to respond to this important debate. This is the second time that the Minister has failed to respond to such a debate, and that is not good enough.

It is well known that there is a lack of funding for social housing. Simon Hamilton is right: the Minister for Social Development was given £20 million in the last monitoring round. However, that is not enough to fund the huge shortfall. Simon Hamilton also argued that the Minister for Social Development must make changes in her Department in order to fund housing. That has already been undertaken. Unfortunately, due to a dire lack of money, it has led to shortages elsewhere: for example, hampering attempts to continue with the normal Housing Executive repair schemes.

The DSD Minister has tried to bring forward other ways of producing funding. It was Simon Hamilton's party colleague the Finance Minister who stalled some of those initiatives, including the possibility of re-profiling Housing Executive debt.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mrs M Bradley: No, I will not.

Simon Hamilton should ask his party colleague to recast the Budget and the Programme for Government

— something that all serious economic commentators are aware is necessary — before criticising the DSD Minister. He also criticised the University of Ulster report 'Addressing the Economic Downturn: The Case for Increased Investment in Social Housing' because it makes reference to homelessness. Has he no social conscience?

As the Northern Ireland Housing Council report 'Bridging the Gaps' states:

"Homelessness levels are at a high level and it is taking increasingly longer to provide permanent rehousing."

Social housing is also a big contributor to health and has a strong impact on fuel poverty.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mrs M Bradley: No, I am not giving way.

The Northern Ireland Housing Council report also states:

"It is widely accepted that housing generally makes a major contribution to Health."

Fra McCann referred to that point, so I hope that he and his party remember that when we ask for their support in getting money to give people decent homes.

11.45 am

The Minister for Social Development is doing a great deal to protect the vulnerable in our society. Her Executive colleagues should assist, not hinder, her. She has protected the budget for the warm homes scheme, thus helping the fuel poor. She has also protected the Supporting People scheme, meaning that instead of people being in institutions, they can live independently in the community. We are all asking for that. I urge the Minister of Finance and Personnel to assist Margaret Ritchie in the good work that she is doing.

Members are telling us to support the motion for the benefit of people who need a home. That is all that those people are asking for — a decent home. We are asking for the appropriate funds to be given to the Minister so that those decent homes can be built. If that happened, the people in question would not face the health problems that Fra McCann spoke about, and if people are really serious, they should ask their Ministers to support the housing budget.

Mr Shannon: The biggest issue that I deal with in my office is housing. Indeed, every Member who has spoken has said the same. Any Member who works hard in their constituency will be aware of the fact that the allocation and provision of social housing is a nightmare. Getting people housed and re-housed is a real quagmire and is very hard to negotiate. As good as Housing Executive and housing association staff are, there are only so many things that can be done at that level. However, something can be done — and, I

believe, must be done — at ministerial level. I am talking about the Minister for Social Development.

I wrote to the Minister recently to express concern about the reduction of grants money that had been allocated to Housing Executive offices in the Province, particularly the Ards office; obviously, I have an issue with that. I urge the Minister to ensure that 1,500 new homes for this year are provided. Strangford, the area that I represent, has almost 3,000 people on the waiting list, which is well above the Northern Ireland average. If those homes are provided, the area will get its fair share of social housing.

Almost 1,700 people are classed as being in priority need in the Ards area, with some 900 on the ordinary list. That shows clearly that social housing need in the Ards area continues to grow. Indeed, such is that growth, it would take over 300 newbuilds in this year alone to address the present housing needs of those who are on the lists. Stephen Graham, the area manager — a real gentleman, hard worker and good manager — has indicated that, in this financial year and the next, around 200 newbuilds are being built with all the different housing associations. We know which associations are involved — BIH, Habinteg, Clanmil, Connswater, and so on. However, that is all subject to funding, which has come to mean that it is unlikely that some of those houses will be built. That is one of our concerns.

There is always a funding shortfall. Given that DSD has been allocated more and more funding in each of the monitoring rounds, I cannot understand that. There must be a turnaround in the way that things are done in the Housing Executive. That change must come from the top and work its way down.

Mr Hamilton: My friend will have noticed that I incurred the wrath of the previous Member who spoke. Does he agree with me that it is wrong to believe that we can meet the real need that exists through the current system, and that, when we are facing a challenging economic and resource environment, new and innovative ways of financing and delivering social housing in Northern Ireland are needed? That is why we need to take a fresh and independent look at how we meet that need in future. We should not continue to do what we have always done; it has not worked.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his comments. I think that all Members will agree that we need new ways to address housing issues. Any time that you go into a housing estate in a town, you will see homes that could be used to house families lying empty. The Minister needs to implement the review to ensure that all homes that should be in use are in use and that homes are not sitting for months on end with no one in them. That is why the Minister must also provide money, not only for building maintenance and

repairs, but for construction. That will give our construction industry, and, as a knock-on effect, the economy, a much-needed boost.

We do not simply want money to be thrown at the situation. It is a matter of thinking it through and getting a strategy that will benefit many sections of the community at once through provision of housing, maintenance and upkeep. There are clear ways in which the Department must tighten up.

First, it has taken the Housing Executive 32 weeks to sell one house in Newtownards — my goodness me. An ordinary private enterprise can do that in 12 to 14 weeks. There is something seriously wrong with the fact that it took the Housing Executive 32 weeks to sell one house.

I asked Margaret Ritchie to provide a breakdown of the number of houses sold by constituency. In the past year, 54 houses in the Province were sold. I know people in Ards who want to buy their house but cannot do so, and I want to know why. Perhaps the Minister can explain that to me. Something is seriously wrong with the system.

In times of economic uncertainty, the sale of homes should be encouraged, and all the revenue from house sales should be redirected to the Department's budget. That could have happened if the process had been speeded up and if the people who enquired about buying their houses had had their enquiries listened to. A little more effort from the land and property section of the Housing Executive could result in more houses being built and sold more quickly. By and large, the Housing Executive is good and it replies, but I have some concerns over the time that it takes.

The Minister must implement greater efficiency in her Department as a matter of urgency so that funding can be freed to go to the right place at the right time. Wisdom must also be shown when allocating funding. Anyone who knows me will know that I completely support the promotion of culture and history and that I believe that we have a duty to preserve and enhance those. However, I also believe that all things should be done in moderation. I accept that help should be given, but I question the granting by DSD of £70,000 for a mural in north Down. Would it not have been better to have used that £70,000 to provide at least one house for a person on the list?

The onus is on the Minister to put her own house in order and to prioritise. As much as she should ask for and receive advice from her ministerial colleagues, she must do her part and accept that the funding that she has been given is adequate if she uses it in the right way. I support the view that social housing is needed, and the Minister knows that, because we have been working very hard to provide housing in Ards. When the Minister implements the review, the money that is

saved will go a great way to providing the funds needed for newbuilds, which will also be beneficial to the construction sector.

I urge Members to think seriously about what they are supporting. We will not stand in the way of the motion. It is right that the issue should be raised, but the way in which it has been brought forward is wrong.

Mr A Maginness: I do not know what has happened in the House this morning, but peace seems to have broken out. It reminds me of the little episode during the First World War when the German and British troops played football on Christmas Day. I do not understand it; there must be something in the water —

Mr McLaughlin: What happened the day after that?

Mr A Maginness: I was going to come to that. When the generals found out that the troops were playing football, they got them back to the trenches.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please return to the motion.

Mr A Maginness: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker.

In any event, it is good to see that people are looking at the motion in a sensible manner. There seems to be a general consensus in the House that the motion is meritorious. Even Mr McCann said nice things about the motion, although he did not say nice things about the Minister; old habits die hard. Nonetheless, even Sinn Féin, including Mr McCann, and the DUP recognise the need for proper financing for housing.

On a serious note, it is accepted that, as stated in the University of Ulster report, investing in social housing in Northern Ireland has beneficial effects, such as its tremendous multiplier effect, which helps to stimulate the economy. It is not only for that reason that social housing is a good thing. People need houses, and the fact that almost 40,000 applicants are in need of housing in Northern Ireland shows that there is tremendous pressure. There is a great need to approach the issue in a creative manner.

I back the Minister's record; she has done very well. As Dr McDonnell said, it is a miracle — comparable to that of the loaves and fishes — that she has produced so many houses and has maintained the services of DSD despite the fact that she has not had sufficient or proper financing.

The Minister has asked for housing to be put on a sound financial basis. There are two ways to do that; either directly through the Budget or by looking at public housing creatively in order to find new means of financing it. The Assembly can do that.

Earlier, I mentioned that in Britain, there is prudential borrowing, which allows —

Mr Savage: Does the Member agree that the contribution that housing associations have made in

Northern Ireland has made a big impact on social housing? Were it not for them, I do not know what situation social housing would be in at present.

Mr A Maginness: I accept that housing associations have made a contribution. Indeed, the Minister, in trying to maximise her budget, has reduced the housing association grant. That means that housing associations must borrow more, indeed, an increased proportion of the cost of newbuild, which makes DSD money go further. That is a creative way to finance housing.

The point that I was making about the Housing Executive's borrowing powers was that the Assembly needs to look at that creatively in order to determine where the Housing Executive can raise additional finance for housing. I see no reason why the Assembly cannot do that. If it does so, I believe that the Treasury —

Mr F McCann: Mr Maginness is aware that the Committee has discussed that issue: indeed, it did so when he was a member. The Committee is awaiting papers on how that proposal would work, which, so far, have not been forthcoming. It seems to everyone that that could be a long way off. The Committee needs those papers urgently so that it can discuss the issue.

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful for Mr McCann's intervention. I support the Committee's consideration of the issue in order to find ways and means to support the Minister in being creative and putting housing on a sound financial basis.

I believe that borrowing powers for the Housing Executive are crucial. As has been pointed out by other Members, house sales and land sales are no longer sufficient to finance housing in Northern Ireland: it is as simple as that. There is not the same volume of sales as there was previously. Therefore, the housing budget is under severe pressure.

The Housing Council's paper entitled 'Bridging the Gaps' is a useful contribution to the debate. The council must be congratulated for its innovative work in that regard.

Mr Burns: I support the motion and repeat the call for more money for social housing. The SDLP has made that point many times previously, during many different debates. I make it again, unashamedly.

Putting money into social housing programmes is one of the best ways that the Assembly can help the local economy. That has been the SDLP's position, and it is the position of people such as Professor Mike Smyth of the University of Ulster. Other Members mentioned the report, in which he makes a number of clear points. Although all those points have been mentioned in the debate, I will run through them again briefly.

In general, house building creates more jobs than any other investment. For every 10 jobs created through building houses, seven other sustainable jobs

are created elsewhere in the economy. That is a clear multiplier: jobs created in the construction industry help the entire economy. The cost of land for construction has fallen sharply, which makes now a good time to invest in construction.

We will get value for money if we build on land that we already own. New houses will help us to deal with the housing waiting list, homelessness and housing stress, and better houses will help us to counter deprivation and to lift people out of fuel poverty.

12.00 noon

The Minister for Social Development received £20 million in the June monitoring round, and we thank the Minister of Finance and Personnel for that extra money. However, the Social Development budget still falls short. Originally, DSD needed an extra £100 million; it now needs £80 million. The SDLP has made that point again and again. The reasons for the budget shortfall are well known, so I will not repeat them. However, I remind Members that the receipts from house and land sales have virtually disappeared, so the budget for social housing has been reduced.

We need to put the social housing budget on a firm financial footing once again by continuing to press the Finance Minister for more money. Living hand to mouth from one monitoring round to the next is no way for the Minister for Social Development to have to run her Department. That is why we have asked for the Budget and the Programme for Government to be revisited.

As Mr McNarry said, much has changed since the Executive agreed the Budget. It is time for a change: we must revise our spending priorities. Based on the evidence and on the report from the University of Ulster, it is clear that investment in social housing should be a bigger priority.

More money has been brought forward for social housing in England and Scotland, and we should do the same. Thousands of new homes are urgently required. In the current economic climate and with housing stress at an all-time high, the demand for social housing will only increase as waiting lists grow longer, repossessions become more frequent, and homelessness rises. We should address those problems by building new houses, as that will also help the economy in the best possible way. That is why we are committed to the newbuild targets; however, we cannot reach those without extra money.

I thank all the Members — I think that there were 18 in total — who participated in the debate. We are, however, disappointed that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is not here to respond to the motion. The Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, has been here on no fewer than 10 occasions to respond to Members' queries and to motions on the issue of social housing.

In proposing the motion, my colleague Declan O'Loan set out the case for investment in social housing very well. Simon Hamilton, the Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, said that he understands the problems that the Minister faces. He asked the Minister for the report: the Minister has already asked for it, and it should be coming to the Committee.

Sinn Féin's Carál Ní Chuilín said that she understands the importance of building new houses, because that will increase the number of apprenticeships. Having more apprenticeships will help to reinvigorate the construction industry and make it grow. Apprenticeships are the lifeblood of the construction industry; they should not be cut. I, therefore, agree with Carál that there needs to be more support for apprenticeships.

David McNarry said that the whole world has changed due to the economic downturn, and that we really need to revisit the Programme for Government and the Budget. That is very important. It does not mean only the Social Development budget and the housing problem; that goes right across all the ministries in the Assembly.

Stephen Farry brought us, as Lord Morrow might say, back to reality. But he wanted to shift the emphasis in the Budget to water charges, as if by bringing in water charges everything would be solved. Tell that to the electorate; let him announce that the Alliance Party is all for water charges.

David Hilditch spoke well. He understands the problems that the Social Development Minister is facing. Mitchel McLaughlin feels that the SDLP is always coming back to the Assembly to ask for money. He said that our one and only cry is that we do not have enough money for housing. He said that we are always back here begging for money. Well, we have to come here and ask for money for housing because the housing budget was £100 million short. We got £20 million, but we are still £80 million short.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Burns: No.

Mitchel McLaughlin did not mention all the other priorities that the Social Development Minister has, such as the warm homes scheme, the Supporting People programme, neighbourhood renewal, the economic downturn, and the creation of more jobs in benefit offices. The Department for Social Development is a big-spending Department, and it deals with a lot more than just housing.

Jonathan Craig spoke well. He mentioned that there was better value for money to be got. He said that, in the construction industry, prices now are better value than they would have been two years ago. I thank Billy Armstrong for his contribution, and I think that Alasdair McDonnell spoke very well, too.

Fra McCann understands the problems in social development. He gave us the facts and figures for the entire Department and for social housing. I thank Fra for his contribution.

Lord Morrow nearly stole the thunder from my winding-up speech. He referred to the whole debate as a farce. I totally disagree; the debate has been far from a farce. There has been a complete acknowledgement of the underspend in social housing. Every Member knows and understands that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Burns: I thank everyone who contributed to the debate. My party colleague Alban Maginness said that when the war broke out, the soldiers went out and played football, and then went back to the trenches. I do not want us to go back into our trenches. I want us to work together to solve the social housing problem.

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

Mr Burns: The SDLP wants to build more houses.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the particular impact on the housing construction industry of the current economic downturn; further notes the recent research by the University of Ulster that investment in social housing would have a multiplier effect on job creation; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make moneys available to invest in a programme of new build social housing across Northern Ireland.

Mr McNarry: Manchester United went into the trenches.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

As the Business Committee has arranged to meet at 12.30 —

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We had an unprecedented situation this morning, and I fully respect the rulings of the Speaker on that. However, the only remaining business in the Assembly today is Question Time and an Adjournment debate. I think that a lot of us are conscious of the credibility of this institution among the public in Northern Ireland. The number of hours that we will have on the Floor is extremely disappointing. Is there any possible way that the Business Committee can reflect on whether it is possible to bring any business forward this afternoon so that we can have a working Assembly, rather than one which sits for only one and a half days this week?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 12.30 pm. Members can raise with the Business Committee any issues that they have at that time. As the next item of business is Question Time, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 3.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.10 pm.

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

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rating of Empty Homes

1. **Mr Brolly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue will be lost by the postponement of the rating of empty homes.
(AQO 165/10)

Mr Brolly: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist a haon. Question 1.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I am glad that there was an interpretation, but I think that I would have guessed that it was Question 1.

The rating of empty homes is likely to raise between £6 million and £8 million in additional regional and district rates revenue when it is established. However, the experience of the rushed introduction of the rating of vacant non-domestic properties in 2004 suggested that the amount that would have been raised through the rating of empty homes in 2010-11 is likely to be significantly less than that amount.

Land and Property Services (LPS) is experiencing the same problems as the Rate Collection Agency in compiling a list of reliable owners in time for the April 2010 introduction of rating of empty homes. Therefore, it is likely that just over half the revenue that the measure is capable of raising annually would have been raised, and the postponement of one year has the advantage of allowing LPS sufficient time to finalise the list.

Mr Brolly: I thank the Minister. He has probably answered my supplementary question, which was whether the real reason that the rating of empty homes was not implemented was because Land and Property Services has difficulty in delivering it.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am very pleased that I anticipated the Member's supplementary question. There is no doubt that one of the reasons was that we did not have a full list of vacant homes. I hope that council building control departments will help Land and Property Services to identify such properties. The additional reason was that there would have been implications in introducing rating on vacant homes,

given the state of the housing market. It was decided, therefore, that we should postpone its introduction.

Lord Browne: Would the Minister agree that it has become increasingly difficult for councils to set a budget for the financial year because of the default in the collection of rates? What percentage of rates has been collected by Land and Property Services in each council area, and what action has been taken to recover unpaid rates?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I tend to have certain facts given to me by the Department before I come to Question Time. However, I do not have the detail for which the Member asked in relation to the percentage of rates that is not collected in each council area. However, the amount of rates that has not been collected has increased, and probably sits at about £130 million, which is quite a high sum. Despite our taking an increasing number of people through the courts to recover rates, the sum has increased. That is partly due to the recession and partly due to the fact that work needs to be done on rates collection.

As for identifying properties on which rates are not collected, building control carried out an exercise in the Belfast City Council area that found that many properties in the city that were thought to be vacant were not, in fact, vacant. That exercise increased the rates base by about £4.2 million. That is the way forward, and I would like to see LPS working with local councils to ascertain which properties are not paying rates and whether they should be.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members from all sides that supplementary questions should not be read.

Mr Durkan: The Minister referred to the introduction of the rating of non-domestic properties, which was never introduced in Scotland. Is the Minister aware that the Chancellor has introduced new reliefs in England in the context of the downturn, and does he recognise that, through no fault of their own, many owners cannot let their commercial properties? Those properties are facing deterioration because money that could be spent on maintaining them has to go towards rates.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although I accept the Member's point, we are evaluating the rating of vacant non-domestic properties. We have sought the views of a wide range of people, which we are now considering. However, lest I give the impression that we are less generous in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom, the rating of non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland operates at a 50% level, whereas a 100% level operates in the rest of the United Kingdom. Moreover, rates for manufacturing industries are capped at 30%. There are differences in the rating systems, and, therefore, a comparison cannot be made between here and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Public Expenditure

2. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of what the public expenditure situation may be after the general election in 2010. (AQO 166/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although the position will not be confirmed until the conclusion of the next UK-wide spending review, a marked slowdown, if not a reduction, in current expenditure is expected after the next general election. The noises from the Conservative Party conference today and yesterday, and from the Chancellor, indicate that there appears to be almost a competition as to who will cut deeper. The leader of the Conservative Party has made it clear that if his party wins the next election, Northern Ireland will not be exempt from reductions. I am sure that the Members from the Ulster Unionist Party can tell us some more, given the insight that they have through their contacts with the Conservative Party.

In the past number of years, the funding of public services has experienced a significant uplift at an average of about 6.8% a year. That means that we are working from a higher base, and, therefore, there is considerable scope to yield further benefits from the previous investment. The Executive's 10-year investment strategy, which runs until 2018, was based on the continued growth in capital of either 2.3% or 2.7% a year. That contrasts with the Treasury's latest projections that investment in the UK will fall by about 9.3% in real terms between 2010 and 2014. However, significant reductions in construction prices should at least help us to get more for every pound that we spend. Therefore, given the uncertainties about public spending decisions after the next election and some other factors that I mentioned, the total impact is difficult to assess.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. What can the Executive do to offset any reductions in available spend?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are several measures that the Executive can take, and are taking, to address that problem. First, we must reduce the unnecessary bureaucracy that surrounds much of the public sector. Steps must be taken to remove it, and Ministers should consider that matter in their own Departments. Furthermore, the Executive will need to consider scaling back programmes that are no longer needed or are no longer regarded as effective. Governments tend to continue with measures after their usefulness has passed or after the issue that they were designed to address has been sorted out.

That is the second point that I want to make: we should examine the activities that we are involved in and ask whether they are really necessary.

We must also prioritise the efficient delivery of front line services. I will probably raise the Health Minister's ire when I say that productivity in the health sector in Northern Ireland is approximately 16% lower than that in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is probably true of many other front line services; there is room for considering more effective and efficient ways of spending the money that goes into those services. There is also the more fundamental issue of whether we can get greater contributions from local households for the provision of public services. The Assembly will have to have a debate about that issue at some stage.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. We are all aware that we are facing a very difficult future, given the run-up to the election in the current economic circumstances, and the post-election scenario. I am sure that the Treasury is keeping a close eye on the situation. Has the Minister considered exploring with Treasury officials the implications for the next comprehensive spending review (CSR) period and the new policies that our friends will introduce after the next election?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not just a case of considering whether to explore those issues; there is the question of whether the Treasury is prepared to divulge any information. As the Member will be aware, we should have already been talking with the Treasury about the outcome of the next CSR period. That has been postponed until after the election; it would appear that the Chancellor is not even discussing with his own Ministers the possible effect on their departmental budgets. At present, it is difficult for us to get a picture of what is likely to happen in the coming year. An election is coming, and even if we had an indication from the current Chancellor about what is going to happen, there is no guarantee that he will be in place after the election, or that the existing programme will continue.

Mr McNarry: The Minister has recently made much of the forward-planning and preparation strategy that he has put in place to shore up his Budget. Rather than looking to us to tell him, has he made contact with the Conservatives, who are likely to form the next national Government?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Given the fact that the Conservative Party has not shared its plans for the future with its political mates who are sitting at the end of the Chamber, I suspect that I am not going to get too much joy either. Indeed, having listened to what has been divulged by the Conservative Party so far, it has not been prepared to be specific about the measures that it is prepared to consider. It has said only that any such measures will be draconian and that they will apply to Northern Ireland. I look forward to any enlightenment that can be given to the Assembly by

the Ulster Unionist Party, which now has a close relationship with the Conservative Party.

I hope that, when the Ulster Unionist Party hears whatever story it is told by its new political allies, it will report it a bit more accurately than it did some of the figures that it has put into the public domain so far. I am glad, at least, that the Member did not refer to the black hole today. I was surprised that he did not do so; he seems to be obsessed with financial black holes, and wants to compete with another party in identifying the blackest of the black holes. Even when the figures are not accurate, he will make them up. I hope that he can get some information when he speaks to the shadow Chancellor.

3.15 pm

Mr McNarry: Answer the question.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thought that I had answered the question. The answer is that, at present, since the Conservative Party is not even sharing the total picture with its members, it is unlikely that it will share anything with me.

Dr Farry: I share the Minister's view on the Conservative Party and its Ulster Unionist colleagues. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This is Question Time. Allow the Member to ask his question.

Dr Farry: The Minister mentioned efficiency savings being made through institutional reform. Will he comment on the potential for savings to be found from tackling the divided society that potentially costs £1 billion a year?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Alliance Party's figures for the cost of a divided society have been contested. I am on record as having made this clear: savings can be made, and the duplication of services in certain areas adds to the costs of the position in Northern Ireland.

Take the Alliance Party's education policy as an example of the costs of a divided society. It is quite happy not only to fund the state sector and the maintained sector but to promote a third sector — the integrated sector — even where such schools are planted in areas where there is a surplus of places in the state and maintained sectors.

In talking about the costs of a divided society, the Alliance Party ought to look at its own policies because sometimes those policies add to the costs of a divided society.

Civil Service Equal Pay Claim

3. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Civil Service equal pay claim. (AQO 167/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The matter was debated in the House last week. I thank the unions and staff for the fieldwork on the review of the technical grades, which was completed on time. My officials are considering the results of that review as well as a copy of the draft report, which has been passed to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA). I expect internal procedures to be completed shortly, at which point the report will be finalised. My officials are also engaged in intensive negotiations with NIPSA.

In response to a question from the Member for North Belfast Mr Maginness last week about what I would be doing, I said that I would be meeting officials from NIPSA. I did so yesterday, and it was a useful meeting. I conveyed to the officials from the trade unions that I wish to see the matter resolved as quickly as possible.

However, I repeat to the Member that this is not only within the remit of the Department of Finance and Personnel; there are two sides to the negotiations. NIPSA has its own procedures. It must talk through any proposals, and even if an offer were on the table, NIPSA would have to ballot its members on it.

My officials must also meet the individuals involved to discuss their circumstances. We are still some way from a resolution, even if we can reach the point where an acceptable offer to both sides is reached.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Will the Minister clarify whether the completed review of technical grades 1 and 2 is now the accepted benchmark for negotiations on the way forward?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department's review of technical grades 1 and 2 has been with NIPSA since the beginning of September. NIPSA has not indicated that it does not accept the review's conclusions, but it has not yet formally accepted that review.

Mr Craig: I will ask the million dollar question to which all civil servants want an answer. If a settlement were reached, how quickly would civil servants receive a payout?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I made it clear during last week's debate on the Civil Service equal pay claim, and again today, that any final settlement that is reached between the Department and the trade unions has to go to NIPSA to be voted on by its members. I do not know how long that is likely to take. Even if NIPSA accepts a settlement, there has to

be a meeting with individuals who will have to accept the available offer. Individuals who do not accept the offer will have the right to go to a tribunal. I do not know how long that process would take, but it could take years. It is impossible to give a date for civil servants' receiving a payout. However, once there is a final settlement that can be accepted by both sides, I will take a report to my Executive colleagues to ensure that we put the necessary finances in place.

Mr K Robinson: The Minister has just touched on the point that I was going to raise. Does the Minister envisage any difficulties in acquiring the moneys or loans from HM Treasury that may be required to pay the final settlement in full?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There will be a combination of legacy payments and ongoing costs. Once a settlement is agreed, there will be some uplift in the pay of those who have been affected. That will be an ongoing cost rather than a legacy issue and will, therefore, be met by the Northern Ireland Budget and not by HM Treasury. We already have a facility on which we can draw for part of the legacy payments. I indicated that I am prepared to return to the Treasury to seek additional finance for the legacy costs if necessary. We will have to ascertain how any costs to the Northern Ireland Budget will be financed.

Departments: Reduction in Number

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of how much would be saved annually by reducing the number of Departments from 11 to six. (AQO 168/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the context of the constrained public expenditure position facing the Executive, it is clear that Northern Ireland has too many Departments. Although steps have been taken to share services, there remains an unnecessary and costly duplication of functions. I invite Members to read the 'Independent Review of Economic Policy', which was published last week. The panel, which was chaired by Professor Richard Barnett, discussed whether we need a Department for Employment and Learning and a Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It suggested that a single "Department of the Economy" would be more effective.

There is wide recognition of the need to rationalise Departments, and it is estimated that reducing the number of Departments from 11 to six would save tens of millions of pounds per annum on an ongoing basis. Such a move would also be a significant demonstration to the broader public sector and wider society that the Executive are serious about efficiency. However, it is not just about saving money. The amalgamation of Departments would also enable us to do better

business. I was previously in the Department of the Environment and witnessed the difficulties that are often caused by three Departments' involvement in the planning process.

Therefore, as well as savings in administration, significant savings would be made because we would have a better way of doing business. That would have a huge impact on the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Hamilton: Given the increasingly challenging economic environment, does the Minister agree that public patience with the bloated political bureaucracy in Northern Ireland will not last long, particularly when the tens of million of pounds of savings that he has talked about could be made? Does he further agree that our focus should now be on service delivery and not on sustaining an artificially large administration?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The view that I expressed is not just my view or my party's; there is a wider recognition among those who work with Departments and those who are reviewing how the system works that significant savings could be made.

The Assembly must consider the number of Departments for several reasons, and not just because of our constrained financial circumstances — although that should be an impetus. First, if we want to deliver services, do we need to deliver them in the way in which we are delivering them at present? Secondly, considering the issue would be an important message that we are taking efficiency savings seriously. Thirdly, it would create Departments that worked better and which could do the business of government much more effectively.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am fascinated by the idea of cost-effective government, which I welcome, as does my party. However, does the Minister not agree that concentrating on the number of Departments is a bit of a phoney issue, given the overstaffing in Departments? Figures that I have to hand suggest that the number of staff in the Department of Finance and Personnel has increased by more than 14% in the past 18 months. Surely reducing staffing levels would be a better way of saving money than reducing the number of Departments.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will deal with the issue of the number of staff in the Department of Finance and Personnel in a minute or two, but let me first say that the Member has not been listening to my answers. I do not think that I have particularly concentrated on reducing the number of Departments. At this moment, I am answering a question about reducing the number of Departments, but had the Member listened to my earlier answers, he would have heard me talk about the productivity gains that could be made in some Departments. Even if the number of Departments remains the same, there are

ways of ensuring that output is much more effective and efficient. Of course, Ministers should be working to achieve such output at present. Indeed, the idea behind the efficiency review panel was to consider such issues.

We must be very careful when considering the number of staff at the Department of Finance and Personnel. I have looked carefully at my Department, and it is up to every Minister to do likewise for his or her Department. The Member is right: there has been an increase in the number of people employed in the Department of Finance and Personnel. However, the figures do not take account of the fact that the delivery of shared services has meant that new personnel have joined the Department of Finance and Personnel — staff who would previously have been scattered around other Departments, dealing with accounts, IT or human resources. That influx of people has increased staff numbers.

I make the following point to the Member about those shared services: Access Northern Ireland, for example, is now achieving the same output for 25% less cost.

3.30 pm

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Roadshow: East Belfast

1. **Ms Purvis** asked the Assembly Commission whether there are plans to reschedule the Assembly roadshow for east Belfast which was poorly attended by MLAs due to the extended sitting of the Assembly on 22 September 2009; and whether members of the public who attended will have their travel costs refunded. (AQO 179/10)

Mr Moutray: The east Belfast roadshow will be rescheduled as soon as possible. As the Member knows, the roadshow on 22 September was the first in an autumn series that was promised by the Assembly Commission in response to the public's positive feedback about the first round of roadshows that took place in spring 2009.

Unfortunately, the unexpectedly late sitting of the Assembly on 22 September meant that several MLAs who had committed to being part of the panel were unable to leave Parliament Buildings. Ms Purvis was the only Member to attend and was able to answer questions from the audience on several issues. The members of the Assembly Commission shared the public's disappointment that the event did not proceed as advertised. Therefore, the Speaker travelled to the Park Avenue Hotel to convey his apologies.

The Speaker and his officials judged it preferable, though not ideal, to reschedule the event at the Park Avenue Hotel for a date on which MLAs from all parties would be able to participate. The audience was most understanding about the difficult position and appreciated the commitment to arranging another event in the constituency. Every effort will be made to advertise the events widely, including through local community networks, as the purpose of the roadshows is to maximise public accessibility to MLAs.

On the night of the event, transport was provided for one member of the public who had expressed concern about travel arrangements. The Assembly Commission cannot identify every member of the public who attended and is, therefore, unable to provide refunds for travel costs incurred on the night. However, the Commission hopes that all those who attended on 22 September will be able to return for the rescheduled event.

Ms Purvis: I thank Mr Moutray for his comprehensive answer. I welcome the rescheduling of the roadshow in the near future and the fact that it will be advertised as widely as possible. Mr Moutray mentioned one member of the audience who spent a considerable amount of money — exactly £25 — on a taxi to travel to the roadshow. However, other members of the public were also out of pocket through paying to travel to the event. Should those people find it difficult to meet the expense of returning to a roadshow in east Belfast, will they be able to get in touch with the Assembly Commission or its officials?

Mr Moutray: I am prepared to reconsider the issue and write to the Member.

Mr A Maginness: Given the success of the roadshows throughout Northern Ireland, in addition to holding another meeting in east Belfast, will the Commission extend the programme to enable more people to participate?

Mr Moutray: The Assembly Commission received an evaluation of the previous series of roadshows that outlined the costs, the issues raised by the public, the public attendance at each venue and the feedback received. Given the success of that first round of roadshows, members of the Commission, most of whom participated on panels throughout that series, are deeply committed to extending the series. After the current round of roadshows, they will make an assessment, and a decision will be made subsequently.

Parliament Buildings: Security Arrangements

2. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Assembly Commission to provide details of the security arrangements at Parliament Buildings regarding the deployment of the PSNI during (i) plenary sessions; (ii) Committee

meetings; and (iii) any other circumstances where the PSNI is deployed. (AQO 180/10)

Mr Neeson: During plenary sessions, seven police officers will be on duty from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm or until 30 minutes after the House rises, whichever is later. That number of officers allows duties to be rotated and facilitates periods of rest and refreshment.

During Committee meetings and as the week progresses, the number of officers will gradually reduce to three, and they will normally be on duty from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm.

In other instances, such as during VIP visits, the PSNI, in consultation with Assembly security services, will determine the number of police officers according to what is deemed operationally appropriate.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat. I thank Mr Neeson for his answer. Will he give us some idea of the cost of the PSNI operation in Parliament Buildings? When is the service level agreement up for renewal? When that happens, will there be negotiations about the number of officers who will be based in Parliament Buildings?

Mr Neeson: The pre-agreed costs are in keeping with national guidelines and are reflected in the service level agreement. That agreement will be reviewed and the security situation, as it exists, will impact upon that. The operation represents an annual cost of approximately £413,000, or £8,000 each week. That figure is calculated using nationally agreed rates and is kept under constant review.

Mr Spratt: Does the Member agree that the Police Service of Northern Ireland provides an excellent security service to Members? Given that there was a serious incident in the Building, does the Member also agree that it is necessary to have security to reassure Members and the public who attend the House?

Mr Neeson: I agree entirely with Mr Spratt. The Michael Stone incident very much impacted on the number of police personnel who have been taken on board to secure the Building and look after the safety of Members and the public.

Mr Cree: Will the Member advise whether there has been any appraisal of the security arrangements by the Commission since the events of 2007? Has consideration been given to the balance between public access and security?

Mr Neeson: The situation is kept under continuous review. The Commission aims to develop value for money while ensuring the safekeeping and well-being of Members of the Assembly and the public.

Lord and Lady Craigavon's Tomb

3. **Mr Elliott** asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on the promotion of Lord and Lady Craigavon's tomb to visitors to Parliament Buildings. (AQO 181/10)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Member for his question. Members may know that the tomb of Lord and Lady Craigavon has been an integral feature of the official tour script since 1999. It is established practice for the Events Office and Education Service staff who deliver official tours to routinely inform our guests of the tomb's location. The Member will particularly wish to know that, following his recent question on the matter, staff have been asked to emphasise the feature during their deliveries to ensure that all guests are fully aware of their option to visit the tomb if they wish.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for his answer. Will he give a commitment that the Commission will make a visit to the tomb part of the itinerary of the official tour and not just have a reference to the tomb?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I have no problem with giving an assurance that that will be brought back to the Commission for consideration. However, I point out that, in inclement weather, it would be difficult to take parties out to see the tomb. From that point of view, we will have to consider how best to put the tomb on the itinerary and ensure that our visitors know all about it.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his reply. Lord and Lady Craigavon's tomb is a very important part of the tour. We all know that Lord Craigavon was buried with his two .303 rifles. I do not know who he thought he would see in the next world.

Would it be possible to have signage for the tomb? On a tour today, it was indicated to people where the tomb was, but people were not quite sure of its location. I thought that having signage outside might make the tomb more accessible to the people on the tour.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I hope that the Member is not suggesting that Lord Craigavon was trying to start an underground movement. I think that signage should be better and that it would be of great help to visitors. I agree that the tomb is an important part of this Building's heritage and history, and I will certainly bring the matter to the Commission's attention. I am sure that there will be no opposition to putting up a sign for the tomb.

Mr Dallat: Mr Deputy Mayor — *[Laughter.]* You were once; in fact, you were also mayor. Sometimes one gets confused about which place one is in.

People from my tradition did not frequent this place, certainly not to the extent to which they qualified for a

tomb. However, from time to time, some great people from the nationalist community, such as the late Joe Devlin, did descend on this place. Has the Commission given any thought to displaying relics that tell that story, which, although largely one of isolation, is nevertheless an important part of the Stormont story?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: There has not been much discussion on that subject. However, if the Member is suggesting that we exhume some of the people he mentioned, I am sure that we could work in dead earnest to ensure that they are properly located here. Bringing that subject to the Commission's attention will raise a subject that is dear to the Member's heart.

Assembly Website

4. **Mr McCallister** asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on the development of the new Assembly website. (AQO 182/10)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The business case for the project and the procurement strategy for the design and hosting phase of the project have been drafted, and they will be agreed at the next project board meeting in mid-October. The project team continues to evaluate content management systems and will put together demonstration sessions for the project board and clerking and reporting staff.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to Rev Coulter for his answer. He will be aware that the Assembly website is one of the main portals through which the public can see what goes on in this Building. If the old website is anything to go by, the new one should be excellent. Will the Commission consider making archive video of Assembly proceedings more accessible?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The Communications Office continually works to update and design the structure of the present website, introducing enhanced services and making use of social media channels, such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube. At my age, I am not sure whether there are any more, although at times in this House we certainly twitter a bit.

Recently, a new service was introduced: the video archive. Website users can watch again or catch up on any Question Time session from the Chamber. Participation in social media technologies is expanding rapidly, and the Assembly's use of such channels encourages communication between the Assembly and its stakeholders. In addition, it increases opportunities for interaction. For example, a new web presence, yourassembly.com, has been established to deliver content relating to the Assembly roadshows. The website contains video taken at the roadshows and it is linked to the Assembly's Twitter, Flickr, Facebook and YouTube feeds, which invite comments from visitors on a number of discussion topics.

3.45 pm

Annunciators: Electricity Costs

5. **Mr Ford** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the estimated cost of electricity incurred in the operation of annunciators throughout Parliament Buildings during the summer recess; and the associated amount of CO2 produced. (AQO 183/10)

Mr Neeson: The estimated cost of the electricity consumed by the annunciator system during the summer recess was approximately £113. The associated amount of CO2 produced was less than 700 kg. Members will appreciate that the method used for calculating such costs is not an exact science. The calculations are based on the following figures: the average operational power use of a TV set in the annunciator system is 85 watts, and 41 of the 57 TV sets in the system were switched on during the recess period. That was confirmed by Information Systems Office. The system was operational from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, during the summer recess. The average price of electricity supplied to Parliament Buildings during the period was 9p per kilowatt hour.

Mr Ford: It is unusual to ask a question of a Member seated behind me. That is perhaps symbolic of the unusual way in which the Commission operates.

Does the Commission accept that, although the figures are relatively small in this case, it is an example that shows a need for better management of energy consumption in the Building. An annunciator that runs for several weeks, announcing that "The Assembly is in recess" does nothing to convey the impression of a working Assembly or the practicalities involved. The Building has a very good overall energy consumption rating score, but there are management issues that the Commission must continue to address.

Mr Neeson: The annunciator system is left on during recess to provide an information service to visitors. Furthermore, during the summer recess, a series of tests was completed on the system. The environmental review has identified that as an area where electricity consumption may potentially be reduced. It may be possible to switch off the annunciator during the recess periods or turn off the TV sets in areas of the Building that visitors are less likely to visit, such as the first or fourth floors. Of the 57 TV sets in the system, 41 are located on those floors.

The Commission is trying to improve performance in that respect, and this is an issue that will be taken into consideration during the next recess.

Accommodation Strategy

6. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on the work carried out in relation

to the accommodation strategy; and how much this work has cost to date. (AQO 184/10)

Mr Neeson: Following completion of the space utilisation study, the accommodation review project team presented options and associated costs to the Assembly Commission on 18 June. The Commission requested that further consideration be given to the provision of fully functional Committee rooms, with a view to carrying out a pilot scheme during the summer recess. As a result, the Members' Reading Room, room 30, was converted into a new Committee room. If the Member has not yet seen that room, I invite him to take a look at it.

A new bespoke meeting table has been installed to accommodate 18 people. Full broadcast and archiving facilities will be included in the room. Services have been installed to allow for the future provision of LCD or plasma screens to meet the needs of Committees, and replacement lighting has been installed to cater for broadcast requirements.

In addition to that work, the gents' toilet near the Senate Chamber was redesigned during the recess, allowing for the creation of a new education suite for the education officers. To facilitate that, a new door was created to that room, which is now accessed from the main corridor near room 12. The approximate cost of the work is expected to be in the region of £85,000 to £95,000.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Neeson for his response on the work that was carried out. I was in room 30 today for the meeting of the Agriculture Committee. It is a great facility and "Fair play" to the Commission in regard to that work. Is a second phase of work planned? What timescales are planned, and what costs are involved?

Mr Neeson: Consideration is being given to improving the Committee rooms and enhancing the facilities in them. The Member may be aware that the issue of accommodation for the public was one of the big issues raised at many of the Assembly roadshows across Northern Ireland. In addition, work is progressing on cleaning the library store in the basement so that that space can be better utilised. It is also hoped that there will be a range of internal moves to improve staff accommodation in Annexe C and Parliament Buildings. As proposals are being drawn up, there is not yet a set timescale for that work. However, it is an issue that is being kept constantly under review.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Parliament Buildings: Bilingual Signage

8. **Ms J McCann** asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to provide bilingual signage both inside and outside Parliament Buildings. (AQO 186/10)

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, in carrying out all its functions, powers and duties, to have due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity among the nine categories of people identified under the legislation. Paragraph 6.2 of the commission's equality scheme provides that, within a year of the approval of the scheme, the NIAC will review its arrangements for providing information in minority ethnic language formats. The Assembly Commission will be reviewing the issue of signage in the development of a language policy. That policy, which will be developed by March 2010, will be screened in compliance with section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for differential impact, and all issues regarding signage will be considered in that context.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his answer. Does the Commission accept that this institution is used by two main traditions and that it should reflect the cultural identity of both?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: The Assembly Commission's equality scheme was approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on 27 February 2008.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Assembly Commission have any concerns about how additional signage would interact with the listed status of Parliament Buildings?

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: That aspect will be considered by the Assembly Commission, which has to be conscious of the listed status of the Building. Any additional signage may be subject to the approval of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's built heritage branch.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are no more questions. That concludes Question Time.

Motion made:

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

ADJOURNMENT

Unauthorised Monument in Newtownbutler

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic has 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Elliott: It is unfortunate that I have to bring this issue to the Assembly for debate, but I do so following the events of the weekend of 12 September 2009, when a monument was erected in Newtownbutler village. That caused great concern to the local community there, particularly the small, isolated, local, Protestant, unionist community. The Newtownbutler area has undergone a huge amount of ethnic cleansing in the past 40 years, whereby large numbers of Protestants and unionists, particularly security force members, have been shot, blown up and brutally murdered.

The monument is a commemoration of terrorists, of whom, I understand, not all are local. It was put up with total disregard and contempt for the authorities in the land. I understand that the organisation behind the erection of the monument is Sinn Féin; an organisation that is seeking the devolution of policing and justice to the Assembly. It is ironic that it disobeyed the laws of the land. It did not apply for planning permission; it put up the monument without the authority of the agency that owns the land, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and it did not consult the Housing Executive or ask its permission before erecting the monument. In fact, Sinn Féin had the cheek to say that it intended to consult the Housing Executive following the erection of the monument. What contempt for the authorities of the Province.

When I think back on the past 40 years, I recognise that such behaviour is nothing new in the Newtownbutler area. The village is continually swamped with Irish tricolours flying, and there has been a continual campaign of intimidation against the local Protestant and unionist communities in that area. Many of the people from those communities have had to move out of the village and surrounding area and go to live in other areas, mainly in County Fermanagh, that are classified as being safer.

A number of people have been murdered in the area, and I think of a local shopkeeper, Richard Latimer, who was murdered a small number of yards from where the monument is erected. To me, it is not the issue of monuments being erected; rather, it is where they are placed. The monument in Newtownbutler has

been erected in an in-your-face position where many people who are entering and leaving the village can see it. Those who put up the monument have disregard and a lack of respect for the community in that area.

It is interesting to note that the Benches opposite are empty of the party that was behind the erection of the monument: Sinn Féin. It is a disgrace that its members cannot come here and answer for themselves on this issue and tell us why they put up the monument. All that they were able to tell us, through the local press, was that they intended, at some stage, to ask the authorities whether it was OK to do it, after they had carried out their cowardly act.

It seems that there is no shame in them. They do not care that people are hurting because of their act, and it shows the contempt that they have not only for the authorities but for the people whom they often classify as their neighbours, who are fellow citizens of the Province. They shamefully disregard the thoughts and emotions of those people, many of whom had loved ones murdered throughout the past 40 years. Although Sinn Féin members try to tell us that they have changed and moved on, they continue to show blatant disregard for the feelings of the local people.

I reported the matter to the Planning Service as soon as I could, and I am pleased to say that the local planning office opened an enforcement file on the situation immediately. It is following up the matter to see what action, if any, it can proceed with. I am also pleased that the Housing Executive has started a process of assessing the views of the local population and local elected representatives to see what it can do about the monument, since it is on its property.

I am also aware of a similar monument that was erected in Dromore in County Tyrone. The Equality Commission had to refer that matter to the Secretary of State, because Omagh District Council, the owner of the land, refused to take any action on it. Thankfully, the Equality Commission had the initiative to refer that to the Secretary of State, who had to make a recommendation to Omagh District Council. I hope that matters do not have to go that far in this instance and that the authorities will move on it and take action.

My thoughts at this time are with the people who have been deeply hurt over the past 40 years — the real victims in the Province — and I am concerned for the people who live in the area who are intimidated and who have had their lives destroyed by this.

4.00 pm

Over the past number of years, the population of unionists and Protestants in the Newtownbutler area has diminished to a very small base compared with what it was 45 years ago. I am seeking the support of the authorities so that those people can be supported

and their concerns given credence. Hopefully, that will bring the situation to a reasonable conclusion.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Member agree that republicans' continuing to erect such monuments, which cause great offence to the Protestant relatives, neighbours and friends of those who were murdered by the republican movement over the years, raises very serious issues about what is called a shared future? Does he also agree that the absence of republican Members in the Chamber for today's debate, including the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, is nothing less than shameful?

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for his comments, which I support. The difficulty with such monuments is that many of them are of an in-your-face nature. They are very divisive in the local community, and they cause a great deal of heartbreak to those who lost loved ones during the Troubles. That makes their erection a very difficult issue for those people to deal with.

Mrs Foster: I support the Member, and I commend him for securing the debate today.

By their nature, memorials or monuments generate and deserve community respect and understanding. The so-called monument in Newtownbutler is as vile as it is provocative, and Mr Elliott has given the reasons why it is so provocative. The monument has been set in an area that fronts on to a public road that a large number of people in that area use. Therefore, the impact that the memorial would have on the small and already alienated and isolated, unionist and Protestant community in the Newtownbutler area was well known.

The memorial itself was erected in the dark of night, which is quite ironic given that the intimidation and murders that took place in that area were also carried out in the dark of night. Those acts were carried out by faceless cowards who went about their business murdering police officers and many Protestants simply because they were Protestants.

Of course, the monument received no planning permission, and I welcome the fact that the Minister of the Environment is in the Chamber to listen to and respond to the debate. Furthermore, those who erected the monument had no permission from the Housing Executive to do so. Like Mr Elliott, I welcome the fact that the local Housing Executive has spoken to local political representatives and local people to assess their feelings on the memorial.

The memorial causes gross offence to the local unionist community and to the wider community in the south-east Fermanagh area. Indeed, it has caused offence simply by its presence; it is quite imposing, given that it is 6 ft high and 4 ft wide.

A bizarre situation exists elsewhere in County Fermanagh. The Fire Brigade removed from its

premises a memorial to those who were murdered in the IRA atrocity in Enniskillen after receiving one complaint from a member of staff. The removal of that memorial caused a great deal of hurt to the wider community in County Fermanagh. Given that, I ask the Equality Commission to examine the situation regarding the monument in Newtownbutler closely, because many people will complain about it. Therefore, there is an urgent need to remove the monument or memorial — call it what you will — in Newtownbutler. If the memorial in Enniskillen was offensive, and I do not accept that it was, how much more offensive is the memorial in Newtownbutler?

I commend the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the stand that he has taken against the glorification of terrorism in GAA clubs in Northern Ireland, and I urge him to continue with that approach. I ask other Ministers to take a similar stand on their shared future.

We heard that the issue arose because the monument was erected on Northern Ireland Housing Executive land. I took the opportunity to mention that to my colleague Margaret Ritchie, the Minister for Social Development, some time ago, and I received a letter from her today in which she referred to:

“the unlawful erection of a monument at Galloon Gardens in Newtownbutler...erected...without the agreement, involvement or knowledge of the Housing Executive”.

Her letter goes on to outline what she believes is the way forward, and the Member for Newry and Armagh has already referred to the shared future agenda. It is a disgrace to see what has happened.

The Member for North Down is in the Chamber, and no doubt he will talk about what has happened in North Down during the past week or more. It is disgraceful to see public money being spent in that way; likewise, it is disgraceful to see public land being abused in that way by those seeking to mark out their territory, and that is exactly what the monument is about. That fact has been acknowledged by the Minister for Social Development in her letter, where she said that during her recent meetings:

“One of the issues most commonly raised ... has been around the marking of territory by paramilitaries”.

That is exactly what is going on in Newtownbutler, and it is akin to an animal marking out its territory. We know that many of Sinn Féin’s former colleagues are causing difficulties for the party in the Newtownbutler and Fermanagh area. What does Sinn Féin decide to do? It erects a monument to mark out its territory. It is carrying out a desperate and pathetic act in Newtownbutler.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Member agree that, rather than erect republican memorials and wallow in republican ideology, mainstream republicans, as they are called, would be better to give up names and

information about their erstwhile colleagues who now mask themselves as republican dissidents. It would enable the authorities to identify and apprehend those people much sooner.

Mrs Foster: That is precisely the point that I was going to make, and I thank the Member for making it for me. Instead of marking out their territory with monuments, they should be giving the names of dissident republicans to the forces of law and order so that we can rid ourselves of the scourge that is hanging around the necks of constituencies such as the Member’s constituency of Newry and Armagh and my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

It is absolutely disgraceful that Sinn Féin cannot even come to the Chamber to defend the erection of the monument. The Member referred to the fact that there was a very scant reply about the monument from the local councillor in the local papers, who said that they had thought about going along to ask the Housing Executive. What a disgraceful thing to say. The forces of law and order — the Department of the Environment, the Housing Executive and the Police Service — are there, and they are there to be obeyed.

It is disgraceful that the Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone has absented herself from the House. She knew that the debate was coming up, but she has not had the grace to come and argue her side, and that speaks volumes.

Mr Gallagher: We have all lived through 30 years of conflict, and we know all about the violent conflict that resulted in deaths on both sides of the community. In that regard, Newtownbutler is no different from other areas of Northern Ireland. Members from both sides of the community have lost their lives, and some of the darkest incidents during our troubled history occurred in and around the Newtownbutler area.

The SDLP has always emphasised the need to recognise the pain of all those who have been bereaved in the conflict and the rights of loved ones on all sides to commemorate those who have lost their lives. It is a matter of regret for the SDLP that, at this point in the life of the Assembly, we still do not have a shared future strategy and that progress on victims’ issues is very slow.

With the commemorating of victims of the conflict comes a responsibility to respect the pain and hurt of other families with the utmost sincerity. It is self-evident that no healing can take place if the suffering of others is disregarded or if commemorations are hijacked for political purposes. We saw what happened in the Kilcooley estate in recent days, where a memorial has been used for purposes other than those agreed. At least in that case I understand that an investigation is under way.

In the 11 years since the Good Friday Agreement political progress has been slow, but what has been clear over that time is the strong desire of both sides of the community to build a shared future and a harmonious society. People want that to happen not just in the Assembly but in our housing estates, neighbourhoods and schools. It is widely agreed that division and mistrust must be overcome in this society and that healing and reconciliation are the objectives that people want us all to work towards.

The Newtownbutler monument commemorates the dead hunger strikers, and the rights of the families of those who died on hunger strike have to be respected. The area suffered numerous deaths as a result of violence right across the community —

Mr Elliott: Does the Member accept that those who died on hunger strike did so of their own free will, whereas the people — many in the Newtownbutler area, such as Ritchie Latimer, who lived just a few yards from the monument — who were brutally murdered, shot and bombed at the hands of terrorists, did not have a choice? They were cut down by thugs and cowards.

Mr Gallagher: I accept what the Member said about some of the local people who lost their lives; I mentioned that earlier. It is the view of the SDLP that, with all lives lost as a result of the Troubles, the grieving of families and their right of commemoration must be respected.

Apart from a political connection that Bobby Sands had with the constituency, none of the hunger strikers was from Newtownbutler or, indeed, from Fermanagh. In the eyes of some local people, the monument was erected without any wide community consultation, any consultation with the victims' commissioners and without any statutory authorities being approached. It is therefore entirely inappropriate. Others in the area regard it as having more to do with the exercise of power and community control than with commemorating lost lives.

Because those responsible for erecting the monument have ignored the sensitivities of others and have caused controversy, they may end up by dishonouring those whom they claim to commemorate. Their actions fly in the face of all who are working to build respect and reconciliation between the two traditions on the island. If we are to build a better future for all and to begin the work of uniting our people, we must remember all the victims of a very dark period in our history in a respectful way. Those who plan commemorations should consult widely in the area; they should take account of the views of all those who share their neighbourhood. They should consult the victims' commissioners. There is now a victims' forum, which should also be consulted.

Above all, as I said, they should avoid giving offence to any other people who have lost family members, particularly by not putting memorials anywhere close to locations where other people lost their lives during the Troubles. The Newtownbutler case has been handled very badly, and there is no doubt that great damage has been done. Any repetition of that anywhere else should be avoided at all costs.

4.15 pm

Lord Morrow: I also congratulate Mr Elliott for securing this appropriate and timely debate. As a result of the debate, some of the shenanigans that are going on within republicanism have been exposed and seen in clear daylight.

There is little doubt that republicanism and Sinn Féin are split right, left and centre, particularly in Fermanagh. Sinn Féin's non-attendance for the debate demonstrates clearly the depth of that chasm. The fact that Sinn Féin is not prepared to come here today to defend the actions of its foot soldiers also demonstrates that. As my colleague Arlene Foster said, it is particularly significant that the Minister of Agriculture has decided that she does not wish to participate in the debate. That should not be underestimated.

The erection of the monument was, no doubt, purposely designed to cause the maximum amount of hurt. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why its location was selected. The monument is there to glorify terrorism in all its rawest, worst and most sectarian forms. The border areas of County Fermanagh, County Tyrone and County Armagh have suffered perhaps more of the sectarian warfare that has been carried on by the Provisional IRA for the past 35 years than any other part of Northern Ireland.

Therefore, the erection of the monument seems to be an insulting and offensive move to those of us who come from a different part of the community. We are told that those people were something other than what we understood them to be and anyone with half a head on their shoulders knows them to have been.

I was interested to read a quote from a local councillor, Councillor O'Reilly, who served in the House for a period. He said:

"This monument marks a show of respect for all those who died in the hunger strikes of 1981 and commemorates ... Bobby Sands who many people in South Fermanagh worked extremely hard to get elected. We all have to share communities and tolerate each others cultures and traditions".

He said that the memorial was not erected to be insulting to anyone. If ever there was hypocrisy, that is it.

Mrs Foster: Given that Councillor O'Reilly said that, will the Member agree that it is incredibly hypocritical of him to be a part of the cheerleading gang that objects to band parades and Orange services being able to progress along the main street in

Newtownbutler to church? He is always there at those protests. How does that show respect for each other's culture and tradition?

Lord Morrow: The point that my colleague Arlene Foster makes is a good one, and I certainly concur with what she says. That individual says in the papers that we must tolerate each other and share communities. It is amazing that, when it comes to a church parade or another parade, he is the main cheerleader trying to ensure that the parade does not go through.

We have come to the stage in this country when we have to make up our minds. Some people have great difficulty with that: either they are moving on or they are not. We are told continually that it is time that everyone moved on past the 35 dreadful years. Of course, those 35 dreadful years should never have happened.

Some of us make the effort to take society forward and to create a better future for the next generation. It behoves Sinn Féin to start to address difficult issues. Some times, in order to do that, one must stand up. It is patently clear, however, from the empty Benches that Sinn Féin members will not stand up when it comes to taking difficult decisions in their own communities, particularly in County Fermanagh.

Sinn Féin went ahead and erected that monument in the dead of night. If someone does something in the dead of night, instead of in the open, there must be something wrong with it. Let me make it clear: I do not condone the erection of monuments to people who have carried out acts of terrorism, regardless of the section of the community from which they come. I have no difficulty or embarrassment in saying that. During the 35 years that I have been in public life, I have been totally consistent in condemning such memorials and atrocities. To try to perpetuate the names of those people into the future is highly offensive and insulting.

I look forward to the day when the authorities will take the first step, which will send out a clear signal to everybody that that sort of behaviour will not be tolerated. Nothing less than the removal of that offensive landmark will satisfy the unionist community.

Let it be said that it is not only unionists who find those memorials highly offensive. Many people in the nationalist community — some of whom have spoken to me one-to-one — do not want to be part of that. I can understand that, sometimes, it is extremely difficult for them to speak out and to say that openly. Undoubtedly, there is growing resentment of that type of behaviour in the entire community and society. It must stop. For Sinn Féin members to play the good guy, bad guy when it suits them will not wash for ever.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it would be more fitting for Sinn Féin to make every effort to find the graves of

the disappeared and to let that information be given to the public and police on both sides of the border, rather than to erect a monument that causes hurt and despair among many people?

Lord Morrow: I thank Rev Dr Coulter for that superb point. Having worked quite closely with one particular family of the disappeared, I know how that family still hurts to this very day. Both parents, sadly, passed away without ever knowing what happened to their 21-year-old son. His brothers continue to fight for that information to the best of their ability. Rev Coulter makes a superb point.

Sinn Féin makes much play of the claim that it does its best. Often, its best is just not good enough. It strikes me that Sinn Féin just does not get it. It does not seem to understand that the offensive things in which it is engaged — the type of activity that has been brought before the Assembly today — shatters the confidence of the unionist community and, indeed, many people in the nationalist community. I look forward to the day when all of that is left behind. I look forward to the removal of that memorial in Newtownbutler.

Dr Farry: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Adjournment debate. I congratulate Mr Elliott for securing it. It is telling that there is a greater turnout from the Alliance Party than from Sinn Féin, given the constituency. The issue affects all of Northern Ireland.

I have deep family roots in County Fermanagh, and can certainly appreciate how that memorial will have been received in the community.

I welcome the direction in which the debate is moving: Members are acknowledging that this issue is not just a matter for Protestants, but a matter for people from a Catholic background and other backgrounds, too.

We should not assume that people from the Catholic tradition will support a memorial that is offensive to Protestants just because the IRA is perceived to come from that tradition. There are challenging issues to address, such as how the rule of law is observed and how we should deal with the past so that we can move on.

The loyalist memorial in my constituency of North Down was mentioned. Recent press coverage of that memorial and our discussion of another memorial in Newtownbutler show that the problem affects everyone in Northern Ireland. Government must respond seriously to those problems. It is important that we condemn loyalist and republican paramilitary memorials equally, because they are exactly the same.

I was disappointed that Mr Elliott spoke in generalities and talked about issues regarding republicans but not loyalists. We must tackle the issue with consistency and balance. A whole host of issues has been thrown up.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Dr Farry said that I did not talk about loyalists. I am not aware of any loyalist memorials that have been erected in County Fermanagh generally or in Newtownbutler in particular. If the Member can tell me where one is located, I would be happy to hear of it.

Dr Farry: Mr Elliott and Mr Kennedy spoke about Northern Ireland-wide issues that were couched solely in regard to what republicans are doing but not loyalists. The record will —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Adjournment topic is unauthorised monuments in Newtownbutler. As far as I am aware, Mr Elliot and the other Members stuck to that subject, and I ask that you do the same.

Dr Farry: I respect your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker. However, the Hansard report will reflect a more general discussion, including references to Mr McCausland and GAA grounds.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It appears that, in spite of your advice, Dr Farry is persisting with a line that seems to challenge your authority.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I note what you say, and I thank you for the point of order. Dr Farry, I insist that you stick to the subject matter that appears in the Order Paper, and I ask that you refrain from straying into other areas.

Dr Farry: Thank you for your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will return to the issue and follow the example set by the other Members who spoke in the debate.

The episode throws up challenges for the public sector to how it responds to the matter. First, there is planning policy and how it is enforced. Memorials require planning permission; people cannot erect them without authorisation. Secondly, there is the issue of the abuse of public land and the use of public funds.

There is the wider issue of how we deal with the past. I recognise that people from all backgrounds and traditions may wish to acknowledge loss and suffering. However, we must distinguish between that kind of recognition and the kind of recognition that grants organisations any legitimacy whatsoever for their actions. The erection of the monument in Newtownbutler crosses that boundary.

4.30 pm

There is also the issue of how we promote a shared future. It is important that we look to shared space. The situation in Newtownbutler compromises the notion of shared space. Shared space does not have to be neutral space; however, a permanent memorial such as this fundamentally compromises the notion of a shared future.

There is also the issue of how public agencies interact with the legacy of paramilitarism in our

society. There is still an infrastructure that exercises community control, with respect to loyalists and republicans, at a grass-roots level. Although the overt violence may have disappeared, there are insidious moves to create tensions within communities, whether through flags, bonfires or memorials. In some respects, due to fear, people have difficulty expressing their opposition to such moves. The public sector has difficulty enforcing its statutory duties around shared space because of the perceived fear of its workers. We should acknowledge that that fear is there and that it needs to be addressed.

As other Members have mentioned, there are issues relating to flags in which we need to very clearly ensure that there is a co-ordinated and effective response to attempts by loyalists and republicans to compromise shared space.

What happened in Newtownbutler throws out a large challenge and is an example of similar episodes across Northern Ireland. Although I appreciate that the Minister of the Environment is in the Chamber — he may be able to talk about the situation from a planning perspective — there are responsibilities for other Ministers. For example, the Minister for Social Development, with respect to Housing Executive land; the Minister for Regional Development, with respect to the use and abuse of public highways; and the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with respect to the creation of a strategy for a shared future. I look forward to the Minister of the Environment's comments, and those of his colleagues in the Executive, as to how we tackle this cancer within our society.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I thank the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Mr Elliott for securing the Adjournment debate. It is clearly an issue on which many Members — and, for that matter, members of the public — hold strong views. I too have strong views on the illegal erection of this monument. Given the highly charged emotions that it generates, that period, during which terrorist criminals committed suicide, is not one that should be remembered in this manner. As we build a shared future, monuments of that nature are inappropriate and cause division within our society. We cannot allow the bully boys who lurk in the shadows to dictate what can or cannot be erected in our cities, towns or villages.

Therefore, I welcome the opportunity to provide some background to the case in Newtownbutler and to explain the current situation. The case involves an unauthorised hunger striker monument that has been erected at the entrance to Galloon Gardens, in Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh. The monument was first brought to the attention of the Planning Service on 15 and 16 September, when a number of complaints were received in the Omagh divisional planning office. Following receipt of the complaints,

an enforcement case was opened on 17 September, and, on 22 September, a site visit undertaken.

The monument is located in the centre of a small area of open ground adjacent to Galloon Gardens and the main street in Newtownbutler. The monument measures 2 m wide by 1.2 m high by 0.3 m deep, and is constructed of coarse stonework and marble. No evidence has been obtained as to who carried out the unauthorised works. A subsequent Land Registry search has confirmed the land to be in the ownership of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

On 12 October, the case will be reviewed at the monthly meeting of the enforcement group in the Omagh divisional planning office. As with all enforcement cases, the evidence gathered to date will be assessed, and a number of outcomes are possible. First, if it is found that the monument does not constitute development, or that it is immune from enforcement action because of the length of time that it has been in place, the case could be closed. However, the Planning Service is of the view that the monument does constitute development, and initial evidence indicates that the monument was only constructed in September. Thus, it is not immune from any future enforcement proceedings and, therefore, planning permission is required.

Secondly, the Planning Service could invite an application for the retention of the memorial. That would allow all local issues, including impacts on amenity and townscape, to be assessed fully. Alternatively, the Planning Service could proceed with enforcement action to have the monument removed. That would initially involve working with the landowner, which is the Housing Executive. Should that not prove successful, the Planning Service could proceed to formal action by serving an enforcement notice, which would require the removal of the monument.

With the last two options, the onus is likely to be on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to address the matter, because it is the acknowledged landowner. Initial discussions have taken place between the Planning Service and Housing Executive officials from the Fermanagh district office, who are aware of the monument. Those officials have sought some time to see whether there is potential to resolve the matter locally to the satisfaction of all parties.

The Planning Service accepts that the best way to deal with the matter is to seek local agreement. Over the coming weeks, further discussion will take place with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to establish progress. If progress cannot be made, I will instruct the Planning Service to initiate enforcement proceedings; I will not be dictated to by bully boys who tried and failed to dictate to the people of Northern Ireland through murder and mayhem.

Adjourned at 4.36 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 12 October 2009

The Assembly met at 1.00 pm (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing Orders

Ms Ní Chuilín: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 12 October 2009.

Mr Speaker: Before I put 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) be suspended for 12 October 2009.

Mr Speaker: As there are Ayes from all sides of the House and there are no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated. Today's sitting may go beyond 7.00 pm, if required.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Standing Orders

Mr Speaker: As the next three motions provide for related amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to group all three motions and to conduct one debate. I will call the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move motion (a). The debate will then take place on all three motions. When all Members who wish to speak have done so, I will put the Question on motion (a). I will then ask the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures formally to move motions (b) and (c), and I will then put the Question on each motion in turn without further debate. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow): I beg to move

Motion (a): Leave out Standing Order 57 and insert —

“57. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

(1) There shall be a standing committee of the Assembly to be known as the Committee on Standards and Privileges —

(a) to consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to it by the Assembly;

(b) to oversee the work of the Clerk of Standards; to examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interests established by the Assembly; and to review from time to time the form and content of those registers;

(c) to consider any matter relating to the conduct of members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the committee's attention;

(d) to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct;

(e) to consider any reports of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards;

(f) to perform the functions described in Standing Orders 69B and 69C;

(g) to make reports (including reports to the Assembly) on the exercise of any of its functions or any other matter listed above.

(2) The committee shall be appointed at the commencement of every Assembly and may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

Motion (b): Leave out Standing Order 69 and insert —

“69. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

(1) A Register of Members' Interests, which shall list the categories of registrable interest, shall be established, published and made available for public inspection.

(2) The Clerk of Standards shall compile, maintain and from time to time publish, the Register of Members' Interests.

(3) Every member shall inform the Clerk of Standards of such particulars of their registrable interests as shall be required, and of any alterations to such interests within 28 days of each alteration occurring.

(4) Before taking part in any debate or proceeding of the Assembly or its committees, a member shall declare any interest, financial or otherwise, which is relevant to that debate or proceeding, where such interest is held by the member or an immediate relative.

(5) No member shall, in any proceeding of the Assembly —

(a) advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual; or

(b) urge any other member to do so; in return for any payment or benefit specified in this context in the Code of Conduct.

(6) In this order —

‘financial interest’ means any registrable interest other than one falling within category 3 which is not remunerated, category 11 or category 12 of the Code of Conduct;

‘registrable interest’ means any category of registrable interest defined as such in the Code of Conduct.

69A. ASSEMBLY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

(1) There shall be an officer of the Assembly, to be known as the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, who shall upon referral —

(a) from any person of a specific complaint, in relation to alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct; and

(b) from the Clerk of Standards, in relation to any matter falling within paragraph (2);

carry out an investigation and make a report thereon to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

(2) Those matters are —

(a) matters relating to members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege;

(b) specific complaints about members made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests; and

(c) matters relating to the conduct of members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct.

(3) A report made under paragraph (1) shall not include any recommendation for any sanction to be imposed upon any member, other than a recommendation for rectification under Standing Order 69C.

(4) The Commissioner shall not, in the exercise of any function, be subject to the direction or control of the Assembly.

(5) The Commissioner shall not be dismissed unless —

(a) the Assembly so resolves; and

(b) the resolution is passed with the support of a number of members which equals or exceeds two-thirds of the total number of seats in the Assembly.

69B. SANCTIONS

(1) Where it appears to the Committee on Standards and Privileges that a member has failed to comply with any provision of the Code of Conduct or Standing Orders 69 to 69C, the committee may make a report to the Assembly. The report may include a recommendation that a sanction be imposed upon the member.

(2) In consideration of such a report, the Assembly may impose a sanction upon a member who has failed to comply with any of those provisions.

(3) Sanctions may include, but are not limited to —

(a) a requirement that the member apologise to the Assembly;

(b) censure of the member by the Assembly;

(c) exclusion of the member from proceedings of the Assembly for a specified period;

(d) withdrawal of any of the member’s rights and privileges as a member for that period;

and for the avoidance of doubt, the rights and privileges withdrawn under sub-paragraph (d) may include the rights to salary and allowances.

69C. RECTIFICATION

(1) Rectification under this order means —

(a) rectification of the Register of Members’ Interests, in the case of a complaint following failure by a member to register an interest in the Register;

(b) reporting and apologising to the Assembly in respect of a failure of a member to declare an interest, in the case of a complaint following that failure.

(2) The Committee on Standards and Privileges may allow rectification under this order if —

(a) the Assembly Commissioner for Standards recommends it;

(b) the failure was minor or inadvertent; and

(c) the member acknowledges the failure and either undertakes to apologise for it or has apologised for it.” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

Motion (c): In Standing Order 81, after “In these Standing Orders —” insert —

“‘Code of Conduct’ means any code of conduct for members together with any guide to the rules relating to the conduct of members agreed to by the Assembly;” — [*The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).*]

Lord Morrow: Members will recall that, on 23 June 2009, the Assembly agreed the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the associated Assembly code of conduct and the guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members.

The aim of the motions to amend Standing Orders is to allow the report’s recommendations and the code to be implemented. The issues in the code of conduct and in the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges that require changes to Standing Orders are primarily about how to make a complaint to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards and about sanctions on Members who fail to follow certain rules.

Most of the amendments are fairly minor, and the Committee on Procedures took the opportunity to present the relevant Standing Orders in a more logical format. Motion (a) amends Standing Order 57, which is entitled “Committee on Standards and Privileges”. Currently, that Standing Order contains paragraphs dealing with the functions of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards and outlines the process for making complaints against a Member. At the moment, the complaint must be submitted to the Assembly Clerk of Standards, who forwards it to the Commissioner for Standards for investigation.

The report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges recommended that complaints about alleged

contraventions of the code of conduct should be made directly to the Commissioner without having to go through the Clerk. The issues have been addressed and are now contained in the proposed Standing Order 69A.

Two other minor changes have been made to Standing Order 57, one of which will harmonise the way in which references are made to Committees. The other is a consequence of adding references to the code of conduct to Standing Order 81. Revised Standing Order 57 will now deal solely with the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Motion (b) on the Order Paper relates to Standing Order 69, which is about Members' interests. The Standing Order is being amended because Standing Order 69B is being created to deal with sanctions in the event of Members' failure to follow certain rules. Those provisions in Standing Order 69 are being deleted. Specific references to the code of conduct in Standing Order 69 have been amended because of the changes to Standing Order 81, and the reference to time periods has been changed from four weeks to 28 days to be consistent with the earlier changes to timescales.

As I mentioned earlier, the elements of Standing Order 57 that covered the Assembly Commissioner for Standards have been removed and are now in the proposed Standing Order 69A. This will allow anyone, not only the Clerk of Standards, to refer alleged contraventions of the code of conduct to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards. Alleged breaches of privilege, complaints about the registration or declaration of interests and Members' conduct will be referred to the Commissioner by the Clerk. A small number of other minor changes have been made to make the references gender-neutral. Consequential amendments have been made based on the change to Standing Order 81, and cross references, including references to rectification procedure, have been updated. The definition of "financial interest" has been amended to reflect the new structure of the code.

The report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges states that, where a Member is found to have breached the code of conduct, one sanction that it might recommend is that the Member is suspended from Assembly proceedings without pay for a specified period. Standing Order 69A is being introduced to make explicit the range of sanctions, such as withdrawal of salary, which may be imposed on Members for breaches of rules on standards and privileges. Moreover, it makes explicit the power of the Assembly to impose those sanctions. Standing Order 69C will allow for a new rectification procedure whereby complaints about Members' minor admitted failures to declare or register interests can be dealt with by an apology and rectification without the need for the Assembly to impose sanctions.

Finally, an interpretation of the code of conduct is being added to Standing Order 81. At present, Standing Orders contain references to specific paragraphs of the code of conduct or guide to the rules, as have been agreed at certain dates. Therefore, Standing Orders must be amended every time the code or guide changes. The addition to Standing Order 81, along with the consequential amendments, makes all references to the code and guide generic so that Standing Orders will not need to be changed every time the code or guide changes.

That completes my outline of the motions to amend Standing Orders 57, 69 and 81. I commend the motions to the Assembly.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chathaoirleach as na focail a dúirt sé. Beidh muidinne ag tabhairt tacaíochta do na moltaí.

First, I apologise for being late and missing the Chairperson's opening remarks. We support the motions and the changes to Standing Orders that they make. I wish to place on record the Chairperson's handling of those matters, and no doubt he has acknowledged the role played by the staff who assisted the Committee's deliberations.

Mr O'Loan: I support the motions. As a member of the Committee on Procedures, I concur with all that the Chairperson has said, and I can confirm to the Assembly that the Committee has given full and proper consideration to the proposed new Standing Orders.

I will now add some remarks in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The proposed changes enable the implementation of the new code of conduct, which the Assembly agreed in June 2009. The code will come into effect today, and all Members will have received a copy of it. I urge Members to read the code of conduct and abide by it. It is crucial for public confidence that we have in place a code that provides for trust in the integrity of Members of the Assembly.

The new code requires Members to complete a new registration form and return it by 9 November 2009. Any Member who wants advice or guidance on the registering of interests should speak to the Clerk of Standards, who will be happy to give assistance. I can confirm that the Committee on Standards and Privileges is content with the wording of the proposed new Standing Orders. Some of the changes are purely administrative or tidy up the language or structure that is used. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has no difficulty with any of that.

Other changes are essential in order to implement some of the new measures in the code. The issue of sanctions is a particular concern. The Assembly has agreed that it is essential that it should be able to suspend a Member without pay for a specified period, where

that Member is found to have breached the code or the guide. The proposed amendments to Standing Orders will enable us to do that.

Finally, I will address the matter of rectification. The Committee on Standards and Privileges has always recognised that there will be instances when Members may inadvertently omit to register or declare minor or trivial interests. Where that happens, it is more appropriate that we deal with complaints proportionately and quickly. The proposed amendments to Standing Orders will, therefore, allow for a rectification procedure that will enable the Committee on Standards and Privileges to secure an apology from the Member concerned and ensure that clarification be put on the public record, without formally bringing reports to the Assembly's attention.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr Storey): I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. If we could all keep our comments as short and sweet in other debates, we might not have to suspend Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4).

To get down to this afternoon's serious business, I want, in particular, to thank Mr O'Loan, whose Committee on Standards and Privileges has worked to ensure that the standards set in the House are robust yet are flexible enough to allow any minor oversights by Members to be handled in an appropriate manner. The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges mentioned that.

The motions to amend Standing Orders ensure that the work of the Committee on Standards and Privileges can be brought to fruition. The relevant Standing Orders are now presented in a clearer and more logical format.

I have nothing further to add, other than to accept Lord Morrow's proposals.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(a) Leave out Standing Order 57 and insert —

“57. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

(1) There shall be a standing committee of the Assembly to be known as the Committee on Standards and Privileges —

(a) to consider specific matters relating to privilege referred to it by the Assembly;

(b) to oversee the work of the Clerk of Standards; to examine the arrangements for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interests established by the Assembly; and to review from time to time the form and content of those registers;

(c) to consider any matter relating to the conduct of members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the committee's attention;

(d) to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct;

(e) to consider any reports of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards;

(f) to perform the functions described in Standing Orders 69B and 69C;

(g) to make reports (including reports to the Assembly) on the exercise of any of its functions or any other matter listed above.

(2) The committee shall be appointed at the commencement of every Assembly and may exercise the power in section 44(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(b) Leave out Standing Order 69 and insert —

“69. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

(1) A Register of Members' Interests, which shall list the categories of registrable interest, shall be established, published and made available for public inspection.

(2) The Clerk of Standards shall compile, maintain and from time to time publish, the Register of Members' Interests.

(3) Every member shall inform the Clerk of Standards of such particulars of their registrable interests as shall be required, and of any alterations to such interests within 28 days of each alteration occurring.

(4) Before taking part in any debate or proceeding of the Assembly or its committees, a member shall declare any interest, financial or otherwise, which is relevant to that debate or proceeding, where such interest is held by the member or an immediate relative.

(5) No member shall, in any proceeding of the Assembly —

(a) advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual; or

(b) urge any other member to do so; in return for any payment or benefit specified in this context in the Code of Conduct.

(6) In this order —

‘financial interest’ means any registrable interest other than one falling within category 3 which is not remunerated, category 11 or category 12 of the Code of Conduct;

‘registrable interest’ means any category of registrable interest defined as such in the Code of Conduct.

69A. ASSEMBLY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

(1) There shall be an officer of the Assembly, to be known as the Assembly Commissioner for Standards, who shall upon referral —

(a) from any person of a specific complaint, in relation to alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct; and

(b) from the Clerk of Standards, in relation to any matter falling within paragraph (2);

carry out an investigation and make a report thereon to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

(2) Those matters are —

(a) matters relating to members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege;

(b) specific complaints about members made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests; and

(c) matters relating to the conduct of members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged contravention of the Code of Conduct.

(3) A report made under paragraph (1) shall not include any recommendation for any sanction to be imposed upon any member,

other than a recommendation for rectification under Standing Order 69C.

(4) The Commissioner shall not, in the exercise of any function, be subject to the direction or control of the Assembly.

(5) The Commissioner shall not be dismissed unless —

(a) the Assembly so resolves; and

(b) the resolution is passed with the support of a number of members which equals or exceeds two-thirds of the total number of seats in the Assembly.

69B. SANCTIONS

(1) Where it appears to the Committee on Standards and Privileges that a member has failed to comply with any provision of the Code of Conduct or Standing Orders 69 to 69C, the committee may make a report to the Assembly. The report may include a recommendation that a sanction be imposed upon the member.

(2) In consideration of such a report, the Assembly may impose a sanction upon a member who has failed to comply with any of those provisions.

(3) Sanctions may include, but are not limited to —

(a) a requirement that the member apologise to the Assembly;

(b) censure of the member by the Assembly;

(c) exclusion of the member from proceedings of the Assembly for a specified period;

(d) withdrawal of any of the member's rights and privileges as a member for that period;

and for the avoidance of doubt, the rights and privileges withdrawn under sub-paragraph (d) may include the rights to salary and allowances.

69C. RECTIFICATION

(1) Rectification under this order means —

(a) rectification of the Register of Members' Interests, in the case of a complaint following failure by a member to register an interest in the Register;

(b) reporting and apologising to the Assembly in respect of a failure of a member to declare an interest, in the case of a complaint following that failure.

(2) The Committee on Standards and Privileges may allow rectification under this order if —

(a) the Assembly Commissioner for Standards recommends it;

(b) the failure was minor or inadvertent; and

(c) the member acknowledges the failure and either undertakes to apologise for it or has apologised for it." — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

Resolved (with cross-community support):

(c) In Standing Order 81, after "In these Standing Orders — " insert —

"'Code of Conduct' means any code of conduct for members together with any guide to the rules relating to the conduct of members agreed to by the Assembly;" — *[The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow).]*

1.15 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Assisted Suicide

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

Mr Donaldson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the verdict in the Purdy case and the decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland to issue guidance on assisted suicide; and states its opposition to any attempt to legalise assisted suicide.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion in the names of myself and my honourable friends the Member for Strangford Mr Hamilton and the Member for South Down Mr Wells.

The background to the issue of assisted suicide or euthanasia, if you prefer, is based on the recent developments that occurred in the House of Lords, where a case was brought by a lady called Debbie Purdy, who sought clarification on the circumstances in which prosecutions might be brought in cases that involve assisted suicide. As a result of the observations that were made by the Law Lords in that case, it was necessary for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) here and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales to publish interim guidance for the courts or anyone else on the circumstances in which prosecutions might be brought in cases of assisted suicide. The Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland issued his interim guidance on 23 September and launched a consultation process on the subject.

It is timely that we are discussing the issue. It is a matter that affects people in Northern Ireland, it is a matter of national import, and it is the cause of debate across the United Kingdom. It is a cause for concern. We made clear in the text of the motion that we are unequivocally opposed to the legalisation of assisted suicide or euthanasia in the United Kingdom.

Christianity teaches us that human life — all human life — is valuable and that the deliberate taking of life is wrong. That is the starting point for my examination of the issue. Human life is valuable and ought to be valued, not just the young, people who we regard as productive or the able-bodied in our society but all human life.

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

I happen to have the privilege of having a younger brother. He was born with cerebral palsy. Andrew has lived all his life in circumstances in which he has had a very limited form of life experience. He finds it difficult to communicate and he cannot walk, and I pay tribute to my mother and father for their dedication over the years in caring for him.

Let me be clear that there are no circumstances in which my family would consider it appropriate to take steps to end Andrew's life prematurely. We believe that his life is in the hands of God and not in our hands. We believe that the duration of his life is in the hands of God and not in our hands. Doctors told us that Andrew would not live for very long after he was born. However, more than 40 years later, he is still alive and still making his presence felt in our family home in the kingdom of Mourne.

Baroness Warnock, a leading member of the House of Lords, said that people with dementia, another medical condition that is often associated with assisted suicide, waste people's lives and the resources of the National Health Service. In her view, people with dementia are a drain on the resources of the National Health Service, and their lives are wasting away. She believes, therefore, that they almost have a duty to die. That attitude, which devalues human life to the extent that people are regarded as a drain on the resources of our Health Service and have some kind of duty to die, is appalling. It is contrary to the values and standards that I hope the Assembly would uphold in preserving and protecting the right to life in every circumstance.

Such an attitude wrongly evaluates people in terms of their benefit to others or what society can gain from their existence. It denies them their intrinsic value as human beings made in the image of God. A decision that the intentional ending of human life can be not only acceptable but therapeutic and a legitimate means of relieving pain and distress is a monumental step for our society to take. If human life can be terminated when it becomes too difficult and if some people are considered better off dead, how will society determine which lives are proper candidates for termination and which are not? How will we prevent the principle that certain lives can be terminated becoming a rule that they should be terminated?

Acute human suffering should not be dealt with by disposing of the person facing that suffering. We all recognise that there is acute human suffering. We all recognise what individuals and families have to go through when the health of a loved one deteriorates or when someone has a lifelong condition that limits his or her well-being and enjoyment of life. However, I do not believe that the answer is the legalisation of suicide, assisted suicide or the premature termination of life.

The pro-euthanasia lobby features a vocal minority of independently minded and articulate patients who want to control the time and manner of their death. However, the vast majority of those seeking to access legally assisted suicide do not fit into that category. Rather, they are the most vulnerable members of society: elderly people; terminally ill people; incapacitated people; and depressed people. Those people often feel uncertain about whether their lives are worth living and fear becoming a burden to others. We all have experience of older people who wrongly regard themselves as a being a burden on others. If assisted suicide were legal, many would feel that they had a duty to request an early death, especially if it were offered by their physician as a possible therapeutic option. Some people would face the added risk of coercion by others who might stand to gain financially or otherwise from their death.

Medical professionals are opposed to euthanasia. The British Medical Association (BMA) is opposed to both physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. It believes that ongoing improvements in palliative care allow people to die with dignity. The BMA argues that there are limits to what patients should be able to choose if their choice will inevitably impact on other people.

A previous attempt in the House of Lords to permit assisted suicide was Lord Joffe's Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill. That Bill was opposed by the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Anaesthetists, the Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Geriatrics Society. That represented a very powerful coalition of opposition from the medical profession to the legalisation of assisted suicide.

The UK is a world leader in the provision of specialist palliative care, helping patients and their families to cope with the physical symptoms and the emotional distress of advanced illness. We want to continue to strengthen the level of care that we provide to our older people.

Let us, for one moment, consider the experiences of the few countries that have legalised assisted suicide. The Netherlands formally legalised voluntary euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide in 2002. The practice of involuntary euthanasia is now well established in that country, with 546 deaths in 2005 as a result of lethal drugs not explicitly requested by the patient. In the state of Oregon, in the United States, physician-assisted suicide was legalised in 1997. That law has led to patients "doctor shopping" for willing practitioners, using doctors who have minimal knowledge of the patients' pasts and who may be ideologically disposed to fulfil the patients' requests for a premature end to

their lives. That is not a road that we want to travel. That is not somewhere we want to go.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Donaldson: I hope that the Assembly will unite and make it clear that we oppose the legalisation of assisted suicide or euthanasia in Northern Ireland.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. The motion and the outworkings of the Purdy case have highlighted genuine and deeply held concerns on both sides of an extremely emotive argument. There should be a genuine and open debate on this issue to allow us to reach an informed opinion, and I am concerned that the motion requires us to adopt a position on assisted suicide before such a debate has taken place.

The motion seeks to tie the Assembly to what some might view as a fundamental position of opposing any attempt to legalise assisted suicide, but I do not believe that the decision by the DPP to issue guidance on assisted suicides represents an attempt to move towards legalisation. Rather, that decision is the legal outworking of the Debbie Purdy case, a case that cannot have failed to move all of us in the Chamber.

The case of Debbie Purdy is the case of a woman who suffers from primary progressive multiple sclerosis and who made a decision to end her life when her condition deteriorates to such a point that she can no longer live her life with dignity. She is seeking legal reassurance that her husband would not face prosecution for helping her to die. Remember: the penalty for helping someone to end their life is a 14-year jail sentence. There is no doubt that the House of Lords ruling on her case was significant and a turning point for the law on assisted suicide, but does it represent an inevitable step towards the legalisation of assisted suicide, as this motion seems to suggest? I do not believe that it is as black and white as that.

The Law Lords found that it would be a breach of Debbie Purdy's human rights for her not to know whether her husband would be prosecuted for accompanying her to the Swiss clinic where she wishes to die. The Director of Public Prosecutions was, therefore, required to issue a policy setting out when those in such a position can expect to face prosecution. We are now seeing those guidelines being issued: we are not seeing assisted suicide being legalised.

Let us not forget that there needs to be room for compassion within the law. We, as a society, need to ask ourselves what good it would do to jail Debbie Purdy's husband for 14 years for helping her to fulfil her wishes. We need to tackle such questions, not only in this Chamber but across society, by having an open and frank debate. It is for that reason that Sinn Féin tabled an amendment to the motion, calling on the Executive to conduct an inquiry into the implications

of the Purdy case and the DPP decision and to report the findings back to the Assembly.

1.30 pm

Such an inquiry would have allowed us to make the informed, rational decision that is required. Unfortunately, Sinn Féin's amendment was rejected, and, in the absence of the necessary debate and discussion, we are being asked to adopt what some might view as a fundamental position.

In common with Jeffrey Donaldson, I am a carer; my family and I care for my mother who has had Alzheimer's disease for 10 years. I was appalled by what Baroness Warnock said. Although it has been challenging for us as a family, being able to care for our mother in our home has been a gift. As a family, we understand the illness. We would never countenance putting my mother into a home, let alone taking a decision that may, according to some interpretations, be available to us should the ruling be passed.

We must not adopt a knee-jerk reaction on assisted suicide; it is far too important for that. By not having the necessary conversations and not exploring all the possible ramifications, we fail to do justice to those, such as Debbie Purdy, who find themselves in tragic situations. For those reasons, Sinn Féin will abstain on the vote.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to participate in this important debate. The Ulster Unionist Party regards the issue as a matter of personal conscience, and, therefore, I speak as an individual. It is in the interests of parliamentary democracy that there should be a free vote to allow elected representatives to listen carefully to the debate and to vote according to their conscience.

Assisted suicide is not the act of an individual; it involves others, including family members and those in the medical profession. Furthermore, the legalisation of assisted suicide would involve the sanctioning of the act by society as a whole. Therefore, it is important not to regard the issue as one of respecting the rights of individuals. It is not about me and my rights; it is about us and our obligations to one another in society.

What would a change in the law mean for relationships in families, and between the medical profession and a patient and his or her family? It is my strong belief that, in the context of a terminal illness, the legalisation of assisted suicide could radically undermine those relationships. A family has a responsibility to love and to comfort during terminal illness, and central to a medical professional's vocation is the duty to do no harm. Both callings are challenged and undermined by the notion that a family member or medical professional can facilitate assisted suicide.

The present debate in the UK flows from the decision that the Law Lords made a relatively short time after Parliament had spoken definitively against suicide. That is not how the law in the United Kingdom or anywhere should be made. The courts exist to interpret law, not to make it. We should rethink our approach to, and investment in, palliative care. That should be a defining characteristic of what it means to be a caring society that cherishes the most vulnerable.

On a personal note, and reflecting on my experience and that of my family, we were blessed that my mother lived well into her 80s. In the latter stages of her life, however, she was considerably weakened by a series of strokes, and that gave rise to questions about her quality of life. Wherever mum was placed, whether in hospital or in nursing homes such as Avila in Bessbrook or the Sandringham Care Home in Portadown, the standard of care was not an issue. My family and I have the highest regard for all the staff, and we thank them for taking care of my mother.

However, at no stage did we, as a family, contemplate or even suggest that we should facilitate the premature ending of our mother's life. We wanted to cherish that life to the very end, however difficult that was. I believe that that is the view of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland and I hope that it is the view of this Assembly. I respect those who have a different view, but that is how I see the issue.

Mrs Hanna: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. The SDLP has sympathy with the intent of the motion, although it is my understanding that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has issued guidance on whether prosecutions will take place in individual cases. The guidelines do not and cannot decriminalise assisted suicide, which is still illegal under the Suicide Act 1961. I welcome the fact that no advance guarantees will be given about whether to prosecute in individual cases.

The 1961 Suicide Act gave the final say to the DPP about whether there should be prosecutions. I accept that prosecutors have to exercise discretion in their decisions and assess whether a prosecution will pass the public interest test. It is clear from the DPP's paper that charges are more likely if the victim is under 18 or mentally ill, or if the suspect stood to gain, financially or otherwise, from the death of the person in question. It seems likely that serial assistors will be prosecuted, as will members of groups such as Dignitas, whose main purpose is to facilitate suicide.

I have four main concerns about the guidelines. First, they apply at home and abroad, so they apply to people who travel to Switzerland. They also encompass suicide by the seriously ill as well as the terminally ill. By the seriously ill, I mean a person who

may suffer from a severe and incurable physical disability or a severe degenerative physical condition from which there appears to be no recovery, but who may not be terminally ill. The term "seriously ill" covers a wide range of medical conditions, including chronic heart disease and most kinds of physical disability. However, the way the guidelines are written suggests that the lives of a whole group of people who are seriously ill or disabled are less deserving of the protection of the law than others.

Secondly, I am concerned that the prosecution of spouses, partners, close friends or family members is envisaged as being less likely than the prosecution of others. There is a danger that that could give the green light to assistance from close relatives or friends, who, in many cases, may be those who stand to gain personally from the death of the person in question.

Thirdly, I am concerned that the discretion of prosecutors will be accepted as the norm rather than the exception. To my mind, that usurps the function and prerogative of this legislative Assembly. Assuming that policing and justice powers will be devolved, this is an issue that will have to be faced up to and on which leadership will have to be given. With all due respect, nobody elected the DPP.

Fourthly, this Assembly has often debated the issue of suicide, particularly among young people and in urban and rural areas of economic and social deprivation. Recently, there were a reported 30 suicides in the North in one month. Although we have a suicide prevention strategy, I am concerned that those guidelines could inadvertently contribute to sending out the message that although we have policies for combating suicide among the young and other vulnerable groups, assisted suicide, in other cases, could be acceptable.

I do not minimise the distress of families and friends who watch a loved one who suffers from a terminal illness or whose personality crumbles under the ravages of Alzheimer's disease or similar conditions. However, we must have consistency. In relation to the issue of unbearable physical pain for the terminally ill, there have been tremendous advances in palliative care in recent years, and I pay tribute to the work of hospices and others. There is also much more emotional and practical support that is given by dedicated professionals to family and patients.

I agree with the science fiction author Terry Pratchett, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, that we should devote more resources to help to find cures.

The SDLP's fundamental ethos is grounded on civil and human rights, and the most important right of all is the right to life. Our outlook has been shaped irrevocably by the terrible conflict that the North has had to endure for more than three decades. A primary

purpose of the law in any ordered society is to protect human life. In the past, the unique value of human life has too often been disregarded. Our belief that the right to life is paramount will certainly inform our response to the motion.

Mr Ford: At the outset, I emphasise that, given that my party regards assisted suicide as an issue of conscience, I speak in a purely personal capacity.

I also do so because of the personal circumstance in which I, like other Members, find myself. Within a little over two years my mother and my mother-in-law both died. Both died in their own beds, in their own homes, surrounded by family and after relatively short illnesses in which they did not suffer greatly. For that, we are extremely grateful. One should be very grateful that somebody can have more than 90 years of a happy life and die secure in their faith without suffering.

We must recognise that that is not the case for everyone in society. I am not talking about examples such as that which the proposer of the motion gave when he talked of his brother. The issue is not one of saying whether any particular person's life is worthless. However, difficulties arise that must be taken into account. One such example is the Purdy case, which involves someone who is clearly fully mentally competent and who recognises the suffering that may lie ahead. In such cases, the person involved may not share the faith that sustains others.

It seems to me that the key element is to ensure that guidelines are in place to meet those difficult circumstances with compassion while protecting the vulnerable. I do not doubt that in some places where assisted suicide has been legalised, the pressure builds up and assisted suicide becomes the assumed outcome and not just an option for those who wish to choose it. We should oppose absolutely people's being pressurised in that direction. Therefore, I agree with the opposition of the Members who tabled the motion to any question of legalising suicide in our society.

However, it was a little unfortunate that, when moving the motion, Mr Donaldson used the term "euthanasia" a couple of times. My understanding is that euthanasia is an active process of what might be described as mercy killing. I believe that there is a slight difference between the terms "suicide" and "assisting suicide" that is not accounted for fully in the language that he used.

Mr Donaldson: I was not trying to liken assisted suicide with euthanasia; my point was that there is a very fine line between the two, and that if one were legalised, the inevitable consequence would be the legalisation of the other.

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for that clarification. I may not agree with his use of the word "inevitable"

but I can certainly accept his point about there being a narrow line.

Other Members talked about the clear need for us to ensure that better care, including palliative care, is provided for many people with long-term illnesses. We heard already in the debate of examples of places and of family circumstances in which people with particular long-term needs are well cared for. The reality is that as a society we may or may not resource acute hospital services well. We do not, as a society and in general, resource community care and palliative care nearly as well as we should.

To some extent, the debate is not quite about the current legal situation. I have stated my opposition to any question of legalising assisted suicide, but we now have the DPP's guidelines of the circumstances in which prosecution would be considered. Those guidelines make it clear that the process for prosecuting assisted suicide cases is exactly the same as that for any other criminal case. First, there is the evidential test, which, in itself, may not be entirely clear. That is the situation in the Purdy case. Secondly, the public interest is tested. I would certainly not stand over the guidelines for the latter test in every sense as they are promulgated, but I believe that they are a reasonable attempt to recognise that there will be a small number of extremely difficult circumstances in which prosecution will probably not be in the public interest.

In circumstances in which someone who is deeply affected by their love for somebody who is suffering gives that person a relatively small amount of assistance to carry out what is clearly an intended suicide, we have to recognise that there are real public interest issues in pursuing such a case to the full extent of criminal law.

1.45 pm

The Director of Public Prosecution's guidelines are a reasonable attempt to take account of such circumstances. Nevertheless, rather than the majority of Members simply saying, as I expect, that they are opposed to legalisation, we should debate them in more detail than one can manage in a five-minute speech in this place. There are difficulties with how guidelines might be applied on the issue of whether prosecution is in the public interest that must be discussed, not just by lawyers and doctors but by wider society, of which we are representatives. With that caveat in mind, I accept what the proposer of the motion has said, but this debate should not be the end of the matter.

Mrs I Robinson: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the motion. As Members have already said, this is a very serious matter. Society has a duty of care to the sick and vulnerable, especially the aged population. Therefore, the guidelines recently published by the

Director of Public Prosecutions are worrying. The law should uphold the sanctity of life, without any equivocation.

Why do our legislators always seem to rush head-on to accommodate a vociferous minority, regardless of the overwhelming body of evidence that opposes its opinion, either on a Christian or a moral basis? Moreover, how many of us have heard our elderly parents say at some stage in their lives that they are a burden on everyone? Down the line, such words could become a green light for someone to believe that they are helping their elderly parent by offering a way out. Some people could abuse that, and, unfortunately, we have seen people in ordinary criminal circles manipulate others because they have, for example, a lot of money in a bank account or a property. Why would they not do the same in respect of this matter?

I am also glad to take this opportunity to applaud the work of the palliative care nursing profession, all of whom give wonderful service and display devotion and commitment to the terminally ill. I call on the Minister of Health to do his utmost to improve palliative care services for the terminally ill and those who are suffering great pain.

On publishing his guidelines, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Starmer, said:

“There are also no guarantees against prosecution.”

I welcome that statement, but he also suggested that the guidelines will provide people with enough information to make informed decisions. I want to know what he actually meant.

Dr Peter Saunders from Care Not Killing said:

“There must be a real danger that this will be seen as giving the green light to assistance from close relatives or friends.”

As I said, I share that concern. The guidelines have not changed the law, but I am worried that they give people something on which to fall back should they help someone to end their life. That position should be clarified.

Among the factors in the guidelines that determine prosecution, it is worrying that the Director of Public Prosecutions suggests that having the guidelines written down could lead to people helping their loved ones to take their own life in due course.

We must oppose any move to introduce to the United Kingdom any form of law that permits a person to help to take someone else's life. I am morally opposed to any such legal idea, which throws up many challenges. If such a law were passed, what would constitute murder? Anyone who takes someone else's life in cold blood could claim that they were asked to by that individual. That scenario is particularly relevant to the elderly or physically disabled.

Assisted suicide also throws up many social issues. If we get too old or too sick, will we face pressure to take our own lives, as a result of the fear that we will be a burden on our family and friends? Furthermore, any move to legalise assisted suicide will put those in the medical profession under extreme strain, for, on entering the service, members of that profession take an oath to save and preserve human life.

The number of those who die as a result of assisted suicide in Europe is growing, but I am thankful that it has not reached the same level here. I am happy to stand with my colleagues in supporting this important motion.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The tone and manner of the debate reflects how personal an issue this is, both to us as legislators and to society at large. What strikes me is that, even in our own minds, Members do not have the answers to all the questions raised. That is true even of those Members who have taken time to research the subject, are involved in the issue in other legislatures, have been lobbied more strongly than other Members or have been involved in the debate over many more years than most through their politics, their Church or other aspects of life.

Many questions on the subject remain unanswered. That is why, as stated by my colleague Martina Anderson, my party will abstain from voting on the motion. The debate almost finalises the issue: the Assembly has spoken, and this is the way it will be. In my party's view, we need to begin a debate on the subject of assisted suicide and allow all sections of society to be heard on this most sensitive subject. It is about how our loved ones wish to deal with illness and becoming old and infirm. That is what we are talking about: people who find that someone with whom they have spent their life and whom they love deeply has reached a stage where he or she can no longer continue because of illness or infirmity.

As has been pointed out, the Purdy case highlights many of those issues. A young woman who has all her mental capabilities intact decided that she wanted to bring to an end her suffering and went through a legal process to ensure that her husband would not be prosecuted for involvement in that. Mr Donaldson said that some who ask for assisted suicide have strong mental capabilities but that there are others in a similar position who cannot make such a decision for themselves. Those are the people whom we must protect.

The question is asked whether, if we introduce assisted suicide, it will open a door to many other things. I hope and expect that those questions have been asked in other countries and legislatures that have introduced assisted suicide, and that those jurisdictions have introduced safeguards to protect the vulnerable

and the loved ones of those who have decided to take that path and to ensure that assisted suicide does not become a byword for murder. We all want to avoid that and to ensure that those who have reached such a decision are not treated badly or abused by close relatives or friends who are motivated by the prospect of financial gain.

We must also ask ourselves whether, if we talk openly about or legislate to allow assisted suicide, we damage all the energetic work and campaigning that we have put into that other aspect of suicide, namely, its prevention. Does that open up a new debate? Does it legitimise suicide?

In saying that, I am not saying that anyone has committed a crime or, in my opinion, a sin for taking their own life. No one knows what pushes that final trigger in someone's head when they decide to take their own life, and I will not sit in judgement on anyone on that issue.

Another question is whether assisted suicide means that suicide becomes more frequent. I do not know the answer to that. It is difficult for me as a legislator to make a decision on a subject that we have only started to debate. Until those questions are answered in my head, the debate has taken place in public and all sections of society have made their voices heard on the subject, the Assembly should not be making a decision, even during or after a private Member's debate. We need to ensure that, following today's debate, we open up the public forum; that, in six months or a year, we return to an informed and sensitive debate — and today's debate has been sensitive — on the subject of assisted suicide; and that we approach it with open minds.

Mr Wells: It is seldom that the Assembly deals with such a serious issue. I will not be my normal, chatty self in this particular debate because it is such a serious matter.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of attending an event that was organised by Life After Loss at Belfast Castle, which was supported by more than 1,000 people who had lost children through a miscarriage, stillbirth or death shortly after birth. It was an extremely poignant event as we launched 1,000 balloons, each with the name of a child who had been lost in those circumstances, into the sky. Not only was it poignant but there were many tears. That event emphasised to me, once again, how sacred life is.

My view, which I am sure is the view of many people in Northern Ireland, is that life starts at conception and ends at a natural death and that the only being who can or should control that is the Almighty. Northern Ireland is different from the rest of the United Kingdom and, indeed, probably from the rest of Europe in that we hold, as a community, to strong Christian values. We do so whether we are from the evangelical Protestant, the Roman Catholic, or

even the liberal Presbyterian tradition that I know that Mr Ford comes from. We hold to those views as something that we will lose at our peril and that is very dear to us.

Therefore, there should be no question of any change in the legislation in Northern Ireland on this important subject; just as the Abortion Act 1967 should never be introduced in Northern Ireland. That legislation may be imperfect, confusing and difficult to interpret but it has worked — it has acted as an impediment to abortion, as the present legislation clearly acts as an impediment to assisted suicide.

Recently, we have all heard about the tragic case of Gareth Anderson in the Ulster Hospital. The initial prognosis was that Gareth's condition was extremely serious. I am delighted to say and we are all pleased to hear that, as a result of the skill of surgeons and a lot of prayer, Gareth's condition has improved dramatically and there is every prospect that he may make a reasonable recovery. That is good news. However, that case shows that the initial prognosis can be wrong. A very serious diagnosis can be made, and then, as a result of prayer, natural healing or the skills of surgeons, the situation can be turned round.

In Newcastle, in my constituency, there is a famous case of a clergyman's wife, Mrs Mackay, who was diagnosed as being terminally ill with cancer and was given absolutely no hope six years ago. That lady is now out and about giving talks to church congregations throughout Northern Ireland about the benefits of faith healing. Therefore, it is wrong to assume that, because someone has had terribly bad news, it is terminal.

Like other Members who spoke in this debate, I am extremely worried that a right to die could become a duty to die — that older people may be placed under huge pressure to do the honourable thing, as it were, because they are considered to be a burden on society or to the family. There is precedence for that. We have often heard in the courts about elderly people who were pressurised by their families to change their wills.

How many times have such cases been fought in the courts? Last Friday, in fact, the court ruled to revoke a will under which someone had left £2 million to the RSPCA, and it was believed that pressure had been exerted in that case. If such behaviour goes on during the writing of a will, what might happen as the burden of residential or care at home, in particular, weighs heavily upon a family? It is possible that they will come under pressure from the unscrupulous to do the "honourable thing" and subject the elderly person to some form of assisted suicide.

2.00 pm

Northern Ireland is well served by the present arrangements. I am not certain of the legal situation; it

would be useful if Mr Hamilton, in his summation, informed the House whether the issue is the call of Northern Ireland, through the Executive or the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, or whether direct rule Ministers acting on behalf of the Parliament in Westminster can inflict it on us. It would be useful to know exactly where we stand. Most people in Northern Ireland do not want to see any move or significant change in the present situation on this highly emotive issue.

Mr Kinahan: I am glad to be able to speak on such a serious issue. However, the motion muddles matters and does not demonstrate an understanding of what is going on. The DPP's decision to issue guidance is an effort to simplify the issue so that we will understand the rules; it is not an attempt to legalise assisted suicide. I agree that we need to look into the matter in more detail.

We should thank Sir Alasdair Fraser for putting together the guidelines and for clarifying matters, as we do indeed know when to prosecute. We should praise the Purdys. If we think of the absolute hell that they and many others must have gone through, we will appreciate that this is a chance for people to consider how they are to cope in future.

If I may go for a slightly lighter tone for a second, may I say that many of us might feel that appearing on 'The Stephen Nolan Show' or coming here is assisted suicide. However, I do not want to joke too much; this is a very serious matter, and I do not want to see it perverted by us thinking truly down Christian principles. It may be Christian to allow things to happen, and we must not force our religious principles down other people's throats, as, it seems, is the case with a motion that will be debated later today.

There will be rare occasions on which we will need the guidelines. We need better care and debate, but think of those people who, nobly and bravely, are suffering complete and utter agony. If we prevent them from finding a release from that agony, we are no better than the Gestapo. The issue is not about rights; it is about freedom. It is about the freedom of choice for a very small minority. Today, I hope that Members will remember that rare cases will arise, and we should not condemn everyone by misreading the guidelines. Choice is a bedrock of our society, and the motion is too dogmatic. I do not support the motion, and I agree that we should have further debate.

Mr A Maginness: I come from a constituency that is labouring under the horror of many suicides, particularly among young people. What sort of message do our arguments on assisted suicide send to young people who are suffering under stress? I understand the inevitability of the DPP issuing guidance on assisted suicide following the Purdy case,

where the House of Lords indicated that there ought to be guidance or assistance on whether to prosecute. However, I am uncomfortable with some aspects of the interim guidelines.

I do not blame the DPP for Northern Ireland, Sir Alasdair Fraser, because he is an honourable public official who is carrying out his public duty following the decision of the House of Lords. However, his interim guidelines on the public interest factors against prosecution for assisted suicide sit uncomfortably with those who are opposed to assisted suicide becoming permissible under the law. He makes it clear that there will be no change in the law and that it is not the intention of the guidelines to make such a change.

The first of those guidelines requires:

"The victim had a clear, settled and informed wish to commit suicide."

How can the DPP or anyone else come to that conclusion? How does one define or determine a victim's state of mind? The fifth guideline requires:

"The suspect was wholly motivated by compassion."

"Wholly" motivated, as opposed to "partly" motivated, by compassion is also difficult to define. The sixth guideline requires that:

"The suspect was the spouse, partner or a close relative or a close personal friend of the victim, within the context of a long-term and supportive relationship."

Is that guideline helpful, and does it really assist us in determining whether a prosecution should be brought? Surely those who are closest to the victim are the people who have suffered the most and are the most likely to carry out an action that could bring about suicide.

Although the DPP's guidelines on assisted suicide are well intended, there are some difficulties. The public have been given an opportunity to air their views on the guidance during the consultation process, and I encourage them to do so.

Although the guidelines will not change the law, they could muddle it. The law entrenches certain values, and, when one begins to change the law, those values are undermined. It is important that the law supports the right to life. I believe that life is a sacred gift. I do not believe that it should be interfered with, and nor do I believe that a person has the right to end his or her life.

Mr McNarry: It is always interesting to hear Mr Maginness being subjective, and I thank him for being so during his contribution.

I also share his belief in the right to life. Does the Member feel that that right is not being dealt with in the guidelines? Will he suggest a way in which it could be dealt with? There are those who believe that that view, because it is not written in the guidelines and, therefore, cannot be read or pointed to, has been set aside.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Member that interventions should be as short as possible.

Mr McNarry: You are quite right to remind me of that. I am looking for the Member's professional guidance as to how —

Mr Deputy Speaker: There will be no time for an answer if the Member does not hurry up with his intervention.

Mr McNarry: Does Mr Maginness think that the right to life should be included in the guidance?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has 10 seconds left.

Mr A Maginness: That is an extremely difficult question to answer. All that I can say is that if the law remains unchanged —

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

Mr A Maginness: I thought that I had an extra minute.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have got the extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: I have or I have not?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have; yes.

Mr A Maginness: I believe that, if the law remains unchanged, the criminal offence of assisting suicide is a certainty.

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

Ms S Ramsey: As John O'Dowd said earlier, this has been a sensible and sensitive debate. It is always useful for the Assembly to have the opportunity to discuss important issues. I agree with the part of the motion that states:

"That this Assembly notes the verdict in the Purdy case".

However, I also think that any decision made by any Government — including our Executive — should have an input from the community, and it is useful that there will be a consultation exercise. We should, through our offices and constituency networks, encourage people to get involved in the consultation exercise and to respond to the documents.

There appears to be some confusion, even during this debate, over points that have been raised, and Members have raised a wide range of opinions on the issues. Nevertheless, the key message from all Members is that we must ensure that we protect the most vulnerable, no matter what. The most vulnerable people should be uppermost in our minds, and it is important that that message gets across. It is very hard, during a debate that lasts an hour and a half, or during a five-minute contribution, to get that message across, and only the sound bites come out in the media. The clear message today is that we must protect the most vulnerable in our society.

The interim guidance states that the consultation will run from 16 December and a final policy will be

published in the spring of 2010. Sinn Féin tabled an amendment so that the Executive could become involved. What input will the Executive Ministers, including the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, or the Committees have? This is a fundamental issue. Members spoke earlier about the need for personal choice and for free votes. However, it is important for the Executive to be involved.

The press release issued with the guidance states that it:

"identifies those public interest factors which must be weighted both for and against prosecuting someone".

Members who spoke previously highlighted the confusion in that area. Many people have strong views both for and against assisted suicide. Therefore, it is important to have a consultation exercise. A recent press article stated that the will of the people will be listened to. There should also be input from the Health Minister and the Health Committee, which should have a role and be able to respond. Therefore, it would be important for the Committee to have a copy of the consultation documents.

The Debbie Purdy case has raised important issues and important questions. However, everybody should arm themselves with the facts. No one takes the issue of assisted suicide lightly. We commend carers, but we must follow that up. Carers who look after loved ones are sorely underfunded, and they are not getting the proper care package or the financial support that they need. That issue must be looked at.

Families of a loved one who has taken his or her life have campaigned long and hard to remove the stigma that he or she "committed suicide". Those families believe that their loved ones did not commit a crime, and we should be sensitive to the needs of those families.

I also believe that it is a matter of personal conscience; Danny Kennedy mentioned that earlier, as did a number of other speakers. It is important that people come to the decision armed with all the facts.

2.15 pm

I want to end on this note: I hope that no one here finds themselves in the position of being asked to assist a loved one to commit suicide. The clear message that should be expressed is that there is always hope, and that we should never lose hope. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Easton: I support the motion on a most vital matter, namely, the sanctity of human life. It is, I would contend, a matter of principle to seek to support, to nurture and, most importantly, to protect human life. Can any of us envisage where it would end, were we to devalue the principle of the sanctity of human life? Is it a folly to suggest that we could end up in a situation in which, as a society, we would tell people with

serious life-limiting conditions that we do not deem it appropriate to use financial resources to sustain and prolong their lives, but that, when they are ready, the Government will assist their suicide? I believe that that would be wrong.

That is the reality of what is happening in the state of Oregon in the United States. A lady there named Barbara Wagner, who had lung cancer and was on Medicare, the state health insurance system for the poor, was given the message that she would be denied certain forms of medical treatment, but that the state would pay for her assisted suicide. That is wrong.

A similar thing happened to Randy Stroup, who had prostate cancer. Perhaps it is appropriate to listen to what Mr Stroup had to say verbatim:

"It dropped my chin to the floor ... not pay for medication that would help my life, and yet offer to pay to end my life?"

Those are sad words, which make us confront the importance of today's debate.

As I understand it, the decision in Mr Stroup's case was reversed on appeal, and Mrs Wagner was subsequently supplied with free medication by the drug manufacturers. However, those two cases show what can occur to people in our time, in a state where the authorities assist suicide. We must be ever vigilant to ensure that vulnerable people in our society are not pushed around, cajoled or — let us be frank — bullied into the termination of their lives because they are led to believe that, due to their life-limiting illness, they are a drain on society's financial resources and that their care is some sort of affliction and burden that their loved ones have to bear.

The British Medical Association states that it:

"has long advised doctors — for moral as well as legal reasons — to avoid actions that might be interpreted as assisting, facilitating or encouraging a suicide attempt."

If that were not explicit enough, it goes on to state:

"The BMA remains opposed to doctors taking a role in any form of assisted dying."

I contend that those directions are not given lightly by medical experts; rather, they are the conclusion arrived at after detailed analysis of the expertise of the medical profession. Although no one has the monopoly on wisdom, only a fool would consider lightly the direction of the BMA.

In conclusion, what is the situation for a person with depression who seeks assisted suicide? Are patients in that situation given the necessary psychiatric care and support? The experience of Oregon would appear to suggest otherwise, as physicians there can assist suicide without considering the psychological aspects. Is that where we wish to go? I do not believe so.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member giving way. I wonder whether he has actually read the guidelines,

because, as I read them, it was absolutely clear that a case that involved any question of a psychiatric illness would tend to result in prosecution.

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I take his comments on board.

I argue for a better way, where the psychology is changed from suffering from a life-limiting condition to living with a life-limiting condition, where there is effective palliative care and the sanctity of human life is upheld, promoted, and, most important of all, protected. In supporting the motion there is no better conclusion than that of the assistant director of the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide, Wesley Smith, who stated, when referring to Oregon:

"legalising assisted suicide leads to abandonment, bad medical practice and a disregard for the importance of patients' lives."

Life is sacred, and only God can decide when we go from this life.

Lord Morrow: I support the motion. Some interesting comments have been made, not least the confusing ones, particularly Mr Kinahan's. I could not make up my mind, and I suspect that he could not either, whether he supports the motion, is against it or is neutral on it. Perhaps some day he will tell us.

I agree thoroughly with the view that has been expressed that human life is God given and can be terminated only by the giver of life. Suicide, in any form, is wrong. It would be a sad day for Northern Ireland if assisted suicide were legalised and legislated for here. Carmel Hanna said correctly that, one day, the Assembly will have to stand up on the issue. I look forward to that day.

We are faced with sad statistics about people who simply feel that they cannot bear another day alive and who are driven or are drawn to take their own lives. Generally, that leaves a gulf of unanswered questions, recriminations and, of course, tremendous grief. We have campaigned for support and funding for the individuals who have simply come to the end of their tether, if I may use that expression. However, I accept fully that the issue of assisted suicide is in a somewhat different category. We are told that the people involved have made the conscious decision that they no longer wish to suffer from a crippling, debilitating illness that has left them without hope or dignity. Therefore, a degree of sensitivity must be exercised when challenging the topic.

On completing training and before stepping out as fully fledged practitioners, doctors take the Hippocratic oath, which has formed the backbone of medicine for centuries. Its emphasis is on preserving life at all costs, treating the condition where possible, and, whenever they are successful, making the patient well. Whenever that cannot be achieved, the oath

remains a powerful ethic by ensuring that the suffering of patients is kept to a bare minimum.

We are told that two doctors are required to examine a potential assisted suicide patient to determine whether their condition is terminal and degenerative and to decide whether they are of sound mind. We are told that strenuous enquiries will be made to ensure that the patient has not been put under any financial, emotional or physical pressure.

However, a closer look reveals that the only requirement on the two doctors is that they be registered. That means that they could be qualified for as little as one year. Such doctors would have gained very little on-the-job experience. Much of a doctor's career is spent learning from such experience and putting into practice tried and tested methods over and over again. A doctor with one year's experience would not be remotely close to having gained enough pertinent knowledge of life and death.

Furthermore, to examine such cases, a doctor will not be required to have any specialised background on the patient's condition or illness. They will need neither any particular ability to assess the patient's mental health nor the experience to determine whether a patient has been forced into such a position.

Each doctor will see the patient only once. No doctor, even a highly trained and experienced consultant, could possibly draw conclusions on a matter of life and death after one sitting. The two doctors must, of course, be paid for their time. The criteria for assisted suicide are fundamentally flawed and fall far short of the core of the Hippocratic oath and society's duty to care.

When the Abortion Act 1967 was introduced, similar arguments were made that it would not open the floodgates. Let us consider that, some seven million abortions later.

Mr Wells: Will the Member agree that David Steel, who introduced the Act in 1967, said that it was intended only to clarify the confusing and difficult cases? He managed to clarify the 2% of difficult cases by introducing an Act that led to the deaths of seven million unborn children. Can the Member see the same danger with potential legislation on assisted suicide?

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for making that point. I could not agree with him more.

I trust that the Assembly will take a long hard look at such issues when the day comes for it to make a decision. Now, we can see the extent to which legislation that was introduced to accommodate difficult cases has been abused. Much more could and should be said about that. I see that my time is nearly up.

Some people say that there is no comparison between euthanasia and assisted suicide. I disagree;

there is a comparison and a frightening closeness. Recently, someone on the Benches opposite said that this is a fundamentalist's viewpoint. It most certainly is not. The BMA made its position clear recently, and it is also opposed to assisted suicide.

I am pleased that no one in the Chamber strongly feels that assisted suicide should be legalised. I hope that the House supports the motion unanimously.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Question Time will commence at 2.30 pm. Therefore, the debate will resume at 3.30 pm when the first Member to speak will be Alex Attwood.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members gently that supplementary questions should not be read out.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where ME patients are currently being treated, following the closure of the clinic at Belfast City Hospital. (AQO 187/10)

4. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alternative arrangements will be made for ME patients following the closure of the only treatment facility at Windsor House. (AQO 190/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 4 together.

The clinic at Belfast City Hospital was provided on a voluntary basis by a consultant psychiatrist who had a personal interest in chronic fatigue syndrome. In the 12 months up to July 2009, 16 patients were seen at that clinic. The consultant concerned has retired recently, and in preparation for his retirement, no new referrals have been accepted since July. The occupational therapy element of the service, however, is continuing for existing patients.

I met representatives of the Northern Ireland ME Association recently to hear their concerns at first hand. I understand that patients do not want a psychiatric-led clinic in Belfast; rather, they want a consultant-led service that is based in a neurology department. I have asked my officials, in association with the Regional Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to the services that ME sufferers require might be improved. An initial meeting involving those key stakeholders will be held in the next few weeks.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle agus a Aire. I am glad that the Minister

answered my question. Obviously, a number of people were concerned when they heard that the service was being moved. I appreciate the effort that the Minister has made in meeting some of the stakeholders concerned. The Minister said that a meeting with other key stakeholders will take place in the next few weeks. Is there any prospect of proposals coming out of that meeting? If so, when does he think that will happen?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A couple of other things are under way. First, a neurology review is examining the policy that was laid down in 2002, and secondly, a physical and sensory disability strategy will go out for consultation shortly. Those will have a bearing on how we address ME.

In effect, ME sufferers have access to the full range of services that are laid out by the Health Service, and that is available to them in consultation with their GPs. However, at the meeting with stakeholders, including the board and the trust, it is important that we look at ways of going forward and of addressing patient need.

Mr Attwood: I welcome that the Minister, like the World Health Organization, acknowledges that ME is a neurological condition and should be treated in that context, rather than the way in which it was treated at Windsor House, which is a psychiatric-based facility.

I understand that the Minister has received recommendations, further to a health assessment, for shared services on the island of Ireland that will address a range of conditions. Neither the North nor the South alone has the critical mass to provide treatment on that basis, but together they do. Given the number of people who have been diagnosed and who are awaiting treatment, does the Minister agree that a better co-ordination of services and facilities on the island would develop a better service generally for those patients?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not aware of any all-Ireland proposal; I am looking at the needs of patients in Northern Ireland. We are guided by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, which were published in 2007 and which the Department endorsed in a circular that was issued in January 2008.

The guidelines recommend, for example, that there should be individualised programmes for patients with ME. The issue is about addressing that need. There are about 7,000 ME sufferers in Northern Ireland, and their symptoms range from mild and moderate to severe. The cause of ME is unknown, and there is no known cure for it.

We are looking at best practice in other areas. We are seeking to ensure that sufferers have access to the required services and, in common with NICE

guidelines, a neurology-based service rather than a psychology-based service. The service was in Windsor House, at Belfast City Hospital, and was led by a consultant psychiatrist who had a particular interest in the condition. It was carried out on a voluntary basis and, as I said, the consultant is about to retire.

The best thing to do now is to meet stakeholders. We will take account of the neurology review, which is coming forward, and the physical and sensory disability strategy, the consultation on which will be put out shortly. That consultation period is an opportunity for others to provide their input. There are a number of things that we can bring together to see what steps can be taken in managing what is a very difficult and complex condition.

Mr Shannon: I am sure that the Minister will be aware, as Members are, that many ME patients have asked their elected representatives to consider whether a specialist ME adviser could be designated for one of the hospitals. Has the Minister considered designating a specialist ME adviser for one of the hospitals in the Province to address that issue?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I will listen to what comes out of the meeting with the stakeholders, the trust and the Department, and what comes out of the physical and sensory disability strategy and the neurology review. We will look to find a way forward that corresponds with NICE guidelines. No doubt we can tease out whether to have one ME centre in Northern Ireland or to use the services that are available throughout the health and social care framework to create a system in Northern Ireland that is signposted by GPs.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's response, and pass on my best wishes to Dr Scott, who performed that service for almost 10 years. As far back as July, he was instructed by the trust not to accept any further referrals. It is now October —

Mr Deputy Speaker: You must ask a question, Mr McCarthy.

Mr McCarthy: Some 7,000 patients have had nowhere to go since July. Does the Minister think that something more urgent could have taken place before now? We are only now talking about starting to meet people.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The clinic was run on a voluntary basis by a consultant who had a particular interest in ME. Dr Scott worked as a consultant psychiatrist in Windsor House at Belfast City Hospital. He took on 16 patients a year, which is a very small number compared to the number of people in Northern Ireland who have ME.

Mr McCarthy says that ME patients had nowhere to go. That is not true. Patients have the whole health and social care system to address their needs, and it does

so. ME sufferers say that there needs to be a more co-ordinated approach, and that is what I am looking at to get through the steps that I have outlined in previous answers.

Ambulance Service: Western Health and Social Care Trust

2. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the proposed cuts to ambulance hours in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 188/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no proposed cut to Ambulance Service cover in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. Under the Ambulance Service's plans, there will be a net increase of nearly 4,500 hours of paramedic cover. That will be achieved by replacing 13,500 hours of A&E ambulance cover with over 18,000 hours of rapid response paramedic cover. My assessment of the proposals is that emergency response times in the Western Trust area will continue to improve, and that those patients most in need will get faster pre-hospital emergency care.

Mr P Ramsey: Is the Minister aware that a recent BBC report showed that in England — or Britain — in over 91% of calls in which a rapid response vehicle was sent out, an ambulance was sent out also? In light of that, can the Minister tell me the number of rapid response vehicles that were sent to emergencies in which an ambulance was also required because the rapid response paramedic could not provide adequate cover in that emergency?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: We covered that issue on a number of occasions. When a rapid-response vehicle is dispatched, an ambulance is dispatched at the same time. In about 90% of cases, the ambulance is required, but the rapid-response vehicle arrives at the scene first, which means that the paramedic gets to the patient faster. In 10% of cases, the ambulance, which carries a paramedic and a medical technician, can turn back because its presence is not necessary.

There is a fully trained paramedic in both the rapid-response vehicle and the ambulance. Although a rapid-response vehicle can respond more quickly than an ambulance, the two are very similar and can provide the same treatment. However, an ambulance carries a stretcher, a chair and a spine board. Therefore, the figures that the Member read out for England are entirely consistent with what we would expect.

The performance of the Ambulance Service over the past five years, particularly its performance in the Western Trust area, shows a marked improvement in response times.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement and the information that the Ambulance Service has made a positive difference in Fermanagh and west Tyrone. Does he agree that continual negative comments about the Ambulance Service are extremely demoralising for its hard-working staff?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I entirely agree and extend that sentiment to the entire health and social care sector, which seems to be subject to constant scaremongering, criticism and negativity. That has been particularly apparent over the past couple of weeks.

The Ambulance Service is doing better year by year. For example, we set a target for a response time of eight minutes to life-threatening emergency calls. In 2004-05 in the Western Trust, 49% of such calls were responded to in eight minutes; the response rate is now 71%, which is a marked improvement. The figures for the rest of Northern Ireland are equally encouraging. Every minute that we can save in getting paramedics to patients with cardiovascular conditions, for example, can show a marked improvement in their chances of recovery or chances of avoiding permanent disability.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's comments on the Ambulance Service, which gave evidence to the Committee on Thursday. Will the Minister provide reassurance that, in the rural parts of the west, outside Derry and Omagh, for example, the target response time of eight minutes for life-threatening calls will be achieved? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: One of the heartening features of the Ambulance Service's performance is the improvement in rural areas. The rapid-response vehicle primarily concentrates on urban areas, because that is where it works best. In most of the rural areas of Northern Ireland, we are planning no change to existing accident and emergency cover. In western areas, such as Limavady in the north, Strabane, Castlederg and Enniskillen, it is proposed that there will be no change in Ambulance Service provision.

We are always seeking to reduce response times. The Ambulance Service is doing very well and reaching the target of 70%; it knows that as soon as it reaches the target, we will start discussing how to better it. We are concerned with what is best for the patient, how the patient can do better, providing the best service and saving lives.

2.45 pm

In the Western Trust area, an increase from 49% to 71% in response times within eight minutes for category A life-threatening calls was made against a background of a 40% increase in calls. Demand is rising all the time, with a huge increase in business.

Despite that, the Ambulance Service has shown a very marked, heartening and commendable improvement in response times, and it deserves to be congratulated for that.

Mr Easton: Will the Minister explain why, at last Thursday's Health Committee meeting, when a set of cuts was presented by the Ambulance Service, we were told about a second set of proposals that the Health Committee had not seen nor heard about from the trusts, the Department or the Minister? Will the Minister give an assurance that, in future, any proposals will come to the Health Committee so that it can have view of them and comment before he signs off on them?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I will not ask the Minister to answer that. It is not specific to question 2.

Health and Social Care

3. **Mr McFarland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there has been increased demand for services in the health and social care sector in the past twelve months. (AQO 189/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2008-09, around 48,000 more people had a first outpatient appointment than in 2007-08. That had a knock-on effect on elective patients and day cases, where over 13,000 more people were treated. Eleven thousand more people were admitted through A&E for emergency inpatient care, which is an increase in overall demand in 2008-09 of 9% or more. Growth is set to continue at the same rate in 2009-2010, but I have only 0.5% more resources, in real terms, to respond to that. Hardworking health and social services staff delivered an impressive increase of 6.7% in productivity between 2006-07 and 2008-09, but that will not be enough to bridge the gap, and services are under pressure to meet demand and the challenging efficiency targets.

Mr McFarland: I recall that the Executive agreed that the Minister could have the first £20 million call on funds. Does he agree that urgent funding is needed to deal with the swine flu epidemic, and that others should stop playing party politics with the Health Service?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Not playing party politics with health has been my constant plea. Most people in this House are, in general, very responsible and supportive of the Health Service. Some are consistently negative and unhelpful, and, as far as I can see, consistently play politics with the Health Service. Shame on them — I could name them, but I will not. I do not want to embarrass anyone who is here, but I particularly do not want to embarrass absent friends.

The Health Service has made huge strides in a programme that is still rolling out. As Members are aware, the service has gone from 19 trusts to six, and from four boards to one, and has set up a business services organisation to centralise essential services, such as HR, wages and maintenance, which were spread across a number of trusts. Those are being centralised by the business services organisation to create economies of scale and streamlining.

We have seen an almost 7% increase in efficiency in the Health Service over the past couple of years. That is highly commendable, and all members of the health and social care workforce, from consultants all the way through, deserve to be congratulated for the work that they have done. Against that, however, we have seen rising demand — up by around 9% so far this year. It is impossible for the Health Service to respond to a 9% increase in demand on a 0.5% increase in resources in real terms.

In addition, I am still waiting for the Budget settlement to be implemented. I have not seen a penny of the first call of £20 million in the Budget. Moreover, I have to deal with pandemic flu. We estimated our middle-case scenario at £78 million, and I have a right to bid for that. To date, I have not been assured of a penny of that. Therefore, I cannot respond to contingency plans at the minute, although I hope to be able to respond in due course. However, it will only be possible when I am absolutely certain about finances in the Health Service.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that mobile phones and BlackBerries should be switched off.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with the Minister: it is important to commend staff. I hope that he does not consider my question negative, but rather as a means of teasing out answers. I am slightly concerned that the Department's permanent secretary, in his previous role in the Department of Finance and Personnel, seemed to be of the opinion that we could deal with efficiency savings in Departments. How can we square that circle, given that there is now a suggestion that health should be excluded from efficiency savings? The permanent secretary's approach does not make sense; why has it changed?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Before I took up this post, the Health Service produced £124 million of efficiencies under the Gershon-related efficiencies every year. As the Member is aware, the current efficiencies amount to £700 million over three years. As I have explained, demand has increased. At a base level of two years ago, £700 million of savings would have been achievable with a huge amount of pain; the background of a 9% increase in demand, frankly, makes it

impossible. The same number of healthcare staff is, in essence, doing 9% more work; they are stretching themselves.

When considering efficiencies, we must compare like with like. I am not aware of other Departments in which the workload has increased by 9% per annum, and the Member should note the distinct lack of pain in all other Departments in finding efficiencies. That suggests that it is not as difficult in other Departments as it is in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, which is further along in the review of public administration (RPA) process. We are saving 1,700 administrative jobs at £53 million per annum. I remind everybody that the House and the Executive voted for that through the priorities for action targets under the Programme for Government. We all voted for that, and I am ahead of that target. I am achieving every target for the Health Service that was laid down in efficiencies and agreed in the House.

My Department's efficiency has increased by 7%, but demand has increased by 9%. John Appleby came to Northern Ireland and produced a famous report on efficiency that made a number of recommendations. All those recommendations have been implemented — bar one. One key recommendation was that Health Service resource should rise by 4.3% per annum in real terms. That has not happened, and, therefore, we are still labouring under the resource that was set several years ago. Our increase this year is, in real terms, half a percent, which is the lowest increase in the Health Service in living memory.

Furthermore, I have not seen a ha'penny of the first £20 million call that I was supposed to receive without a problem. In addition, I must deal with the problems of pandemic flu. For example, I will soon announce the first deliveries of vaccines, which I have bought because I believe that the people of Northern Ireland need them. However, I still have no assurances on that resource.

Dr Farry: I did not vote for the Budget or the Programme for Government. Given that trusts are proposing the closure of hospitals and the removal of beds, does the Minister agree that the approach to efficiency savings is clearly wrong? Does he believe that the bureaucrats in the trusts are the best people to determine the way forward on efficiency savings?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Member did not vote for the Programme for Government or the priorities for action; however, he voted for Ian Parsley. Look where that got him. *[Laughter.]* A vote from Stephen Farry is no particular endorsement. *[Interruption.]*

You are not in Bangor now.

We are reducing bureaucracy according to the Programme for Government's priority targets, which

were agreed by the Assembly and the Executive, and we are ahead of those targets as well as our efficiency targets.

I will move to the issue of bed closures. At the tail end of the financial year, when trusts are suddenly faced with deficit funding, Government finances do not allow us to underspend or overspend; our spending must be in line. In most businesses that have a turnover of £1 billion, as the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust does, a £20 million overspend is not something to get excited about; one would simply take from next year's money or borrow from reserves. However, none of those options is available to the Health Service because of the way in which it is funded and because of the way in which public finances are administered in the UK, which means that there must be full spend as opposed to good spend.

As a result, we have to find £20 million fast, and that has an effect. The contingency plans are simply plans and proposals; I have not examined them in depth, and they are a long way from being approved. There has been a great deal of scaremongering about those plans and other plans that are effectively non-plans, and which can become plans only if I agree to them. I am a long way from doing that.

Missed GP and Hospital Appointments

5. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide estimates of the number of missed GP and hospital appointments in the last year. (AQO 191/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Health and Social Care Board does not separately collect information on the number of GP appointments. Some general practices may collect information on missed appointments, but to collect such information from each of the 357 general practices in Northern Ireland would involve a disproportionate cost. The number of hospital appointments for which patients have failed to attend in the past year is as follows: there were 1,565,497 outpatient attendances in 2008-09; patients failed to attend 190,235 appointments. The "did not attend" rate was 10.8%.

Mr Ross: In August 2009, the BBC reported that, across the UK, approximately £600 million was wasted on missed GP and hospital appointments. What steps is the Minister taking to try to stop people from missing appointments? Has he considered fining people who continually miss appointments?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: GP appointments are one thing: GPs are independent contractors who contract with the Health Service to provide certain levels of healthcare

to their patients, and there is a tariff that goes with that. They are, in effect, independent businessmen and businesswomen who manage their own affairs, including their "did not attends". Hospitals are somewhat different; we have taken a number of steps to bring down the "did not attend" rate of cancelled appointments, such as partial booking, whereby outpatients agree a suitable date and time for their appointment no more than six weeks in advance.

One of the problems was that appointments were being agreed months in advance. Partial booking arrangements offer patients a choice of date and time for their appointment, and they reduce the number of patients who do not attend. Trusts must ensure that patients of the same clinical priority are seen in strict chronological order. Trusts pool lists between consultants in a specialty to equalise waiting times, and clinic templates have been reviewed to ensure that a reasonable allocation of time is given to new non-urgent referrals.

Some steps have been put in place. We still have an unacceptably high rate of missed appointments, which costs many millions of pounds a year. If memory serves me right, the most recent estimate was that approximately £14 million was lost to the Health Service in missed appointments; that is money that we can ill afford to lose. We constantly appeal to patients not to break appointments.

Fining patients would be much more difficult. GPs can take more direct action. I should have said that the estimated loss to the Health Service in missed appointments was £11.6 million; that information is in the public domain. We might have to consider fining patients, but it would be difficult to administer.

One would have to allow for the fact that people can have perfectly valid reasons for non-attendance and may be unable to phone through their cancellations. Fining those who do not keep appointments is not the simple solution to the problem.

3.00 pm

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Better Regulation and Simplification Review

1. **Mrs Hanna** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how, and when, she will implement the recommendations of the report on the better regulation and simplification review.

(AQO 202/10)

9. **Mr Cobain** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her Department's response to the better regulation and simplification review. (AQO 210/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions one and nine together.

The review is complex, with 85 recommendations that apply to all areas of the Department's work in the agrifood sector, including areas in which we are applying European legislation. Fifty two recommendations fall specifically to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), and of those, 35 that can be implemented have been identified, many of which were already being implemented as ongoing developments in various work areas.

Forty one recommendations require further investigation to identify the possibility of introduction by DARD and/or other Departments. So far, nine are likely to be rejected for various reasons including legal obstacles and disproportionate costs.

The informal consultation on the independent panel's better regulation and simplification review ended on 30 September. Three responses have been received by my Department and will be taken into consideration in the formal response to the review that will be published in the autumn.

Mrs Hanna: Will the Minister outline the overall costs of the review and specify whether any anticipated savings will result from the implementation of the recommendations?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I do not have the actual costs of the review to hand. Some recommendations will reduce the administrative burden on farmers; but at this point, I do not have that level of information. I am happy to respond to the Member in writing.

Mr Cobain: Will the Minister consider establishing a single inspection body for all on-farm inspections?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I came to this job with a view to looking at what I could do to help reduce the burden on farmers: I asked that question. However, inspections are carried out for different reasons. We have brought inspections together where possible but, unfortunately, it is not possible to do that for all of them. We have done what we can to reduce the burden of inspections on farmers.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for her responses. Will she indicate when she intends to introduce, and ensure the early implementation of, the independent panel's recommendations in a clear and beneficial way to help the farming industry?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I recognise that the burden on farmers can be reduced. There is a public service agreement target to reduce the administrative burden on farmers by 25% by 2013, with an interim target of 15% by 2011. Progress towards those targets will be monitored to ensure that they are being met. We will do everything that we can to reduce the burden on farmers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Rural Communities

3. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to support rural communities, particularly people in isolated areas who are on low incomes. (AQO 204/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is responsible for investing significant amounts of money into the rural economy each year, including single farm payments and investment through the rural development programme. I also argued successfully for £10 million of Programme for Government funds specifically to address poverty and social exclusion in a rural context. That funding is to address five key themes: rural fuel poverty; rural community development; rural childcare; transport; and a rural challenge fund.

Last winter, I supported the Department for Social Development's warm homes scheme, under the fuel poverty element of the programme, ensuring that up to 600 rural homes received necessary improvements to heating and insulation systems. The rural childcare programme opened to applicants in June 2009, and received 57 applications that are now being assessed. I have confirmed my support for continued community development including the provision of resources for rural support. I am also finalising plans with the Department for Regional Development for improved access to transport for people living in isolated rural areas.

The rural challenge programme is also open to applications. That programme aims to assist in tackling poverty and exclusion in rural areas, and to provide project-based evidence to inform future policy on rural poverty and exclusion. The programme will focus on eight target beneficiary groups in rural areas, including low-paid workers. Potential applicants will be required to attend a best-practice workshop, which will assist applicants with the identification of poverty and exclusion issues in their area; the evidence to support need; the people affected; and the most suitable responses for each local area.

I am also delighted to advise that, in conjunction with the Public Health Agency, I have agreed to a project to maximise access to, and uptake of, grants,

benefits and services in rural areas. It is planned that the unique cross-departmental project will target the most deprived rural super output areas across the North. It will seek to assist hard-to-reach people who live in rural areas to access the benefits, grants and services to which they are entitled. I will continue to advocate on behalf of rural people who live in isolated areas and on low incomes, particularly through my membership of the ministerial subcommittee on poverty and social inclusion.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Renewing Communities pilot programme, which was delivered by the Department, sought to support isolated Protestant communities that live in border areas. Will the Minister outline the future plans for that programme?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I do not have that information with me. A pilot project was undertaken in four areas of the North, and we are evaluating that programme. I will come back to the Member with more details on its future.

Mr Elliott: The Minister said quite a lot about the rural development programme. Has she sent any letters of support to individual projects that are being undertaken under axis 3 of that programme?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am not sure what the Member means by “support”. Axis 3 is being administered by local action groups and, primarily, councils. I do not fully understand the Member’s question.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As someone who lives in and represents a rural area, I thank the Minister for her reply about those areas. The Minister, as part of the Executive, has a keen interest in rural matters and, indeed, has placed that interest on the public record. Can the Minister confirm that the independent working group’s report, which contains recommendations on planning permission for non-farming families, has proven inconclusive, despite the group having spent a substantial length of time deliberating on the matter?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My participation in the Planning Policy Statement 21 working group is not related to the original question. I will be happy to respond to the Member’s query if he comes back to me in writing.

Dangerous Dogs

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her proposals to deal with the issue of dangerous dogs.

(AQO 205/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am pleased to announce that the wide-ranging and comprehensive review of dog control legislation, which I announced in November 2007, is now complete. I am preparing proposals for consultation. As Members are aware, we have serious dog control problems here. The system is simply not dealing with the issues effectively. There were around 750 dog attacks on people last year. We also have a big problem with stray dogs, with almost 8,000 stray dogs being impounded by dog wardens in 2008. That is a greater number of stray dogs per head of population than in Britain. Moreover, many of those strays have to be destroyed. It is unacceptable that the North accounts for one third of all dogs that are destroyed between here, England, Scotland and Wales.

To address those issues, I propose to build on the existing legislation by retaining the ban on dangerous breeds and introducing further dog control measures. The enhanced measures will have three main elements: a focus on prevention through earlier intervention to stop dog attacks; making it an offence for a dog to attack another dog; and promotion of responsible dog ownership that is supported by a more robust and effective dog licensing regime.

As part of the enhanced dog licensing regime, I am proposing that all dogs should be microchipped and that dog wardens should have powers to attach conditions to licences if there are concerns about dog behaviour. Given that licence fees have not been reviewed since 1983 and stand at £5, I also propose that the licence fee should be increased to a more appropriate level, with significant reductions for groups such as pensioners and those on benefits.

As part of an agreement to share early thinking with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, my officials presented initial policy ideas to the Committee last week and agreed to consider some of the views of its members. Committee members agreed with me that there were serious dog control problems and they raised a number of concerns.

It is extremely unfortunate that the exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. It is also regrettable that some of the reporting was simply wrong. There is no proposal that requires all dogs to be on a leash at all times. The comments of the Committee were very helpful, and I have listened very carefully to them and to the views of the public over the past few days in further developing my proposals for consultation. Once they are finalised, I will seek the approval of the Executive to put them out for consultation. It is anticipated that that will run from November to January and, following full consultation, a Bill will be drafted, with the aim of introducing it to the Assembly

by June 2010 and it reaching the statute book within the lifetime of the current Assembly.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I have listened to what the Minister has said and I thank her for her comprehensive answer. Has she decided on the level of licence fee that she is going to consult on?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: There certainly needs to be an informed debate on the dog licence fee, and the current level of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the legislation. As a result, the bulk of the dog warden service cost is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just dog owners. The dog licence fees currently collected amount to less than 10% of the cost of the dog warden service.

During the review, local councils suggested figures for dog licensing ranging up to £70. My officials explored with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development some early ideas on a fee of £50, with 50% reductions for the owners of neutered dogs, and further reductions for people aged 65 or over and those on certain means-tested benefits. Again, it is extremely unfortunate that that exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. However, I am pleased that a debate has started on the matter of dog control and licence fees.

I have listened very carefully to the concerns of the Committee and the public and have taken those into account in developing my proposals for consultation. I am, therefore, preparing to consult on the basis of three options: one is a core option based on an inflation-linked rise; one is an option to maintain the status quo; and one is an option that covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my core proposal, a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over. The cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5. The cost to owners whose dogs are neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5, and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983.

I recognise the importance that a dog can have for an older person, in providing companionship and a sense of security, and that is why for the first time I am making a dog licence free of charge for those aged 65 and over. If an older person has more than one dog, the fee for additional dogs will be pegged at the current rate of £5. The fee will also be pegged at the current rate for those on means-tested benefits and for any owners who have their dogs neutered. That will help those on low incomes and will encourage neutering, in turn reducing the number of strays and unwanted dogs.

That core proposal will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the cost of dog control. As I have said, the licence fee is only one part of my proposals. I believe that the whole dog control package will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when the proposals are put out to public consultation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Danny Kennedy, who has not been microchipped, to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Kennedy: I have not been neutered either — yet. *[Laughter.]*

As a concerned owner of two West Highland terriers, both of whom have been warned about their future because of financial issues, I welcome the Minister's change of emphasis. Will the Minister assure the House that the additional revenue collected will be available to local councils for the policing and enforcement of the legislation?

3.15 pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: At the moment, councils retain the collected revenue to help with their provision of dog wardens, and that will also be the case in future.

I cannot possibly comment on whether Mr Kennedy is neutered or muzzled.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's comments; there is a lot to take in. It is a pity that that message was not sent out in the first place. Many people, particularly elderly people, have been coming to my office, and, I am sure, to the offices of other Members, to complain.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Ask your question, Mr McCarthy.

Mr McCarthy: My question is simply whether the Minister should have considered significantly increasing the penalties for people who allow their dogs to cause damage, chase other dogs, and so forth, rather than an excessive increase in the cost of a licence.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I regret that our initial discussions with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee were taken so badly out of context by the media. A lot of people were concerned about the implications that it would have for them. I appeared on a BBC programme to try to reassure people, but that did not work, and I was unable to get the message across that dog licensing was only one element of what is being proposed.

The point of the legislation is to give more control to councils so that irresponsible dog owners will have

to face up to their actions. The councils will have the power to force people to do things, such as keeping a dog muzzled or on a lead in public, or maybe insisting that a dog be neutered. Various conditions can be applied to try to encourage responsible dog ownership; that is what we are trying to get to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The licence for a black-and-white dog is not cheaper.

Rural Childcare Strategy

5. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the implementation of the rural childcare strategy.

(AQO 206/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I set up the rural childcare stakeholder group in July 2007 and, in March 2008, I was pleased to present its report 'Rural Childcare: Investing in the Future' to the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. The report contained a number of cross-cutting recommendations, including the development of a DARD rural childcare programme. It also ensured that rural childcare was recognised in the early-years strategy for nought-to-six-year-olds that was developed by the Department of Education

My officials have now developed a rural childcare programme that is delivered and funded as part of the Department's rural anti-poverty and social inclusion framework. That programme's aim is to improve childcare provision across the rural North. That will be accomplished by supporting a series of pilot or demonstration projects that provide solutions to the particular and distinct challenges faced by rural areas and communities. Those will provide a positive evidence base for the development of future policy and priorities in the provision of rural childcare.

Since the programme began in June, 57 applications have been received, and those that passed the initial eligibility sift are being appraised. It is intended that letters of offer will be issued to successful applicants in late October or early November.

Childcare is recognised as being extremely important in enabling people to pursue employment and training opportunities. Therefore, the adequate provision of childcare in rural areas is essential. I am pleased that, through the rural childcare programme, the opportunities for rural areas will be better explored and realised. Furthermore, in my role as a rural champion, and through my membership of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people, I will continue to advocate the needs of children living in rural areas.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer; it will be much appreciated out there. Will the Minister tell the House who can apply to the programme and when, because that information is required?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Applications were restricted to pilot or demonstration projects run by community or regional representative organisations that address the key areas highlighted in the rural stakeholders' report, such as access, early-years integration, quality, sustainability and affordability in a rural context.

Of the total of 57 applications, 31 passed the initial eligibility sift. The applications came from a range of groups: cross-community childcare facilities, such as preschools, playgroups, náiscoils and so forth; and groups with a specific interest in the provision of childcare for those with special or additional needs. Individuals and profit-making organisations also had an opportunity to receive support, other than financial assistance, from projects run by community-based and representative organisations.

Although the scheme has closed, people who work in the private sector can still apply for childminding support under the rural development programme, particularly under measures 3.1 and 3.2.

Mrs M Bradley: I welcome the rural childcare strategy. How many extra childcare places will the strategy fund?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: It is premature to say how many until letters of offer go out and until we view the applications. However, it is very important to get that evidence base so that the Department and the Executive can identify the needs of rural areas and ensure that those needs are met. I am happy to answer the Member's question, but I will not be able to do so for some months.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she advise what amount of funding has been made available to implement the new strategy? One hundred per cent of a rural playgroup's funding can be withdrawn if its attendance dips below 10 children in the immediate preschool year, even if that happens for a very short period. That can result in the removal of a playgroup from an isolated area. Has the Minister made representations to the Minister of Education on that issue on the ministerial subcommittee?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have not made representations on that issue specifically. In answer to the first part of the Member's question, the indicative budget for the rural childcare programme was set at £1.5 million, and there is a maximum available grant of £250,000 for Six-County-wide representative organisations and

£100,000 for community organisations. However, I have had a number of discussions with the Education Minister on childcare provision in rural areas. I expect those discussions to continue.

Animal Welfare Legislation

6. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she expects to bring forward an animal welfare Bill. (AQO 207/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: A new animal welfare Bill is one of my key ministerial priorities. I intend, subject to Executive approval, to progress an animal welfare Bill through to introduction in the Assembly by June 2010, and to enactment during the lifetime of the current Assembly. A new animal welfare Bill will seek to address the gap between the legislative protection that is provided to farmed and non-farmed animals and to strengthen existing welfare provisions generally. The legislation will aim to ensure that protection for animals is at least equal to that in Britain and will reflect on lessons that have been learnt since its animal welfare legislation came into force. Where possible, the new Bill will also endeavour to take on board legislative developments in the South.

The new legislation's overall purpose will be to protect all sentient animals from cruelty and unnecessary suffering. It will also set out the obligations for people who have animals in their care, including domestic pets for which they are responsible.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the nature of Executive business these days, and given that we are now well into October, will she give a reassurance that her Department will have produced a Bill by June of next year that has Executive approval, and that that piece of legislation will be passed by May of the following year? If that has been a priority for the Minister's Department, will she give guarantees, in so far as she can, around the Executive timetable and the Assembly timetable?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member knows that the only two certainties in life are death and taxes. Although I cannot give such guarantees, I put on record my appreciation of the very proactive work that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has undertaken with me on animal welfare legislation and dog control legislation. We recognise and accept that the work is hugely ambitious. It will take a great deal of effort to get down to the nitty-gritty, but I have no doubt that the public expect us to introduce legislation, which we can do if we work collectively. I will deal with the issue of Executive approval when the time comes.

Mr McCallister: I thank the Minister for her reply. I agree that the public expected the legislation to be introduced some time ago. Does she envisage any proposed role for the USPCA or other welfare organisations under the new legislation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: At this stage, there is no intention to change the USPCA's role under the Bill.

The USPCA is an independent charity and nothing in the Bill will change that. However, the Department will continue to work closely with the USPCA on welfare issues.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the Bill increase the penalties?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Subject to Executive approval, the Department intends to address the maximum level of penalties. Under the current legislation, a person convicted of cruelty to animals under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972 is liable on conviction to a maximum fine of £5,000 and/or three months imprisonment. The Bill will set out new maximum penalties for cruelty offences, including imprisonment for a term not exceeding 51 weeks or a fine of up to £20,000, or both.

Those penalties would apply to offences that involve the causing of unnecessary suffering, animal mutilation, administration of poisons and offences in respect of animal fighting. The Bill will include post-conviction penalties such as deprivation of and disqualification from the right to keep animals; destruction of animals, if appropriate; cancellation of existing licences; and the forfeiture of equipment.

DARD: Efficiency Delivery Plan

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what percentage of her Department's efficiency delivery plan is based on cuts to front line services. (AQO 208/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The efficiency delivery plans, or EDPs, require DARD to save 3% cumulatively per annum over the period 2008 to 2011, which, in DARD's case, equates to £6 million, £12 million and £18 million.

DARD's EDPs include three areas that could have an impact on its customers. First, we intend to re-phase the implementation of the food strategy. Secondly, the incidence of brucellosis is falling at present, which may obviate the need to reduce disease-compensation levels, although that must be reviewed by the Department. Thirdly, we are in discussions with the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development about the transfer of the costs of collection and

disposal of fallen bovines aged over 48 months back to the industry. The EU decision to increase the BSE testing age has already enabled annual savings of £1.4 million to be made in that area.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. In the original efficiency delivery plans in 2007, the savings on administrative charges through improved business processes were £5.68 million. In the most recent proposals, the Department expects to save just £0.87 million. Why is there such a significant reduction? Where have those costs transferred to?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: In fairness, I do not have in front of me a breakdown of the Member's figures, so I will have to look at that again. However, we have tried to mitigate the effect of savings on front line services, and we have looked very hard at how we can lessen the impact of those savings, but every Department must make savings or cuts. We must find a way of doing so that does not increase the burden on our customer base.

Mr Savage: I listened carefully to the Minister. Will she indicate to the House the whereabouts of the cattle that were stolen in the Loughgall area that were infected with TB —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not relevant to the question being answered by the Minister.

Single Farm Payments

8. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she can give farmers an assurance that if they are chosen for inspection it will not delay their Single Farm Payments, particularly if no problems are found. (AQO 209/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I personally assure all farmers that we will work to process cases and to make single farm payments as quickly as possible, once the payment window opens on 1 December. In 2008, we paid out more than 80% of single farm payment claims by the end of December, and we hope to do the same this year.

As far as inspection cases are concerned, I can provide the assurance that those not showing any problems will be processed alongside non-inspected cases. Unfortunately, feedback from the payments branch suggests that the number of inspected cases that need adjustment because of land changes related to boundaries and ineligible land is likely to be very high. Those adjustments are complex and take time to clear. I take the opportunity to remind farmers that it is essential that they tell the Department about any changes to field areas.

The changes fall into two categories. The first involves permanent features such as houses, laneways and tanks; the second, semi-permanent features such as scrub and winds.

Land under both those categories is considered ineligible and should not be claimed for. If farmers tell us of any change to their eligible land before we find it, although we will have to readjust their single farm payment entitlements, we will not apply penalties. However, in cases in which we find the change, we have to readjust entitlements and, if appropriate, apply penalties. Such cases take longer to process. We have no choice but to make those adjustments, and we are facing a potential £28.5 million disallowance.

3.30 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Assisted Suicide

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the verdict in the Purdy case and the decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland to issue guidance on assisted suicide; and states its opposition to any attempt to legalise assisted suicide. — [Mr Donaldson.]

Mr Attwood: I broadly welcome the tone and content of many of the contributions to the debate before Question Time. Before dealing with the particulars of the motion, without prejudice to the guidelines that the CPS and the PPS have issued, I shall make a broader point.

I welcome it when the prosecution authorities in the North begin to develop policy and issue public statements about what their policy might be when prosecuting offences. That is a welcome development, and it sets a useful precedent, because, whatever one may think about the guidelines, there are too many vacuums in the administration of justice and in the prosecution of offences for the PPS in the North and, I dare say, the CPS in England not to publish more comprehensive reasons for and policies about when cases will be prosecuted or dropped. Indeed, as I understand it, the PPS in Belfast is about to publish a new policy that gives reasons why cases may collapse or be withdrawn or why charges may be reduced. In that regard, I have been saying to the PPS that it should not publish those guidelines until there has been further consultation with victims and witnesses. Nonetheless, the publication of policies and the giving of insight into why the PPS makes decisions about certain matters is a useful and welcome development.

A number of colleagues, including Mrs Hanna from South Belfast, expressed concerns about the guidelines' content. I have no doubt that the CPS in England and, more particularly, the PPS in Belfast have listened to those concerns. Therefore, if issues arise about the level of discretion that the PPS may have in deciding whether to prosecute a spouse who assists a suicide or about assisted suicides for those who are seriously as opposed to terminally ill, I trust that the new guidelines will be clarified or strengthened in order to address those concerns. Moreover, I trust that this debate will be reflected in the consultation that PPS is undertaking.

Having said that, I think that the Assembly will have to get its head around the matter and similar matters, especially in the context of the devolution of justice powers. John O'Dowd and Martina Anderson in some

way dealt with that point. When it comes to matters such as assisted suicide, people in the North have, in effect, three choices. First, we can pass laws that create absolute offences, whereby anybody who assists a suicide will be prosecuted and appear before a judge, in which case a judge will have the discretion to decide what penalties are laid down, which could end up being a minimum penalty. Even an absolute or conditional discharge for assisted suicide may not help public confidence or move public debate forward. Secondly, we do precisely what happens now; namely, the PPS, consistent with the law that governs the matter in Northern Ireland, should develop the tightest possible guidelines to legislate against any possible abuse in assisted suicide cases. Thirdly, after the devolution of policing and justice powers, the Assembly could legislate on the matter, creating the context, guidelines and certainty for assisted suicide to reflect views in the Assembly and public opinion in the North.

Those are our alternatives. People may not like the CPS/PPS route for moral or legal reasons, but it is probably the best way of creating certainty and best practice rather than leaving it to judges to decide what penalties should be imposed or to the Assembly to create law that would have to take into account variable factors such as the public interest and other matters.

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

Mr Attwood: I welcome the debate and hope that the Assembly returns to this matter and deals with suicide and assisted suicide in a much fuller and more rounded way.

Mr Shannon: The matter is an emotive one and it is easy to get carried away; I may be one of those sometimes carried away by emotion. However, sound judgements are not usually based on emotional responses. There is a saying: hard cases make bad law. That has been tried and tested over many years' and I believe it to be true.

A hae a strang belief i the sancity o' life. A alloo at we hae laas fer gye guid reasons an' tae let ithers bae i a position o' dictatin' life an' death isnae a healthfu' position fer simboadie tae bae in. In es mich es we'd like tae think at loved yins an femmelie members onie iver hae oor bes' intherests aa hairt, they can bae swayed bae emotion an bae ither less worthy motives.

I believe firmly in the sanctity of life and that we have laws for good reasons. To allow others to dictate life or death is not a healthy position for anyone. As much as we would like to think that loved ones and family members only ever have our best interests at heart, they too may be swayed by emotion and other less worthy motives.

Recently, I read an article by the Reverend Ian Galloway that succinctly expresses much of the fear

and reservation that should be taken into account when considering the legalising of assisted suicide. The author states that a certain camp seeks to change our law so that the state will be given the authority to stamp "suitable to die" on some people. It goes on to state that we are assured by those who advocate assisted dying that it will be tightly controlled, well policed and not open to abuse. Vulnerable people, they assure us, will not feel pressurised into taking an option with which they are not entirely comfortable. After all, we are a civilised society, or at least that is what they say. However, more than 200 people a year starve to death in NHS hospital wards and, tragically, people fall through all those safety nets. Can it be guaranteed that legislation with the express purpose of bringing about the deliberate killing of a human being will never be misused?

Many were shocked by the views of Ludwig Minelli, the lawyer who founded the financially opaque Dignitas suicide clinic in Switzerland, where one may be charged £2,500 to £6,000 for the privilege of undergoing assisted suicide. He defended the decision of his non-profit-making organisation to assist in the suicide of a healthy young woman and talked of the "marvellous possibility" presented by suicide and of the burden placed on the NHS by those who have attempted suicide and failed. Does that vision really represent the route that this country wants to go down or the kind of society in which we want to live? The Royal College of Nursing now takes an officially neutral stance on the issue, but the British Medical Association and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges continue to oppose assisted dying. The most recent and comprehensive survey of doctors in the UK shows a large majority of medical professionals against it.

Tragically, large numbers of people choose to end their life. Our response should not be to encourage and help people along that route but to offer care, support and a listening ear.

I also read of a survey of 7,000 doctors that reveals that the group of clinicians most strongly opposed to any form of assisted dying is palliative care specialists: the doctors who deal most closely with people at the end of their life. We should take note of that as well.

If we allow our feelings of pity to endorse a case where a husband assists his dying wife to end her life sooner, what will happen in the case of a father who has a child with an expected lifespan of five or six years? Can that father rightly assist the child to die sooner rather than later? Do we discount the life-saving breakthroughs that medicine delivers daily? Do we discount the hand of an almighty God? My colleague Jim Wells mentioned the case of young Gareth Anderson. Gareth lives in my constituency, and I worked with his father. To those who do not believe in miracles I say, "If ever there was a miracle, that was one".

My answer to all of those questions is a resounding no. As is often said, this is a slippery slope, and we cannot let it go too far. The legalisation of abortion has led to thousands of perfect children being killed every month on the mainland because they are an inconvenience. How long will it be before it becomes inconvenient to pay for a nursing home for an elderly relative? Where do we stop?

We have heard what other Members have said on the subject. No matter how people try to rationalise assisted suicide, it can never be a good thing for society as a whole, and we will stand against it in this Chamber. I urge Members to support the motion; it has been moved for the best reasons. Assisted suicide is a moral issue for many people in our society, and we must support the motion.

Mr Hamilton: Like Mr Shannon and Mr Attwood, I thank Members not only for their contributions to the debate but for its tone. Given that this is an extremely emotive subject, the emotion of which could easily have spilled over into the Chamber, the manner of debate has been good and helpful towards having a worthwhile discussion. It was noticeable that a number of Members spoke not only of general cases of which they are aware but of personal cases in which their loved ones have had very challenging conditions that have made the latter days of their lives very difficult for them and for their families. The personal experience that Members brought to the discussion was helpful to the debate.

For me, as for many people, the subject of assisted suicide was brought into focus when the verdict was reached in the Purdy case early in the summer. What particularly irked me was the joy with which the verdict was met by some. It was a verdict not on a libel case or on the awarding of damages for an accident but on a case that had profound and far-reaching implications for how we, as a society, treat our fellow man. That is why the issue deserved much more respect than was, perhaps, shown by some in the immediate aftermath of the case.

I concur with the comments made by Mr Kennedy; it also worried me that we were seeing another example of potential legislating from the bench. That is not the way that law is or should be made in this part of the world. Law is supposed to be made by legislators such as us and enacted in the courts by the judiciary, not made by the judiciary itself.

Inevitably, the verdict in the Purdy case has been latched onto by those who have had a long-standing agenda of legalising state-sponsored suicide and who see it as an opportunity to achieve that agenda. Although I understand Mr Attwood's point about the guidelines — in many respects the Public Prosecution Service has been put in the unenviable position of

having to issue them — and I disagree fundamentally with that guidance or the points contained in it, I understand the position into which the PPS has been put by the verdict in the Purdy case. Many of us regard the guidelines as the slippery slope or the thin end of the wedge towards something much worse than guidance on when somebody may be prosecuted for assisting in someone else's death. That is the real fear.

I also understand that the issue of assisted suicide is not black and white. I may see it as being black and white, but I know that a great many others do not. However, I believe that the vast majority of people in the UK, particularly in Northern Ireland, are opposed to any liberalisation or attempted liberalisation of the laws to allow for assisted suicide or, indeed, for the turning of a blind eye to it.

The greatest fear that I have with any move towards liberalising the law on assisted suicide in any way, shape or form is not for those articulate individuals who are seen as the face of assisted suicide, calling for changes in the law to allow it to happen or for those who assist not to be prosecuted. My fear is not for that group of people, who are clear in their views and espouse them articulately, but for the wide number of others, the vulnerable in our society. If we move to a situation in which assisted suicide is legal or a blind eye is turned to it in this country, it raises the question of what happens to the elderly, those with dementia, those who are very ill or even those who are depressed. Allied to that, I have another question: what about the individuals who exert a malign influence on those vulnerable people for their own benefit, perhaps even for material benefit? What is done to protect those vulnerable people?

3.45 pm

Some espouse the view that there are those who would be better off dead or who are a burden to their loved ones or to the society in which they live and that time, energy and resources are being taken up in looking after them. In proposing the motion, my colleague Mr Donaldson mentioned Baroness Warnock, who has been forthright in her views on and support for assisted suicide. Of people who have dementia, she said:

“you're wasting people's lives — your family's lives — and you're wasting the resources of the National Health Service.”

She went on to say:

“you'd be licensing people to put others down. Actually I think why not”.

There is a view, which is espoused by such individuals as Baroness Warnock, that people are a burden when they get to old age or if they suffer from a particular illness. If we liberalise the law on this issue in any way, my greatest fear is that the people who are going through a difficult time in their lives and who need our help and assistance will be put at risk.

When I was preparing for today's debate, I was touched by the words of another member of the House of Lords, Baroness Campbell of Surbiton. She suffers from spinal muscular atrophy and is confined to a wheelchair. She has said that she could meet, in many ways, the criteria for assisted suicide that people are putting forward. She does not want to see the law changed to allow for assisted suicide, particularly for disabled people. She said:

“Our belief was that if the state were to sanction any person to assist another in the ending of that person's life, it would switch the mindset of doctors and those who would help us in this country to thinking that that is what we really want — the very people who need every encouragement to live and not to succumb to society's prevalent view that our situation is so tragic, so burdensome, so insufferable that surely we must want to die.”

Those words are particularly poignant, coming as they do from somebody in Baroness Campbell's position.

Some Members said that, if assisted suicide were legalised, there would be safeguards in place. However, the evidence from other jurisdictions around the world that have entertained and played with the idea of allowing assisted suicide is that those safeguards will be absolutely worthless.

Jeffrey Donaldson cited the example of Holland, where 546 deaths in 2005 came about as a result of lethal drugs being prescribed but not at the request of the individuals who committed assisted suicide. In Oregon, in the United States, there are cases of “doctor-shopping”. In 2008, 50% of cases of assisted suicide in that state involved individuals who had been with their doctor for less than eight weeks. Therefore, people are finding doctors who are sympathetic to the idea of assisted suicide and who know nothing of the patient's circumstances, illness or condition.

There are also famous cases concerning the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland. Although we see that clinic in the headlines, a lot of people do not realise that that clinic is under investigation on several counts, including accusations of malpractice, of profiteering from death and, dangerously, of assisting a depressed man to kill himself. The evidence from around the world is not, as one Member said, that such cases will be rare. Many ongoing cases have possible malpractice and wrongdoing connected with them.

We are a civilised, caring, compassionate and, above all, Christian society, and, when looking after those who are ill or the most vulnerable, those qualities should be demonstrated. That should be what marks us out as a civilised, caring, compassionate and Christian society. We have some of the highest standards of palliative care in the world, and I echo the calls of others to see what we can do to help the likes of the Northern Ireland Hospice, Marie Curie Cancer Care and Macmillan Cancer Support to enhance the work

that they do and to help more people in those difficult times of their lives.

The widespread, almost universal, medical opposition to assisted suicide is something that we cannot ignore. Nor can we ignore the fact that not a single group that works with the terminally ill or the elderly supports the introduction of assisted suicide.

In conclusion, I will quote Baroness Campbell, who is an inspiration on the subject. In a debate in the House of Lords on the subject of assisted suicide she said:

“If I should ever seek death — there have been times when my progressive condition challenges me — I want a guarantee that you are there supporting my continued life and its value. The last thing that I want is for you to give up on me, especially when I need you most.”

Those words are extremely poignant. All lives are valuable, and we should not do anything, inside or outside the Chamber, that devalues human life. Assisted suicide is not an easy way out. It should not be viewed by the House or by any other legislature as an easy option to deal with a difficult issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the verdict in the Purdy case and the decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland to issue guidance on assisted suicide; and states its opposition to any attempt to legalise assisted suicide.

Catholic Church Services

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

Mr O’Dowd: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to withdraw his statement that he will “not attend a service in a Catholic Church”; further calls on the Minister to recognise that such a refusal to attend a Catholic Church service from an Executive Minister has no place in an inclusive society, and that as an Executive Minister he has a duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society regardless of their religious background.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I ask Members to read the motion that has been tabled, because it calls on a Minister of the Executive to take action. It does not call for action from an individual or anyone else with deeply held personal beliefs but from someone who has consciously decided that they wish to serve in a power-sharing Executive.

The House heard from the United States Secretary of State today, and she told us that the Assembly is involved in building peace on a day-to-day basis. We will not always agree, and there will be heated and agitated debate, but our role is to build peace. Furthermore, the role of the Executive, which came out of the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements, is to create a new beginning in this part of Ireland and to help the various communities and political factions to work together. It is not always easy to work together, and it sometimes proves difficult, but that is our role. However, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure feels that it is appropriate, as a Minister, to state publicly that he will not attend a service in a Catholic church. That is despite the fact that he made a conscious decision to become a Minister and to sign the Pledge of Office in which he pledged to work for all of the people in the North.

I am not a theologian, and the debate should not be on theology, religious beliefs, who is right or wrong or how they worship their God or their gods. That is not my role, nor is it the role of anyone in the House. We are politicians; our role is to legislate, and, in our unique circumstances, we must use our role to build peace on a day-to-day basis.

Can anyone imagine a Minister in any other Executive or Government in western Europe saying that he or she would refuse to attend a church service of another denomination? Can anyone imagine an English Minister saying that he or she would refuse to attend a service in a mosque or a Minister from the Twenty-Six Counties saying that he or she would refuse to attend a Presbyterian or Church of Ireland

service? If that happened there would be uproar, quite rightly. However, it seems acceptable for an Executive Minister here to say just that and, whether he meant it or not, to insult over 40% of the population.

It is no good people claiming that some of their best friends are Catholics, because that is like people saying that some of their best friends are black after a racist remark has been made. There is no point in saying that. To create a new beginning and to be friends with and respect someone, that relationship must be built on the principle of respect. You may not agree with them. I am not asking the Minister to attend a Catholic service and to take the sacraments, and I am not asking him to agree with the sacraments. I am not asking him to do anything. In fact, I am not even saying that he has to attend a Catholic service at some stage. However, I object to someone in a power-sharing Executive that has been built out of the need to build peace and end sectarianism saying that he will not attend a service in a Catholic church and then expecting that statement to go unchallenged.

In England, a row is going on in the media over an allegedly racist comment that a TV personality made to a guest on a dance show. The row has taken up many column inches and editorials in the broadsheets and red tops. The papers are challenging the notion that such racist comments are acceptable in the modern era. That debate has gone back and forth, with apologies being issued and reassurances given that racism was not at the heart of what was said and that the TV personality wishes to tackle racism. However, an Executive Minister, calculating or otherwise, insults 40% of the population with his comment, yet it has been allowed to pass us all by. I have no doubt that other comments that he has made since he came into office will also come into play.

The motion calls on the Minister to withdraw his statement. It does not call on him to attend a church service or to put one in his diary — it does none of that. Nevertheless, the question that lingers in most people's minds is —

Mr Weir: Is the Member saying that it does not matter what the Minister does, as long as he says what he does that he is not going to do? *[Laughter.]*

Mr O'Dowd: I will treat that intervention with the contempt that it deserves. I am saying that the motion does not call on him to put attending a church service in his diary. Other Members and I are challenging the Minister's belief or mindset that says that it is OK to come out with such statements and not expect a reaction.

The question that must be answered is "Why?". Why should he not attend a service in a Catholic church? I have attended services in churches of several different denominations, and I found them very interesting, very informative, very enjoyable and, in some ways, even

spiritual. I was not struck down by a bolt of lightning when I left those services. Does the Minister expect that he will be struck by a bolt of lightning when he leaves a Catholic service? Is that where the belief comes from? Or is there a more sinister belief that says that those who attend services of Catholic worship are lesser people? If that is the case, it is a very concerning stance to take.

It is bad enough for a member of the public to have such views, and it is bad enough for that person to express them. However, it is totally unacceptable for a Minister of this power-sharing Executive, which was formed out of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement, to make such a statement. Those agreements were put in place to build peace. One of the challenges that faces the Executive and individuals is how to tackle sectarianism and break down the old barriers that created sectarianism, hatred and division in our society. Part of peace building is looking deep into oneself and seeing what challenges one must overcome as an individual to ensure that peace is built in this society and to see that one's work and role is to build that peace and not cause greater division.

I wait in expectation for the Minister's response; perhaps he will explain why he felt it necessary to make such a statement, especially as he was being interviewed in his capacity as a Minister. I note that he will be responding to the debate as a Minister. That shows, therefore, that he believes that the issue fell into the ministerial pot. It is beyond me why he felt it necessary to come out with such remarks and why he has felt it necessary, since he has come into office, to target nearly every aspect of the Catholic, nationalist and republican community's lifestyle. That appears to be his hobby horse. He does not appear to be promoting arts and culture; he appears to be demonising people's arts and culture, and now he is demonising their religious beliefs.

4.00 pm

I am not here to lobby on behalf of any religious faith; all Churches have perfectly capable leaders, spokespeople and people in high office for that very reason. It is not my role. I am not taking the role on, and have no wish to do so. There are people to do that job. However, when a calculated insult seems to have been offered to 40% of the population, the House deserves, first, to hear from the Minister why he said what he did, and, secondly, to ask him to withdraw the statement, because there is no logical reason for it.

Everyone has their own personal beliefs, but the Minister knew when he took on the role as a Minister in the Executive that he would face challenges. If he is not up to the challenges of a power-sharing Executive, of creating peace on this island, and of tackling sectarianism, he should go even further than the motion requests and step aside. If he cannot

live up to the pledge and the spirit of his ministerial office, he should step aside, because unless we tackle sectarianism in all its forms, we are doomed to repeat our history. For a Minister to say that he will not attend a service in a Catholic church is blatantly sectarian.

Mr Campbell: The only thing on which I find myself in agreement with Mr O'Dowd is that Members should read the motion. That is always a good place to start. I would have thought that Members would have done so anyway without any persuasion on the part of the Member for Upper Bann.

When considering the motion, we have to look at the incident to which it refers. My understanding is that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure was asked a straightforward question on the radio. The question was not flagged up in advance, but was asked during an interview. When that happens, I assume that most people would expect an honest answer. Having got the honest answer, the honourable Member proceeded to table the motion.

To all intents and purposes, the motion seems to say that if a Minister has particularly religious or evangelical personal views and expresses those views openly and honestly in an interview, under certain circumstances that viewpoint almost automatically debars them from office. That is what the motion says. It appears to be an attempt to gag the Minister politically and to dictate what he can and cannot say. The movement to which the honourable Member for Upper Bann and all his colleagues belonged for more than 30 years was a dab hand at gagging, although it was not political gagging that it engaged in. It was more direct gagging, and events took courses beyond gagging. Fortunately, however, as I have said many times, we have moved on, even though sometimes the rhetoric seems to suggest that people want to go back.

The motion says that the comments to which it refers have no place in an inclusive society. I would have thought that the right of a Minister, an MLA, public representative, or, indeed, any member of society, to express their sincerely held views when asked a direct question is part and parcel of an inclusive society. I would have thought that it is the antithesis of an inclusive society to assert that people can say certain things as long as we agree with them, but if they say things to which we take exception, their part in an inclusive society will be withdrawn. That is what the motion appears to smack of.

Not in a radio interview, but during last week's Question Time to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, another Minister made comments in response to my honourable friend the Member for Strangford Mr Hamilton that caused offence in our community. The DUP did not table a

motion that stated that such comments are not part of an inclusive society.

Mr Weir: If the DUP were to follow the example of the party opposite, we would be so deeply offended that we would wait for around three months before tabling such a motion.

Mr Campbell: I am glad that the honourable Member mentioned that. It has not gone unnoticed that that length of time elapsed before the motion was tabled.

The honourable Member for Upper Bann Mr O'Dowd made the most spurious reference that I could imagine. He said that the motion was not an attempt to ask the Minister to attend a Catholic Church service. However, the motion addresses the fact that the Minister said that he will not do that. The Sinn Féin motion, therefore, attacks the Minister for not doing something that Sinn Féin does not want him to do. I am sure that some people would like the opportunity to psychologically analyse that. I would be interested to hear their conclusions.

Outside the Chamber, Minister Ritchie of the SDLP gave an interview in which she made a comment about the Orange Order. Many people on these Benches and outside the Chamber took exception to, and were offended by, those comments. However, we did not table a motion to ask her to withdraw those comments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will, Mr Deputy Speaker.

This is a free society. The Minister is entitled to his personal religious views, and he is entitled to express them. None of those views counteracts or runs contrary to the duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society. The Minister has eminently displayed his ability to do that, and he will continue to do so.

Mr Kennedy: On a day when much international opinion has been directed and focused towards Northern Ireland, it is deeply unfortunate that the Assembly is debating a motion of this nature. The motion does not reflect today's Northern Ireland — a Northern Ireland in which good neighbourliness and common decency lead people across the traditional religious, cultural and political divides to respect one another's religious traditions.

Many people in Northern Ireland will wonder exactly what the motion is about. It is quite noticeable that the Church leaders who were in attendance for this morning's proceedings have not deemed it necessary to stay for this debate. At weddings, funerals, carol services, Remembrance Day services and other civic functions throughout Northern Ireland, people from the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, people from

other faith communities and people from none interact with and show respect for one another. I strongly believe that that sense of good neighbourliness and common decency, which is shared by the vast majority of people across the community, has sustained Northern Ireland through its darkest days and can now provide the foundation for building a shared future.

I understand and strongly share the convictions of the reformed faith, but I regard my views as personal, and, in most cases, I regard them as private to me, even in the conduct of my public service as a Member of the Assembly or as a member of my local authority, Newry and Mourne District Council.

Of course, reference has been made to certain statements by various Ministers. It is worth reflecting that, in the past, the Education Minister praised a hunger striker as being a role model for young people. The deputy First Minister described partitionism as evil, which leaves those of us who believe that the creation of the state of Northern Ireland was both necessary and positive in no doubt as to what he thinks of us. It is no wonder, therefore, that OFMDFM is making little or no progress towards a shared future when the habit of making such statements is so deeply ingrained in certain parties.

On the specific matter that is dealt with by the motion; I must say that the right to freely exercise one's conscience and religious beliefs is a fundamental cornerstone of a liberalist, pluralist society. That belief is also strongly affirmed by the faith traditions that contribute so much to the life of our community. The very idea that we could compel a Minister to act contrary to his or her conscience is both deeply disturbing and illiberal.

The party that proposed the motion appears to have a new-found belief in respecting the sanctity of Catholic acts of worship. That comes from a party that, within recent living memory, sought to justify the murder and attempted murder of judges and their family members as they left Mass. That comes from a party that blatantly ignored the words of the spiritual leader of the Catholic tradition, the Pope, who, in Drogheda in 1979, said that "murder is murder is murder."

My party understands the obligation that public service places on elected representatives to respect our community's diverse religious traditions. It also understands that the free exercise of conscience must be respected. The motion does a huge disservice to both those truths. The Ulster Unionist Party will oppose it.

Mr P J Bradley: When I read the motion, my immediate thought was whether the issue is people's most important concern at present, or whether it was yet another attempt by Sinn Féin to divert attention from the Assembly's continual failure to deliver

anything of value to Northern Ireland's people. I will return to that matter later.

I want to state clearly that it is not for me or anyone else to tell Mr Nelson McCausland the layman which churches he should or should not visit. He is entitled to his convictions, however much they may differ from those of other people, and to practise them as he believes best.

However, it is a different situation when we talk about the obligation of Mr Nelson McCausland, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure. By accepting ministerial office, and knowing the demands that come with it, the Minister should, at all times, demonstrate a willingness to respect other people's religious convictions.

Like his ministerial colleagues, Minister McCausland is paid for his work out of the public purse. The taxes that go towards his income are not collected from one particular section of society. Taxpayers — whether they are Protestant or Catholic, belong to other denominations or are non-believers — contribute to the Minister's salary and to the running of his Department.

Therefore, I suggest that Minister McCausland is not exempt from carrying out all his ministerial obligations. His advisers must ensure that selectiveness is not permitted to sideline his obligations. He is expected to be a Minister for all people: he cannot be a Minister for some.

At a time of crisis in hospitals and throughout the Health Service, and when thousands of men who were once employed in the construction industry are doing what Phil Coulter wrote about — walking the dog — I ask whether Mr McCausland's comments should be elevated to such a major point of concern. The education system is an absolute mess. The conundrum of the transfer procedure remains the ultimate riddle about which the Minister of Education is still guessing.

Farming and many other industries are living through the greatest period of uncertainty that they have ever faced. During a time of such economic unrest, the best that Sinn Féin can come up with is to bring a divisive religious motion to the Assembly; a motion that, regardless of its failure or success, will do absolutely nothing for Northern Ireland's people.

4.15 pm

How many people went to bed last night either worrying about, or being delighted at, Minister McCausland's remarks? I imagine that very few did. In the privacy of their homes, the majority of people are more concerned about health and education issues, lack of employment opportunities, shortage of money for housing and home repairs, paying their mortgages, and other concerns.

On another line of thought, albeit somewhat hypothetical, Pope Benedict XVI is contemplating a visit to the United Kingdom in 2010. However, what will his Irish advisers, who are considering the possibility of inviting him to Ireland, make of the Minister's attitude and the fact that the Catholic religion has been dragged down to the level of political debate by Sinn Féin.

We all remember when Pope John Paul II was prevented from coming North in 1979 because of IRA violence. It would be ironic if history were to repeat itself and another Pope was advised to stay away from the North.

I am not qualified to make authoritative comments on religion or to advise anyone on religious practices. However, I wish to quote a deceased cleric who travelled the world promoting shared futures and peace. I ask the Minister and Sinn Féin to consider the words of the late Fr Mychal Judge, who visited Northern Ireland during millennium year.

Fr Judge had a message for all, and it was not directed at any specific religion or religious grouping. He said that, when people get to heaven, God would not ask them to which denomination they had subscribed but only how much they had loved him and how much they had shared their lives with others. He went on to say that his findings on the human condition were that such divisions persisted for reasons of power and control, and all that does is cause conflict and its inevitable consequences. I share the late Fr Judge's thinking. However, as the comments of Minister McCausland and Sinn Féin verify, the scene in Northern Ireland has, sadly, not really changed in almost a decade.

The SDLP will continue to promote the term "shared future". I occasionally hear other parties paying lip service to that. I do not view the Minister's comments as being part of any shared future strategy; however, I think that he must be given the chance to work towards that. I do not consider the ongoing antics of Sinn Féin, either inside or outside the Assembly, as being part of outreach programmes. In fact, the direct opposite is true.

Mr Lunn: The Minister's comments raise problems in respect of the requirements in the ministerial code and the Pledge of Office. I am surprised that no Member has yet read out the relevant sections of either of them, so I will.

The ministerial code requires Ministers to:

"operate in a way conducive to promoting good community relations and equality of treatment".

The Pledge of Office states that Ministers must:

"promote the interests of the whole community represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly towards the goal of a shared future".

I doubt that any Member would disagree that that is a basic requirement of holding public office. Neither the ministerial code nor the Pledge of Office actually mentions religion. However, they imply that Ministers are required to behave in an even-handed and impartial way. I know that the Minister will respond to the debate, so I want to know whether he thinks that his comments bring into doubt the impartiality that is implied by the Pledge of Office and the ministerial code.

My party had a considerable discussion about this issue today.

A Member: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Lunn: There might have been minor nuances in the difference of opinion.

One section of the party believes that a Member is perfectly entitled to his or her point of view, and that is my view. When I say "Member", I mean ordinary Members of the Assembly. However, I think that the Pledge of Office and the ministerial code put an extra onus on Ministers to go beyond that.

I wonder whether Mr McCausland has the same objection to going to other non-Protestant services. What is his stand on attending a mosque or a Jewish synagogue? The job of Minister carries certain requirements. I do not imagine that Ministers are frequently asked to go to church services. A mayor of a city might have to do that as part of his or her civic duty. I certainly had to, but perhaps Ministers do not have to.

If a very prominent figure in the arts world were to pass away in any other jurisdiction in the world — I hesitate to use a name, but I am talking about someone of the stature of Seamus Heaney — it would be normal for a Minister with responsibility for culture, arts and leisure in that jurisdiction to attend the funeral. I wonder how our Minister would respond to that sort of request.

We had a discussion about what the word "attendance" means. Does it mean participation? I will put that one to bed straight away; as far as I am concerned, if someone enters the precincts of a church during a service and stays for its duration, he or she is participating.

I respect Members' rights to make comments. Recently, Mr McCrea Jnr made a comment on the subject of the Pope being the Antichrist. I totally disagree with that, but it appears that he can say things such as that as a private citizen and even as an MLA. That is a pity. I think that it is a different matter when a person is speaking as a Minister, which brings me back to the Pledge of Office and the ministerial code.

The motion calls for the statement to be withdrawn. I do not think that there is much chance of that, and I do not think that it would make any difference if the statement were withdrawn. Such a statement cannot

really be withdrawn; it was a straightforward declaration. However, I agree with the second half of the motion, which states:

“as an Executive Minister he has a duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society regardless of their religious background.”

To me, that sums up the matter, perhaps more than the requirement for the withdrawal of the statement. The Alliance Party is going to have to support the motion, but I am trying to be even-handed about it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: Perhaps the previous Member who spoke goes to show that there is often nobody more illiberal than a liberal.

In recent days, some Members opposite have falsely accused my party of trying to drag Northern Ireland back to the 1950s and into some sort of one-party rule. Yet, if the motion is passed, its import will drag us back to the 1550s, to the days of Queen Mary and compulsory attendance at Catholic churches. That is the import of the motion, essentially. It indicates clearly that there is no place in any ministerial team for anyone who will not worship at every church available. Therefore, I urge everyone who believes in freedom of religion and freedom of conscience to join us in the “No” Lobby today. I hope that the Alliance Party will have some sort of last-minute Damascene conversion, if that is not an inappropriate phrase, and join us in the “No” Lobby.

Mention has been made, particularly by the Member who spoke previously, of the Pledge of Office and the need to engage with all sections of society. Everyone, including the Minister, accepts that there is a need to engage with all sections of society. He has not said that he will not go into a Catholic church; he has not said that he will not deal with the Catholic community; he has not said that he will not meet Catholic representatives. What the Minister said specifically is that he will not participate in a particular form of worship.

We are told, and it has been said in the debate, that we live in a free, liberal and tolerant society, although one may sometimes question some of the implications of that. Yet, it seems strange that there is a great sense of tolerance except when some Members express their religious views. In such cases, there is no tolerance at all. We have seen a number of occasions on which Members, having expressed a particular religious viewpoint, have been subjected to a form of witch hunt. That is particularly acute when it comes to those who express an evangelical Protestant viewpoint.

If a motion came before us condemning a Muslim Member of the Assembly for refusing to go to a particular religious service, everyone, rightly, would say that the motion was racist and sectarian in nature.

It would be fundamentally wrong to condemn a Muslim for refusing to go against his or her beliefs. However, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure seems to be an appropriate Aunt Sally for the Members opposite. If we are to accept the ideals of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, there must be freedom to attend church services, and freedom not to attend church services if someone believes that it is wrong to do so. Choosing a place of worship is a fundamental freedom.

Mention was made of respect. Henry III, King of Navarre, who was a Huguenot and became the King of France in the 1590s, famously said that Paris was worth a Mass. He meant that he would swallow his pride, swallow the Catholic wafer and take part in the Mass so that he could become a king. Does that show respect for religion? If the Minister went to a church service believing that it was fundamentally wrong and hypocritically went through the motions, would that show respect for the Catholic Church, or any religion?

I will peel away the layers of the motion to show what lies behind it. As has been said, it is not about the Pledge of Office, because the Minister is engaging with all sections of society. The motivation for the motion is not offence caused to the Catholic Church, because, as I said, the Members opposite were so offended that they tabled the motion a mere three months after the Minister's comments. The party opposite did not seem worried about offending the Catholic Church when it was engaged in 30 years of murder and mayhem: there was no great point of high theological principle back then. The motion is more about incidents such as that in Galbally, where there was a commemoration of terrorism, than it is about transubstantiation.

The Minister is a *bête noire* for the republican community and it seems to be “Kick Nelson McCausland Day”. That is not an acceptable basis —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Weir: We should promote and support freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Anyone who has a sincere belief in those ideals and in liberty will join us in the “No” Lobby.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a rá go mbeidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an ruin seo.

The subject of the motion is important because it goes to the heart of what is expected of Ministers as they carry out their duties. The debate comes on a day when the Assembly voted to adopt a new code of conduct. No smokescreen based on the visit of Hillary Clinton, or a Member mixing the Pope up with Maggie Thatcher, will change that. A Member said that the issue being debated may not be the most important

thing on people's minds. We accept that, but it is an important matter and should be debated in the Assembly.

On 9 July, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure said on the BBC that he would not, on a point of principle, attend a service in a Roman Catholic church. That is a complete contravention of any interpretation of the Pledge of Office. If that pledge is to mean anything, it must ensure that Ministers act and serve in the best interests of all people. In accepting their roles, all Ministers should commit to not making religious belief a barrier to carrying out their duties in an impartial and non-partisan manner.

The Minister's statement contradicts that sentiment and fundamentally undermines his ability to say that he is carrying out his duties without fear or favour. No one on these Benches, or anyone anywhere, would expect Ministers to alter any well-held views that they have, no matter how absurd or quaint others may regard them. However, adopting a blanket-ban approach to any religion undermines a Minister's ability to do his or her work. Gregory Campbell propagated the idea that a person who gives an honest answer to an honest question is absolved from all wrong. If a position is incorrect, it is incorrect: honesty does not come into it, and the Minister needs to learn that.

His stance is a product of days long since passed — they certainly should have long since passed. Indeed, we should perhaps have left such views behind in the Dark Ages. The Minister's statement is wrong, and that is why we have adopted our position.

4.30 pm

Mr Campbell: You used to shoot people.

Mr McCartney: Would you like to repeat that?

Mr Campbell: I am happy to take up the offer to make an intervention. The Member spoke about personally held views. Is he saying that, if a Minister is asked what his personally held religious views are and he answers honestly and if his view is of a particular kind, that automatically debars him from being a Minister?

Mr McCartney: No. I wish to make two points. First, that is not what you said from a sedentary position. You did not take the opportunity to repeat in your intervention what you said when you were sitting down.

Secondly, through the Chair —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: My apologies.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. All remarks should be made through the Chair, Mr McCartney.

Mr McCartney: Through the Chair, I want to note that that is not what the Member said when he was sitting down.

Secondly, I have already said that, even if a person holds an honest position, if it is incorrect, it is incorrect. Racists might be asked whether they believe that other races are inferior. They may give an honest answer and say that yes, they believe that they are, but they are wrong — that is the point that we are making here today. The Minister's position is wrong; that is all that we are saying. By being wrong, he is, in our opinion, in breach of the ministerial code.

None of this happens in a vacuum. Only last month, in a debate in this Chamber and on three radio programmes, the Minister gave his sense of what he believed to be the shared future. He is entitled to do that, and he was not a bit behind the door in saying how he felt that others had failed to meet his definition of a shared future. Indeed, the benchmark that he put forward for the definition of "shared" was how reasonable people would react to certain given situations. Therefore, the question for the Minister now is his own question: would it be reasonable for people in the twenty-first century to expect Ministers in an Executive — indeed, all Members of this Assembly — to attend religious services as part of their ministerial or Assembly functions? In my opinion, it would. The Minister's current position exposes his narrow view of what "shared" means. He is saying, "If my vision or sense of 'shared' is not accepted by other people, I rule you out, and you will not be part of that society."

The purpose of the motion is very simple. There are no hidden agendas. The motion is up front; there is no sense of my trying to say something that is not in the Order Paper, which I do not think that many Members have read. The Minister should take the opportunity today to address the matter by asking himself the very simple question —

Lord Morrow: Give him a chance.

Mr McCartney: Pardon?

Lord Morrow: I suspect that he will.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, order. We are not going to have a tennis match from one side of the Chamber to the other. Mr McCartney, you have 40 seconds.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The question for the Minister to ask himself is whether reasonable people would view him as someone who is not capable of acting in a fair and non-partisan way. His position, as stated, serves only to undermine his ministerial integrity. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Mr Simpson: If ever there was a debate in this Chamber that shows the true depth of Sinn Féin's moral, ethical and political bankruptcy, this is it. In the past year, we witnessed the fortieth anniversary of the civil rights movement. All those Members on the Sinn Féin Benches, including those who cobbled together

this motion, would claim to be inheritors of that movement. I may be wrong, but, from what I recall, one of the claims that supporters of the civil rights movement made is that nobody should be denied employment, discriminated against or denigrated on the grounds of his or her religion. However, Sinn Féin, in an official Assembly motion, has today tossed all those fine words in the bin. According to Sinn Féin, people are entitled to have their faith honoured and protected only as long as they are not an evangelical Protestant whose beliefs differ from the claims and activities of the ecumenical movement.

Of course, there is another side to this. What does Sinn Féin always tell us? It tells us that it follows in the footsteps of Wolfe Tone and wants to bring together Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. However, today we can see the truth: Sinn Féin never meant a word of it. Today, thanks to Mr O'Dowd, Mr McElduff and Mr McCartney, we see the truth: anyone who dissents from the modern ecumenical movement has no place in this new Ireland, as they call it.

For 40 years, members of the IRA, Sinn Féin's night shift, lay in the drains and crawled on their bellies to slaughter people on the sole grounds of their religion. During today's debate, the day shift has set out its stall. Whereas the IRA sought to deny Protestants the right to life, Sinn Féin seeks to deny the wrong kind of Protestant the right to hold a job. Perhaps we are supposed to be glad of that progress. Perhaps we are supposed to be glad that, instead of regarding all Protestants as legitimate targets who can be justifiably killed on the grounds of their religion, Irish republicanism now only takes the view that some Protestants should be denied the right to hold public position on the grounds of their religion. I am not inclined to be glad with such progress. Of course, that is the Sinn Féin view.

Where does the SDLP stand on the matter? Will it actively oppose Sinn Féin's attempt to create a modern-day Spanish Inquisition in Northern Ireland? The debate also raises serious questions for the Catholic Church and, indeed, for every component part of professing Christendom. Does it support this attempt to coerce a person's religious conscience? Does it subscribe to Sinn Féin's attempt to force individuals to recant their religious convictions? Does it endorse this crude but clear attempt to deny people the basic right to think, believe and worship according to the dictates of their conscience? We have a right to expect an answer from all those angles: from the SDLP, the Catholic Church and from across the religious spectrum.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Dominic Bradley.
[Laughter.] I call Mr Alban Maginness.

Mr A Maginness: I will try my best to substitute for my colleague.

A person who wants to be respected should respect. In our divided community, respect is required across the political divide. We must respect both political traditions and the people who represent them. Equally, there are religious differences in our society that are, in many ways, coterminous with the political divisions. We should respect one another's religion as much as we respect one another's political beliefs. Therefore, it behoves every Member, whether Catholic or Protestant, nationalist or unionist, to respect and to be respected. It is important that we all abide by and aspire to that principle.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

It is desirable that individual Members show such respect. However, Ministers in the Administration here have a duty to show that respect. A person who becomes a Minister, the chairperson of a council or the mayor of a borough must divest himself or herself, to some extent, of party-political association. That person must represent the whole community. Ministers are no different from the Lord Mayor of Belfast or the mayor of Lisburn; they should show respect for the whole community and represent the community at large.

I do not believe that, as Mr Simpson suggested, anyone is saying that people should compromise their religious beliefs. A person does not compromise his or her religious beliefs by entering a Catholic church in which a service is taking place. People do not have to participate actively, but they must show respect for those who belong to that religious tradition. It is important that Members of the Assembly who become Ministers do that. It is desirable for all Members of the House to do that, whether they are entering a Catholic church or a Protestant church or attending a Catholic service or a Protestant service. That should surely be everyone's basic duty.

The matter does not simply end there as far as religion is concerned. It extends further into the political field. There are those in this House, particularly on the Sinn Féin Benches, who would refuse to attend any event at which members of the British Royal Family were present. Surely that is wrong, but I do not hear Sinn Féin Members saying that it is wrong. Indeed, the Member for Upper Bann Mr O'Dowd criticised the leader of the SDLP recently for attending the opening of the new wing of Altnagelvin Area Hospital in Derry because the Queen took part in the official opening.

The application of any standard must be consistent; it seems to me that, in this matter, Sinn Féin is being inconsistent and is open, rightly, to criticism. It may well be that, as P J Bradley said, this is simply a diversion from the profound political difficulties in

which Sinn Féin finds itself at this time. Whether or not that is true, there are principles in this divided society that politicians should adhere to; they should represent the common good, and they should do things that, perhaps, they do not like, such as attending a Catholic service in a Catholic church. If that creates goodwill in our community, helps to bridge the divide and helps to create a shared future, surely that is a good thing.

I know Nelson McCausland personally, and I know that he has deep religious feelings and beliefs. I respect those feelings and beliefs, but I do not believe that asking him to attend a Catholic church service compromises his religious beliefs. I believe that he, in fact, enhances his religious beliefs by creating in our society an open and respectful culture.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it now practice in this House that, when a Member does not turn up for a debate, one of his party colleagues is called in his place? That is in sharp contrast to what happened to one of my colleagues when he was about 45 seconds late for a debate.

Mr Speaker: The Member knows that I was not in the Chair at that time. I will consider the issue, and I am prepared to come back to the Member directly or to the House.

Mr Bresland: This is not only a disgraceful motion; it is offensive, bigoted, sectarian and intolerant. Those who tabled it should hang their heads in shame, but at least it reminds us that their commitment to equality comprises nothing but hypocrisy and emptiness. Like squawking parrots, Mr O'Dowd, Mr McElduff and Mr McCartney have been trained to repeat wonderful words such as "equality" and phrases such as "inclusive society", "parity of esteem" and "ending sectarianism", but I fear that they have absolutely no idea what those words really mean. They have no understanding of fairness or true equality; indeed, they are the enemies of those values. They have no interest in them; they never had and never will.

Sinn Féin has long talked of its vision for a new Ireland in which everyone, Protestant and Catholic, would be equal. It was saying that even during the years of the IRA's campaign of terror, when people were murdered simply because they were Protestants.

We did not believe Sinn Féin then, and we do not believe it now. That party will, of course, tell us that it has no problems with people holding religious views, as long as they keep them to themselves and do not let those views affect how they do their work.

4.45 pm

The motion basically states that, if people hold public office, they are not allowed to have a

conscience, especially if it is a Protestant one, and that they must attend a form of worship that they do not agree with and cannot accept. Again, those are the bully-boy tactics that Sinn Féin is long famous for. It reminds me of Germany in the days of Hitler. Perhaps Sinn Féin would like all Protestants to be marked with a "P", just to make things simpler.

To see an example of religious bigotry, sectarianism and hatred, we need look no further than Sinn Féin. The motion states that the Minister has:

"a duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society regardless of their religious background."

I agree entirely. That is what my colleague Nelson McCausland has done since he took up office. He will continue to do that and do it well without the need to attend a service in a Roman Catholic church. How does Sinn Féin square the motion with the refusal of its MPs to attend Westminster? Surely, by the logic of the motion, their absence from Westminster is wrong?

I fear that the bigotry displayed in the motion is also to be found on the SDLP Benches. That party's record on the issue is not good either. The great civil rights party has been quick to condemn evangelical Protestants who have expressed strong religious views. SDLP Members have argued that such views are not compatible with public office. How does the SDLP feel about a Protestant being ordered to attend a Mass against his wishes?

Where does the Roman Catholic Church stand on the motion? I would be very interested to know. If the motion is passed, it will send out an alarming signal not only to Protestants but to all who value and cherish civil and religious liberty. I oppose the motion.

Lord Browne: I rise to support — to oppose the motion. *[Interruption.]* I support the previous Member, and I oppose the motion. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Lord Browne: It is my firm conviction that any Executive Minister has a duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society, whether the person or persons concerned are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or atheist. However, I utterly reject the narrow-minded and baseless assertion that adherence to a religious principle that requires non-attendance at a service based on different theological principles has no place in an inclusive society.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Lord Browne: I have just started, but I will give way.

Mr A Maginness: The Member states that this is a principled objection. Will he explain how non-attendance at a Catholic service is a principled objection?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Lord Browne: I regard the right of an individual to decide whether he wishes to attend a particular religious service or to attend none as a vital component of his or her religious and civil liberties. I am sure that Mr Maginness would agree.

The House should not assume from what I have said that I believe that there are no political or religious principles that may, in certain circumstances, lead to social division. I recently read that Islamic religious law, as applied in Iran, permits a man to marry a non-Muslim woman but forbids a woman to marry a non-Muslim man. Clearly, that religious rule would appear to most of us in this society to be socially divisive and discriminatory against women. However, a rule requiring non-attendance at a particular religious service seems to be completely unobjectionable. It would have absolutely no effect on the people participating in that service; they would be completely free to worship as they please and without hindrance.

The Minister has demonstrated, on many occasions, his full commitment to the building of a shared and inclusive society in Northern Ireland. In the short period since his appointment, he has engaged fully with all the major sporting organisations, and he has promoted artistic and cultural events across all sections of the community. In the light of all that, the wording of the motion is particularly regrettable. Indeed, the motion's implication that the Minister is not fulfilling his duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society could be considered inflammatory.

There is no doubt that the motion has caused great offence to several religious groups and has perhaps made community tensions a little worse. The Minister is a man of great integrity and high moral principle. It is utterly absurd and offensive to call on him to recognise his duty to society, given that he has never neglected that duty in any way. I strongly oppose the motion.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland): Soon after my appointment to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I was interviewed by the BBC. In the course of that interview, the journalist asked me whether I would attend a service in any church at all. I was honest with him and explained that, although I would attend a cultural or community event in a Roman Catholic building, I would not attend a service of Roman Catholic worship.

John O'Dowd said that the view that I expressed was a calculated insult. I remind him of the next sentence of the interview, in which I stated that my position does not mean that I do not have good relationships with Roman Catholic people. I do not want to offend them, and I am sure that they do not want to offend me. In the course of my ministerial duties, I have attended a concert by the Ulster Youth

Choir at Clonard monastery already, and I may well attend an event in that Roman Catholic building again in the future. I have attended events in Roman Catholic schools, and I am sure that I will do so again.

For me, the issue is one solely of worship. I emphasise that because, as reported in the latest edition of the 'Limavady Northern Constitution', Sinn Féin councillor Paddy Butcher said that I had refused to enter a Catholic church. Gerry Kelly made the same point in a Radio Ulster interview. By the time that the motion was proposed today, however, Sinn Féin had managed to check the facts and get them right. That message should be passed back to Paddy Butcher and to Gerry Kelly, given that he is not here.

I must add that I did not raise the issue, because I believe that it relates to a situation that will not arise. I merely answered a question that was put to me, and I stated something that is a matter of personal conscience. I emphasise that I am a Minister of culture and sport, not a minister of theology. However, both John O'Dowd and Alban Maginness asked why I hold the view that I hold. I hold it for a number of reasons, and I assure John O'Dowd that it has nothing to do with bolts of lightning.

There are significant theological differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism that concern fundamental issues of the Christian faith. This is not the place in which to explore those differences, but I take the position that I have because of such theological differences. I will say in passing that if one looks at the standard publications and documents of the Roman Catholic Church and the historic Protestant statements of faith, right across the range of Protestant denominations, those differences are noted, whether they are in the Westminster Confession of Faith of Presbyterians, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of Ireland, John Wesley's sermons and notes, the Savoy Declaration of the Congregationalists or the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. There are many people to whom such doctrinal differences will mean nothing at all, but, as a Christian, saved by the grace of God on the cross of Jesus Christ, I hold that those are important matters that go to the heart of my Christian faith, because they are about salvation, redemption and grace; they are not peripheral matters.

I believe also in civil and religious liberty and in freedom of conscience. Those are long-established principles that can be traced back 300 years. Indeed, the concepts of civil and religious liberty were very much at the heart of the Bill of Rights and other documents associated with the Glorious Revolution. Moreover, in a more contemporary light, the right to freedom of conscience is enshrined in international human rights law, and, if it is a right, it is for everyone, including MLAs and Ministers in the Executive. I will add also that we have seen the Roman Catholic Church

demand that same right of freedom of conscience, especially in areas such as the work of Roman Catholic adoption societies, and I agree with those organisations on that matter. However, the Sinn Féin motion before us seeks to deny a Minister the right to religious liberty and freedom of conscience and is a denial of those basic human rights.

It seems that Sinn Féin is demanding that, in order to hold ministerial office, a person should be required to attend worship in a church of a particular denomination. That is something for which there is an interesting historical precedent. In 1704, soon after the death of King William III, the Test Act was introduced in Ireland, and it required that anyone holding public office should attend communion in the established Church of Ireland. Dissenting Protestants and Roman Catholics who did not attend communion in the parish church were, therefore, barred from public office. The effect of the Test Act was that all the Dissenters, or Presbyterians, on the corporations in Belfast, Londonderry and other towns were removed from office in what was an act of religious discrimination. Eventually and thankfully, the Test Act was abolished, and the cause of religious liberty in Ireland prevailed, but now it seems that Sinn Féin and some others want to introduce a new Test Act of their own making. They want to promote religious discrimination, and anyone who supports the motion is supporting religious discrimination.

Mr Elliott: Does the Minister accept that it is duplicitous of Sinn Féin to propose such a motion when only a few weeks ago, it objected to the local authority in County Longford giving a civic reception for a group of Orangemen from County Fermanagh who were visiting there?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for that helpful intervention and for that information, which sheds some light on the attitudes and motivations of members of Sinn Féin.

The motion refers to an “inclusive society”, but an inclusive society is a tolerant society and one that respects the personal faith of every individual. Therefore, an inclusive society has a place in it for the evangelical Protestant, just as much as for anyone else. How can society be inclusive if there is no place in it for those of us who are traditional evangelical Protestants? How can a society that excludes evangelical Protestants from ministerial office be inclusive?

5.00 pm

Alban Maginness used the word “respect”. I always seek to respect the rights of others, and I simply ask that others respect my right of conscience and my right to civil and religious liberty.

I do not disagree with the final part of the motion: how could anyone? I agree that:

“an Executive Minister has a duty to serve, respect and engage with all sections of society regardless of their religious background.”

However, that should be true of all Members of the Assembly. I serve, respect and engage with all sections of society, irrespective of their religious background, and that includes the Roman Catholic community. I, as an evangelical Protestant, may share common cause with the Roman Catholic Church on a range of social and moral issues, particularly on the sanctity of human life, as I am unashamedly pro-life and pro-family.

It is interesting to recall that when the forum on the bill of rights discussed the right to life of the unborn child, I and other members of my party voted for a pro-life position and engaged with a representative of the Roman Catholic Church on that and other matters. The party that sits opposite, and whose members tabled the motion, took the contrary view.

The interview that gave rise to the motion took place at the start of July, and it is now the second week of October. Why is Sinn Féin raising the issue three months later? Is Sinn Féin seeking to divert attention from its shortcomings?

Mr O'Dowd: It was summer recess.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Is it seeking to divert attention from the issues that I raised about its abuse of GAA premises at Galbally? Is Sinn Féin seeking to divert attention from its failure to embrace a shared and better future?

In my private life, I have always sought to show respect to members of other Churches. I may disagree with them and I may express that disagreement, but I respect their right to hold their views. Most people recognise that the real reason for today's belated and discriminatory motion is that Sinn Féin is seeking to divert attention from itself. The motion is framed in the language of liberalism, but it is intolerant, inconsistent and discriminatory.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ní nach ionadh, beidh mise ag labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. Ní aontaím le PJ Ó Brollacháin nuair a deir sé nach bhfuil an díospóireacht seo tábhachtach: tá sí thar a bheith tábhachtach.

Unsurprisingly, I will speak in favour of the motion. I disagree with earlier contributors to the debate who suggested that it is not particularly important; it is an extremely important debate.

John O'Dowd commenced the debate by reminding Minister Nelson McCausland that he is a Minister in the power-sharing Executive. As such, he has signed the Pledge of Office that includes the obligation:

“to serve all the people ... equally”.

Mr O'Dowd asked how it would be received if a Minister in England or elsewhere in Ireland said that he or she would not attend a mosque or a Presbyterian church. There would, of course, be uproar.

The word "respect" was much used throughout the debate. John O'Dowd suggested that the Minister was guilty of making a calculated insult and causing offence to more than 40% of the population of the Six Counties, and he asked why he had done so. In the latter part of his speech, the Minister set about answering that question.

Gregory Campbell suggested that people are entitled to articulate their religious or evangelical views, and that that should not debar anyone from office. He said that Simon Hamilton was greatly offended by Martin McGuinness last week. Peter Weir wondered why there was a three-month delay in bringing this motion before the Assembly. That was answered very recently by John O'Dowd when, from a sedentary position, he explained that there was a summer recess.

Mr Weir: Will the Member therefore confirm that this was the first opportunity to have this motion put the Order Paper and that Sinn Féin has not selected other motions ahead of it?

Mr McElduff: I do not know whether the Member is suggesting that there are more important motions, but we suggest that this is a very important motion. We went through the normal procedure to secure its tabling today.

We were told that the Minister has, so far, eminently displayed his ability to act as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That would not be universally accepted in the Catholic community, the nationalist community or the republican community. If a vox pop were done, it would be evident that Nelson McCausland is a Minister who does not inspire any confidence at all in the wider community.

Danny Kennedy suggested that the motion was bad timing. Of course, there would never be a good time for a motion like this from Danny's point of view. I think that, at one point, Danny said that he would vote in favour of the motion, but he may have changed his stance. He said that it was all about interaction with good neighbours, and he talked about partition. He then confused what the Pope said at Drogheda with what Margaret Thatcher said.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not, in this case.

Unfortunately, P J Bradley said that this debate was not the most important that could come before the Assembly. I agreed with much of what he and Alban Maginness said, but it occasionally appears that if Sinn Féin says that today is Monday, the SDLP will say that today is not Monday; it is the day before Tuesday. It

increasingly appears that the SDLP will say that something is black if Sinn Féin says that something is white.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that Sinn Féin contradicts itself in relation to its criticism of the Minister because it maintains a ban on its members or Ministers attending any function that the Royal Family attends? How can he reconcile that with the position of Sinn Féin in relation to the Minister?

Mr McElduff: The Member is introducing a non sequitur to the debate. It is not relevant. My point was — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McElduff: My point was that the SDLP, in the Latin vernacular, tends to play ad hominem instead of addressing the issues.

Trevor Lunn was much more constructive. I welcome the fact that the Alliance Party will support the motion. That is an example of a party reading the motion on its merits and individual strengths and then, in its wisdom, deciding that this motion is worthy of support: no other agendas, just worthy of support.

Peter Weir took us back to the 1500s. He felt that Nelson McCausland has become an appropriate Aunt Sally for Sinn Féin. However, if Peter were to examine the track record of Nelson McCausland in his three months as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure with respect to a whole range of issues, he would see that Nelson is doing quite a good job of alienating himself from —

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not give way in this case.

Raymond McCartney said that a lot of the debate was a smokescreen and that, effectively, the Minister's comments are a contravention of any possible interpretation of the ministerial pledge. I agree. Raymond talked about this being a product of the Dark Ages.

He reminded Members that the Minister is good at lecturing us all on a shared and inclusive future. However, ask any nationalist or Catholic member of the public about Nelson McCausland and they will echo the 'Irish News' letter-writer who said that he may have received a broad education, but he is extremely narrow-minded.

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I will not; I will proceed to the end of my speech now, if the Member does not mind, but I hope that he is keeping well, apart from that. *[Laughter.]*

David Simpson seemed to be a latter-day convert to republicanism when he quoted Wolfe Tone; I welcome that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McElduff: Mr Simpson was a good advocate for Theobald Wolfe Tone, and he asked where the SDLP stood on the motion. Alban Maginness then set about answering that question, and, again, respect was the key word for Mr Maginness. He felt that one does not compromise religious beliefs by entering a chapel where mass or a Catholic service may be taking place. Mr Maginness then went on to say that the motion was a diversion from Sinn Féin's "profound political difficulties".

That was Alban Maginness talking to Sinn Féin, the party that topped the poll in the European elections in which Alban failed to secure a seat, yet he lectures us on our "profound political difficulties". He talked about disagreeing with Sinn Féin when it did not seem to make any sense.

Allan Bresland then spoke —

Mr McNarry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you guide the House on whether it would be correct for the Member to declare whether or not he is speaking as Chairman of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. That is certainly not a point of order.

Mr McElduff: I will resist the opportunity to ask whether David is speaking as Deputy Chairperson of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

Mr McNarry: I am ready to answer that.

Mr Speaker: Order. Take your seat. *[Interruption.]*

Order. Every Member has had an opportunity to speak on the motion. I certainly did not call Mr McElduff as Chairperson of the Committee; that was absolutely clear. Carry on, Mr McElduff.

Mr McElduff: Well, I think —

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: Not in this instance, David. *[Laughter.]*

The Member knows fine well, or at least he ought to know, that I am speaking in a party political capacity.

East Belfast Member Wallace Browne said that he supported the motion, then quickly corrected himself. He said that Nelson McCausland was a man of great integrity and high moral principle — I am sure that he owes Wallace Browne a tenner for that.

I will move to a conclusion. The Minister é féin denied that his remarks were a calculated insult and once more went down the line of saying that some of his best friends are Catholics, as outlined by John O'Dowd. The Minister said that he had been to Clonard Monastery; we welcome that. I again ask whether there is an element of incitement to those who are not theologically minded or theologically aware of the great differences of salvation, redemption and faith when a Minister publicly declares what sets us all apart.

I invite the Minister to in future concentrate more often on a public declaration of commonalities and similarities. I will end with that. I ask everybody to unite behind the motion.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 35; Noes 41.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mrs M Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Dr Deeny, Dr Farry, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lunn, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr F McCann and Mr McKay.

NOES

Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr T Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Adjourned at 5.27 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 13 October 2009

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Employment and Learning that he wishes to make a statement regarding the outcome of the review of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement. However, before I do that, I thank you for the flexibility that you demonstrated yesterday when we had particular pressures in our programme.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly of my Department's publication of a review of the Construction Industry Training Board. During an Assembly debate on 25 February 2008, I announced that, although the next review of CITB was due in 2009, I was bringing it forward to start in 2008. My decision was made in acknowledgement of the serious and persistent concerns that were expressed by the construction industry here and by political representatives on the value for money that employers receive in return for their levy payments. That review has concluded, and I have accepted the recommendations and asked my officials to work together with CITB on their implementation.

The review took place in two stages. At the first stage, the consultants were asked to address the question of whether there was a continued need for CITB and the levy. They concluded that the CITB and the levy were necessary interventions for the well-being of training in the construction sector. At the second stage, the consultants identified four options: option 1, CITB to remain unchanged; option 2, CITB to remain as a non-departmental public body but with a rationalisation of its activities; option 3, CITB Northern Ireland to merge with CITB-ConstructionSkills in Great Britain; option 4, CITB to be funded with a voluntary rather than statutory levy. Those options were assessed, and

the conclusion was reached that the CITB should remain as a non-departmental public body with rationalised activities.

The review recommends that the CITB retain its non-departmental public body status and the statutory levy; that the CITB and ConstructionSkills — one of the sector skills councils — fully merge under one management structure and one brand and operate from one location; and that the levy threshold be increased from £15,000 to £80,000, thus exempting small businesses from paying levy. The review also recommends that the legislation be changed to remove air conditioning, refrigeration, plumbing, utilities and gas installation from the scope of the levy; that the administrative burden be reduced on employers and the CITB, with grants to be applied for by training providers; that the CITB stop delivering direct training and contract that work out and form strategic partnerships with centres of excellence; and that the CITB running costs be significantly reduced so that levy payers get a greater proportion of their contributions back via training grants or other benefits.

I have introduced the necessary legislation to increase the levy threshold to £80,000. From 1 September 2009, smaller employers no longer must pay a levy. That accounts for almost half of CITB levy payers. That is an important measure to support small businesses, particularly in the current economic climate. Other legislative changes will follow over the next two years to allow for the other changes that I have outlined.

To reduce overheads, the CITB anticipates that it will reduce its staffing level by around one third, and it is currently assessing the skills profile required for the new organisation. Departmental officials are working with the CITB, and they will keep the implementation of the changes under close review. To assess the impact of the changes on the construction sector, I anticipate another formal evaluation in the two to three years after the report has been implemented.

The various efficiencies recommended in the report will result in a significant year-on-year increase in the proportion of levy returned to our construction industry. The report provides an important blueprint for the future of the CITB, which has a crucial role to play in supporting our construction sector during and after our recovery from the recession.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Furthermore, as the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I praise the Minister's willingness to bring such issues to the Committee and to the House. I know that several Committee members will be interested in the statement, as its subject matter has been discussed several times in Committee.

I welcome the increase in the levy threshold from £15,000 to £80,000, because, as the Minister indicated in his statement, small employers — a group that accounts for more than 50% of those who currently pay the levy — will no longer have to pay it. With that in mind, will the Minister outline what impact the review of the CITB will have on the quality of construction industry apprenticeships, which, up until now, have been seen as less than perfect? Furthermore, will he outline the rationale behind the changes that he intends to make to the appointment of members to the CITB board? Have any objections been raised so far?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Raising the levy threshold will remove approximately 1,200 employers from the levy regime. As the Chairperson will know, I have received several representations from Members who have brought delegations to meet me.

This was a continuous theme throughout. A threshold of £15,000 is very low: it effectively means one employee. We felt that that was unreasonable and the bureaucracy unnecessary. It takes almost half of those people out of the frame altogether, and members of the public — employers in particular — will be happy to have it in place in the current circumstances.

The Member raised the issue of board members. As a non-departmental public body, the board is appointed under OCPA guidelines. However, it represents various sectors; some board members represent employees and some represent employers. I have had representations in this regard, and the principal issue that has been raised is that perhaps the small and medium-sized enterprise sector may not have the representation that some people think that it ought to have. It has been drawn to my attention that the larger organisations in the construction sector may have a disproportionate influence on events. I cannot confirm the veracity of those points, but the Member asked me directly whether I had received any representations on the matter: I have, and they are along the lines that I have outlined. In appointing members to the board, I will take into account the representations that I have received. I am not in a position to confirm the veracity of those representations, but I certainly have received them. I suspect that the Member may also have had similar lobbying, because people who would come to me would go to the Committee frequently or vice versa. It may be something that we can take up together and discuss in the future.

The Member asked about the quality of apprenticeships, and I will give a pen picture of where we are. As of 8 October, there were 1,629 apprentices registered in construction-related occupational areas, which represents about 15% of the total people registered with the Department on its funded apprenticeships. However, that is about 50% less than it was before; the previous levels were much higher. However, as the

Member knows, the construction sector in particular has been hard hit by the downturn. We have just over 1,600 apprentices, but that represents only 50% of what it has been previously.

We have introduced measures to try to help apprentices who have been made redundant in the downturn, and the Member will be aware of the Skillsafe scheme. There are defined apprenticeship frameworks for construction training which have operated successfully for some years. I am aware that the Construction Employers Federation, in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board and the joint council, has come forward with proposals for a revised scheme. We will consider those and respond in due course.

There is a particular difficulty in the industry because of the high percentage of people who are self-employed, and that, undoubtedly, creates an issue with apprentices. It also creates an issue with health and safety. The CITB has a mobile unit, which will continue to operate under the CITB's direction. However, it will probably buy in some training capacity. There is no doubt that construction is one of the more difficult industries. The rationale for retaining was that, because of the unique nature of the industry, it was felt that if we just relied on the normal regime a lot of people could well slip through the net and not get the proper access to the necessary training and apprenticeships.

10.45 am

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement. Of the four options, the second, which includes a number of recommendations, is preferred. One of those is that the legislation be changed to remove air conditioning, refrigeration, plumbing, utilities and gas installation from the scope of the realigned Construction Industry Training Board. Can the Minister tell us how those training needs will be catered for? Can he also confirm whether any companies or firms have been identified to deliver the direct training that is normally delivered by CITB but which is now to be contracted out?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: With regard to the latter point, those companies have not yet been identified, but the CITB will have to contract for that service to be provided in the normal way. I can write to the Member on the issues, but I presume that the CITB will indicate a public requirement, so it will be a procurement exercise in the normal fashion. The CITB will indicate that it needs the provision of particular training and can then contract out for it. Instead of doing it all in-house, the training provision will be contracted out to various providers. As far as I am aware, those providers have not, as yet, been identified, and I am not aware of any contracts having been awarded, but that is part of the process in which we are engaged.

The removal of air conditioning, plumbing and other trades from the scope of the CITB will bring us

into line with the rest of the UK, where that has already occurred. Training in those sectors will be provided in the same way as training in every other sector. Construction is the only sector left where there is a specific levy option. As the Member will know, there used to be four or five boards with a levy power covering retailing and other sectors, but it was felt that, in the current circumstances, the unique nature of the construction sector meant that it was still important to have a board with a levy power.

Mr McClarty: Like my Committee colleagues before me, I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that it is important and timely to consider the scope of which firms are defined as liable to pay the CITB fees?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: That issue is possibly one of the most contentious, because a levy is a form of tax, and no company likes to be eligible to pay a tax; therefore being in or out of scope, as it is called in the sector, is very significant. I suspect that the Member is aware that people have been lobbying significantly in the past on the issue of which firms should be in scope and which should be out. There are, however, complications.

First, some companies engage in some activities that are in scope and some that are not. For example, if more than half the payroll of a company happens to be in an activity that comes under the auspices of the CITB, that company's entire wage bill is deemed to be included. Many such companies feel that that is unfair because not all their activities are in scope yet they are charged as if they were. I will review that issue to assess whether it continues to be fair and reasonable and see what alternative means and methodologies could be adopted. I am considering whether changes are required to what is called the "50% rule". I have received representations from the Mineral Products Association in Great Britain and have planned meetings with that organisation and with ConstructionSkills in Great Britain, where similar arrangements exist. We will consider that to see whether some changes can be made to satisfy those who have made known their concerns.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement. In response to a question from the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, the Minister referred to the outsourcing of some of the training programmes. Will the Minister outline the steps that his Department could take to ensure that locally based organisations have an opportunity and will be available to conduct training on the programmes?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Members regularly reflect that concern about outsourcing generally and not only outsourcing that is specifically to do with training. I am sure that most Members, at some stage, have been concerned about that sort of

issue. The Member will be aware that the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) of the Department of Finance and Personnel carries out procurement exercises on behalf of all Departments. I am not sure whether the CPD carries out procurement exercises on behalf of the CITB or whether the CITB carries them out itself. I assume that the CPD carries them out on behalf of the board.

Everyone is governed by European rules on procurement, which are explicit. One cannot favour a company because of its physical location. Some local companies may have cost advantages because they are already here, and that should be reflected in their bid. However, the Member will know that it is not possible to direct, to localise or to give advantage to a local company over a company that might bid from outside Northern Ireland. That consideration has been made regularly on all types of procurement issues, and the law in that area is very complicated. The Department of Finance and Personnel has the expertise, and it conducts most procurement competitions on behalf of Departments.

The process, however frustrating, must be followed, because, when people feel that they have been discriminated against, they often take their case to court. The Member will be well aware of that; contractual issues are still being fought over in Departments. The Department for Employment and Learning cannot guarantee that any outsourced contracts will be directed to local companies; it is up to a company to make the best bid. That is the only way in which such matters can be determined, and the Member, as an enthusiastic European, will be well aware of where the rule comes from.

Mr Ford: I also thank the Minister for his statement. I am sure that his speedy action on increasing the threshold for the levy to £80,000 will be extremely welcome to a number of very small employers. Will he indicate the timescale in which the merger of the CITB and ConstructionSkills will be achieved and the likely impact on the total number of jobs in the merged body?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: It is estimated that the CITB will reduce its staff complement by around one third. The merger of the two bodies onto one site is already under way, and the joint operation will be based at the current CITB site at Nutts Corner. The bodies are looking at the new skills profiles that will be needed so that they can assess the qualifications and the type of personnel that they will require. That process will be settled before long. I cannot give the Member precise timing, but, if it would be helpful to him, I will inform him as soon as possible. The number of personnel has been reduced by around one third, and amalgamation on the Nutts Corner site is taking place.

Mr T Clarke: I join other Members in thanking the Minister for his statement. He said that direct training

will now be contracted out. Does he have any concern that, when that training is contracted out, it will not be of the same high standard as that which the CITB delivered? I am sure that part of the rationale for contracting out is that it is cheaper. However, the word “cheaper” sometimes raises concerns that the same level of training will not be delivered.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member made an important point. Throughout the consideration period and when Members brought their delegations to me, a number of employers made the continual criticism that they did not get the return that they should have because the CITB’s administration and running costs soaked up too many of their resources. Clearly, in recent years, the pattern has been that contracted-out services are, by and large, in most cases, more cost-effective than those that are delivered in-house. Therefore, that balance must be struck.

I assure the Member that my Department would not be interested in maintaining a board if its training standards were unsatisfactory. Indeed, it is fair to say that the Education and Training Inspectorate has a role to play in examining the training that is provided and reporting thereon. There must be quality control; there is no point contracting out unsatisfactory training. Therefore, I take the Member’s point. I assure him that the Department would not go down that route if it thought that the level of training was unsatisfactory. However, I am sure he accepts that we must ensure that the minimum amount of money is taken up by administration and that the maximum amount goes back into the sector.

We are most concerned about the small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the vast majority of businesses in the sector. The Member will know of companies in his area that are of that type and size. They are very small companies. It is our job to ensure that the maximum amount of resource is redirected to them. The Department believes that those companies and their employees would not necessarily get training if that mechanism were not in place.

I assure the Member that we will keep quality under constant review, because that will determine whether the board is working. As I said in my statement, we will look at the situation in two or three years’ time to ensure that it is working. I assure the Member that that will be one of my Department’s top priorities.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. My question is about value for money, which the Minister touched on in his previous response. Just one quarter of the survey’s respondents believed that the CITB offered value for money. Can the Minister reassure the House that the review’s recommendations will provide value for money, particularly for those small organisations

and businesses that do not believe that they received it previously?

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

That question is at the core of the matter. If the answer to that question is no, we have wasted time and effort and must, therefore, move on. Value for money provides the rationale for what we do. The Department has responded to the fact that too many people were involved. We tried to deal with that. We have cut down to 1,300 the number of companies that will be included, compared with double that number previously.

As regards quality and identifying the right service to deliver, we are trying to reduce administration costs so that as much as possible of the levy is redistributed in training grants to various companies.

11.00 am

We have said that we want that to go to smaller companies. The delegations that a number of Members brought to see me continually reflected that theme. They said that the CITB was a bit top-heavy, that its administration costs were too high, and that it should be amalgamated with the other body to ensure that it was more streamlined.

Only time will tell whether we have been successful; however, we will continually monitor that. In view of that fact, I think that the Committee broadly agreed that changes had to be made so that people feel that they are getting value for money. Between us, we will monitor this.

If there is another review in a couple of year’s time and things are not satisfactory, we will have to take a different view. Value for money is certainly at the core of the issue. That will be the determining factor as to whether we are successful in the changes that we are proposing today.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I, too, welcome the Minister’s statement. Does the Minister agree that many construction firms, especially small ones, will welcome the increase in the levy threshold? How will that help them on the ground to come back from the recession?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am sure that all those companies, of whatever size, that will not have to pay a bill that they currently do will be happy about that. The increase in the levy threshold will be of small assistance to a number of small companies. There are a lot of small companies just above that level, and they will still be covered by this. Our objective is to try to redistribute the training resources for their benefit. The nature of the construction industry is different; it is very difficult to track apprentices, because people move around the country continuously. We, therefore, felt that there

needed to be a specific and unique solution to this case. That is the rationale for retaining the board.

Our aim is very clear: first, to remove an unnecessary burden from a lot of very small employers, which we are doing, and, secondly, to ensure that those small employers that must continue to pay the levy will see the positive impact of their contributions. Effectively, resources from the larger levy-payers are being redistributed among some of the smaller ones. That is what we are trying to do. The key to that will be the quality of the service that is delivered. While we set out with a very clear aim, only the passage of time will determine whether we succeed.

The House will have an opportunity to revisit the issue. In two to three years' time, we will be formally monitoring and assessing whether those changes are producing the results that we anticipate.

Mr Dallat: I add my thanks to the Minister for his statement and, in particular, for increasing the levy threshold from £15,000 to £80,000. However, I question whether £80,000 is such a large amount in the construction industry.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that many small businesses in the construction industry face bills of £30,000 or £40,000. Is there any hope for those businesses that have suffered setbacks such as bed debts and other difficulties since the recession? Is there any hope of their being able to negotiate with the CITB on the real cost of the benefits that they have received? Many of them have received nothing. The Minister will know that some small businesses had a very high turnover of staff because they subcontracted out to other small businesses, and they have received no real benefit.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member needs to be aware that one of the downstream consequences of the current recession is that the Construction Industry Training Board receives its revenue on the basis of wages paid in the previous year. The year that we are about to enter will be a very difficult one, because last year was the year when the crash came in the construction sector. Consequently, the levy will be reduced substantially. In a sense, that is forcing some of the decisions that we are making, such as staff reductions and the need to rationalise. Clearly, the percentage that people are being charged will not change this year. No increase is being made to compensate for the reduction in the levy. The levy was designed not to add an additional burden, and we are trying to get as many people out of paying it as possible.

The Member said that £80,000 is not a lot of money, and that is true. However, what we have done means that there is a consistent approach between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. We will keep that under review in so far as there are inflation issues and other issues that we need to take into account, because

inflation in the construction industry tends to be different from inflation in other sectors. There are no plans to increase the levy to make up the shortfall in the current year. However, there will be a substantially reduced budget produced by the levy, not simply because of the removal of a lot of people from paying that levy, but because it is based on the payroll of the previous year. As we know, large numbers of people in the construction industry have been made redundant. There will be a dramatic drop in income, but the rate at which people are being asked to pay will not be increased.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Rates (Amendment) Bill

Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/09] do now pass.

Before providing Members with an overview of the content of the Bill, I take the opportunity to thank Members for their support during the passage of the Bill through the Assembly. I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for considering the underpinning rating policies. I acknowledge that we would not be where we are today had we not had such co-operation from the Committee and the Assembly.

As I said in previous debates on the Bill, I, along with other Members, would have preferred that it had been possible to take the Bill through the Assembly in the normal way and to have had a Committee Stage. Unfortunately, to do so would have meant that the support for ratepayers, as provided by the Bill, would not have been in place until April 2011. We did not want to miss the deadline of the next financial year. Therefore, next April, households and businesses will experience the changes provided for in the Bill.

I thank the Chairperson, former Chairperson, and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee, for their considered evidence taking and their detailed scrutiny of the policies that have underpinned the Bill over recent years. I very much hope that the productive working relationship between my Department and the Committee will continue as the associated subordinate legislation passes through the House.

I have covered the detail of the Bill with Members before. However, I think that it is worthwhile going through that again and the advantages that the Bill will present to households and businesses across Northern Ireland.

The Bill is an important piece of legislation, and it goes a long way towards completing the Executive's review of the rating system. It also provides strong examples of how the Executive and the Assembly are delivering for the people of Northern Ireland and how they have listened and responded to the concerns that people have brought to Members, the Committee and the Executive.

The Bill will enable increased support to be given to households and businesses at a time when they are under financial and economic pressure. It progresses a key range of measures that aim to provide direct and indirect assistance to a wide range of ratepayers. In the commercial sector, the key aspects relate to the enabling

power for a small business rates relief scheme, which will also enhance rates relief for sub-post offices. It will ensure that between £8 million and £9 million of help can be provided to more than 16,000 smaller businesses each year. The Bill will also provide the Assembly with the flexibility to decide the level at which liability for industrial rating should be set in future years, and it will help to facilitate the future revaluation of commercial property.

In the domestic sphere, a wide range of measures, which were agreed by the Executive and consulted on last year, are provided for. Through subordinate legislation, the Bill will allow for the introduction of two new energy-related schemes. The first will provide for a one-off reduction in the rates of ratepayers who install loft or cavity wall insulation in their homes. The second will enable full rate relief for the first occupiers of new zero- or low-carbon homes for up to five years and two years respectively.

Importantly, the Bill also contains new data-sharing powers, which aim to improve the take-up levels for certain reliefs. Through those powers, we can ensure that people get the help to which they are entitled. As Members will agree, that will be a very important measure, particularly for pensioners and other vulnerable groups. The Bill also amends current enabling powers, which will allow for the introduction of a rates deferment scheme for pensioners and the rating of empty homes in due course. Although the scheme will offer help to some pensioners, particularly during the current economic downturn, and I want to ensure that it is effective and attracts sufficient and manageable numbers. Having too few participants may mean that the scheme is not worthwhile, and having too many may prove unaffordable and unsustainable.

In a couple of years' time, I want to conduct a thorough evaluation of the scheme's effectiveness, which will examine how many people it is helping and whether it represents value for money. That is part and parcel of the policymaking process. In due course, I will update the Committee and the Assembly on the outcome of the evaluation and take their views on board.

I have already said that I intend to postpone the rating of empty homes until April 2011, and I will keep the situation under review. However, Members may wish to note that it is not possible to introduce that measure part way through the rating year.

In the domestic sector, the Bill provides for compensating payments to be made to district councils that are affected by the reduction of the maximum capital value to £400,000. As a transition measure for that cap, it would be neither appropriate nor financially feasible to extend the time period that it covers beyond the two years that the Executive agreed or to extend the compensating payments to the original cap of £500,000.

Those are the main measures that are being taken forward in the Bill. I look forward to Members' support in ensuring that the Bill clears its Final Stage: having got thus far, I hope that it does fall at that hurdle. The debates on the Bill have been interesting. I salute those Members who showed their dedication to the scrutiny of the Bill by being here at 12.00 midnight during its Second Stage, staying awake — I did not notice anybody sleeping — and participating as they did.

I thank Members for their co-operation. I emphasise again that, although the Bill has been subject to accelerated passage, which is not the desired procedure, there has been good co-operation. I commend the Bill to the House.

11.15 am

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Committee for Finance and Personnel considers the Bill an important piece of legislation, not least because it includes measures to ensure that much-needed help is delivered to businesses and households in this difficult economic climate.

The use of the accelerated passage procedure meant that the Committee was not afforded the opportunity for in-depth scrutiny of the Bill. However, the Committee received a detailed clause-by-clause briefing from departmental officials at its meeting on 9 September 2009. Although there was no formal Committee Stage, I assure the House that the Committee extensively examined rating policies since 2007, and has engaged closely with the Department in developing the Bill.

The Committee undertook detailed scrutiny of the Executive's review of the domestic rating system in 2007. In addition to considering submissions to the Department's consultation, the Committee sought further oral and written evidence from the Department and a number of stakeholders. The Committee made 33 recommendations in the report on its response to the Executive's review, which was published in November 2007.

The Committee subsequently received several oral and written briefings from departmental officials, including briefings on the outcome of consultations that were undertaken on high-level rating policy changes. I wish to put on record the Committee's appreciation to the officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) rating policy division for the level of assistance that they provided to the Committee during the important policy-development stages of the reforms. Their approach provides a model of good practice for departmental engagement with Committees.

The Committee is pleased to note that some of the recommendations from its 2007 report have already been moved forward in advance of the Bill, such as those relating to the lone pensioner discount, and education and

training rate relief. Other recommendations highlighted in the report are provided for in the Bill, including green rebates for environmental measures, a deferred payment scheme for pensioners, measures to improve the uptake of rates relief, and the introduction of the rating of vacant domestic properties.

I said during the Second Stage debate that the Committee was, at that time, considering the Minister's proposal to postpone the introduction of the rating of empty domestic properties. At its meeting on 23 September 2009, the Committee recognised that the current economic climate was not conducive to the early introduction of that measure. Given the potential revenue that has been forgone as a result of that delay, the Committee recommends that, in 2010, the Department review its position on the timing of the introduction of the rating of empty homes.

The Bill makes provision for aspects of non-domestic rating policy, which have also been scrutinised by the Committee. In April 2008, the Committee called on the Minister not to rule out a relief scheme for small businesses, considering the importance of the small-business sector to the local economy. The Committee welcomes the inclusion of a small business rates relief scheme in the Bill, which includes enhanced relief for post offices, and notes the provisions regarding industrial derating, whereby the percentage liability will be set from 1 April 2011 by means of an Order subject to affirmative resolution.

I highlighted the Committee's appreciation of departmental officials' assistance during the policy-development stages of the rating reforms. On a less positive note, in respect of the recent legislative stages, Committee members were disappointed that they did not have time to consider ministerial amendments in advance of them being tabled at Consideration Stage, especially as the nature of the amendments suggests that the Department should have been aware of their necessity earlier in the legislative process. The Committee wrote to the Department to express its concern, and the implications that that may have when DFP seeks to use the accelerated passage procedure for future Bills.

At its meeting tomorrow, the Committee will consider a response on that issue from DFP, which offers an explanation and an assurance that, for any future legislation, the Department will ensure that the Committee is notified at the earliest possible opportunity when DFP envisages that amendments may have to be tabled after Second Stage. That response is welcome. Nonetheless, it is important to put down a marker, especially in the context of accelerated passage.

The Bill contains enabling and delegated powers by which subordinate legislation will be introduced to implement the detail of the various measures and schemes. My Committee will play an important role in scrutinising

the forthcoming statutory rules, and I ask the Minister to ensure that we are given sufficient time to carry out that role effectively. On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I formally support the Bill at its Final Stage.

I want to make one comment from a party perspective. I am glad that the Minister said earlier that he will keep the rating of empty homes under review. I want to emphasise to the Minister the importance of keeping that matter under review. In light of the huge need for housing, we should ensure that no one could use the system to prevent people from accessing much-needed housing.

Mr O'Loan: I support the Bill at its Final Stage. It is important that the legislation be passed so that its provisions are in place and implemented by April 2010.

The Bill contains several measures, including reliefs, which are desirable. It is important that people benefit from those. As I have said in the House previously, a rating system is, essentially, an unfair system. It is a property tax, and, as such, it is only loosely correlated to a person's ability to pay. Any taxation should be related to ability to pay. That brings about a need for reliefs in the rating system to ameliorate, to some degree, the existing unfairness. A balance needs to be struck between issues such as the loss of revenue and the need to create a system that is not overly complex. The preceding discussions between the Department and the Committee have resulted in a fair scheme.

I support the various measures. The small business rates relief scheme will provide useful benefits to small businesses, particularly post offices. I support the measures that will encourage energy efficiency, particularly through zero-carbon and low-carbon homes, and I welcome the measures on rate deferment. I support the provision to rate empty homes, and I welcome the Minister's comments about postponing that measure for next year and reviewing the situation thereafter. That is exactly the right stance.

Although the rating of vacant non-domestic properties is not relevant to the Bill, I have raised the issue previously. I am glad that the Minister has taken my comments on board during his evaluation. I support the measure that will provide temporary reimbursement to councils for the revenue that they lost because of the rate cap. I note the Minister's comments about evaluating that measure in two years' time; that is sound. For example, a measure was created recently to provide a relief for students; it simply did not work, and we have, sensibly, decided to phase it out.

It is important to achieve a balance, and we should not keep changing the system all the time. People must become familiar with the reliefs, because such knowledge impacts on the uptake of reliefs. If we change the scheme all the time, it will more difficult for people to

get used to the available reliefs. Nonetheless, a sensible review is the right way forward.

Dr Farry: Despite the fact that we were discussing the Bill at approaching midnight several weeks ago, it is fair to say that the Minister would never put anyone to sleep. We can accuse him of many things but being boring is not one of them, even at that late hour.

The Alliance Party is happy to support the Final Stage of this important legislation. However, given that this is a legislative Assembly and that this is important legislation, I am somewhat disappointed that the debate is petering out. However, that is another matter.

The Bill is the culmination of a process that has been under way for several years. It began when Brian Wilson and I proposed a review of the rating system in a private Members' motion in June 2007, which was followed by several consultations on various aspects of rating. The Bill is a major piece of legislation that will be in place for several years, and it may be some time before we return to the subject in the same depth.

The process has been a strange one; there has been a leisurely approach to the consultation over the years, but because of the circumstance surrounding the Executive, we had to use accelerated passage to ensure that we met the commencement dates. The Second Stage was debated extremely late at night, and we are debating the Final Stage in a leisurely fashion because other business is set to collapse.

I want to make some specific points, largely about how the legislation fits into a wider policy context. First, I will pick up on Declan O'Loan's point about rates not being the fairest approach because property is, perhaps, a blunt measurement of someone's ability to pay. During the debate on the Second Stage of the Bill, I made a point about the Alliance Party's preference for a local income tax as a better way of doing things. At that time I was not seeking to open up a wider debate; I was just making a simple point. Nevertheless, the Minister engaged with me, as is his usual way.

The Minister pointed out the difficulties of introducing a local income tax and gave the example of the Scottish Parliament, which considered the idea but moved away from it. It is worth noting that those assumptions may not apply in Northern Ireland to the extent that they do in Scotland. We have two opportunities to introduce a local income tax in a more cost-effective way. First, it may be easier to achieve if we were talking about such a tax only as a replacement for the regional rate. Secondly, we have, perhaps, a unique advantage in that all of Northern Ireland is covered by BT postcodes, which may make it easier for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' computers to work things out. Those are points for the record, but I accept that, in many respects, they are moot points now, as the issue has

been settled for some years to come. Perhaps we will come back to it in future.

It is worth pointing out that if the Executive are forced into considering water charges soon, any such charges will be based on property values in the same way that rates are based on property values. The issue of fairness is one that the Assembly cannot fully escape.

There are other aspects of the Bill to consider. I am sceptical about the small business relief scheme, but I am prepared to give it a cautious endorsement. I am not overwhelmed by the economic arguments for that scheme, to which a significant deadweight is attached. However, there are social benefits, which, perhaps, tip the balance in the scheme's favour. My difficulty is that such a scheme is another example of a response to the economic downturn and the problems faced by business whereby the Executive have addressed, essentially, the cost base that is confronted by businesses. We did something similar for households when we froze the regional rate and deferred water charges. We have also considered industrial rating for businesses and how to keep it down. In themselves, such measures may be justifiable; they may help businesses through difficult times and allow the economy to keep moving by demand. However, they do not give us an opportunity to change the way in which business operates in Northern Ireland, nor do they allow us to tackle the underlying structural problems in our economy.

When we come out of recession, those same underlying problems will remain. In some respects, the lost revenue from schemes such as small business rate relief could be more efficiently used in other ways to assist businesses and change the underlying dynamics of our economy in order to allow us to become a more competitive region. I am slightly cautious about the potential wisdom of those measures and the impact that they may have.

11.30 am

At Second Stage, the Minister came close to acknowledging that there is a challenge to the Executive to try to use its economic tools to rebalance our economy. He said that that had to happen and that the priority had to be to address the cost pressures. We disagree: we think that both can be done together. Measures to rebalance the economy will help us out of recession. We have a difference of opinion on that approach.

I welcome the proposals that have been made on energy efficiency and low- and zero-carbon homes. I am encouraged by the flexibility in the legislation to allow the schemes to be extended if they prove successful. However, I regard those schemes as necessary but not sufficient — not just on DFP's part but on that of other Departments — to address the challenge of energy efficiency and climate change. Leaving aside the

causes of climate change, we would all agree that there is an economic rationale for trying to change our approach to the management of energy.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has an important role in renewable energy, energy policies and the associated costs in Northern Ireland, which are a major competitive disadvantage for businesses. The Department of the Environment has a similar role in planning, and the Department for Social Development has one in housing. It is important to stress that energy efficiency in homes and businesses should be examined from two viewpoints: taxation or rates, to provide financial incentives for people to go down that road, and regulation.

I ask the Minister to clarify where we stand in respect of building regulations. The Assembly legislated on building regulations in March of this year, and the expectation was that the Department would issue regulations on energy efficiency. There is a concern that we are not moving as quickly as other jurisdictions, particularly towards the 2016 target for low- and zero-carbon homes. That is part of a wider package in which we need to use the ratings system and buildings regulations to reach that objective.

The Minister conceded at Second Stage that we have not done the modelling to work out how far any individual aspect of policy will get us towards the targets for how we shift our energy usage. Will the Minister clarify whether households would be entitled to rate relief on low- and zero-carbon homes on an individual or group basis?

Microgeneration could be introduced to a single household via a turbine linked to an individual house. However, it is conceivable that a developer could build a new housing development in which a single set of turbines would power all the households on that estate. Those households may not be low- or zero-carbon homes on a free-standing basis, but they would be, in practice, if they were linked into the network of that development. Will the Minister clarify whether households would be eligible for assistance in those circumstances?

Finally, will the implementation of the system create significant pressures on Land and Property Services? Members have expressed concerns about the situation in that organisation, and I appreciate that LPS has done a lot of good work in recent months to turn things around. There is an impression that Land and Property Services is under-resourced. I appreciate that we face a range of financial pressures, but it is noticeable that that body makes a bid in every monitoring round and that those bids seem to be increasing. Indeed, in the last monitoring round, Land and Property Services bid for £5 million, which represents a considerable uplift on its baseline figure.

Will the Minister comment on the underlying funding of Land and Property Services and on whether there is a problem to which the Assembly and the Executive need to return? We are happy to support the Final Stage with the caveats that I outlined about what the Executive need to do in a wider context.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank all the Members who participated in the debate. One of the pleasing things has been that Members have had to strain to find criticisms of me. That is not normal for Members. I wrote down the number of times that even Mr O'Loan the Member for North Antrim said that he agreed with me, and I will keep that as a useful record. I do not think that he will say it that often, but I will endeavour to ensure that he does. I will respond to Members' points. We covered many of the same issues at the Bill's Second Stage, at its Consideration Stage and again today at its Final Stage. However, one can always be sure that Dr Farry will come up with something that has not been raised before and which had not been anticipated — that is part of the legislative process.

The Chairperson noted the assistance that was given by officials. I, too, thank the officials for the policy work that was required for the Rates (Amendment) Bill and for their work on the Bill itself. In an age of cynicism, when people who work in the Civil Service are often referred to as faceless, uncaring and inhuman bureaucrats, it is nice that faces can be attached to the names of Department of Finance and Personnel officials. They appear regularly before the Committee, and they are responsive to Members' concerns and try to provide answers to their questions. I thank the officials for the support and help that they have given to me. I assure members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel that their interfacing with officials and the work that officials have done on the legislation will characterise future work.

The Chairperson raised the issue of empty homes and welcomed the fact that we will review the situation again in 2011; she noted that revenue would be lost by not proceeding with the scheme, and she is right. However, I assure the Chairperson that work on the database of empty homes continues. The work that Building Control is doing along with Land and Property Services in seeking to identify empty homes in Belfast led to the identification of a large number of homes that were occupied but on which rates were not being paid. I have had briefings from Building Control and was informed that about £4.2 million worth of rateable value was identified during that process. Therefore, although we are forgoing revenue, work is ongoing. I want to encourage Building Control and LPS to work together right across Northern Ireland to continue their work, which may identify available revenue streams that we are not tapping into.

The Chairperson also mentioned the amendments and the late notification of those amendments. I gave an explanation for that at Consideration Stage. The Chairperson is quite right that the amendments, which were technical, were identified at an early stage, but they could not be brought forward earlier because they were identified after the Bill had received Executive approval. Had we amended the Bill before its Second Stage, it would have had to go through the approval process again, and that would have caused delay. It took long enough to get the Bill through the Executive in the first place, without putting an amended Bill through, especially as the amendments were only technical. Therefore, as per the protocol of the House, the amendments could not be published until the Bill had had its Second Stage. The Committee was notified of the amendments as quickly as possible after that.

I have written to the Chairperson and the Committee outlining in great detail the procedures and constraints under which we were operating, and I hope that that is acceptable. I hope that accelerated passage is not going to be the order of the day in the future anyhow, but the one thing that I will give a commitment on is that, where departmental or ministerial amendments are being made to Bills, we will try to give notification of that as quickly as possible.

I turn to Mr O'Loan's remarks. As I have said, I welcome the fact that he agreed with me on so many issues in relation to the Bill. He is quite right that policies need to be evaluated constantly. There is no point in simply doing things because that is what we did two or three years ago or even further back. Very often, some of the things that we choose to do are done in response to particular situations, and, as those situations change, it is good policy to evaluate the measures that we have undertaken to see whether they are effective or still needed.

Mr O'Loan made the important point that changing the system is not painless. First, especially when it comes to a policy such as this one, which is being implemented in the Bill, people have to get used to that policy and the measures involved. Constantly chopping and changing creates uncertainty. The other point that I will make to the Assembly is that very often Members are encouraged to respond to a changing situation, and we think that it is simply a case of clicking our fingers and things happen. However, they do not happen that easily; all changes involve a cost. I know that Dr Farry raised the issue of the resourcing of the LPS, and I will come to that in a moment or two. Every time we change the rating system, changes have to be made to items such as the IT systems and forms etc that are used by the LPS. In addition, the LPS staff must undergo training, and that comes at a cost. That is one of the reasons why, now that we have nearly completed the Executive review of the rating system, I hope that there will be

stability for a number of years, so that we can reap the benefits from the changes on which we have spent money.

Dr Farry started by saying that he feared that the debate was petering out. However, through his contribution, he single-handedly tried to ensure that the debate did not peter out and that a number of issues would be raised. His first point was that any policy change involves a process. This is particularly important, because some commentators expect the Assembly to be able to wave a magic wand. That process, because of the constraints on us to consult and to test the policy before incorporating it into a draft Bill, takes a fairly long time. There are those who think that there are instant answers. However, if we were to take short cuts on the consultation or other steps in the process, they would be the first to shout about it. Dr Farry brought an air of realism to the debate on how long it will take to implement the identified changes.

11.45 am

I will not debate with Dr Farry or with Mr O'Loan, who also raised the issue, on whether rates are the fairest way of raising taxation, other than to repeat the point that I made at Second Stage. I am not sure whether Dr Farry is an economist, but he speaks like one at times: "On the one hand, this and, on the other hand, something else". As an economist, he will know of Adam Smith's canons of taxation, one of which is that efficient collection is a characteristic of any good tax system. As I pointed out in an earlier debate, local income tax would not be an inexpensive way to raise money. I noted Dr Farry's point about applying it only to the regional rate. However, the same work would have to be done to apply it to the regional rate as to the district rate. I am not sure whether being covered by BT postcodes would reduce the cost of collection, because people's ability to pay would still have to be assessed. As is often the case with economics, it is a dry debate, because we have moved on, and we have decided on the system that we will use.

Dr Farry: We will declare a ceasefire on that for now.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We will, but I am sure that we will return to it at some stage.

Dr Farry also raised the issue of business rates relief, with which he disagrees. I know that the issue is popular with the Federation of Small Businesses, the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) and many others, yet Dr Farry is prepared to stick his head above the parapet and question whether it is the most effective way of spending public money; and I admire him for that. It is a response both to small businesses saying that they are under pressure and to the current economic situation, and it is, therefore, an appropriate way of spending money.

I do not view business rates relief as an alternative to the longer-term structural change in the supply side that is required to grow the economy, and I hope that I did not give the impression in earlier debates. If one considers the Executive's record, one will see that they do not regard business rates relief as an alternative option but as something that goes along with the longer-term structural measures that the Executive are undertaking on infrastructure, training, encouraging an enterprise culture, improving the infrastructure to help small businesses to start up in business parks and so forth.

Work on all those measures is being done at the same time. I do not, therefore, want to give the impression that the Executive are concentrating on short-term measures and ignoring longer-term measures. Dr Farry is right that, if we are to go down the road of changing the structure of the economy, there are much more fundamental issues that need to be dealt with than the short-term Elastoplast, as it could be described, of business rates relief.

Dr Farry raised several points about energy efficiency. I am glad that he did not make one particular point, because it could have led to a long debate. He did not try to attribute climate change to any one particular cause. That is also a debate for another day.

The Member is correct: the important point is that it is good policy to look at how we can save energy and make our homes more energy-efficient. That is good for individuals because it reduces their bills at a time when, ironically, because of the response to climate change, they will face increased costs. The other day, the Utility Regulator talked about an increase of anything up to 60% in electricity bills because of the fixation with reducing CO₂ emissions. People will find that energy is more expensive in the future, so it makes sense to save it. Since there is only a finite supply of many of our energy resources, it makes sense to use them wisely. Our measures are designed to do just that.

As far as progress on the building regulations is concerned, I do not have that information today. However, I will write to Dr Farry about that because the issue that he raised is important. He also mentioned rates relief for low-carbon or zero-carbon homes. I think that it makes sense to do that in some kind of linked way. We will address how the issue that he raised will be dealt with when it comes to the formal definition of zero-carbon homes.

I hope that I have gone through most of the points that Members raised, and I thank everyone for the work that they have done.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/09] do now pass.

Education Bill

Consideration Stage

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Ní thairgtear an Bille. Not moved.

Mr Speaker: The Consideration Stage of the Education Bill has not been moved.

I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement regarding the outcome —

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance. Are there any reasons why the Consideration Stage of a Bill should not be moved? These matters were fully —

Mr Speaker: Order. This is not a debate. The Minister has not moved the Consideration Stage of the Bill. That is a matter for the Minister and the Executive. However, I was notified by the Minister of her intention not to move the Consideration Stage of the Bill. Party Whips were informed, and a letter from the Minister was put into Members' pigeonholes. Let us not have a debate: the Consideration Stage of the Education Bill has not been moved.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You are absolutely right: the Whips received notice. Are Members of this House not entitled to an explanation and perhaps an apology?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already said that the Consideration Stage of the Education Bill has not been moved. It rests there. If Members want to discuss the issue with me further, please discuss it outside the Chamber. Let us not have a debate because the Consideration Stage of the Bill has not been moved.

Mr McNarry: Further to that point of order —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am taking no further points of order on the issue. The Consideration Stage of the Bill has not been moved. I ask the Member to take his seat. I am moving on.

I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement regarding the outcome of the September monitoring round. The Minister will make his statement today at 1.30 pm. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until that time.

The sitting was suspended at 11.54 am.

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

1.30 pm

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Public Expenditure 2009-2010: September Monitoring

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement regarding the public expenditure 2009-2010 September monitoring round.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Following the Executive meeting this morning, I would like to make a statement regarding the outcome of the September monitoring round, so this is hot off the press.

The second monitoring round of 2009-2010 has the role and purpose, under the in-year monitoring process, of allowing the Executive to make optimal use of resources at our disposal by reviewing departmental expenditure plans in light of the most recent information available.

In my statement to the Assembly in July on the June monitoring round, I informed Members of the record levels of investment in the public services that were delivered by the Executive in 2008-09, and the fact that that was at least partly due to the considerable reductions in levels of underspending compared to previous years. However, I also indicated in that statement that the improved spending performance of Departments last year had implications for the management of the expenditure position going forward. I particularly highlighted the need to reduce our use of overcommitment as a tool for managing public expenditure.

The simple reality is that if, unlike under previous direct rule Administrations, Departments now spend the vast majority of money available to them, the return of significant funds to the Executive during the year or large year-end underspends cannot be anticipated. That point sets the important context for the September monitoring round, in which the key challenge for the Executive was managing the overall financial position to protect our own integrity, and that of the Northern Ireland block, by ensuring that we do not overspend against the amounts available to us, while supporting priority areas in which additional funding is needed. In anticipation that some Members may try to portray such a position as a self-inflicted wound, let me say that the contrary is true: it is a consequence of an Executive who deliver for the

people of Northern Ireland on levels of spend, on sound financial management and on responsive public services.

Turning to the detail, the level of reduced requirements declared by Departments in the September monitoring round was £26·8 million in current expenditure and £21·1 million in capital investment. Further details are set out in tables attached to my published statement.

To underpin my point about better financial performance, reduced requirements this year total only 57·7% of the amount declared at the same stage last year. I emphasise the significance of that position; it means that the amounts allocated to Departments in the last Budget are being used by those Departments for the purposes intended, rather than being returned for redistribution. They are meeting the purposes proposed by the Executive and endorsed by the Assembly following an extensive public consultation process — yet more evidence of a successful delivery against the considered needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

However, as a consequence of that performance, and of the overcommitment that existed at the end of the June monitoring round, no funds are freely available for allocation to Departments at present. Some in the House may seek to paint that situation as unduly problematic, but in reality the position highlights our progress in delivering the commitments set out in the Programme for Government.

In order to facilitate further sound financial management in Departments, the Executive have allowed Departments to move resources across spending areas when the movement reflects a proactive management decision that is taken to enable the relevant Department to manage emerging pressures within its existing baselines. Those Departments are to be commended for their actions to address pressures in that way.

It has also been necessary, largely due to technical issues, to reclassify some amounts between expenditure categories. Details of those changes are provided in the tables that are attached to the statement.

Although no amounts were available for reallocation to address departmental pressures, the Executive have agreed small allocations of £0·1 million current expenditure to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Audit Office. Those allocations reflect the bodies' unique circumstances and the fact that their costs are agreed by their respective Committees, as opposed to being subject to the normal scrutiny and challenge that apply to other Departments. That said, and acknowledging that the amounts involved are small, I urge the House and the Northern Ireland Audit Office to recognise the financial constraints and to do all in their power to minimise their call on the wider public expenditure position. Those institutions, more than any others, must lead by example.

When viewed in light of the lower level of reduced requirements and the amount of end-year underspend in 2008-09, those charges have resulted in a reduction in the total overcommitment to a prudent level for this stage of the financial year. However, the balance between current and capital overcommitment is slightly skewed, with current expenditure being ahead of target, while capital investment is behind target. Therefore, to redress the imbalance, the Executive have agreed to reclassify £22·5 million of current expenditure as capital investment.

That reclassification brings the overcommitment position to £45·8 million for current expenditure and £20 million for capital investment, which, based on departmental spending performance in 2008-09, represents the maximum level of overcommitment for this stage of the financial year, with no scope to increase that amount to meet any pressures at this time.

Three issues were identified as being of sufficient strategic importance to warrant action by the Executive at this time: the £20 million first call on available money for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), which was agreed by the Executive as part of the last Budget; the costs of addressing emerging pressures that are linked to swine flu, which, again, is a health issue; and the Bombardier CSeries project in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI).

Turning first to the £20 million first call on the available resources for DHSSPS, as Members will recognise, the constrained financial position that we face means that, at this time, there are no available resources to allocate against that commitment. However, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has helpfully offered to release £10 million capital investment through proactive management of his significant investment programme, which, through some flexibility that is available to the Executive, can now be reclassified as current expenditure and returned to his Department as a first instalment against the £20 million. With respect to the balance, the Executive have agreed that making good on that commitment will be a priority for the remaining two monitoring rounds this year, when all reasonable efforts will be made to find the remaining £10 million.

At this stage, swine flu costs are still estimates, and the Health Minister has identified likely minimum requirements of £42·6 million current expenditure and £22 million capital investment. Those amounts may be subject to change; however, the Executive have agreed to move forward on that basis. Taking account of the amounts that are available in the existing DHSSPS budget, a net pressure of £27·9 million current expenditure and £11·5 million capital investment remains to be addressed.

Finally, with respect to the Bombardier C Series project, DETI has identified a net capital investment pressure of £22.3 million.

I should explain that this £500 million investment — the largest ever inward investment project secured for Northern Ireland — is expected to create more than 800 new jobs over its production cycle, with many more jobs forecast to be created indirectly at peak employment. The supply-chain benefits for the UK, and for Northern Ireland in particular, are substantial. The investment will help to safeguard and further develop high-quality manufacturing skills in Northern Ireland for many years to come. That highlights the importance of the issue as a project in its own right and as evidence of the Executive's commitment to make economic growth their number-one priority.

In dealing with those two strategic issues, the Executive have agreed that, despite the constrained financial position, they are of such significance that support must be made available to the two Departments concerned. That will come from two sources. The Executive have agreed that Barnett consequential that were received in the Chancellor's 2009 Budget amounting to £23.8 million will be used, first, to cover the C Series project, with the balance set against the residual swine-flu capital costs. Before that, the Executive had intended using that funding to offset the additional efficiency reduction of £122.8 million, which will apply next year. However, given the financial position and the importance of the two issues, the consequences of the efficiencies will be addressed as part of wider work on the 2010-11 position. The Executive will consider that at their next meeting, and I will make a statement on that issue to the Assembly in due course.

As regards the balance of the swine flu pressure, the £27.9 million current expenditure and £10 million capital investment, the Executive have unanimously agreed that it will be funded by way of a pro-rata contribution from all other Departments. A table showing the total contribution by Departments is attached to that statement. However, I will continue to press the case with Her Majesty's Treasury that the UK Government should contribute to those costs, and robust monitoring systems will be put in place so that any funding not required for swine flu will be returned to Departments.

We should not underestimate the significance of this. At a time when all departmental budgets are under significant pressure, the Executive have acted decisively and in the broader strategic interests of Northern Ireland, setting narrow departmental interests to one side. Those were difficult decisions for Ministers and there was much debate about them. However, it is important to recognise that those adjustments do not mean a reduction in overall expenditure levels; they

simply represent a reprioritisation — I wish the civil servants would not use those big words in my speeches — of the funds available to the Executive as others have suggested, but without the need for a formal and time-consuming bureaucratic Budget process. The corporate approach taken by the Executive has enabled those strategic pressures to be addressed while ensuring that the overcommitment remains at a prudent level for this stage in the financial year.

Although the overall financial position means that it was not possible to address all the pressures identified in the September monitoring round, our prudent and responsible approach means that the pressures of strategic significance have been addressed, while the integrity of the Northern Ireland block has been maintained. That emphasises the importance of having a local and fully functioning Executive and delivery by the people of Northern Ireland for the people of Northern Ireland. For that reason, I commend the September monitoring position to the Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There is a long list of Members who want to ask questions. If Members ask questions and keep them precise, everyone will get their turn; if they make statements, not everyone will be accommodated. If a Member makes a statement, I will move on to the next Member.

Ms J McCann (Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I welcome the Minister's statement and I particularly welcome the fact that top-slicing by Departments did not have to happen in the case of the Bombardier C Series. In view of the importance of economic investment, I ask the Minister whether he agrees that it should be distributed equitably to balance regional development across the North.

1.45 pm

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I welcome the Chairperson's support of the monitoring statement and the way in which we have decided to allocate money. We were mindful, especially when looking for the C Series money, of the impact of top-slicing across Departments.

I agree with the Member's point; indeed, if one looks at the Executive investment portfolio at present, it is quite clear that we seek to dispense the benefits of public spending across the whole of Northern Ireland. This morning, I was interviewed about some of the views that I expressed on the Bain report — I suspect that that is what the Member was alluding to. When I was questioned on the situation in the north-west, I was able to point out that, in recent months, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister for Employment and Learning have introduced measures there to help those who have

found themselves unemployed to reskill and retrain. The Ilex programme has received £18 million, which will open up the huge Ebrington site in Londonderry and which represents substantial investment and urban regeneration for the city. New schools are also being built in the city.

That picture is replicated all over Northern Ireland. The £10 billion that the Executive dispense across Northern Ireland is spent on a wide range of projects. Indeed, one of the things that I have done as Minister of Finance and Personnel is to go to see some of those projects in the west, south, north and north-west of Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I particularly welcome the fact that we are now seeing Departments spending their allocation, which contrasts with the situation a number of years ago in which there were large amounts of underspend and the resources were not being used efficiently.

My question follows on from the Chairperson's question and is about the money that has been allocated to DETI on the CSeries. First, people may wonder why that money was not allocated earlier, as part of the DETI budget. Were there any particular restrictions that meant that that could not happen? Secondly, what are the implications for the economy of the allocation of money to the CSeries?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There was a lot of negotiation with the Treasury and Bombardier about the CSeries, and that was not finalised until after the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period had started. Therefore, not being certain that the money would be spent, the Minister put the money back into the pot, with the understanding that, should the CSeries go ahead, the contractual obligation — it is a contractual obligation — would be met. The Executive have honoured that contractual obligation. That explains why the allocation was not in the budget of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Having said that, the allocation to the Department is not 100% of the funding; the Minister had to find the first £10 million and the remainder was made up from the reallocation in the monitoring round.

I have emphasised the importance of investing in the CSeries project already. At more than £500 million, it is the largest amount of money for a single inward investment project in Northern Ireland. I do not know a great deal about the technology, but it will put Northern Ireland at the leading edge of carbon fibre technology. Obviously, there are spin-off effects from that. It will generate 800 high quality, well paid, highly skilled jobs. Indeed, if the jobs that will be maintained in Bombardier as a result of the project and supply chain jobs are included, the total number of jobs over

the eight years of the investment is probably more than 2,400. Obviously, it is a very important project, and we had a contractual obligation. We have sent out the right signal that we are not simply saying in words that the economy is the priority but are showing it in our deeds.

Mr McNarry: It is clear that the Minister's inheritance is creating a struggle for him. In the circumstances, I welcome what he is doing for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and for the Bombardier CSeries project.

However, the Minister says that no funds are available for allocation. That is a sweeping generalisation. Is it not an admission that DFP's number crunching is crashing down around it, necessitating the Minister to make a full statement with bare facts, warts and all? Will he confirm whether the £380 million shortfall will be the top figure, or whether it will escalate to £480 million or £580 million? Where does the Minister stand? Does he know where he stands?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I anticipated that I might get such a question from the Member; in fact, I would have been disappointed had he not asked me a question along those lines. Let us look at what I, as Finance Minister, have inherited. This year, public expenditure in Northern Ireland is the highest that it has ever been; investment and capital investment are the highest that they have ever been; and Departments, which are spending to their programmes, are doing what they said that they intended to do. I am pleased to have inherited that legacy.

As I said in my statement, to some extent, those developments cause some pressures. In the past, when lots of money that was supposed to be spent was not spent, Departments declared reduced requirements, enabling any pressures that came along to be met. That is no longer possible, or, at least, it is not as easy as it was in the past. However, we should be pleased, not unhappy, about that. Even having done that, we were able to find in the September monitoring round the money for the two fairly significant pressures that I discussed.

I remind Members that we were able to find the £200 million for the deferred water charges and additional money for housing in the June monitoring round. So much for the figures being in disarray and there being some panic. Although difficult decisions will have to be made, it is unfair of the Member to say that I have inherited some kind of crumbling financial legacy that is difficult to manage.

The Member was correct to say that the Assembly is entitled to an explanation as to how we intend to go forward in the next financial year; indeed, I think that I made that point in my statement. Will £370 million be the total pressure? If it is not, how much will it be?

How do we intend to address it? I made clear in my statement that once the Executive have had an opportunity to consider the paper on that matter, I will make a statement to the Assembly so that Members can ask me difficult questions about it.

Mr O'Loan: I note what the Minister says about the dramatic reduction in reduced requirements. That calls fundamentally into question the use of monitoring rounds as a mechanism for addressing financial pressures, and it is leading to activity that has all the hallmarks of crisis management. Does he agree that, in the medium term, a better method of managing our public finances must be put in place? The mechanism for dealing with swine flu is to top-slice from all Departments, and I am surprised at the Minister's defence of that method.

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

Mr O'Loan: I am surprised that the Minister offers that as the only solution. Does he agree that the use of an Ad Hoc Committee to reprioritise the Budget, which I have recommended here before, would be the best way forward in the short term?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Reprioritising the Budget would not have made a blind bit of difference to the situation that we face. Swine flu could not have been anticipated in a debate or in a reprioritisation of the Budget.

A reprioritisation of the Budget implies planning ahead in a different way from before, but those plans must still be made on the basis of certainties. When unanticipated factors arise, other mechanisms must be found to deal with them.

The Member criticised the use of monitoring rounds. However, there are only two other mechanisms for allocating funds from the block grant. At the very beginning of the process, the Member's party and others supported having an even greater overcommitment; that would have been far more dangerous and have led to crisis management. We would have found no money forthcoming to write off the overcommitment, which would have led to dramatic changes in the last two or three months of the financial year. That would have created a real crisis; therefore it was not an option.

The other option was a contingency fund. However, Members must recognise that if we —

Mr McNarry: *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I note that Mr McNarry made a comment from a sedentary position, advising me to create a contingency fund, and that the creation of such a fund was his party's idea. It was not his party's idea; his party's idea was to have an even bigger overcommitment.

We must be clear what establishing a contingency fund would mean. Money would be taken from Departments now and placed into a pot to deal with an emergency that might happen during the year. The contingency fund would have to be retained until the end of the financial year, and if an emergency did not occur, a scramble would take place to spend the money. That is not good financial management.

Whatever the option taken, it will have its disadvantages. However, I am coming to the same conclusion as Mr O'Loan: if little money is released through monitoring rounds, perhaps they are not the way forward and we should perhaps examine another mechanism for reallocating funds. That would probably mean creating a contingency fund; however, that option is not necessarily pain free, and neither would it mean that Departments would not lose money.

Mr O'Loan also mentioned the top-slicing of Departments' budgets to pay for swine flu. That was the only option that was available to the Executive for the release of those funds, after the examination of other areas from which money could be reallocated. The top-slicing arrangement is something from which many Departments benefitted in the past, and it was the only fair way of finding the money for swine flu. However, as the Member suggested, when it comes to longer-term planning we must examine the targeting of non-priorities and not fund those areas.

Dr Farry: I welcome the September monitoring round, albeit in the middle of October.

Will the Minister clarify the position with respect to the use of the Barnett consequential for the C Series project at Bombardier and what is happening to the balance of that fund? Northern Ireland received £116 million over two years for that project. Furthermore, does the Minister recognise that the source of those funds was an economic uplift at a UK level in the form of an economic stimulus? Moreover, surely the example of what the Executive are doing in supporting Bombardier demonstrates that they should be doing more to use resources to support the economy. The point that I would make about —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has asked a question.

Dr Farry: OK. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member asked a question early in his contribution and went on to ask several more. However, that is not unlike the Member; he is well known for getting good value when making contributions in the House.

The Member is correct: only one side of the Barnett consequential money that the Executive pushed to next year was used, and that was the capital side.

There is £26.5 million for current spending, which will be available to relieve pressures next year unless a decision is made this year to bring it forward into the current spending period.

2.00 pm

With regard to the purpose for which the Barnett consequential was used, the whole point of devolution is that Westminster will not tell us how to spend that money. There is a mechanism through which we get our share of money that Westminster spends on items that are included in the Barnett consequential. That money is not ring-fenced or hypothecated; it is simply available to us, and we decide how we wish to spend it. The Assembly has decided its spending priorities.

If the Member looks at what we have done with capital expenditure, he will see that we have spent it in exactly the way in which he wanted it to be spent, which was to promote the economy — the private sector of the economy — a project that will bring in high-level skills, high-value jobs and contribute to economic growth and sustained economic growth over the longer period. Today's decision falls into line with the purpose for which the extra money was received in the first place, although the Assembly will want to guard jealously its right to make decisions as to how it spends the money that comes as a result of Barnett.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister referred to the allocation of £20 million for housing in the June monitoring round, and he will recall the condition that was placed on that allocation, which was that a further £20 million would be released immediately by the Department for Social Development for Egan contracts. Does the Minister share my concern that the Minister for Social Development has confirmed that only £8 million has been released to date? Does he also share my worry that, although the Minister for Social Development has taken the £20 million for capital expenditure, she has not kept up her end of the bargain?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, the Member is correct: when I stood here in July and made a statement on the June monitoring round, I made it clear that there was a clear condition that the £20 million for capital investment that was made available to the Minister for Social Development was in respect of disability adaptations and housing renovation grants. There was a clear condition that, with capital expenditure on a sounder footing, the Minister for Social Development would immediately release the same amount of additional current expenditure to the Egan contracts. That is contained in the Executive minutes and is on record in the Assembly. Indeed, her argument for doing so at that stage was that maintenance projects and contracts had a high multiplier effect, employed a much higher degree of

local labour and could help in regenerating the construction industry in local areas. The construction industry, the public and the Assembly have expressed an ongoing interest in the matter, and I will be asking the Minister for Social Development to tell the Executive how much money she has released to the Egan projects, and I will be seeking an assurance that the full £20 million will be released by the end of the year. It is not only the multiplier effect that that will have on the construction industry that is involved; there is also the improvement in the quality and stock of homes.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McElduff): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire, agus ba mhaith liom ceist a chur ar an Aire as a ráiteas.

Will the Minister note the importance of the Places for Sport programme operated by Sport NI? The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure considered the September monitoring round at its meeting on 10 September. The Committee is determined that that key programme, which benefits sporting clubs at community level, should be carried on into future funding periods.

Secondly — my question will be specific — will the Minister also note that the Committee is concerned to learn that just over £2 million that had been assigned to the Ulster-Scots Academy has been surrendered back to the Department of Finance and Personnel? That concerns us because the Committee visited various projects over the summer, including an Ulster-Scots community group in Ballymoney that needed £48,000 to continue with its programmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must ask a question.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure: Will the Minister note the Committee's interest in both those matters and perhaps place some conditions on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in future monitoring rounds?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The answer to the Chairperson's first question is that the Minister will make bids for his future budget. If the Places for Sport programme is a priority for the Minister and the Committee, of course the Minister will make a bid, which will be considered along with all other bids.

I am not quite clear on the detail of the Committee's visit to the Ulster-Scots group in north Antrim, but I am amazed at the Chairperson's diversity: English, Irish and now Ulster Scots. Perhaps some day he will break into Ulster Scots in the Chamber so that he and my colleague Mr Shannon, who is not in the Chamber at present, can have a conversation.

If the money that that group sought was for an ongoing project, it was probably current expenditure, whereas I understand that the money that is being surrendered is capital expenditure. I think that I am correct in saying that, although if not I will be happy to correct myself in a letter to the Chairperson. It may seem odd that the Minister has surrendered £2 million that had been assigned to the Ulster-Scots Academy when an Ulster-Scots group needs £48,000, but the money could not have been transferred. That is not just a DFP rule but a Treasury rule. The Minister could not have transferred it from capital expenditure to current expenditure, so we are probably talking about two different things. If I am wrong, I will come back to the Chairperson.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr Kennedy): I am grateful to the Minister for his statement. I wish to ask about OFMDFM departmental savings. Annex A to the Minister's statement outlines a reduced requirement of £11.5 million under the heading "EU Match Funding". Will the Minister explain the background to that match funding, what is meant by it, where it comes from and why it is not required at this stage?

On a wider point, can the Minister confirm that the principle of the £20 million first call on available money, an arrangement one of his predecessors and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety made, still stands and will continue to stand despite current circumstances?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: On the Chairperson's last point, I have already given a commitment in two ways. First, the resolution that the Executive agreed this morning included an explicit commitment to look for and find the extra £10 million that is required to facilitate the £20 million first call. Secondly, I made that commitment in my statement to the Assembly. Despite the constrained circumstances, I have made it clear that we will do what we can to meet the commitment to find an additional £10 million.

The figure of £11.5 million that was referred to is matched funding. Traditionally, money is held so that there will not be a hindrance. I will write to the Member on that issue, because I am trying to make out the writing in my notes. As far as I am aware, put simply, that money is held centrally to match fund EU programmes. Perhaps because some of the programmes have not come forward as quickly as might have been expected, it has not been necessary to draw on that matched funding, hence the reduced requirement. It is not OFMDFM money; it is money that OFMDFM holds centrally for EU programmes. That is the position as far as I understand it from the scribble that I have been given, and I hope that that satisfies the Member at a higher level. If he needs

more detail, I will drop him a note to explain the exact detail of the money that was not drawn down.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mrs D Kelly): I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the reallocation of the strategic waste infrastructure fund (SWIF) from the capital cost to the resource cost. I hope that that will enable the Department of the Environment to allocate the resource quickly and appropriately to ensure that Northern Ireland keeps up with its waste management obligations. However, will the Minister assure the House that the SWIF funding has now been placed permanently on that footing so that future monitoring rounds do not have to be used to address the issue and so that the organisations can be allowed to move forward on their obligations?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Carte blanche cannot be given for moving money from capital expenditure to current expenditure. As I explained in answer to Mr McElduff, there are rules on the reclassification of expenditure in that way.

I know a bit about SWIF funding because of my previous role as Minister of the Environment. The slowdown in the projects and the decision-making means that it is not necessary to spend all the capital money in this year. Some money was required for areas such as the communications strategy, so reallocations were enabled.

We simply cannot say that, since the money for the waste strategy is from capital expenditure, it can be shifted over into current expenditure. Design work, work on planning permission, consultancy work and so on came from revenue expenditure, so a reclassification was needed. That was perfectly acceptable, because it was anticipated that such work would be covered in the capital cost of a project. The capital project was not progressing, so the money was not available and reclassification was carried out.

The general point is that a capital project of, for example, £100 million may include costs that are regarded as revenue costs because the capital work is not progressing. In such a scenario, that money can be released. As far as I understand it — if I am wrong, I will come back to the Member — a request must be made when there is a disconnect between the project starting on the ground and the preparatory work being done. That is why the problem arose in that case.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take some encouragement from the Minister's statement and his noting of the fact that improved performance has a direct consequence for the amount of money that will be available in future monitoring rounds. The progress that that displays in project management and financial management must be recognised.

I am also encouraged by the degree of co-operation among Ministers, which the statement acknowledges. Ministers were prepared to take a bit of pain to contribute to the allocation for the Executive's response to swine flu. That is an encouraging sign.

2.15 pm

With regard to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's creative and helpful contribution, I understand that the Minister for Social Development also made a proposition about a major project that will not go ahead as planned. She suggested that she bring forward some £70 million. That would have made a substantial contribution towards the swine flu epidemic as well as to the social housing fund.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must ask a question.

Mr McLaughlin: Was an opportunity missed?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank the Minister for his question, albeit a long one. I must say that Ministers did not take the pain easily; they had to be persuaded. They fought valiantly to protect their departmental budgets, as one would expect. To a degree, they had to be dragged towards the pain. However, I suppose that the Member is correct: they took the pain.

Although it was a good example of how Ministers must fight their corner and argue their case, at the end of the day, we took a collective decision on two projects. We also looked for inventive ways of dealing with the issue. However, it was not a painless experience.

The Minister for Social Development offered to make available money from the Royal Exchange project, most of which had been set aside for vesting property. However, due to legal and other difficulties it was anticipated that it would not be spent next year and so could be brought forward to be spent this year.

The problem is that the Royal Exchange project is an important regeneration project in the centre of Belfast, to which private investors have contributed considerable sums in anticipation of help in assembling a site that would enable them to deliver the project. Had the money been brought forward, there would have been an element of bad faith. That would have sent out the wrong signals and put the project in jeopardy.

The difficulty with bringing forward and spending the £70 million in 2009 is that we would have to find it in 2010 or in 2011, which would be even worse, as we will have to deal with an even more constrained capital Budget. Although we cannot foresee circumstances after the election, we know that they will be worse than they are now. The chance of that bid being successful would have been much smaller, and an invaluable

urban regeneration project might have fallen by the wayside. I am sure that the Member who is sitting on Mr McLaughlin's right, Mr Fra McCann, would not have been happy if that had been the case.

For that reason, we decided that it was not a good idea to spend £70 million that had been earmarked for a project that the Executive want to go ahead and which would have substantial benefits for Belfast city centre. To have reneged or even hinted that we would do so would have affected investor confidence

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He has answered some of my questions about money from the previous monitoring round in response to Simon Hamilton. Indeed, it is also relevant to his previous answer.

In the light of continuing and emerging pressures on social housing provision, will the Minister continue to prioritise it if money becomes available in future monitoring rounds? With respect, although I accept that Belfast has priority to a certain degree, the need for social housing in my constituency is as great as it is anywhere.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, as regards the Member's last point, one has only to look at the number of capital projects and at where money is currently being spent to realise that the Executive are addressing problems right across Northern Ireland.

The Rates (Amendment) Bill, the Final Stage of which took place earlier today, will affect businesses all over Northern Ireland. That is particularly relevant to sub-post offices in rural areas as they will get enhanced help with their rates.

We are also taking a range of other measures. For example, the cap on the manufacturing rate is not specific to Belfast or the greater Belfast area; rather, it applies across Northern Ireland. The measures that we are undertaking apply across the whole of Northern Ireland, and that is right. I do not want people in parts of Northern Ireland to feel that they are not benefiting from the decisions that are being made here; rather, I want people to feel collectively that they have ownership of the project here and of what results from that.

Secondly, priority has been given to social housing. The difficulty is that capital receipts have not been as high as we had anticipated. They are worth about £20 million less than we expected them to be this year. However, Members should not underestimate the fact that the recession has also given us the opportunity to get more for our money. As we all know, prices of new houses have fallen dramatically, in some cases by 40%. However, the Minister for Social Development's housing budget has not fallen by 40%. Therefore, we should not automatically assume that we will get fewer houses because less money is available. In fact, despite

the reduction in revenue as result of the fall in capital receipts, the potential exists to get substantially more for our money by buying wisely, and that is the important point.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. I congratulate the Minister of Health on finding £10 million. I also welcome the news that the Executive have agreed to move forward on the estimated costs for addressing swine flu. I encourage the Finance Minister to put as much pressure on Westminster as possible in order to get funding that meets the demands that swine flu has placed on the health budget.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that he will make health a priority in the next monitoring round.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, I made it clear that I alone will not be seeking additional money from the Treasury. I spoke to the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers, and collectively we will raise the issue at our next meeting with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. We already raised that issue in writing; however, we have not had a very positive response. Nevertheless, we will not let up on trying to get additional funding.

If anything should qualify for contingency funding from the Treasury, swine flu should, given the nature of the problem and the spending that it entails. However, the Treasury has said that it believes that the devolved Administrations should find the additional money in their budgets. Indeed, it expects the Department of Health in England to find additional money in its budget. The issue is being pursued. Of course, the First Minister and deputy First Minister also raised the issue at the last Joint Ministerial Committee plenary meeting. The two other Finance Ministers and I will follow that up when we meet the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

The Member asked about making health a priority. I reiterate what I said on about four other occasions — in the agreement that was signed at the Executive meeting; in today's statement; and in the answers that I gave to Members — we will make our best endeavours to find the £10 million gap in the £20 million first call in the December and February monitoring rounds.

Mr Ford: I join my colleague Stephen Farry in welcoming the Minister's "October monitoring round" statement. The Minister has correctly identified that, as Departments become more efficient in spending money, the amount of money that becomes available at monitoring rounds becomes smaller. In that light and without wishing to sound too much like Declan O'Loan, does the Minister agree that it will be necessary to have a proper Budget — however time-consuming and bureaucratic, as he described it, that may be — that can drill down into priorities, rather

than merely dealing with money that is voluntarily surrendered by Departments? Does the Minister accept that, although top-slicing all Departments to cover the cost of swine flu may be the only available short-term remedy, it is not a good example of dealing with prioritisation?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Seven months in advance of the next financial year, I took the step of identifying the pressures that I knew existed at that stage. Some Members have said that that £370 million might not be the end of the story because, for example, the equal pay claim had not been factored in, and we do not know what the final outcome of that will be. Nevertheless, I gave my Executive colleagues the picture, as I understood it, seven months in advance, so that we could have exactly the type of debate that the Member mentioned.

Instead of top-slicing, I would much rather that we could reassess the relevance of programmes from two or three years ago. Such programmes may have been created with the best of intentions, but we could decide whether those programmes have been effective and whether they should be continued. Some programmes must be given a high priority, and, if we do not have enough money, we could decide to cut those projects that are lower down the priority scale. That would be the sensible way forward and the right way of doing it. However, that still would not deal with an unforeseen crisis.

Knowing the pressures that are coming down the line, we plan ahead and try to deal with those in such a way that they do not become crises. However, occasionally, we will still be hit with things that we did not foresee. Such circumstances can emerge overnight and require payment almost immediately. In those circumstances, going back to the departmental budgets — to top-slice, to take action or to cut a particular programme — cannot be ruled out. No Department is going to offer to supply all the money for an unforeseen issue or emergency, especially if it falls outside that Department's remit. Therefore, we cannot totally rule out top-slicing.

We will have a debate on prioritisation. To be frank, I do not care if that comes in the form of a ministerial statement or a tabled debate; that depends on how it is to be presented to the Assembly. However, I think that that is probably a much more sensible approach to dealing with those types of pressures.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement and his frank and honest answers. I know that he has a difficult job. In light of the fact that the reduced requirements represent 57.7% of the amount declared at the same stage last year and following the Minister's announcement that the overcommitment will be significantly reduced, does he believe that there is a

danger that the Executive will break Treasury rules this financial year? Can he outline the consequences if that were to happen?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Apart from being embarrassing, I believe that the consequences would be quite dire. The Treasury would not look very kindly on that. That is why we could not, as some have suggested, simply fund pressures through overcommitment and why we could not leave the overcommitment at the level at which it stood. Therefore, we put some money towards reducing the overcommitment.

The Member has identified the issue very well: the Treasury will not tolerate overspend. We feel that we have got the overcommitment down to a level that is just on the edge of being prudent. We cannot afford to allow spending to slip and thus increase the overcommitment.

As we approach the end of the year, we will have to tighten up.

The Member mentioned the reduction in requirements. However, even if the trend in that reduction, which is currently 57% of that declared at the same time last year, were to continue in the December and February monitoring rounds, we would probably be in a position to bring the overcommitment down to an acceptable level.

2.30 pm

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement. He will agree that it is in the public interest to have increased visibility in all departmental finance issues.

Why has the Minister left the departmental bids out of his statement? When will he provide us with the detail of those bids?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The departmental bids were left out of the statement, because we dealt with only certain bids. We did not accept the other bids, so we were not considering them. We were able to consider only the bids relating to swine flu and the C Series project. However, each Committee will be aware of and, presumably, will have discussed the departmental bids; they may even have had some input into those bids.

I am quickly looking through my statement, but it only details the reduced requirements. However, it should be possible to supply the Member with details of all the bids that were made.

Mrs M Bradley: Seven health trusts are telling us that they will overspend by tens of millions of pounds this year if they do not cut front line services. As no more money has been allocated, is the Minister telling those trusts to cut front line services?

Is there any help to address the issues around Civil Service equal pay claims and the relevant back pay, because I do not see any in the statement?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: All Departments have pressures. Indeed, there was no Department that did not seek additional money for one thing or another. The Member who asked the previous question mentioned departmental bids, and the Committees will be aware of the detail of those bids. Every Department would like to spend more money: that is the nature of any Government Department or business.

The Health Minister has to manage his budget within the agreed limits. I remind the Member that when the three-year Budget settlement was agreed, the Health Minister said that he had got a good deal for health. Those were his words, not mine. He negotiated what he felt was a deal and, like every other Minister, he must live within his allocation. When efficiencies have to be made, I prefer them to be made in ways that do not hit front line services. However, it will be up to the Health Minister and the trusts to decide how to live within their budgets.

The Member's second point was about equal pay in the Civil Service. We cannot factor in anything for equal pay at the moment; £100 million is available from the Treasury for pressures, including equal pay. I do not know what the final figure for equal pay will be, but, as I said to other Members, if that pressure arises this year, we will have to revisit existing budgets. If it arises next year, it will be included in the debate that the Executive must have about pressures. I have already identified £370 million of pressures. If there are additional pressures as a result of the equal pay issue, they will be included in that debate.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. I refer him to the money for road safety that was returned by the Department of the Environment. The Minister may be aware that road fatalities are up compared with this time last year and, indeed, the year before. Will the Minister clarify what that returned money was for, and does he agree that the Department should use that money properly to address road safety issues and introduce measures to reduce road fatalities?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Again, the Department of the Environment is responsible for the detail of why that money was returned. I understand, however, that there was a depreciation and cost-of-capital cover which the Department did not require in this financial year. That money could not have been spent on, for example, an advertising campaign. Therefore, it had to be returned.

I would rather see money being returned than simply being spent without any real planning. The proper way to use money which becomes available as a result of a reduced requirement is through a programme of planned spending, rather than spending it quickly. If the Minister identified money that could not be used for the purposes for which it was allocated, then he did the right thing in returning it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the next item of business is Question Time, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 3.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.36 pm.

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

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Royal Exchange

1. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Royal Exchange development in Belfast. (AQO 216/10)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie): The Royal Exchange is the next major retail-led development planned for the north-east quarter of Belfast city centre and is similar in scale to the Victoria Square development. My Department is currently finalising the development agreement for the scheme, which provides the legal contract for the statutory planning, commercial and funding requirements. The development agreement will set out the timetable and funding requirements for the scheme, and I will make an announcement about that as soon as the agreement has been finalised with the developer.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for her answer, spoken like a true leader. *[Interruption.]* Not that there are not others, of course.

I wonder whether, when she is not considering other important matters of state, the Minister would care to tell me what plans she has to support Lisburn, the real capital of Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member will be very well aware that, in the last two and a half years, I have visited Lisburn on a number of occasions. I have examined the potential of the Lisburn City Council area and have talked to the MLAs, the MP and the councillors for that area about its requirements. I am very pleased that a hotel development was recently opened in Lisburn, the first one for a long time. For me, that signals progress.

As part of the master plan for Lisburn, the consultants, as the Member will be only too well aware, have been asked to produce a retail strategy for the city centre, and that will guide us on the scale and type of retailing provision that Lisburn can sustain to help it maintain its competitiveness. The master plan will look at other ways in which the economy of Lisburn can be developed, so that it is not solely dependent on retailing. The master plan

will look at strategies to develop the office market, the leisure market and other areas of the economy in order to broaden the city's economic base and ensure economic, environmental and commercial regeneration for the next 25 years. That is the whole purpose of a master plan: it looks at the potential of a place such as Lisburn and suggests how it can be developed to its full potential for the benefit of the local residents.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister will be glad to hear that I will not give her leadership bid the kiss of death by intimating anything that might sound like support. Does the Minister agree that the undue delay in the Royal Exchange scheme is creating uncertainty that is not helpful for potential developers of land or buildings adjacent to or around the area outlined for the scheme? Does she also agree that the sequential development policy could be having a detrimental effect on potential investment in Belfast city centre?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member has posed two specific questions about the issues of the potential slippage in the Royal Exchange budget and the policy of the Department in relation to the sequencing of development. In relation to the latter, I have already been looking at that issue, and, as the Member is probably aware, legal advice has been received in respect of that matter.

In relation to the first question, as part of the Budget 2008-2011 settlement, £110 million was allocated in the investment strategy to take forward the Royal Exchange project from next year onwards. I am hopeful that that could happen and I look forward to receiving support for that. The project has slipped, but I have every confidence that it will go ahead. We all must remember that we are in an economic downturn and a global recession, and we have to be able to reflect that and work with it.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Basil commented on the Minister's leadership challenge. Perhaps Basil has a similar conflict of interest in his party, but I will not delve any further into that.

Will the Minister clarify some points about how the sequencing policy affects the north-west quarter of Belfast? Several years ago, Westfield proposed to spend more than £200 million in the hope of regenerating that part of Belfast. No one has questioned the sequencing policy when it comes to the Royal Exchange, because that area badly needs regeneration. However, the north and west of Belfast are also areas of great need, and the sequencing policy has delayed their regeneration by several years. If, after considering that in the near future, the sequencing could be changed to allow that development to go ahead, it would help to regenerate that part of Belfast too.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Maskey for his question. He also referred to the Department's policy of sequencing developments whereby when one is complete, another comes on track. He will know that, in the past, the Department relied on retail-led analysis and retail-capacity analysis of Belfast city centre. I do not deny the need for the north-west quarter of Belfast to be developed, particularly the area around the CastleCourt complex. Over the past year, I met potential developers to discuss that. However, the Department's policy on regeneration in the city of Belfast is guided by legal advice.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister provide an update on the Streets Ahead initiative in Belfast?

The Minister for Social Development: I am delighted to inform the Assembly that the Streets Ahead project in Belfast is on course for completion by September 2011. The benefit from my Department's £20 million investment in renewing the public streets in Belfast city centre can be seen in the creation of an attractive environment for shoppers, visitors and investors. The project will enhance Belfast's reputation as a major retail city, alongside cities such as Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle and Dublin. However, I sound a note of caution: an investment in creating a quality public realm will achieve its full potential in a city centre such as Belfast only when accompanied by an excellent maintenance and cleansing regime. I am confident that that will happen in Belfast.

Only last week, I had an opportunity to walk round the city centre to see evidence of the regeneration work that has been done, and I was most impressed. The staff on site were a bit shocked to see me walking through the city centre alone. I also identified that, on completion of the project, a partnership approach will have to be taken with Belfast City Council on a total cleansing regime. The important benefit of Streets Ahead is that it acts as a further catalyst for the economic and retail-led regeneration of the core of Belfast city centre.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementary questions should relate to the original question.

Warm Homes Scheme

2. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the services delivered by the new service provider for the warm homes scheme. (AQO 217/10)

10. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Social Development what progress is being made to ensure that the revised warm homes scheme has the maximum impact and that landlords, and tenants who are

currently in receipt of benefits, are aware of the advantages of the scheme. (AQO 225/10)

The Minister for Social Development: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 10 together.

The warm homes scheme is the Executive and the Department for Social Development's (DSD) main weapon in tackling fuel poverty. I remain committed to alleviating fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. Following a competitive tendering process, the new contract for the scheme was awarded on 1 July 2009. H&A Mechanical Services and the Bryson Charitable Group are the new managers. It is expected that that competitive process will yield the maximum value for money in the delivery of the scheme. In other words, we should get more done with the resources that are available.

The Member will be aware that we have stringent monitoring arrangements in place with the Housing Executive, which is responsible for administering the scheme, and with the scheme managers. Monthly monitoring meetings are in place at which scheme managers provide detailed reports on progress to date against targets. Inevitably, as with the award of any new contract, there is a settling-in period. However, I am pleased with the progress that both scheme managers have made to date. At the end of September, over 2,500 eligible referrals had already been received. The scheme managers recently submitted a joint marketing plan, and extensive activities are planned over the coming months.

I suggest that all Members should encourage eligible constituents to make contact with the scheme managers to avail themselves of the range of energy efficiency measures that are on offer under the warm homes scheme. Furthermore, the scheme is being promoted through information and advice material in the jobs and benefits network. It also forms part of the overall approach that is being taken to increase benefit uptake. There is a joint approach to tackling fuel poverty with those who are in receipt of low incomes and with those who urgently need their homes heated to keep warm this winter.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. I have met one of the contractors, and I appreciate the work that has been carried out to date. However, I am concerned that people who have oil heating systems have been removed from the criteria. What are the Minister's thoughts on that matter, particularly as it impacts on many of those who are in fuel poverty and live in areas of social deprivation? Many of those heating systems are probably pushing 20 years of age.

The Minister for Social Development: As the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, the Member will recall that the Public Accounts Committee advised the Department to

refocus the scheme to target those who were in receipt of low incomes. That approach was endorsed by the Committee for Social Development.

I am well aware that there are many people who require replacement heating systems. Currently, however, I want to focus on the most vulnerable people and ensure that all those who are in receipt of low incomes, and who are eligible, get the appropriate heating in place in their homes so that we can tackle the issue of fuel poverty in a fulsome and holistic way. The Member will be well aware that over 71,000 households are now warmer since 2001 as a result of the successful warm homes scheme.

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined some of the benefits of the new scheme. I think that people will warmly — pardon the pun — welcome the scheme. In that respect, does she agree that public meetings, such as the meeting that I am organising on Thursday night in Coleraine town hall, in which the contractor speaks to landlords and tenants who have received invitations from active public representatives are a good way to publicise the scheme and ensure that the contractor gets the message out to a targeted audience so that the best benefit is reaped by those at whom the scheme is targeted?

The Minister for Social Development: I am sure that there is always a benefit in advertising. I agree with the Member that that is a good way to publicise the scheme. My colleague from Mid Ulster Patsy McGlone is organising such a meeting in Cookstown. All Members should inform their constituents of the potential benefits of such a scheme so that they can see quite clearly what is on offer.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In the Minister's answer to question 1, I wonder whether she was suggesting that she should not be let out on her own. Will the Minister give us some idea of when the backlog for the warm homes scheme will be dealt with? In particular, I am thinking about pensioners in my constituency who have been waiting since July 2007.

3.15 pm

The Minister for Social Development: I will deal with the second part of the question first. The details of those on the waiting list have been passed to the new scheme managers, both of which are contacting individuals on the waiting list to advise them of the new eligibility criteria. I expect that process to be completed by the end of November, but I have indicated that I want the task dealt with as expeditiously as possible: in other words, much more quickly.

In relation to the first part of his question, as a public representative the Member will know that we go to many places on our own to examine the needs of our constituents.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Minister for her earlier replies on this important matter. Will she assure the House that the proactive promotion of the warm homes scheme will ensure that people in all parts of Northern Ireland, particularly in the Newry and Armagh constituency, will be made aware of the details of the scheme: how to apply, when to apply and what they can expect?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member is probably aware that for the scheme's purpose, Northern Ireland has been separated in two; the northern part is managed by H&A Mechanical Services and the southern part, which includes Newry and Mourne, by the Bryson Charitable Group. To my best knowledge, all of that information has been communicated through all available media. However, if the Member knows of any "chinks in the armour", he should let me know so that I can rectify them.

Mrs M Bradley: Can the Minister tell us what contribution the warm homes scheme has made to the alleviation of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland?

The Minister for Social Development: The three factors that impact on fuel poverty are income, fuel prices and energy efficiency. The warm homes scheme has been hugely popular and very successful since its introduction in 2001. More than £118 million has been spent on making more than 71,000 households warmer.

In addition to heating and insulation measures, householders have received advice on maximising household income through ensuring that vulnerable people claimed all of the benefits to which they were entitled. We estimate that, since introducing benefit checks as part of the warm homes scheme, an additional £4 million a year is now being paid in benefits. We also estimate that £200 million of indirect benefits have accrued in the form of health, education, employment and the environment.

However, energy efficiency is but one element in the alleviation of fuel poverty. Energy prices and incomes are the other key variables, and the best that we can do in relation to them is to build a strong, prosperous economy that raises current incomes and, above all, lifts people out of fuel poverty.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

4. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the funding of the special purchase of evacuated dwellings scheme, with particular reference to cases which have already been approved. (AQO 219/10)

The Minister for Social Development: Funding for the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme for this year is £1.5 million. It is estimated that £9 million in funding will be required to meet the current level of applications. To date this year, 53 applications have been received and 13 completed.

The scheme is normally self-financing, or close to it. The difficulty is that the Housing Executive finds itself paying for houses that it has problems selling on. Following the recent Executive announcement on the SPED scheme, it was agreed that the Department for Social Development would immediately provide the money to fund the statutory SPED scheme to enable all approved applications to be met. Immediate and intensified efforts will be made to sell the existing SPED housing stock, and, if a shortfall is identified between the moneys paid and the income received prior to the end of the February monitoring round, the Executive will meet that shortfall.

To be candid, I should say that I have strong reservations about the scheme in general.

Although there is a need to help those who have been intimidated, for whom we all have great sympathy, a situation in which we buy homes from such people and sell them on to people who are more acceptable to the intimidators is not a long-term solution to the problem, and that is a matter that I will take up with the Northern Ireland Office. I have already had discussions with the Security Minister, Paul Goggins.

Mr Spratt: Does the Minister agree that the Chief Constable only issues certificates in cases in which it is absolutely necessary to do so? Given the number of certificates that he has issued so far this year — I think the Minister mentioned a figure of 53 — and the fact that he has turned down quite a number of others, does the Minister agree that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is legally bound to purchase those houses? In addition, given the areas in which some of those houses are situated, could some of them be used for social housing? Furthermore, does the Minister agree that the extra strain and pressure that was so publicly exerted over the airwaves on a family a number of weeks ago was unnecessary, hurtful and unhelpful?

The Minister for Social Development: The Member raised some issues with respect to the SPED scheme, the first of which was in respect of Chief Constable's certificates. I can safely say that responsibility for that scheme should not be with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; it is a security matter, and responsibility for it should be with the Northern Ireland Office. Secondly, it is wrong to highlight any particular issue. I do not wish to get into predicting levels of intimidation in Northern Ireland. For me, one more case of intimidation is one too many.

Finally, the Finance Minister and I have drawn a line on this issue, and I suggest that the Member should do likewise.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's response. Will she outline to the House the expected shortfall in the housing budget for 2010-11, which will have a detrimental effect on those exceptional cases under the SPED scheme?

The Minister for Social Development: The projected funding shortfall for the next year is £107 million. We are facing a significant shortfall in the capital budget, so all programmes are likely to be affected. Some people may think that I am making too much of this issue, but no other mainstream Executive programme, whether in health, education, roads or training, has been as devastated by the economic downturn as the housing programme. I repeat: we must all agree once and for all to put housing on a firm financial footing.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. However, only 13 out of 53 applications have been approved. I am glad for those 13 families, but, in my constituency, I am dealing with two families that, unfortunately and disgracefully, have received racial abuse to the point at which one family's house was petrol-bombed. Since then, that family has found out that it has been refused a certificate. Does the Minister have any influence with the Chief Constable in issuing certificates? Moreover, what circumstances qualify a family to be issued with a certificate? If one family is deemed to be under threat in one set of circumstances and another is refused a certificate under another set of circumstances, people in my constituency rightly conclude that it all depends on who you are and who you get on the radio with.

The Minister for Social Development: I do not know about those particular cases; the Member should pass on the details of them to me. I firmly repeat what I said at the beginning: I will not get into predicting levels of intimidation. I greatly sympathise and empathise with anybody who finds themselves in such a situation. I have also had constituents who have found themselves in that position. However, the programme clearly belongs to a security budget, rather than to one for housing, and the matter requires further discussions between me and the Security Minister.

I ask the Member to pass me details of those cases so that they can be fully investigated directly with the Housing Executive and, more importantly, with the Chief Constable. Confidential issues are involved, and we want to safeguard everyone's privacy, security and safety.

Mr Cree: I heard the Minister say that she would like to draw a line under this matter, but I am sure that

Members want to know whether she is happy with how the Minister of Finance dealt with her on this matter and whether she had any difficulty in how the negotiations were handled.

The Minister for Social Development: I have had various conversations with the Minister in the Executive. I tabled the matter for discussion on 10 September. I did not beckon publicity in respect of this matter. I am happy with the outcome of that Executive meeting, which was arrived at after extensive discussions and negotiations. It is a satisfactory outcome for everyone.

Social Housing

5. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development how many units of social accommodation have been agreed with the developers of the Titanic Quarter and the Sirocco works.

(AQO 220/10)

The Minister for Social Development: The Member asked me a similar question in May. I am surprised that he continues to ask about those specific sites. Perhaps he has his eye on one of the new homes.

The new developments at the Titanic Quarter and the Sirocco site offer significant opportunities to deliver social and affordable housing as well as shared housing. As part of phase 2 of the Titanic Quarter, 15% of the homes provided will be for social and affordable housing; 10% will be provided in the Titanic Quarter itself; and a further 5% at another site to be agreed. The developer has also agreed to provide 15% of the Sirocco site for social and affordable housing. In both cases, it is not possible to say exactly to how many homes that will equate, as that will ultimately depend on the final number of private homes provided. However, both arrangements have been made possible only with the goodwill and agreement of the developers.

Members will recall that, as part of the new housing agenda, I made it clear that Northern Ireland should no longer be the only region in Britain and Ireland that did not have a formal policy to direct a developer contribution in all new developments. Such a policy would remove any inconsistency or ambiguity between developments, as well as offering certainty and clarity for all future developments.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for her response, but she seems to be offended every time I ask a question in the House. I continue to try to find out how many units of accommodation will be forthcoming from those developments. The number of housing units that will be built in the Titanic Quarter and the Sirocco site is an open secret.

Has the Minister discussed whether that accommodation will be for single people or for a mix of single and family accommodation? Will she guarantee that communities that live around those developments in east Belfast will be fully consulted to ensure that their considerations will be taken into account in the making of decisions?

The Minister for Social Development: I am sorry if Mr McCann feels offended. He is fully aware that, in social housing, the largest complement on waiting lists for any urban area is made up of people who live by themselves. I am sure that the needs of the local community will be fully addressed in relation to that matter.

In relation to community consultation, I am sure that the developers will be available to talk to Mr McCann if he wishes to have such a meeting.

3.30 pm

QUESTION FOR URGENT ORAL ANSWER

Cattle Theft: Keady

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice of a question for urgent oral answer, in accordance with Standing Order 20A, for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the circumstances surrounding the theft of 16 cattle infected by tuberculosis and brucellosis, which were under DARD responsibility on Castleblayney Road, Keady, on Monday 5 October and to outline:

- a. what immediate action has been taken, or will be taken, by her Department to regain possession of the infected cattle;
- b. what immediate action has been taken, or will be taken, to protect cattle across Northern Ireland; and
- c. what immediate action has been taken, or will be taken, to stop a similar incident taking place in the future.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): The question is about the theft of 16 cattle infected by tuberculosis (TB) that were under the control of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on the Castleblayney Road in Keady on Monday 5 October.

The contracted haulier arranged to collect 17 TB-reactor cattle from a herd in Armagh. Initial indications are that, when the haulier arrived at the farm, he was unable to negotiate the entrance with two trailers attached to his lorry. He unhitched the rear trailer and parked it in a lay-by in the area. He then returned to the farm to collect the 17 TB-reactor cattle. On arrival, he discovered that the animals that had been gathered for collection had disappeared; they are presumed stolen. On returning to the parked trailer, the haulier then discovered that the 16 TB-infected animals had been unloaded and had also disappeared. The theft is under investigation by the PSNI, and my Department will work closely with the PSNI and co-operate fully with that investigation. My Chief Veterinary Officer has written to the Chief Constable to underline the seriousness of the issue.

The theft of TB-reactor cattle is a very irresponsible action as those animals pose a significant risk of TB infection to any livestock with which they come into contact. All DARD field staff have been alerted to the theft and told to report any suspicions, as have the

authorities in the South. I also ask any farmer who is offered cattle and whose suspicions are aroused to report the matter to the authorities. As this stage, there is no indication of the whereabouts of the cattle, thus it is not practical to apply any additional disease-control measures. I have stated publicly that the perpetrators of this crime have total disregard for the health status of the cattle population here and for the good reputation of the industry.

The question asks what immediate action is being taken to stop a similar incident taking place in the future. The contractor responsible for the collection of reactor cattle has been instructed to enhance security measures and precautions to prevent any recurrence of such an incident. DARD will also consider the need for additional safeguards as a result of the incident.

Mr Savage: One thing that concerns me and many others in the farming industry is the amount of time spent testing animals and finding cattle that have been infected with such diseases. This incident has inflicted stress on farmers who fear losing their cattle, and it has had financial costs for the Department and embarrassed the Department and all those involved in the agriculture industry.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development discussed the welfare of animals at its meeting today. If it had been a farmer —

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

Mr Savage: Had it been an individual farmer who had lost even one animal from an infected farm, the Department would have thrown the book at him. It would have confiscated everything belonging to him for keeping cattle. At this point in time, we need an assurance from the Minister that what happened will not happen again. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development cannot take for granted the well-being of the farming industry here. The industry has already been put through a lot of stress, only to find out that cattle lifted from a farm were parked along the side of the road and that somebody came along and took them. That cannot be allowed to happen again in this day and age.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I want to clear up a couple of points. First, this type of theft has never occurred in the North before, and my Department will review procedures as a result. I emphasise that the responsibility for this crime — it is a crime — rests with the people who committed it. Those people are content to undermine the good work that DARD and the industry are doing to control and eradicate major diseases.

The Member referred to diseases. The stolen animals were TB reactors, so there is a very low risk of brucellosis. Some of them came from a farm that had

been closed down for brucellosis, but the animals concerned are not brucellosis reactors. The disease in question is TB; there is no risk of any other disease in this case.

The Department has to be robust in its dealings with animals. If an animal goes missing, for whatever reason, we have to know why that happened. We cannot allow farmers to put us in the position where our traceability systems do not stand up. In August 2007, there was an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in England. We argued for our industry, and it was our robust traceability systems that saved our industry from the same types of restrictions that were placed on Britain at that time. We cannot allow those systems to be undermined in any way. We work with the industry and with the farmers' unions, as we should, to ensure that we have the best traceability systems and that they are robust.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Paisley Jnr): The Committee echoes what has been said today about reporting any information to the police. I urge anyone who has any information about the matter to bring it to the attention of the police immediately and allow them to bring to book the person who is responsible for the theft, thereby ensuring that that person is punished properly and adequately.

However, we echo some of the concerns that have been raised. The beasts that were taken from the farm were under the duty of care of the Department, and that duty of care is being examined. We look forward to the outcome of that examination, and, if it is recommended that tightened regulations be put in place, we want to see that happen.

What value has been placed on the beasts that were stolen? Will the Minister inform the House of any communication that is going on with counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK as a result of the theft?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I do not have a valuation of the animals. An indicative value is around £1,000 a beast, so we are talking about a value of £17,000 for the 17 animals. However, I stress that that is a ballpark figure.

We informed the PSNI about the theft, and we talked to the Garda Síochána to let them know that the animals were in transit somewhere and that they should be on the alert. As has happened in the past, we have had to deal with the issue on an all-Ireland basis. That is because the threat of the TB-reactor animals to farms in the South is equal to the danger that is posed to farmers in the North. Our systems kicked into action straight away, and we informed all the necessary agencies.

Again, I appeal to people who have knowledge of the animals' whereabouts to make it known to the authorities. The animals were to be lifted and taken away so that they could be destroyed. We do not want 16 or 17 animals that pose a risk to the industry to be located around the country. We are working very hard to eradicate TB and brucellosis, and I get angry about anything that is done to undermine that work. I am angry about this unfortunate incident; we did not want it to happen. We want to have robust systems in place, and we will be looking at all aspects of the incident to make sure that systems are tightened up.

Adjourned at 3.39 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday 19 October 2009

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MATTERS OF THE DAY

Car Bomb in East Belfast

Mr Speaker: Lord Browne has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Lord Browne to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call Members from other parties, as agreed with party Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak. There will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business has been concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Lord Browne: I am sure that the entire House will join with me and extend its sympathy to the young woman who was injured by the under-car booby trap device that was planted in east Belfast last Friday, and that it will express its relief that she is making a speedy recovery from her injuries.

It is essential that we all unite in condemning that vicious attack, which has no place in a democratic society. Furthermore, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that evil persons are not permitted to thwart the democratically expressed will of the vast majority of both communities in Northern Ireland. Moreover, we must make it clear that violent intimidation will not be permitted to destabilise our democratic institutions or to hinder progress.

There is no doubt that those responsible for planting the explosive device were intent on causing the death of a police officer, and we must utterly condemn that act. It is important that anyone who has any information regarding the matter must pass it to the PSNI, so that those who set out with the intention to murder and injure people can be apprehended and brought to justice.

This act should make us more determined to work energetically to ensure that a stable and peaceful society continues and develops in Northern Ireland.

Nothing should be allowed to deter the people of Northern Ireland from striving towards a shared future of peace and harmony, and I am sure that we are all determined that those evil people will not succeed.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is clear that a small group of individuals in this society are trying to drag us back into conflict and back to the days when there was bloodshed on our streets, when there was no hope and when there was despair, and none of us should allow them to do that.

We have spoken about the activities of those individuals a number of times in the Chamber. Thankfully, on each occasion, the House has stood united in its opposition to what those groups are about and to where they are trying to bring us. To paraphrase what Lord Browne said: we must make politics work. No matter how difficult it is — either personally or as parties moving forward with the political process — we must ensure that politics rules supreme. Those people are trying to cause the conditions for conflict to reign. It is my strong view, and that of my party, that the conditions for conflict do not exist and no one should try to recreate those conditions on our streets.

There is nothing in this society now that cannot be dealt with through the political process, even though it may be long, slow and tortuous. I am not asking those so-called dissident republicans to agree with the Sinn Féin analysis, and I am not asking them to agree with us politically. If people have political differences with anyone in this society — with Sinn Féin or on the matter of policing — those differences can be resolved through the democratic process. That is the route that everyone should be taking. Anybody who is foolish enough to drag us back to where we have come from must be opposed.

I appeal to anyone with information on the activities of those who planted that bomb or those who are involved in any other activity associated with the so-called dissidents, to bring that information to the police and for the police to deal with it.

Sir Reg Empey: Lord Browne referred to an attack on a police officer. However, it was not simply an attack on a police officer; it was an attack on somebody who was connected with a police officer, whether that was a loved one or a family member. Nor was it the first such attack, as there was one in Londonderry not very long ago, as you, Mr Speaker, know only too well.

It appears that these elements are moving things up a notch: not only is a police officer fair game, but members of an officer's family or those who have an immediate connection with officers are fair game. It saddens me greatly that, even after all that we have been through, there are still people — indeed, even a new generation of people — who believe that it is

legitimate to blow a human being to smithereens, whether that is blowing arms and legs off or whatever else. We see wounded people coming back from Afghanistan, and the same sort of attacks are being planned here. The sobering fact confronting everyone in the House is that people still believe that that is the way forward.

The attack took place in a quiet cul-de-sac in a residential area. Because of its location, quite sophisticated and difficult intelligence gathering would have been needed. It was close to police headquarters, so the attack was sending out all sorts of messages.

There may also have been a message for Members of the House. Perhaps the time has come to remind Members of their own security. Why should it stop there? That is something that we should all be aware of. It is only by the grace of God that we are not attending a funeral today.

The fact is also that there are a number of young people who are being misled and abused into going back down that track. They are being brainwashed to believe that by destroying their fellow human beings they are going to achieve some political goal here. It is a very sad development, and I hope and pray that Members and our parties will offer the appropriate level of leadership to dissuade those young people from going down that track again.

Mr A Maginness: I thank Lord Browne for raising this important issue this morning. He encapsulated the views of the House in condemning the attack on a police officer and his partner and expressing the sympathy of the whole House to the family. It was a very chilling and frightening episode, and, quite properly, all parties in the House have condemned it. The point that Lord Browne made is very important. We must renew our vigour in building this democratic institution and showing people that there is only one way to go forward, and that is peacefully.

It is appropriate for us to renew in the House our sense of purpose in building a politics here that is genuinely shared and respectful of one another's points of view, in order to show those who are advocating violence that in fact there is a proper way of going about one's business in resolving any political conflicts, and that is through democracy and through this Chamber. It is important that that message goes out to everyone from the House. Clearly, other parties are in firm agreement with Lord Browne and the points that he has made.

I cannot understand how anybody can go about such a thing. I cannot for the life of me understand how anyone could criminally try to destroy the life of a young woman and of a serving police officer. Remember, the attack on Friday was not simply an attack on a police officer and his partner; it was an

attack on all of us in the House and in the community who are committed to a peaceful, shared future. That should be the message going out from the House.

Mrs Long: It is with a heavy heart that I rise to speak about the issue today, because I do not think it is the kind of incident that any of us would wish to have to discuss when we come to the Assembly on a Monday morning. I send my best wishes to the lady who was injured; I am glad that she is recovering quickly. I also think of her family and friends at this time, because, although her physical injuries may not have been as severe as those who planted the bomb hoped, I suspect that it was quite traumatic for the entire family circle to be involved in such an incident. I am thinking about them.

Others have said that Kingsdale Park is a very quiet residential neighbourhood, which it is. It is also in a very mixed area of east Belfast. The residents there are, quite rightly, shocked and outraged by what has happened, because, for them, it is a move backwards to a time that we all thought had been put behind us. That is hugely disappointing for everyone.

Those who planted the bomb clearly and deliberately set out to take life, and it is only by the grace of God that we are not dealing with a much more serious incident today. Their actions need to be strongly condemned by all in the House, and I am glad that they have been. When you plant a bomb in a residential street, you are not simply attacking an individual and their property; you are attacking an entire community. It could easily have detonated when a young child was walking past on the way to school or when somebody was going to pick up a newspaper. It is a reckless attack on a whole street full of people and a whole neighbourhood. The people who do that have clearly shown yet again that they have nothing to offer the people of Northern Ireland but misery and destruction.

The people of Northern Ireland, by contrast, have chosen to build a more hopeful, shared future. They have entrusted us, as their elected representatives, with taking that process forward. I do not believe that anyone has the right to rob them either of that hope or of that future; they are entitled to it.

We need to ensure that we are not in any way deflected from what we do on a daily basis by the violence that is being meted out on our streets by some individuals. If we allow politics to be influenced by the violent behaviour of others, they will have gained a victory. We need to ensure that we do not allow that to happen.

I close by calling on those who may know the individuals involved to co-operate fully with the police. It is only by bringing those individuals to justice that we will see an end to this campaign.

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Before we conclude this item of business, I advise the House that the leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, Dawn Purvis, also wished to speak on the matter. However, I understand that she was taken very unwell this morning, and she has asked me to convey her apologies to the House for being unable to attend to voice her concerns. It is important that that is said this morning as well.

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a point of order, a Cheann Comhairle. At last Monday's sitting, from a sedentary position, Gregory Campbell referred to my party colleague Raymond McCartney and said:

"You used to shoot people." — [*Official Report, Vol 44, No 3, p112, col 1*].

I believe those remarks to be unparliamentary, and I ask you, if you have not done so already, to check the Official Report and to advise the House accordingly. This needs to be pursued. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for her point of order. I shall look at the Hansard report and come back either to the Member directly or to the House.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At one of our sittings recently, the deputy First Minister said to someone on these Benches:

"I am not 'the deputy' ... and don't you ever forget it." — [*Official Report, Vol 44, No 1, p27, col 2*].

I believe that that was quite unparliamentary, and I would like you to investigate that, also.

Mr Speaker: I thank Lord Morrow for his point of order. I shall look at the Hansard report and come back either to Lord Morrow directly or to the House on the issue.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Legislative Consent Motions

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members 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 on the inquiry into legislative consent motions.

At the outset, I pay tribute to the staff and all the members of the Committee who assisted in bringing the report about.

When the Committee on Procedures began this report in February this year, we always knew that the subject would not generate a particularly high level of interest among others: we were not disappointed. However, the subject needs to be addressed.

For the benefit of Members who have not had the opportunity to read the Committee's report, and before I go into any detail on it, I will give some background and outline what a legislative consent motion is. Back in July 1998, during the House of Lords debate on the Scotland Bill, Lord Sewel, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, addressed the difficult question of the Westminster Parliament making laws for Scotland. Lord Sewel said:

"we envisage that there could be instances where it could be more convenient for legislation on devolved matters to be passed by the United Kingdom Parliament. However ... we would expect a convention to be established that Westminster would not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters in Scotland without the consent of the Scottish parliament."

This is the crux of the matter: Westminster will not normally legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the devolved Administration.

The convention referred to by Lord Sewel has been established, but it is not enshrined in legislation. Instead, procedures have been developed between each of the devolved Administrations and Westminster to deal with occasions when legislation that impinges on devolved matters is included in legislation going through Westminster. Those procedures need to be given a firm footing and be provided for in Standing Orders.

Some Members may wonder why the Assembly should be concerned by the fact that Westminster wishes to legislate on devolved matters. There are two reasons for the Assembly to be concerned, one of which is political and one of which is procedural. In addition, the Assembly must ensure that the legislation

that is going through Westminster reflects the needs of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has a devolved Administration with clear and legally defined roles. The Assembly, its Members, the Executive and Departments operate under devolved powers, and every time that we approve a legislative consent motion, we are saying to Westminster that we know that we are responsible for the matter but that that we are content for Westminster to take it forward. However, we need to ensure that the legislation is right for Northern Ireland.

Therefore, legislative consent motions are politically important for every Member. Although some may have been tempted to casually give their consent to such motions in the past, the Committee hopes that future motions will be given the consideration that they fully deserve so that this area's needs are met.

I shall turn to the procedures that are in place and the likely benefits that will flow from the report's recommendations if they are accepted. Guidance has been produced in Westminster and Northern Ireland, and it has early and full consultation at its core. At present, as soon as a Bill is proposed at Westminster, contact is made with the relevant Northern Ireland Minister and Department. The Minister should then consult with the relevant Assembly Committee, and, after further consultation with Executive colleagues, the Minister will confirm agreement to the devolved provisions being carried in the Westminster Bill.

After the Bill is introduced, the Minister will again be consulted by Westminster on how the agreed policy is to be taken forward in the Bill. The Minister will consult further with Executive colleagues and the Assembly Committee before tabling the legislative consent motion to be debated in the Chamber.

Past debates on legislative consent motions have tended to be rather sterile affairs. In fact, in most cases, very few Members outside of the relevant Committees spoke. During the first 10 debates on legislative consent motions, a total of 59 Members, excluding the Ministers, spoke to the motions. Of those 59 contributors, 43 were members of the relevant Committees. The Committee on Procedures hopes that that will change with the publication of its report and that contributions will be made by a wider range of Members.

The report contains nine recommendations. I shall not address each one, but I shall cover the key recommendations. The Committee has recommended that Standing Orders should be introduced to provide clarity and transparency on the procedures. At present, the process is Executive-driven, and, although most people are content with the current procedures, the Committee considers that it would be much better if

the Assembly were given a degree of ownership and responsibility.

The Committee has recommended that the proposed Standing Orders should provide for the relevant Committees to produce a report on the legislative consent motion. The report should be short and sharp, but it should include the Committee's deliberations and findings. The primary purpose of that is to provide Members with in-depth information that should lead to a more informed debate in the Chamber. To ensure that Members are informed, the Committee has recommended that the motion should not be tabled in the Business Office until the report has been published.

Finally, the report recognises that, in some circumstances, the Minister might have to come before the Assembly with a second legislative consent motion if the original provisions in the Bill were to be significantly amended at Westminster. In such a case, time would be likely to be critical, and, although the Committee acknowledges that a shortened procedure is necessary, it also recognises that the Minister has a duty to inform the Assembly of the full reasons for the second motion.

As I said, the inquiry was not exciting, but it was necessary. The Committee on Procedures views the report as a statement by the Assembly that it wishes to have more information on and more control over legislative consent motions.

The Committee believes that that will be achieved through the implementation of the report's recommendations. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to join the Committee Chairperson in thanking the staff and Committee members for the production of the report. Lord Morrow has explained the issues that are involved and how the report relates to them. As has been stated, the report's recommendations will encourage Members to participate in better-informed debates on legislative consent motions. I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr K Robinson: I also support Lord Morrow's response to an underlying problem in the Assembly. He said that it was not exciting inquiry. However, those of us who braved the journey to Edinburgh on 29 April 2009, as others disappeared by the wayside, found the Scottish experience to be positive.

Initially, there were concerns that the business of legislative consent motions would, perhaps, give back to Westminster the power that Scotland had gained from it. When we spoke to MSPs in detail, that fear did not seem to be widespread. In fact, they believe that the way in which they have approached the problem and dealt with Standing Orders has been quite fruitful.

The key is that if Departments and civil servants at Westminster have a good working relationship with their corresponding opposite numbers in the devolved Assemblies and Parliament, the system works.

The Committee wants Assembly Members to become much more involved than they have been previously. All the recommendations that we have brought forward will ensure that. I assure Members that, in future, when the Assembly is faced with legislative consent motions, they will be briefed by a report from the Committee. The report will make them aware of issues that may concern them, which they can raise on the Floor of the House before the Assembly gives its consent to Westminster to proceed.

Mr O’Loan: As Members said, the issue is highly important. The debate will probably not get the attention that it deserves. Similarly, when actual legislative consent motions come before the Assembly, often, they do not get the attention that they merit.

Members, rightly, devote serious attention to Assembly-based legislation. However, we have a tendency to ignore Westminster legislation that may have a major impact on devolved matters. Members’ eyes tend to glaze over at the very name of legislative consent motions. It is important that good procedures are in place to deal with Westminster legislation of that type.

It is equally important that Assembly Members take a keen interest in what happens under those procedures. The Assembly can have all the procedures in the world; however, if Members do not engage with issues, those procedures will not be effective. I support the procedures that the report recommends. It is good to see them enshrined in Standing Orders. They will improve the situation.

I note the early-warning system that is used in the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government scan the UK legislative programme for Scottish implications as soon as it is announced. They draw those to the Parliament’s attention. It is vital that the Northern Ireland Executive effectively — and I mean effectively — replicate that system and carry that involvement through as legislation develops.

I have one concern, which relates to when a significant amendment is made at Westminster after a legislative consent motion has been agreed. The report addresses that issue. It refers to the possibility of a second legislative consent motion. However, it indicates that there will be no time for proper consideration of such a motion. Furthermore, there is no indication of a clear procedure for the determination of whether a second legislative consent motion will be required.

In practice, therefore, legislation that has significant implications for devolved matters could pass through Westminster without having been approved by the Assembly. Indeed, the Assembly could effectively be

blind as to what has occurred. I am not sure that the recommendations address that matter fully. Recommendation 7 merely states:

“Standing Orders address the curtailed process when a Minister considers that a second legislative consent motion is required.”

How Standing Orders will address that is not exactly specified. Therefore, redesigning Standing Orders around that will require further deliberation by the Committee on Procedures. However, subject to more analysis and discussion of that recommendation, I support the report and the recommendations.

12.30 pm

Lord Browne: I thank Lord Morrow, the Committee members and all the Committee staff for their dedication in ensuring that the report is presented to the Assembly today.

Legislative consent relates to the convention — often referred to as the Sewel convention — that the UK Government will not normally legislate on devolved matters without first gaining the agreement of the devolved legislature concerned, which in our case is the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I welcome the fact that Westminster has provided detailed guidance on legislative consent, including guidance that the Minister who is introducing a Bill must secure the Assembly’s agreement in principle to promote the legislative consent motion. After consultation and agreement, the Northern Ireland Minister will then confirm to the relevant Whitehall Minister whether the Executive agree to devolved provision being carried in a Westminster Bill. After the introduction of the Bill at Westminster, the Executive, the Northern Ireland Minister and the relevant Committee will provide details of the Bill to the Assembly by highlighting and explaining the devolved provisions and giving notice of the intention to table the necessary legislative consent motion to seek consent to the continued inclusion of the devolved provisions in the Bill. All of that is to be welcomed.

When the legislative consent motion has been agreed, the Minister will confirm the decision to the relevant Whitehall Minister, who will then keep the Northern Ireland Minister informed of any proposed substantive amendments involving the devolved provisions during the Bill’s passage through Westminster.

Members should note that, if the Assembly were to reject the motion, Westminster would be able to table amendments to remove the provisions that had not obtained the Assembly’s consent. It is, therefore, imperative that Members are kept better informed of the issues at stake in the motion.

I, therefore, welcome the Executive’s decision to introduce a similar process to that which is used by the Scottish Parliament regarding early notification of

potential legislative consent motions. I also welcome the Executive's agreement to the Committee's proposals that an explanatory memorandum and draft legislative consent motion should be provided to all Members within two weeks of a Bill being introduced at Westminster.

Without wanting to repeat what my honourable friend and colleague Lord Morrow stated, the Committee recognises that, although an individual Member may submit a legislative consent motion, agreements between Westminster and the Assembly preclude Westminster's taking account of a legislative consent motion, even if that is agreed by the House, without the approval of the Executive and the Minister who is responsible. The Committee, therefore, recommends that that issue be addressed by the proposed Standing Orders.

Although some people outside the House offer nothing but criticism and negativity, the report clearly demonstrates the advantage of having a devolved Assembly through which locally elected politicians who represent the main Northern Ireland political parties can influence not only legislation in this House but national legislation at Westminster. That obviously impacts on the daily lives of people in Northern Ireland. I, therefore, support the motion.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr Storey): I thank the Members who have taken part in the debate. As always, Members cannot wait to make their contribution in such debates because of the stimulating issues raised by them. However, as other Members said, it is vital that the Committee on Procedures and the House have a clear understanding of the importance of the motion. I welcome the opportunity to conclude the debate. I place on record the Committee's appreciation for the work that has been carried out by the Committee staff in producing the report.

Before I proceed, Mr Speaker, I will, with your indulgence, make reference to something else, as this may be my only opportunity to do so in the House today. I notice that my colleague from North Antrim Dr Coulter is in the House. I understand that this week, Dr Coulter will celebrate a very important milestone. If my information is correct, the spies in the Building — and they are not from that other large building nearby that was built a few months ago — inform me that Dr Coulter will be 80 years old on Friday. On behalf of my colleagues in the DUP and, I am sure, all Members, I wish him a very happy birthday and many years of blessings to enjoy. I hope that he is not going to retire from the North Antrim constituency.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures: As the Chairperson of the Committee on

Procedures said in his opening remarks, legislative consent motions may not appear to be particularly exciting topics for a Committee inquiry. However, as the inquiry progressed, it became clear to Committee members just how necessary the inquiry was. For far too long, legislative consent motions have not been afforded the importance that they deserve, yet every time such a motion is passed in the Assembly, the result is legislation that directly affects Northern Ireland.

One obvious problem identified during the inquiry was a lack of information to enable Members, especially Members outside the relevant Committee, to contribute to an informed debate. Consequently, when legislative consent motions came before the Assembly, they were often approved by Members who had neither full knowledge nor an appreciation of the relevant issues and their consequences. The implementation of the report's recommendations will change that, and through the new Standing Orders, we will have a degree of ownership to regulate the process. The implementation of the recommendations will also mean that the Minister will make key information available for every Member and the relevant Committee will be able not only to consider the issues at stake, but to report to the Assembly on its findings. Again, that will provide Members with the relevant information. Motions will not be tabled until after that has been done.

All that would not be possible without the co-operation of others. The Committee on Procedures was pleased that, following a discussion with the Executive, Ministers welcomed our proposals and agreed to play their part in full. The Committee was pleased that the Chairpersons' Liaison Group wrote to acknowledge, and welcome, the benefits of the proposals.

I turn now to remarks made by Members who contributed to the debate. We welcome the support of Mr Brady and his party. We thank Mr Robinson for giving us an overview of the Committee's visit to Scotland and appreciate the work of those who endured that arduous task on behalf of the Committee. For those who attended, it certainly was beneficial. Sometimes, the public are very sceptical of what might be termed a "junket". I only say that a trip is a junket if I am not on it. However, although I did not go to Scotland, I can say that it was an informed Committee visit. It is useful to see how other legislators are engaging with the particular problem that we face.

My colleague Mr O'Loan rightly brought attention to the fact that we, as a House and as members of the United Kingdom, should pay attention to the issues in Parliament at Westminster. It was good to be reminded of the importance of the process and of keeping focus on what is taking place in the House of Commons. Mr O'Loan also made reference to amendments and a possible second legislative consent motion. His concerns were noted. The Committee will be quite

happy to look at the draft Standing Orders to ensure that there is a degree of clarity around the concerns that Mr O’Loan raised.

Lord Browne said that the legislative consent motion will ensure that Members are better informed. I think that anything that makes Members better informed on issues that are relevant to the House and beyond is certainly to be welcomed. Lord Browne made reference to the benefit that that will surely bring to devolution and to local elected representatives being able to consider, and have input into, everyday issues that are of importance to our constituents.

I hope that Members found the debate to be informative and that the report will be of benefit to the House. I hope that the House will support the motion.

Mr Speaker: On behalf of the whole House, I congratulate Dr Coulter on reaching the right old age of 80. The whole House wishes him well for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee on Procedures on the Inquiry into Legislative Consent Motions.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Childcare for Students in Further and Higher Education

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which 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 agrees that widening access to further and higher education is a key priority as outlined in the Programme for Government, and that a significant factor in widening access is the provision of campus-based childcare for students; calls on universities, university colleges and regional colleges to examine options for the provision of on-campus childcare, as a matter of urgency, or to seek to preserve or enhance existing childcare provision; and further calls on the Minister to promote such provision with his Executive colleagues.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I too wish Dr Coulter a happy birthday. He is a valued member of the Committee, and I hope that he has many more Committee meetings as well as birthdays. I am bit concerned that his celebrations may dig into Minister McGimpsey’s budget — I hope that he will not light 80 candles on Friday in case that becomes a public safety issue. I wish him well and hope that he has a good day.

I am glad to see so many members of the Committee for Employment and Learning in the Chamber. I thank the Minister for being present to respond to the motion.

The Committee decided to bring the issue to the Chamber, because its members regard the provision of affordable and accessible on-campus childcare for students as key to the commitment to widen access to higher and further education.

I acknowledge the role of the Minister and his Department in the provision of on-campus childcare. The Department provides up to 85% of students’ childcare costs, and that must be welcomed. However, as the Minister highlighted in his letters to the Committee, individual universities, university colleges and further education (FE) colleges are responsible for the provision of on-campus childcare.

I do not want to spend my allocated time lecturing Members on the rules that govern childcare for students or on the assistance that is available. The thrust of the Committee’s motion concerns the provision of childcare on campus and why it is important. The Committee is proud to be able to bring to the Assembly issues that have been raised by stakeholders in Committee and at other meetings and by constituents. We have done that

on a number of occasions and will do so again tomorrow. A big part of our role is to bring to Members' attention issues that we feel they will want to know about and that directly impact on their communities.

The issue of on-campus childcare provision was brought to us by a group that sought the Committee's support to fend off the possible end of childcare provision on the Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster. The university had undertaken an equality impact assessment on the options available for childcare across its campuses, including closure of the provision. The Committee did not hesitate to engage directly with the university, and I am happy to report that the university has decided to continue with its on-campus childcare provision at the Magee and Jordanstown campuses. The university will continue to run its voucher system on the Belfast campus, and efforts are being made to secure its childcare provision at the Coleraine campus for the longer term. That means that closure is no longer on the agenda. That must be welcomed.

12.45 pm

I commend the university for making the right decision, and I support the vice chancellor's stated aim of widening access to university through financial support and other support for childcare. Moreover, I am happy to report that Queen's University has on-campus childcare provision. The Committee for Employment and Learning will seek to engage with FE colleges and other institutions to ensure that they understand the importance of making on-campus childcare available.

As I said earlier, I will focus on why the provision of affordable on-campus childcare is so important, beyond the obvious reasons of convenience and bringing such provision into the reach of students who are often on a limited income. Reliable, accessible and affordable childcare is a huge issue for students in higher and further education who have children, particularly lone parents. On-campus childcare can be the difference between students attending college or university, or remaining frustrated and denied the opportunities that further or higher education could offer them and their families. In some cases, students prefer local childcare that is not on campus for a variety of reasons, including privacy and a desire to base their children near to other family support systems, particularly if they travel longer distances to their place of learning. In those cases, we advocate that the universities and colleges engage with local childcare providers and create networks.

One stated strategic priority of the Programme for Government is the promotion of social inclusion. Equality, fairness and inclusion are regarded as key cross-cutting themes. The Programme for Government

also prioritises advancing social transformation and the inclusion of all our people. Given our ambitious economic goals, it is clear that we must ensure that more people are educated to a higher level. In order to facilitate that, we must put in place support mechanisms, particularly accessible and affordable childcare. For generations, some people in our community have been denied further and higher education opportunities because of childcare responsibilities that have largely confined them either to the home or to low-paid and part-time work. A lack of ability has not held the vast majority of people back; it has been the lack of support and infrastructure, and the lack of childcare.

I will outline a few of the Programme for Government's public service agreements (PSAs). PSA 1 deals with productivity growth, and PSA 2 deals with skills for prosperity. PSA 3 deals with increasing employment, and PSA 10 deals with helping young people to achieve through education. What do those PSAs have in common? They are all designed to make our community more prosperous and to promote greater equality and social inclusion. They all deal with introducing skills, upskilling, reskilling and educating our people, who, after all, are our most precious asset.

We cannot make those aspirations a reality if we leave significant sections of our community out of the equation. Lone parents, mothers who want to reskill and return to the workplace, young parents whose education has been prematurely curtailed and many more groups need childcare to allow them to fulfil their potential and contribute to our collective aim of creating a prosperous and inclusive society in which people who want to learn new skills and expand their education do not face obstacles such as a lack of childcare.

I hope that I have outlined to the House why the Committee for Employment and Learning is so passionate about on-campus childcare for students. Although the Minister fulfils his statutory obligations on finance, and so on, I encourage him to engage proactively with further and higher education institutions to help them create the on-campus childcare that will allow all our people to develop and provide an example for their children to follow. I have great pleasure in moving the motion on behalf of the Committee, and I look forward to the debate, especially the Minister's comments.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Members who tabled today's motion. University provides a time for growth and development, and a time for acquiring new skills and knowledge. It should be a positive experience, which is why we must make life more comfortable, and university more appealing, for our students than ever before.

In recent debates, we recognised that we will struggle to fill many jobs in the future. In 2007, there was a shortfall of 535 hard-to-fill vacancies in the engineering sector. That cost our economy £21 million in gross value added. Our employers are nervous about encouraging foreign investment, and they have good reason to be concerned. If we do not encourage more students to study at home, it is likely that they will study elsewhere, graduate, find employment and settle outside Northern Ireland. That makes it imperative to encourage our universities to enrol as many students as possible so that all courses are filled.

Our graduates are the future of our economy. I read a recent article about the University of Ulster's decision to keep the crèches open at its Jordanstown and Magee campuses, and I congratulate the university on that. In addition, I understand that options are being explored at the Coleraine campus. That is good news. The right childcare is a key factor when parents make the decision to go back to study, because it can help students to engage in their education. Reliable and affordable childcare is a major issue for parents and must be provided in a variety of forms.

Without affordable childcare options, long hours and low pay force many students to make the unfortunate choice between parenthood and work. Sometimes, parents require nurseries that are based on site at colleges and universities, and it sometimes works out that nurseries that are closer to home are more valuable and convenient. Many students will require childcare facilities after classes, which gives them time to complete assignments and take study time.

It is important that colleges and universities understand the difficulties and time constraints with which parents have to cope. Teaching staff must be approachable and supportive. Building long-term relationships is an important strategy in maintaining good relations, so there is no reason why peer support should not be built into lecturing. Application forms for financial support, grants and other assistance should be uncomplicated. The whole system must be simple, and decisions on who is eligible must be immediate. To allow for that, staff will need a certain amount of training so that they have up-to-date information to assist in whatever way they can.

The recent National Union of Students (NUS) report, 'Meet the Parents', showed that 60% of students with children have thought about leaving their courses because of the difficulties that they face in juggling their studies with childcare. On the other hand, some colleges were reported as having very low usage of their nurseries. In response to a question for written answer from Sue Ramsey on 9 November 2007 about childcare provision at Belfast Metropolitan College, the Minister for Employment and Learning stated:

"for the academic year 2006/07, only one third of all available childcare places at the campus were used by College students and staff." — [*Official Report, Bound Volume 25, pWA23, col 2*].

If that is the case, availability should be reviewed. I understand that universities must cut their costs without having a negative effect on the teaching and learning that they provide. There is no doubt that that is a tall order. No one wants unnecessary redundancies or to cause problems for students who want to study but are unable to do so because they cannot afford the childcare costs.

I urge the Minister to reach a position on the matter, and I will welcome his comments later. It is vital that he examines ways in which to provide support for those parents who can no longer avail themselves of child-minding facilities at colleges and universities so that they can still have the opportunity to remain in further education. For many disadvantaged parents, further education is the only way to improve their lives and reduce the risk of poverty. That would have the knock-on effect of eradicating child poverty by 2020. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Mr Speaker, I beg your indulgence and that of the House for a moment to reply sincerely to the very good wishes from all sides of the House. I treasure the friendship of the Members of the House and its staff. Having reached the ripe old age of 80, I have to say that it means a lot to me to look back with many memories. I hope that, in the days to come, Members of the House will be kind towards the old man and will have good wishes for me. It has been a pleasure to serve here, and the experience of being here has enriched my life.

In further education and higher education, the provision of childcare has been an issue in recent weeks. The University of Ulster announced a review of childcare provision at all its campuses, and, around the same time, Belfast Metropolitan College announced the closure of the crèche at its Tower Street campus for financial reasons. The 'Belfast Telegraph' reported early last month that that will affect 30 children. Such a move cannot be taken lightly, and should not be forgotten.

There are only 130 childcare places at Queen's University. The University of Ulster has some childcare provision at all of its campuses, which is delivered in different ways and is under review, as I have mentioned. I urge the University of Ulster to conduct that review in an open-minded way, and I also call on the Executive to move forward with a childcare strategy. The Assembly debated a childcare strategy, and the lack of a lead from the Executive, as far back as April 2009, yet we are still seeking solutions to the same problem.

The motion focuses attention on only one aspect of the problem: provision of childcare for students who are parents. However, the broader problem remains. In its report into child poverty in June 2008, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister identified the lack of childcare as a factor in poverty, particularly child poverty. In 1999, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety issued its childcare strategy, which commented on the variable quality, high cost, low availability and lack of information on childcare in Northern Ireland, and committed to addressing each of those problems. In 2005, Capita undertook a review of the strategy, and found a great improvement in quality, some progress on information, and an improvement in accessibility, which has since begun to decline, but the number of childcare places has risen from 40,000 in 1999 to 47,000 in 2007.

The report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Capita review called for a cross-departmental strategy to be brought forward as a priority. That is yet to happen. The Department of Education must introduce its early years strategy, and the Executive must establish a lead Department for these issues. Childcare is partly, but not exclusively, a Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) issue.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Member agree that it is inconceivable that the Executive have allowed the Lifestart organisation to have its budget greatly reduced, which in turn means that youngsters from socially deprived areas are not able to avail themselves of the education and other factors that go with it as a result of that cutback? Does he also agree that the Executive should reinstate the funding to provide continued assistance to the Lifestart organisation?

Mr Speaker: The member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Member for bringing that information to the House.

Until the Executive take decisions on the broader issues that we have been discussing, we will return to the House and keep debating those issues.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Yes, I will give way.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: I thank the Member for giving way: I am taking liberties in his birthday week.

I appreciate that there are related issues, but as a statutory Committee whose role is to scrutinise the Department for Employment and Learning, we need to be commended for bringing the motion. If other Committees need to raise issues, those should be raised with party colleagues. The motion concerns accessing

higher and further education, and the lack of childcare provision.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I agree that the Committee should be commended for tabling the motion. As someone who has spent many years in higher and further education and has seen the benefits of having childcare facilities available to parents, especially young parents, so that they can continue their education, I think that we should bring this forward. I fully support the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: I, along with other colleagues, wish Robert a happy birthday, and hope that he enjoys many more.

I support the motion. I thank the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing forward such an important issue. I welcome the Minister, and look forward to his contribution.

1.00 pm

I recently spoke to the manager of a women's centre about the value of childcare to education, and she gave me two relevant examples. The first was of a woman who did an access course through the women's centre. The centre's childcare facilities gave that woman the opportunity to study and attend classes, and she is now at university. The second example was of a woman who re-entered education at her local women's centre. She would have had to attend her local FE college in the second year of her course, but that college does not provide any crèche facilities. The woman was unable to afford childcare and, as a result, is no longer pursuing her career in education. She is on state benefits, unable to reach her potential or contribute fully to society.

A recent study that was undertaken in my constituency showed that the vast majority of people — around 80% — consider education to be important. In the same study, cost and lack of childcare were the most commonly cited barriers to entering or continuing education. I am aware that the Minister and his predecessors have placed a high value on breaking down barriers to education, but they have also had to balance their books. Childcare represents good value for money, but it is not free. One college director recently told me that the college used to provide crèche facilities but had to close them because of the cost involved. I have also spoken to representatives of other colleges at which there are no crèche facilities.

It is worth noting for the record that our universities provide subsidised childcare facilities or vouchers for students. Those are very important investments. The University of Ulster's recent decisions to continue to provide childcare facilities at Jordanstown, Magee and Coleraine and to continue the voucher system at the Belfast campus are most welcome.

FE colleges are funded differently to universities, and their method of funding is a matter of ongoing concern to college managers. The funding of further education colleges is dependent on student numbers, which are uncertain from one year to the next. Therefore, college managers tend to be extremely prudent in their spending and in their management of reserves. Perhaps the Minister will comment on how colleges can be put on a more stable financial footing so that college managers have greater certainty about their budgets.

The FE sector should consider the opportunities for childcare provision presented by the community sector. The community sector can provide high-quality childcare at a reasonable cost. A number of professional organisations have opted to provide childcare in partnership with the community sector.

Executive programme funds, including the children's fund, were set up when the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party were the main Executive parties. However, those have been scrapped under the Sinn Féin/DUP regime, and that has cut vital funding for such activities. The question that the Assembly and the Executive must answer is: how do we reappropriate funds for childcare in education? The SDLP supports the motion, but it would be remiss of us not to point out that the Executive does not have Budget lines that are strategically aligned to socio-economic objectives. No one should be surprised, therefore, when socio-economic objectives cannot be adequately set or met because of a lack of funds.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: I agree with the Member regarding the aims and ethos of the children's fund. However, does the Member not agree that, although the children's fund aimed to target the communities most at risk, Departments and civil servants were very cute in their use of the fund? The children's fund was never regarded as additional money, and that is why it was reassessed.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to his speaking time.

Mr P Ramsey: I take the Member's point but, in the past, government work could be directed at specific areas as a result of Executive programme funds; that is the difference.

The lack of alignment to socio-economic objectives is why we opposed the Budget and the Programme for Government, and we explained that at the time. It is also why we proposed in the Assembly that the Budget and the Programme for Government should be overhauled. That proposal was rejected by Sinn Féin and the DUP, and people are suffering as a consequence. If those funds had not been cut and if the Budget and the Programme for Government had been reframed, we might not be having this debate today.

The issue of childcare for students came to the Committee as a result of an equality impact assessment at the University of Ulster. Thankfully, the University of Ulster's senior management team listened to the Committee's concerns, and childcare facilities will continue at the Coleraine, Magee and Jordanstown campuses.

We are encouraging people into education as it offers a passport to employment opportunities, but parents, particularly single parents, are at a disadvantage; either they do not have access to childcare or they find that the provision that exists is too expensive. It is important to address that. The SDLP supports the motion.

Ms Lo: I, too, wish Rev Dr Coulter many happy returns on his eightieth birthday.

I will speak first of my experience as a young mother returning to education. Some years ago, when my two young sons were in primary school, I went back to college to study part time and, eventually, I went on to study at Queen's University and the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. It was very much a time of compromising and constantly juggling studies, childcare and running the home. One minute I thought that I had everything under control, and the next minute one of the two children would fall sick and I was in trouble. However, bettering my qualifications is the best thing that I have ever done for myself, and I have never looked back.

Widening access to higher and further education to include those in under-represented and disadvantaged communities not only promotes social inclusion but is vital for our economy. So many people from those communities are economically inactive, but, given the right help, they would all want to improve their education and get jobs. It is not only a matter of encouraging people to enrol in colleges; it is important to retain them. Young mothers who want to better themselves face so many barriers, not least those that involve their aspirations and practical issues. It is important not to set them up to fail. We must try to help and support them through the difficult times.

Research on child poverty clearly shows that children of lone parents who do not work are most at risk of being trapped in child poverty. There is a great need to encourage those parents to access higher and further education so that they can improve their employability and, thus, their economic situation.

Campus-based childcare facilities not only provide quality care but give parents peace of mind. When children are on site, parents have easier access to them and can check on them at break time and lunchtime. Such facilities are particularly useful for young mothers who are still breastfeeding their children. Queen's University has a very good range of facilities and childcare support: two full-time crèches for children

aged from two months to four years and part-time care mornings for children aged between four and 11. Those services are extremely popular.

Like other Members, I welcome the University of Ulster's decision to retain its crèches at both its Coleraine and Magee campuses and to continue its voucher system in Belfast. At a time of cutbacks, it is all too easy to target such services, as happened with the threat of closure that hung over those crèches. However, that is very much a short-term policy. During the economic downturn, we should encourage more people to upskill and return to education so that when economic recovery comes they will be ready to take up employment.

The education and library boards offer childcare grants for parents in full-time higher education of up to £7,735 for one child or up to £13,260 for two or more children. Parents should avail themselves of those grants. However, a range of childcare services should be made available for student parents, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach —

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Lo: A range of services should be made available to student parents in colleges or in the community nearer their homes. It should be a matter of choice for parents.

Mr Irwin: I add my congratulations to Robert Coulter on his eightieth birthday.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. The issue has come to the fore particularly because of the current economic climate, in which families have recent experience of job insecurity. I know of a few people with young families who have opted to return to part-time study to retrain in another sector of work. It is important to cater for people in that position so that, with the assistance of campus-based childcare facilities, they may be permitted to continue in education.

At present, those with young families who have lost their jobs and are considering a return to education to pursue a different career path do not have access to on-campus childcare. That hampers seriously their ability to afford and pursue further or higher education; childcare is expensive in this day and age. For potential students who have young families, are single parents or are one of two parents who are experiencing hardship, the prospect of enrolling in education is reduced seriously by the lack of childcare provision.

Also, young single parents may have to cut short their college courses or opt out of continuing to higher education so that they can care for their children. Often, in such circumstances, the parent does not immediately envisage re-entering education, at least

not until the child is of a suitable age. However, that student group could have greater access to further study through the provision of suitable campus-based childcare facilities. Such facilities would encourage mothers to return to education as soon as is practically possible and would also benefit teachers.

Childcare facilities exist in some colleges and universities and are well utilised by the student body. However, there remains much room for improvement, particularly in our FE colleges. The Assembly is keen to promote lifelong learning and must, therefore, make it as widely accessible as possible. The failure to provide childcare facilities at universities and colleges is a failure to promote lifelong learning. The current economic climate means that retraining is becoming a more important option for those who are out of work. It would be a positive step for the economy if the Assembly were to try its best to assist families by ensuring that the lack of childcare provision does not represent a stumbling block to those who want to pursue a different career.

I hope that the Minister will give the issue serious consideration and seek to focus the minds of the further and higher education sectors on moving towards the goal. I support the motion.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate my former colleague on the Assembly Commission Robert Coulter on his 80th birthday.

As the Chairperson of the Committee, Sue Ramsey, said, the motion came about because of a situation, since rectified, at the university campus in Coleraine. Although some Members talked about the wider problems of childcare provision in society, it is an ongoing issue in universities and further education colleges. A similar problem to that in Coleraine arose at Belfast Metropolitan College, where childcare facilities have been withdrawn. Although childcare provision in society is a wider issue, the motion focuses on its provision for those enrolling in further education.

The Minister must try to address the issue. I noted his reply to a question about the situation at Belfast Metropolitan College, in which he stated that the colleges and universities are autonomous organisations that set budgets and decide what facilities to provide. Indeed, we have come up against that problem several times. However, there is a conflict between that and the Programme for Government objective and Department for Employment and Learning objective to try to ensure that people can take up further education.

1.15 pm

Many people dream of taking up further education. However, if they are jobless or are in poverty, having a child can unfortunately reinforce that poverty and put up barriers for those people trying to get into further

education. As has been said, this debate has come about because of the situation in Coleraine and in Belfast Metropolitan College. However, I have no doubt that the issue will come up again unless a policy is formulated to deal with the matter. When it comes to cutbacks in college budgets, childcare provision is something that will unfortunately take a hit.

The Belfast Metropolitan College situation involves a PFI contract, which complicates the problem because Northwin Construction owns the building. I know that it is trying to review the situation. I hope that the Minister will try to mainstream funding for childcare provision or implement other measures so that the Executive can deal with the matter. There needs to be a longer-term strategy and, as Robert Coulter said, a cross-departmental debate about how we deal with this problem in society in general. We need to come up with ways that allow lone parents and those who suffer because of poverty and deprivation to get back into further education. Other problems such as financial burdens face people if they want to return to education, so childcare provision should be in place, whether that is on-campus or whether there are other arrangements, as has been suggested.

As a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I support the motion. I hope that we will hear a positive response from the Minister.

Mr T Clarke: Like others, I congratulate Dr Coulter on reaching such a tremendous milestone. I congratulate him on his endeavours and how he continues to work on. I must admit that I was amazed to hear that he is 80 today; I thought that he was much younger. I wish to see him continue the job that he is doing.

I support the motion. I am sure that everyone in the Assembly agrees that education is extremely important. If we are to have a strong economy, we need to have a well-educated population. More and more people are going into further and higher education, which has to be welcomed. However, there are still many people who feel that they cannot enter full-time education due to financial or family circumstances. That should not be the case. For many people who have children — especially those with young children — entering into further or higher education does not seem like a realistic option. Childcare costs, along with the reduced income that is associated with going to college or university, put many people off going down that route.

I welcome the spirit of the motion. I welcome its recognition that the problem exists and the possible solutions that it offers. The priority should be ensuring that existing on-campus childcare services are retained. It is obviously easier for university campuses to provide those services due to the high number of people who can use them, as that reduces the cost of

provision. However, those services are by no means secure, and the argument needs to be made for their retention, as they are essential for enabling more parents to enter full-time education. As we are aware, it is harder for smaller colleges to provide childcare services. However, I encourage them to look at the options that are available to them. For many people, regional colleges are the first step towards university. It is important that the support that they need at that first stage is in place so that they are able to go further.

I believe that a childcare grant is available for those who are studying full time of up to £7,700 for someone with one child and £13,200 for someone with two or more children. However, on-campus childcare is much more beneficial to parents as it gives them more flexibility and allows them to be closer to their children.

There is no silver bullet that will help parents get into further and higher education. However, greater availability of on-campus childcare is one practical step that can be taken to help that happen.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise for my late arrival in the Chamber. I congratulate Rev Coulter and wish him well.

As a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, I support the motion, which advocates:

“widening access to Further and Higher Education”,

and that is what the debate is about. In particular, access must be widened to include people on low incomes. While discussing childcare, Anna Lo commented that we are, by and large, talking about young women. Universities and colleges, by their very nature, should be attractive, welcoming and encouraging to everyone. It should not be beyond the budgets and promotional capabilities of universities, of all places, to encourage young mothers, parents and all those who want to attend. Universities should promote themselves in ways that get those people to join and remain in order to further their education.

That is important for a number of reasons. I am aware, welcome and accept that the Department funds childcare, as Minister Empey said in reply to a question from Committee Chairperson, Sue Ramsey. As Paul Butler and other Members may have mentioned, the motion is about policy, not the management of budgets. We accept that and know that times are tight and that there is an economic downturn. However, I am sure that the Minister and the Department can come up with a policy that makes further and higher education attractive to everyone and ensures that “widening access” is not just a couple of words in the Programme for Government but is implemented in places that matter.

Mr G Robinson: I also congratulate Robert Coulter. With the grace of God, I hope that he is granted many more happy birthdays. Well done Robert.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr G Robinson: Northern Ireland's successful recovery from the current economic downturn lies in its being able to provide the educated workforce required by firms that are expanding or setting up here for the first time. To ensure that such a workforce is in place when needed, we must ensure that the talent in our population is given every opportunity to shine, regardless of previous educational attainment or gender.

The latter point is important to the debate, because lack of childcare is most likely to impact on women. We must make sure that everyone with a talent to offer is given the chance to develop and utilise it for their personal, and Northern Ireland's economic prosperity in years to come. The provision of childcare for those who need it to further their education is key, particularly for women, who traditionally carry out such duties.

I have been contacted by individuals and families who were deeply concerned about the proposed withdrawal of crèche facilities at the University of Ulster's Coleraine campus. Thankfully, the university has said that it will retain the facilities. I do not doubt that withdrawal of such facilities would adversely impact on the educational and life opportunities of some people.

I ask the Assembly: do we or do we not want to utilise the skills of every person in Northern Ireland? The only answer is to remember that there is lifelong access to further and higher education. We must address all the issues that arise for those who wish to take advantage of that lifelong access to learning.

I remind Members that access to such learning brings a double economic benefit, both for individuals and for Northern Ireland. It will help to give us the educated workforce that potential employers seek when relocating or expanding, and it will further assist the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to attract new investment and employment to Northern Ireland.

To ensure that that investment becomes a reality, it is the Assembly's duty to guarantee that childcare is available to those who return to education to update their skills or to enhance their employment chances. Empowering individuals through education will enable the great talent that is undoubtedly in Northern Ireland to be utilised to its fullest potential.

Finally, I point out the obvious: providing childcare, in itself, creates employment, and that can only benefit Northern Ireland's economic well-being. Although there may be short-term financial pain, if childcare

were available to those in higher and further education, there would be long-term financial gain for individuals and for Northern Ireland as a whole. I support the motion.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. The debate has been interesting and, sometimes, almost emotive, so I thank all Members who contributed. Before moving on, I should say to my worthy colleague Rev Coulter that he need not think that he will dine out on this birthday for ever. I assure him that the time will soon return when he will give and receive no quarter.

My Department does not have direct responsibility for childcare policy in the Executive, and that point has been raised already. Indeed, no single Northern Ireland Department has full responsibility for it, so Members will need to return to that issue. Nevertheless, it is a cross-cutting issue, and I am hopeful that the work of the interdepartmental child poverty subgroup, which is led by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and which is developing a childcare strategy, will provide an Executive-wide response to the issue.

I assure Members that my Department is committed to widening access to further and higher education for all groups and sectors in the community, including those with dependent children. I point out that Northern Ireland's record in achieving higher participation rates in higher education for those who are from more disadvantaged backgrounds is well above the levels that are being achieved in other parts of the United Kingdom.

My Department has been striving to widen access to higher education through a variety of financial incentives. In the 2008-09 academic year, we allocated almost £2.5 million to encourage enrolments in higher education from all communities, and £1.4 million went to universities to assist with the cost of providing additional support for students from under-represented groups. A further £342,000 went to higher education institutions to provide disability premiums, and £708,000 was earmarked to support special projects that are aimed at making universities more accessible to young people who have felt excluded from higher education.

The University of Ulster's Step-Up programme is one such project, and it is designed to help people with low attainment levels from disadvantaged areas in Belfast and Londonderry to improve their academic performance and gain entry to university. I am pleased to say that the programme is both well regarded and very successful. More than 700 students from those disadvantaged areas have attended university courses, and 95% of participants have completed their course.

The Discovering Queen's initiative at QUB is another of those projects. That Province-wide programme targets

pupils from non-selective post-primary schools, who tend to have experienced disadvantage. Many participants have had no family experience of higher education and a very limited family income. To date, more than 15,000 pupils have engaged with the programme.

Feedback shows that 87% are more likely to want to attend university as a result of participating in the programme. Under the variable deferred tuition fee arrangements, each of the universities is required to make access arrangements to ensure the provision of student bursaries and outreach activities.

1.30 pm

My Department has asked the universities to submit an assessment of their widening participation initiatives to help to inform the way forward for the recruitment, retention and progression of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of those positive actions, participation of those from socio-economic groups 5 to 7 increased from 24% to 25.8% during the period 2002-07. As under-representation will continue to be a challenge for my Department and for the universities and colleges, we are leading the development of an integrated strategy for widening participation, which has the full support of various Departments.

It is not just in higher education that great strides have been made to encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Over the past 10 years, further education colleges have successfully increased participation in almost every group in our community. Since 1998-99, the number of FE enrolments from the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland has increased by almost 31%. Enrolments from deprived areas now make up one fifth of the FE student population.

FE has also an outstanding track record in engaging students with dependent children. In the 2007-08 academic year, more than 15,000 students with dependent children were enrolled on FE courses. Some of those students have been able to avail themselves of on-site college crèche facilities. Many others have not had access to such provision or have chosen not to use it. It is simplistic, therefore, to suggest that, by increasing the number of crèches at universities and colleges alone, more students with dependents would be able to avail themselves of further and higher education.

Four of the six FE colleges offer on-campus childcare facilities. The level of usage by students varies by college. Almost all those crèches are open to the general public. In order to remain viable, many cater for children whose parents are not college students. Any decision to provide crèche facilities is a matter for individual colleges and universities, which determine what services and amenities to offer students. However, my Department is committed to

supporting students with dependent children and recognises the additional support that they require.

The Department provides a significant level of financial support to students with young children. In 2008-09, my Department provided over £675,000 to help students with the cost of childcare. That support is available through three separate funds to help students to meet the cost of childcare in any setting, not just childcare provided by a particular university or college.

There are two significant advantages to those schemes. First, they are flexible. The student can use the childminder or crèche of his or her choice, which in turn increases the number of childcare places far beyond what could be provided by university or college crèches. Secondly, it is more cost-effective than funding colleges and universities directly for nurseries or crèches. The funding goes straight to the parent or childcare provider, not to the institution. It also means that students with dependent children are free to attend their preferred university or college course of study, and the availability of childcare facilities is not a major deciding factor.

As I mentioned earlier, there are three funding streams for childcare. The Care to Learn Northern Ireland scheme provides young parents, aged 16 to 20, with financial support to meet childcare costs. Care to Learn is open to all full-time and part-time students enrolled in a professional or technical FE course. That scheme provides students with funding to meet childcare costs. It can also assist with the cost of travelling between the childcare provider and the college. In 2008-09, some £326,000 was provided under the scheme. I am pleased to confirm that a further £350,000 will be made available for the scheme in the current financial year.

The FE awards scheme allows full-time students aged 19 or over who have dependent children to claim up to 85% of their crèche costs each week. During 2008-09, £212,649 was claimed by students for childcare under the FE awards, and that was an increase of 116% over the 2007-08 figures. To put that in monetary terms, my Department made an additional £100,000 available for childcare in the academic year 2008-09 through that funding stream alone.

A third funding stream, the support funds, also offers FE students financial support to meet childcare costs. Under the support funds, colleges pay a contribution towards childcare costs directly to the childcare provider. FE colleges awarded £136,735 towards childcare costs through the support funds during the academic year 2008-09.

The two main universities also provide on-campus childcare. Queen's University provides preschool and out-of-school places for young children. The cost of providing that facility is met by user charges and a

subsidy from the university. Student charges are subsidised. The University of Ulster provides childcare services for the children of staff and students across its four campuses in a variety of ways. Those include crèche facilities in purpose-built buildings, owned by the university and staffed by university employees; the leasing of space to independent voluntary organisations to provide childcare; and financial support to meet the cost of childcare provided by independent organisations. The University of Ulster has advised me that it is considering options for future childcare provisions at its Coleraine, Jordanstown and Magee campuses following a public consultation process. The university has given an assurance that the current childcare arrangements at all its campuses will be maintained until at least August 2010.

My Department provides a childcare grant for full-time HE students who have dependent children. That operates in a similar way to the FE schemes that I mentioned. The childcare grant is means-tested and based on actual costs paid for approved childcare.

My Department is committed to ensuring that anyone who wishes to attend university or college can do so, regardless of their financial circumstances. I recognise that students with childcare responsibilities require additional support to undertake their studies. That is why I am pleased to emphasise the wide range of support that my Department offers to help with childcare costs.

Crèche facilities at universities and colleges are a valuable asset, but they cannot ever hope to offer the capacity required to meet the childcare needs of all student parents across Northern Ireland. Through the flexible funding arrangements provided by my Department, FE and HE students with childcare responsibilities are able to choose a childminder and childcare setting that meets their particular needs. As Mr Hilditch said, demand is hard to predict and is erratic, and, in some cases, the only way in which facilities can be supported is by opening them to the public. There is a mixed picture in different places and, of course, it varies from time to time, and that is why we need the flexible financial arrangements that we have.

In conclusion, I am pleased to put on record here today that my Department will continue to encourage and support enrolment in third-level education by young people, whatever their background and circumstances. That includes helping to ensure that prospective HE and FE students have access to childcare provision. I believe that the considerable financial support arrangements that I outlined fully demonstrate that commitment.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mr Buchanan): I thank all Members who have taken an interest in today's

debate by participating in and giving their time to it. I also thank the Minister for his response.

As we seek to support lifelong learning, it is important that on-campus childcare is available at an affordable rate for everyone. Recent proposals to run down and close some of those sites at our universities caused much concern and anxiety among people who seek to further their education and reskill so that they can return to employment. I thank the Committee for its work on the issue and for bringing it to the attention of the House today. I was appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning only recently, so much of the work was done before I assumed that position.

David Hilditch said that we need to make life more comfortable and appealing for students in the future. All Members acknowledge and welcome that, and appreciate that we must do something. I welcome the fact that the universities are to rethink their decision to close their campus-based childcare facilities. There are concerns about the suggested closures, and we are delighted that, in the interim, universities have decided to reconsider the issue. Mr Hilditch also said that it is important to understand the concerns of parents who want to retrain when no campus-based childcare facility is available. He said that 60% of students with children are considering leaving courses because they find it difficult to get childcare support on site. We want to move away from that situation and ensure that childcare facilities are available for those who require them, when they require them.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter said that the moves to close campus-based childcare facilities cannot be taken lightly, and we must be mindful of that. I urge the University of Ulster to approach the review with an open mind. He also mentioned the lack of departmental joined-up thinking and the Executive's failure to produce a childcare strategy.

Pat Ramsey gave examples of individuals who were unable to further their education because of a lack of childcare provision. As a result of that, those people are on full-time benefits. We must move away from that situation and ensure that some sort of childcare facilities are provided for those people. It is imperative that facilities are provided during the economic downturn so that the people who are affected can be retrained and reskilled and get back into employment. Mr Ramsey also spoke about further education colleges. He said that some of them have facilities, some have neither the buildings nor the space in which to provide facilities, and some found that it was too costly to keep the facilities running. He also mentioned funding for further education colleges and the concerns of college principals. The colleges need to be on a more stable financial footing and to know about their future budgets.

Anna Lo spoke of her circumstances and the difficulties that she faced in seeking to reskill and retrain and to be

in a college setting when she was bringing up her children. She spoke of the importance of not only recruiting people into college but retaining them. Furthermore, she spoke of parents' peace of mind when on-site childcare provision is available. She went on to highlight the benefits of the campus-based childcare facility at Queen's University. Perhaps we could consider that model as a provision that could be extended to other campuses. She also said that one size does not fit all, and all Members will agree with that.

William Irwin spoke about the economic climate in which we find ourselves and the need to retain on-site childcare facilities. He said that access for parents of young families, who have lost their jobs or who want to return to employment, should be widened by a campus-based childcare provision. We need to make lifelong learning more accessible and to widen it as much as possible, which would be a positive step towards helping the economy. We must focus the minds of personnel at higher and further education campuses to embrace campus-based childcare facilities.

1.45 pm

Mr Butler spoke about the need for childcare provision for those undertaking higher and further education. He also spoke about the black hole that exists where that provision is not in place. He went on to say that, unless a policy is adopted on campus-based childcare provision, future funding may be jeopardised, and that is a matter of concern. Without such a policy, the first area to be cut by the universities and colleges will be childcare provision, and we must stem that.

Trevor Clarke said that if we are to have a strong economy, we need a well-educated population. Due to the recession, people are losing their jobs, and, if they are to re-enter the workforce, they must be retrained and reskilled. Currently, it is not feasible for many people to enter further and higher education due to the lack of campus-based childcare provision. We must ensure that existing provision is retained. It may be more difficult for smaller colleges to provide childcare, as they do not have the space or the financial support to do so, but that provision is the first step in the retraining and the reskilling of our people.

Claire McGill spoke about making further and higher education more attractive to students, and it is very important to make our colleges and universities more attractive for those who wish to retrain and reskill.

George Robinson spoke about the way in which the lack of childcare provision in the further and higher education sector is adversely impacting on people, especially women, who wish to further their educational skills. He went on to say that it is our duty to ensure that childcare services are available to allow people to achieve their full potential and that, although that might involve a financial burden, that short-term pain

will turn out to be a long-term gain. We must examine a strategy for the future and take that long-term view.

In his response, the Minister made several comments, which I thank him for. He informed the House of the support that the Department provides to the universities and colleges to encourage an uptake in further and higher education. However, despite that support, there is still under-representation of those from deprived areas, and that will remain a challenge for the Department. Indeed, no matter how many resources we put into further and higher education, that under-representation will always be a challenge for both the Department and the Committee.

The Minister told the House that enrolments of students from deprived communities have risen greatly since 1998-99 and that further and higher education has an outstanding track record in attracting students with dependent children.

The decision whether to provide on-campus childcare facilities is for the universities and the colleges to make. However, the Minister stated that the Department had taken a keen interest in the area and that it had provided funding to the universities and colleges to establish childcare facilities. He also told the House that the Department made an additional £100,000 available for childcare in 2008-09.

Many of the issues that the Minister raised dealt with the funding of childcare facilities and the support that is available to the colleges. The Minister suggested that that support will continue, and the Committee welcomes that. The Minister also said that the Department was committed to enabling everyone to attend universities or colleges irrespective of social background. We must widen the support that has been offered by the Department.

I thank the Minister for his response to the debate. I also thank the Committee for tabling the motion —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member please bring his remarks to a close?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: I also thank the Members who participated in the debate, and I hope that there will be full support for the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that widening access to further and higher education is a key priority as outlined in the Programme for Government, and that a significant factor in widening access is the provision of campus-based childcare for students; calls on universities, university colleges and regional colleges to examine options for the provision of on-campus childcare, as a matter of urgency, or to seek to preserve or enhance existing childcare provision; and further calls on the Minister to promote such provision with his Executive colleagues.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Personal Protection Weapons

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshallled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr B McCrea: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the dissident threat to serving and retired military personnel and police officers; and calls on the Chief Constable to review urgently the policy on personal protection weapons.

I propose the motion against a backdrop that is both serious and severe and one that requires our immediate attention. The recent events in east Belfast, coupled with other activity in Londonderry, Newtownbutler and other border areas indicate that the circumstances we now live in are not the same as those originally envisaged when the policy was reviewed by the Chief Constable.

The PSNI policy directive states:

"The Chief Constable acknowledges the positive obligation to take all reasonable measures to obviate the risk to an individual's life where the police know, or ought to know, that there is a real and immediate risk."

It goes on to state:

"In light of the more stable political and security environment the Chief Constable is committed to reviewing the grant of firearms certificates ... and moving towards the situation where these will only be authorised where there is a 'verifiable specific risk' to the life of an individual".

When that document was written, we were living in different times.

The policy was enacted, and in 2005, only 25 personal protection weapons (PPWs) were revoked. By 2008, 100 had been revoked, and by 2009, 151 had been revoked. Clearly, the policy has been brought to bear. Of course, people have complained about it, but there has been no response worth talking about from the PSNI. The changed circumstances were raised in the twenty-first report of the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC), which states:

"the overview of dissident republican activity over the six months" is more serious than:

"any time since ... April 2004".

It goes on to state:

"Dissidents have turned their efforts more directly to trying to kill PSNI officers, using a variety of tactics and methods."

Paragraph 2.6 of the report states:

"Our comments below ... indicate that there has been a continuing high level of serious violent activity, often with the express intention of killing, or making possible the killing, of members of the PSNI and other security personnel, and often doing so by imperilling the lives of members of the general public."

The Independent Monitoring Commission is telling us that there is a very real and a very severe threat, and that these are not the halcyon days that we had envisaged way back when. We now face a very real threat, and no amount of wishful thinking or NIO spin that tells us that there is no real threat and that everything is OK will change the reality that our officers are at risk day and daily, our previous officers are at risk, and, most shamefully of all, friends, family and relatives of officers are at risk.

Against that background, it seems bizarre that a Chief Constable would continue to advocate the removal of PPWs from those who have served this community and our country so well for so long. I could understand if there was a particular problem with PPWs and if they resulted in killings at home or were shown to be part of a problem. However, in all the cases that I reviewed, there has never been a security issue. They have been used responsibly and they give people the reassurance that they need. I cannot see why we should follow a route of sheer political correctness and take away a source of comfort to those who have served us so well.

I know that this issue has been raised by a number of party leaders in discussions with the Prime Minister, and Shaun Woodward has certainly been made aware of it. However, they do not seem to understand that it is not just a matter for the negotiations about the devolution of policing and justice. This issue is not just some trinket to be moved around, and given in exchange for agreement on something else. There is a very real and serious threat to people, and we must overturn the current policy.

I looked at the amendment that has been tabled by Members on the opposite Benches. I wonder why they bothered to table it, because it merely states the status quo. What they are calling for is what the policy already is, so the amendment is entirely redundant. I look forward to hearing the arguments of Members who support the amendment. They will try to say that personal protection weapons should be made available only when there is a clear and identifiable threat. However, all our history tells us that atrocities happen only when intelligence fails — that is when there is a problem. Despite all the good efforts of our men and women, occasionally things happen. At such times, all our people must have the opportunity to defend themselves.

The policy on personal protection weapons has a knock-on effect on morale. What signal does it send to

serving police officers and those who have served in the past if we take away the very weapons that they possess to defend themselves?

I had occasion recently to speak to the most recent group of graduates from the PSNI college at Garnerville. They were fine men and women. I had to speak to them on a serious note, although it was a day for celebration. All of them were proud to wear the uniform of the PSNI. Their mothers and fathers were there, beaming with pride at what their children had achieved and what they were going to achieve. I shared in that pride, but I also had to give them the message that, when they left that place, they were going to go into harm's way. I had to tell them that they were going to go to areas and be asked to carry out neighbourhood and community policing, because only through a hearts-and-minds strategy will we win the long-term battle, but in doing so, they would be placed in areas of extreme risk.

The challenge for all of us is to ensure that we continue to win the support and confidence of all sections of the community, while also being able to keep police officers, those brave men and women, alive. I know that that is a stark thing to say. Some might accuse people of trying to heighten tensions, but nothing could be further from the truth. That is the situation that we face. There have been issues in Londonderry, Newtownbutler, Meigh and east Belfast. The challenge for the Chief Constable is to find a way of resolving two issues: first, winning hearts and minds through community policing; and secondly, making sure that our officers are necessarily protected.

Few things that I can think of would reassure all our men and women as much as a decision by the new Chief Constable, who is not bound by the decisions of the past, to review the policy, to look at it in a new light and to state that, although we cannot be sure about intelligence on threats against any specific individual, we are quite sure that there is a very severe threat.

Every time that I attend a meeting of the Policing Board at which we receive a report from the Chief Constable, we ask about the current level of threat. We are told that it is severe, absolutely severe. No one can minimise this, and those who do — I point the finger at the NIO and its lackeys — are doing us a disservice.

2.00 pm

If we are serious about moving forward on policing and justice on whatever timescale can gain everyone's commitment, we need to start showing that we will address these very real issues properly. Therefore, I urge the House to reject the amendment, which adds nothing to the status quo, to back the main motion and to send a message of positive goodwill to all our men and women in the PSNI.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That concludes the proposal.

Ms Anderson: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "this Assembly" and insert

"calls on the Chief Constable to ensure that any application for a personal protection weapon is considered only on the basis of the level of threat against the applicant."

Tá mé ag labhairt ar son an leasaithe. I begin by pointing out that, like Basil McCrea, I am a member of the Policing Board. I think that, like me, Basil McCrea will have heard the then Chief Constable, Hugh Orde, outline the rationale behind the new regulations governing the issue of personal firearms. Hugh Orde made it quite clear that it was now PSNI policy that anyone who holds a personal protection weapon (PPW) can be considered for a further licence only if it can be shown that there is a threat to the life of the applicant. That is why we are seeing some of the licences being removed; no threat has been identified. That is a good thing.

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

It is a good thing that some of these weapons are being taken out of circulation. It is good that, in the vast majority of cases, there is no specific threat to individuals. I recognise that there are many responsible gun users, but the issue of weapons is not something to be taken lightly. Basil McCrea should know that; after all, the human rights and professional standards committee of the Policing Board — we are both members, and Basil actually chairs it — led the board's inquiry into domestic abuse. It recommended that an application for a firearms certificate should be judged against the applicant's past behaviour, including criminal convictions and breaches of non-molestation orders. The report stated that access to a firearm was a significant factor in any risk assessment, but, rather than heed such warnings, the proposers of the motion seem to want to hand out weapons to all former RUC officers and UDR/RIR soldiers, regardless of background. If they do not, maybe they could say so and clarify the situation when they address the Chamber later.

Basil McCrea was at the meeting when Hugh Orde set out the stall. He heard the evidence, and he heard how, from now on, the PSNI would issue weapons only when there was a verifiable and justifiable threat. Maybe he did not hear that; maybe, like so many of the former RUC personnel whom he wants to arm, he is suffering from a touch of hearing loss. Whatever the reason, it is disappointing, extremely disappointing—

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Ms Anderson: I will indeed.

Mr B McCrea: I was just checking that the Member herself had not had a touch of hearing loss and would take the intervention.

I have listened to the points that the Member has made, and I agree with many of them, including those about domestic violence and suchlike. However, the point of this motion is that there are many officers who have held PPWs for a long time with no ill effects and no unstable backgrounds, nothing like that. All that we are saying is that this is not the right time to revoke this policy.

Ms Anderson: I suppose that the Member will recognise that, out of all the PPWs that were withdrawn in 2009, only two cases were appealed. It does not seem to be an issue for the people who were actually refused. They could have gone through an application process and appealed the decision, but they did not. Only two people appealed their decisions. Those people were probably quite satisfied with the judgement.

Whatever the reason, it is disappointing that the proposers of the motion would rather ignore the reality of the situation and instead seek to prey on people's fears. Basil touched on that in his opening address. It is preying on people's fears to paint a worst case scenario and reduce the issue to its lowest common denominator. How will we ever move to a shared and better future when political representatives are stoking up fears and tensions, insisting that a weapon under the pillow or by one's side is someone's right?

I do not deny that some of those micro-groups — those pseudo-republicans — pose a threat. Indeed, in all likelihood, as many Members know, they pose more of a threat to members of my community than they will ever pose to any former member of the security forces. The way to defeat those people is not to create another armed militia but to show that the political process is working and will continue to work. It is to demonstrate that we can work together despite our different aspirations and all the political differences between us and that we can work together to pursue our political objectives peacefully in a system that is founded on partnership and equality.

Society has moved on, and people want us to work together. Nevertheless, I recognise that there may be cases in which the issuing of a personal protection weapon is justified because of a verifiable and specific threat. However, as the amendment states, all applications should be considered individually, and a decision should be taken once the level of threat against an applicant has been assessed. Operational decisions should be made on the facts; political decisions on the matter should not be taken in this Chamber, and carte blanche should not be given for weapons to be handed out without a justifiable reason.

I ask Members to reflect on the Sinn Féin amendment and to support it based on the arguments that I and many others have made. It is simply not good enough for certificates to be issued to everyone who applies. Consider the evidence on the number of applications for PPWs that have been refused against the number of people who have appealed against the loss of those weapons; many people are satisfied with the decision that was taken.

Some 3,224 certificates are out to issue, 953 of which have been issued to former RUC and PSNI personnel and 1,184 of which have been issued to former UDR and RIR personnel. It is not clear who the remaining certificates have been issued to, but many weapons are in circulation. It must be ensured that the policy is robust and that each case is considered on its merits. Certificates must not be given and reissued to everyone who has secured a PPW. I ask Members to support the amendment. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Like the previous two Members to speak, I declare my membership of the Policing Board.

I welcome this timely debate, for, as the proposer of the motion, Basil McCrea, acknowledged, we have been overtaken by events. I refer first to the disgusting events that took place last week in our city; and, secondly, to the attacks and threats which other people, including Members of this House, have faced or been warned of. I speak as one of those people. We know that, slowly but surely, events are taking over as the security situation deteriorates. Rather than putting our heads in the sand about the security situation, we must face it appropriately.

The other event to overtake the motion is the fact that the new Chief Constable has made the DUP and other parties aware that a new review is under way. That is welcome, and, along with many realists in the House, the DUP will await with interest the outcome of that review. Let us hope that the flawed nature and ideas of the previous review will be set aside and that a new review will result in a much better policy to address the issues that, quite rightly, have been brought to the attention of the House.

At the outset of the debate, it is important to put matters into perspective. I have heard words spoken today that suggest that certain Members want to create an armed militia, give out gun licences like confetti and ensure that whoever applies for a gun licence gets one. However, I have not heard that kind of carte blanche attitude being taken in any debate on, or public reaction to, the issue of personal protection weapons. Indeed, a much more serious attitude prevails among those who already have, or require, personal protection weapons.

Again, it is important to put into perspective that in 1991, there were 10,500 licences for personal protection weapons in Northern Ireland. In 2009, 3,100 such

licences are available. Therefore, the very suggestion that the country is awash with those weapons is, quite frankly, nonsense. If the Assembly were to take the view that weapons should be handed out to every current and former member of the police and military — which has never been suggested by the proposer of the motion, nor, indeed, by any Member on this side of the House — over 33,000 licences for personal protection weapons would be issued in Northern Ireland.

The Assembly must put matters into perspective and recognise that the number of licences that are currently available is small. More importantly, by and large, licences are issued to people who have a military or police background and who are, quite clearly, likely to be under attack. They have also been issued to individual businesspeople who have been threatened or, indeed, have been victims of attempted kidnap. Licences have also been issued to other people who are under attack.

Fewer than one dozen of those personal protection weapons have been stolen during the past five years. During that time, no such weapon has been used in serious or organised crime in the community. I understand that two weapons were used in two separate suicides. Again, those facts should put the matter into perspective. The fear that has been generated that personal protection weapons will cause a serious problem in society is, quite frankly, wrong.

I believe that there is a resource issue. The firearms branch must be properly resourced in order to process applications quickly and expeditiously. The Assembly must reject the amendment because it is, frankly, out of date. It has already been demonstrated that the old review does not work and that a new review must be put in place. Thank goodness that that new review is now in place.

Dr W McCrea: I thank my honourable friend for giving way. The Assembly has been assured that if a specific threat exists, a licence will be granted. Perhaps, the honourable Member could tell the House what specific threat was known against the soldiers in Massereene Barracks, where two of my constituents were brutally murdered?

Mr Paisley Jnr: Fortunately, the solemnity of the point that the Member has made will not be lost in the House. Indeed, what specific and active threat was known against the dog handler who was targeted last week? He was probably one of the most relaxed police officers in Northern Ireland. He was not considered to be under any threat at all. Yet, there was an attempt not only to murder him, but to murder his partner.

Some Members who sit in the House have used personal protection weapons, such as my colleague who used one in the 1980s. There was no specific threat against him. There was a general threat in the area where he lived. People came to murder him. Only

the mercy of God and the straight shot of a bullet from his personal protection weapon saved his life and his family's lives.

People must recognise the seriousness of the situation that is faced. They must also recognise that the motion is not a demand for a new militia and for weapons to be handed out *carte blanche*. It is a demand to protect the lives of people who are clearly and actively under threat. I support the motion and recognise that the Assembly must address the issue expeditiously.

Mrs D Kelly: I am mindful that the debate is taking place after the attempted murder of a serving police officer. I offer my best wishes to the officer's family. I hope that all other officers gain heart from the resounding condemnation of that attack from across the community.

2.15 pm

However, today's debate is about personal protection weapons. Some Members outlined that more than 2,000 of those weapons have been issued to former members of the security services, who are either ex-Army personnel or ex-police officers.

The review of policy on personal protection weapons and any subsequent decisions about the issue are operational matters for the Chief Constable. I am, therefore, thankful that politics and political interference have been taken out of those decisions. The test for the new Chief Constable will be whether he bends his knee to Unionist demands or whether he makes his decisions purely on the information and the intelligence that he has at his disposal.

It has become clear that it would not have made any difference had the police officer who was targeted on Friday had a personal protection weapon. As Mr Paisley Jnr outlined, personal protection weapons have been more likely to attract domestic burglaries in more recent years, given that a number of them have been stolen. They have also been used in domestic violence incidents and in suicide attempts.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I read out the stats on personal protection weapons to the House. The Member cannot show any evidence that personal protection weapons have been stolen and used in serious and organised crime. We should get away from that and have a serious debate. If the Member disagrees with us and the Member who moved the motion, so be it. However, the statistics are clear, and as the Member said, there is no history of personal protection weapons being used in serious crime or armed robberies in the past five years. The only instance that has been recorded was suicide, which was a tragic situation but nothing whatsoever to do with crime.

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Paisley Jnr clearly defined that the weapons that had been stolen were not used in serious and organised crime. Nonetheless, a number of

them have been stolen from homes. That is also a fact. As a former member of the Policing Board, I recall a private meeting during which the former Chief Constable informed members that the number of retiring PSNI officers taking personal protection weapons was declining. Therefore, there has been a change of culture and ethos.

Whether or not Members like to admit it, in the past, members of the police were perceived to be primarily from the Protestant community, and we all know the historic context and reasons for that. Today and in the past, we have seen Catholic officers in particular being targeted by dissidents for reasons that are clear to them. It is unfortunate that dissidents will fill a political vacuum where one exists.

Martina Anderson said earlier that partnership and equality make politics work, and that is right. However, it is quite clear that the majority of people in the community understand the reality of the mutual veto and see the paralysis that exists at the heart of Government. If we were really to get on with the jobs that we have been elected to do in serving the community instead of playing games, people across the community would have much more confidence in all areas of Government.

People do not want guns in circulation. The recent decisions by the INLA and others to decommission are to be welcomed. However, the principle of taking guns out of society applies across the community. Maybe a Member can correct me, but I am not aware of any former or serving police officers or RIR officers who have had to discharge their personal protection weapon to protect themselves, their family or their property. Therefore, one wonders whether some people use them as a comfort blanket.

Mr B McCrea: The Member used the term “comfort blanket”. Does she agree that if someone tells a retired officer to give back the PPW that he or she has held for some time even though he or she has done nothing wrong and is of sound mind and stable, it is likely to have a negative effect on that person? Does the Member think that that is helpful, given the current debate in which she said that we want to hear all sides of the discussion?

Mrs D Kelly: We want a more normal society in which guns are taken out of the community.

Nobody is entitled to hold a firearm: it is a decision for the Chief Constable, and he is very clear about what must be taken into account. The current policy states that the Chief Constable:

“must take account of the unique and individual circumstances surrounding each application and that protecting the life of the applicant is a concern that must be balanced against that of the safety of the public and the peace and the general undesirability to have handguns for personal protection.”

If the Chief Constable continues to apply that principle when individual cases are reviewed, we can all live with it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring her remarks to a close.

Mrs D Kelly: We will be supporting the amendment proposed by Ms Anderson.

Mr McCarthy: I have to inform the House that the issue of personal protection weapons is not one that I have much knowledge on; however, I am the only one here to put forward the Alliance Party's views.

Mr Kennedy: You have just ruled yourself out as justice Minister.

Mr McCarthy: That is possible.

As far as I am aware, the Chief Constable will be reviewing the arrangements for PPWs shortly. It is unfortunate that we are in such a position; we should have moved away from it long ago. I imagine that the people to whom the motion refers would prefer not to have to ask for PPWs. If there were no threat to any of our security personnel, there would be no need for PPWs.

I add my name to those who expressed sympathy for the lady in East Belfast, my neighbouring constituency, and her police partner. It was a horrible experience and something that should never have happened. There was absolutely no reason for it. I do not know whether, as Mrs Kelly said, a PPW would have made a button of difference to the situation on Friday morning. Nevertheless, my party and I look forward to the day when PPWs are not required at all. I support the motion.

Mr G Robinson: As the motion states, there has been a considerable threat from dissident republican terrorists in Northern Ireland, which has been all too evident in the last few days and weeks. In conjunction with that, there is the policy of refusing PPWs to the people who are, due to present or past service, deemed to be at risk from terrorists. That is a dangerous road to go down when people's lives are at risk.

Many individuals involved are serving, or have served, the people of Northern Ireland as full-time or part-time members of the security forces. It could be interpreted that their reward is to be left exposed and defenceless at a time of heightened threat from a lunatic and dangerous fringe group in our society. Perhaps the powers that be think that those under threat should defend themselves with a brush shaft or cower behind the sofa. Unfortunately, that is just not the case when the threat is so high.

Recently, a constituent of mine applied for a PPW and was refused, despite having received official notification from the police that he was under threat.

That is a ridiculous and unjustifiable situation, especially as there is a verified threat against him. In such a case, there should be no question about issuing a PPW to serving or retired members of the security forces so that they can protect themselves and their families. It is a matter of life and death. None of us wants to see our graveyards once again being filled with the victims of republican terrorists, especially when those under threat have been refused a weapon for their personal protection and that may save their lives or the lives of their families.

I fully appreciate that the Chief Constable has not had long to warm to his new chair. However, he must address the issue of PPWs for serving and retired members of the security forces as a matter of urgency. I have no doubt that those individuals deserve support and protection at this time of heightened risk.

I call on the Chief Constable to use his personal authority and common sense to realise that he can successfully address this life-or-death issue.

Lord Morrow: I do not know whether it has been made clear, but my colleagues and I will be supporting the motion and not the amendment. It is unfortunate that the amendment has been tabled, because it attempts to cloud the real issue and not look at it from the proper perspective.

It is worth repeating that events have caught up with the motion. The Chief Constable has commissioned another review. The former Chief Constable conducted a review, but the new Chief Constable, who obviously wants to have a hands-on approach, has ordered another one to take place. We welcome that and await its outcome with bated breath.

The issue of PPWs is very serious and should be debated in the House. It is something that many MLAs have had to grapple with in their own constituencies. For example, just last Friday, I was visited by a constituent who is in trouble because there is a threat to take away his PPW. It is people such as him, who live in isolated rural areas, who need our support and, unfortunately, PPWs. Kieran McCarthy said that it is unfortunate that PPWs are needed in our society. We have to ask ourselves why that is the case.

People need to face reality, and I challenge Martina Anderson and her colleagues to do so. People are being murdered, and we only have to look to last Friday to see another attempt to murder. As was said, two soldiers at Massereene Barracks and one constable in Craigavon were murdered. There was no specific threat to any of those individuals, yet, sadly, they are in their graves. The community is looking to the Assembly and its Members for moral support.

We have come through 35 years of unmitigated terror, and anyone who looks through rose-tinted glasses and thinks that all is well is not facing the

facts. We have a long way to go. We have taken one step: we have another million still to take, and anyone who thinks that there is a quick and easy solution to the problem is not living in the real world.

Dolores Kelly tries to sectarianise everything by conducting a Protestant and Catholic headcount — I do not know why she always insists on going down that road. She said that most PPWs are held by members of the Protestant community. If she insists on making such statements, will she ask herself about the reason for that?

Mrs D Kelly: If the Member had listened to what I said, he would have heard me say that the reasons for that are well known. It is a historical fact that the IRA targeted officers from the Catholic community first to try to put other Catholics off joining the police, in the same way that the dissidents are now targeting Catholic officers.

Lord Morrow: It is a long-established fact that only a very small number of Roman Catholics were in the RUC. If the Member is saying that that was because Catholics were threatened, she is absolutely right — they were threatened by the Provisional IRA and others to ensure that they would not join the RUC. That resulted in an imbalance in the RUC, but that is not the issue that we are discussing. We are discussing the problem for present or former members of the security forces who feel that they need a PPW to protect themselves.

We all want to hasten the day — most of us do anyway — when former members of the security forces and, indeed, individuals in public life no longer feel threatened and do not need weapons to protect themselves. Therefore, I hope that Mrs Kelly will join the rest of the House today and steer society down a road on which we do not need PPWs.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Lord Morrow: At the moment, we do need them. I think that my time to speak is up.

The debate stood suspended.

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Chief Constable

1. **Mr B McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any meetings they have held with the new Chief Constable. (AQO 231/10)

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): Matt Baggott took up his appointment as Chief Constable of the PSNI on 22 September 2009. The deputy First Minister and I had a private informal meeting with him on Wednesday 7 October 2009 in Stormont Castle. I had met the new Chief Constable previously on 30 September 2009, when I led a party delegation to meet him and his senior officers. At the meeting on 7 October 2009, the deputy First Minister and I were encouraged by the Chief Constable's vision for the future of the PSNI and by his focus on establishing a personal policing service that is fit for the twenty-first century.

Mr B McCrea: When the First Minister and deputy First Minister met the Chief Constable, did they discuss the financial package that is on offer? Do they agree with the Chief Constable that that is as good as it gets? Will the First Minister outline the nature of any outstanding issues and when they might be resolved so that he can decide whether the terms are acceptable?

The First Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you can imagine, the deputy First Minister and I took the opportunity to discuss elements of the financial package with the Chief Constable. Indeed, the package improved subsequent to that meeting. I am sure that that will be reflected when the Chief Constable and everybody else sees the document. The deputy First Minister and I are keen for the document to be published. However, it is the property of the Prime Minister; it contains his proposal, and Downing Street must decide when it can be seen.

Mrs D Kelly: Has the £17 million saving that the PSNI is required to make been cancelled? When will the Policing Board, which is the oversight body of the PSNI, have a say and a role to play in the budget?

The First Minister: As I said, it is for the Prime Minister to release the details of the proposal; I do not intend to release it in public for him. The deputy First Minister and I held a series of meetings last week at which we discussed the detail of the proposals with the leaders of the Assembly parties to, as far as possible, update them on the position. My party still awaits clarification on some of the financial issues that are

involved, and other matters must be resolved, such as the identification of a future justice Minister, procedural matters for the decision-making process between the Assembly and the new Department and the substantial issue of gaining community confidence. I look forward to resolving those issues.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What did the Chief Constable outline as being the main financial issues that face the PSNI?

The First Minister: The Chief Constable was particularly concerned that flexibility be secured in the early period of his term to allow him to rely on funds. That is connected to Mrs Kelly's question about the £17 million. The Chief Constable is convinced that efficiencies can be gained in the policing budget, but he believes that a period of time will be required to identify and make those savings. From his point of view, he sought flexibility in the early part of his term to enable him to identify and gain the efficiencies, rather than those efficiencies being enforced immediately.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Will the First Minister inform the House whether the financial deal that is on offer from the Prime Minister has improved in recent weeks? If so, will he indicate by how much it has improved? Furthermore, can he tell us how beneficial that improvement could be, given that some were urging him to close on a deal several weeks ago?

The First Minister: We will all have difficulty in identifying, even at this stage, the question of "how much?". That is simply because there have been so many iterations of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee paper; I believe that we have had three different sets of figures from that Committee. We have had a set of figures from the Treasury, which, I can assure the Member, are slightly lower than the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's figures. We have been working on figures that we were able to interrogate ourselves.

A big issue that was resolved recently was that relating to claims for hearing loss. That was a big ticket matter, as was the issue of legal aid, which was also dealt with latterly. All those issues have to be resolved, and we have seen, sadly, in the wake of the attack in my constituency on Friday 16 October, the need to ensure that the police are properly resourced. There is no à la carte menu from which we can get something and hope that it will satisfy all needs. If there are inescapable pressures in the policing and justice budget, we have to meet them, wherever they are. That requires us to stick at it until that matter is resolved.

I welcome the remarks that were made in the Chamber earlier about Friday's attack. The deputy First Minister and I are both on public record condemning that attack, which showed that intelligence is being gathered by the dissident

terrorists. It is essential that serving and former police officers be alert at this time. We must ensure that community support exists for the Police Service right across the Province and that it has the resources to do the job that we expect of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place to ask question 2.

Ilex Board

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many people have been appointed and reappointed to the board of Ilex urban regeneration company in Londonderry over the last three years, broken down by community background. (AQO 233/10)

The First Minister: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask the junior Minister Mr Newton to respond.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Newton): I was not expecting that, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will just find my place.

I wish to report that eight people have been appointed to the board of Ilex since 2006, two of whom have recently been reappointed in accordance with public appointment guidelines. The community background breakdown is: two Protestant, four Roman Catholic and two unknown. A public appointments competition is under way to recruit additional board members.

Mr Campbell: I thank the junior Minister for his response. Ilex has the potential to do significant work in an area that is economically disadvantaged, such as the area that is served by the Ebrington site. However, just as there is a need to be conscious of the political and religious breakdown of those who apply and are appointed to the Ilex board, will the junior Minister give an assurance that the same consciousness will pertain to the work that Ilex will do, particularly when trying to ensure that the minority unionist community in Londonderry, which has a significant attachment to the rich military history of that site, is represented in the future work programme?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): That is absolutely right, and the Ilex board will want to acknowledge Mr Campbell's points. It is obvious that fairness and transparency in all things are imperative as this very important project is rolled out for that part of Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Will the junior Minister reassure the House that, irrespective of religious or any other

background, any job offer made by Ilex will be based on ability only?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): Above all other considerations, the Member will understand that community confidence is an important feature and that people should be offered public appointments in a manner that is transparent and ensures that the merit of any such individuals can be stood over.

As I said to Mr Campbell, fairness and transparency are important. This project is important to the whole of the north-west and must therefore have community confidence.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to rise in their place to indicate that they wish to ask a question; otherwise I will assume that their question has been answered. Each time a Member wishes to ask a question, they must rise in their place.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

4. **Mr Kennedy** asked the First Minister and the deputy First Minister what progress has been made in negotiations with Her Majesty's Government regarding compensation for savers with the Presbyterian Mutual Society. (AQO 234/10)

The First Minister: We are very aware of the anxiety and distress caused to members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) by the prevailing uncertainties around their savings. We are encouraged by the Prime Minister's speech in Brighton, where he said:

"not one British saver has lost a single penny."

We are doing all that we can to work towards a solution for PMS members. The PMS administrator wrote to members of the society on 22 September to provide an update on his work. His recommendation was to await the outcome of the Government assessment on what assistance they could give before taking further decisions. I assure Members of the Assembly and members of the PMS that the matter is receiving our close attention.

We met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 October to review progress on finding a solution to help PMS members and received an update from officials on progress. We emphasised the need to find an acceptable resolution as quickly as possible. Initial discussions at official level with some local banks have already begun. We highlighted that it would be necessary to progress those talks further.

We should know the outcome of the discussions shortly and are expecting a full paper on the options open to resolve the PMS problem to be presented to the ministerial working group within the next three

weeks. When we receive that paper, we will decide on the best way forward.

Mr Kennedy: I register my interest as one with a modest investment in the PMS. I thank the First Minister for his reply. He will be aware, as is the entire House, of the overwhelming support from all political parties for the plight of PMS savers and investors. Will the First Minister reflect that support in any future discussions with the Prime Minister, the Treasury and the ministerial working group? Will he assure the House that he will not allow the Government to use the PMS as a political pawn in their discussions with any party on the possible devolution of policing and justice?

The First Minister: The Member's investment is the only modest thing about him. He should be aware that it is only he and his party leader who are linking the PMS to policing and justice; neither my party nor I have made a proposal to the Prime Minister to link the two. The issue stands firmly on its own two feet.

It is clear to us, on the basis of what the Prime Minister has said, that savers in the UK will not lose money, and we want him to stand by that. People who have put funds into the PMS regard themselves as savers, and the rule books identify them as such. We hope that the Prime Minister will take that into consideration when he receives the report from the ministerial group.

The deputy First Minister and I, along with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who were present at the last meeting, felt that officials had seriously engaged on those issues and that they were considering proposals. As I said in my initial reply, we regard the involvement of a local bank as the best way forward, if that is achievable. However, that would require us to examine legal and European regulatory issues. Of course, we need to have regard to the interests of the bank, which will want to know details of the Government's involvement.

We hope to take the matter forward. We have agreed to meet in three weeks' time, and I hope that we will agree one proposition that should be put to the Prime Minister at that stage.

2.45 pm

Mr Moutray: The First Minister said that he is all too aware of the hardship that the issue has caused individuals and churches. I thank him and others for the efforts that have been made on behalf of the people involved. Does he believe that the Government at Westminster are committed to finding a solution to the matter?

The First Minister: The deputy First Minister and I have had a number of conversations with our officials who have engaged with HM Treasury in Whitehall. I

get a clear impression that that engagement has been serious. It is not simply a case of propositions being identified — follow-up work is being done. After looking at the options that are under consideration, I hope that we can opt for some of the earlier propositions rather than having to fall back on hardship funds and so on.

We are keen to engage the banks on the matter, and some banks have expressed an interest. Discussions have already taken place, but a phase of due diligence is necessary from the banks' point of view. We will have to look at some regulatory issues thereafter, but we are moving forward. I am aware that the administrator had to postpone a planned meeting with members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society, and I recognise that some people who have savings with the society are experiencing considerable hardship. Some of those people need to access their funds, but they cannot do that. The sooner we resolve the matter the better. We are putting pressure on HM Treasury to complete its discussions so that the Prime Minister can make a final decision.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is there any evidence that the board of the Presbyterian Mutual Society operated outside its legal authority?

The First Minister: A report has been produced that includes criticism of the board of the Presbyterian Mutual Society and others who had a role in auditing and overseeing that organisation's operations. Given the potential legal consequences, we would be better to wait for the publication of the report — if that ever happens — before pointing fingers in any particular direction.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

5. **Mr Ford** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when their Department will publish the consultation document on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. (AQO 235/10)

8. **Ms Lo** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when their Department expects the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy to be published. (AQO 238/10)

The First Minister: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Newton to respond.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 8 together.

It was originally intended that the draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) would be brought forward before the end of 2008. That and subsequent timing commitments were made in good faith, and we expected those to be met. It was not possible to meet

that date, but reaching agreement on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy remains one of OFMDFM's policy priorities. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have agreed a process, and OFMDFM officials are working on a revised draft of the programme. That process will identify areas of agreement and outstanding areas of contention.

We continue to work intensively towards an agreed strategy that will benefit all our people now and in the longer term. However, work to promote community relations and good race relations has continued for the past two years, led and supported by junior Minister Kelly, myself and the entire ministerial team. There are many examples of that commitment. In the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period, we have invested a not insubstantial amount — £29 million — in good relations work to build a shared and better future. Junior Minister Kelly and I continue to chair the north Belfast working group, which focuses on interface issues in Belfast and across Northern Ireland. This summer, we spent £500,000 to resource work on summer intervention programmes. Since devolution in 2007, we have spent a total of £1.5 million on such intervention work.

Since May, we have spent £4.372 million on district councils' community relations programmes, and we have committed a further £2.79 million in this financial year. We have worked proactively with our key partners in Coleraine, both statutory and non-statutory, following the killing of Mr Kevin McDaid in May. We provided £23,000 to Coleraine Borough Council for divisionary work in addition to the £86,000 that was awarded to the council for good relations activities.

Finally, in the past two weeks, we have provided further funding for specific intervention work in east and north Belfast.

Mr Ford: I am totally baffled by that response. It was great to hear that long list of financial statements, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the question that I asked. Some of us have complained for a long time about the lack of a CSI strategy from OFMDFM. My question was about a consultation document on a CSI strategy, and we got no information whatsoever on that. The DUP and Sinn Féin have both prepared documents. If they cannot agree on a consultation document, will they at least agree to circulate their two different documents so that we can have a consultation on them?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I am sorry, but I am not quite sure what the question was.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to ask a brief question.

Mr Ford: I am sorry. Perhaps if the junior Minister had answered my question in the first place, he could have concentrated on my supplementary. I asked a simple

question: if it is impossible for OFMDFM to publish a single consultation document on a CSI strategy because of differences between the two parties, will it at least publish the two separate documents for consultation? We can then engage in a formal consultation process, which might move the issue forward.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): It is my understanding that the two documents have not only been published but have been made public and roundly examined in the press. I am certain that if Mr Ford consults the press or the DUP — I cannot speak for Sinn Féin — those documents will be made readily available to him.

Ms Lo: It was bad enough to have a long delay in publishing the CSI strategy, but the situation is now worse: we have two draft documents, which shows that the two major parties cannot agree on an approach to community relations.

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

Ms Lo: Can OFMDFM give an indication of how long it will take to resolve the impasse and provide a clear timetable for when the strategy will be published for consultation?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for her question. We want to publish a document together. I do not think that it is correct to say that the fault lies wholly with either the DUP or Sinn Féin; the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP also worked on the document for a long time. However, there is a need for agreement, and that agreement was not found in the two parties that had initial responsibility. The Executive have come a long way over the past two years; we can, at least, air those issues and recognise that it will take time, consideration and huge effort on the part of everyone in the Executive to address the legacy of our past and the challenges that lie ahead.

We want a strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration and a blueprint for a shared and better future, but, while we continue to do our very best to reach that stage, we continue to work in communities where much important work is being done locally. We are also working at the heart of government to deliver meaningful programmes that are aimed at ending the scourge of sectarianism. Nothing highlights that scourge more than the reports of the bigotry, sectarianism and, perhaps, ethnic cleansing that is being experienced in Rasharkin at the moment, where Protestant families are under threat and are being driven out of the village. We all want to address those important issues. We want to share a strategy that is effective and can produce results. We need to bring that together.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the junior Minister for his answers. Given that we all want a shared and better future based on equality and human

rights, can the junior Minister outline the relationship between equality and good relations as set out in section 75 of the 1998 Act and as relates to PSA 7 and objective five, as agreed in the Programme for Government?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): The Member raised several issues. The existence of equality does not necessarily mean that there will be good relations. I have made clear the importance that we attach to the matter. It must be addressed, and I hope that it will be addressed sooner rather than later. I hope that the Member's side of the House places as much emphasis on that as does this side of the House.

Mr O'Loan: In light of the junior Minister's evident concern about Rasharkin, one expected to hear more from him about outcomes rather than process. Do the First Minister and deputy First Minister have realistic expectations of producing a report on a CSI strategy before the summer recess? I am thinking of the summer recess of 2010.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): My answer to the original and supplementary questions made it clear that the strategy is important and that it will be produced as soon as possible. It will not be a superficial document that does not deliver exactly what we want; it will be based on strategy, it will contain finite detail, and it will produce outcomes.

Lord Browne: The junior Minister will be aware that an explosive device was fixed to the car of a policeman's partner in east Belfast last Friday. I will be pleased to receive assurance from the junior Minister that that policeman and his partner, having been subjected to the despicable terrorist attack that was condemned in the House earlier today, will be able to avail of the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme to ensure that they receive alternative housing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members must take care to ensure that supplementary questions relate to the original question. As the Member's question strays slightly from the original, we will move on.

OFMDFM: Joint Working

6. **Mr W Clarke** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the joint nature of their office, to explain how the joint procedures within their office work in practice. (AQO 236/10)

The First Minister: The Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 established the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which is jointly in the charge of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. Statutory and other prerogative and executive powers of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are exercised by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. In practice, that

means that agreement must be reached on matters that require formal ministerial approval.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the First Minister recognise that public confidence in the institutions builds when all aspects of the Pledge of Office are observed?

The First Minister: That is one factor that helps to bring about public confidence, but it is not the only one. People want the Assembly to deliver, and that requires the Assembly and the Executive to make expeditious and sensible decisions. That is what builds public confidence. Those decisions must be made in the context of the ministerial code and the Pledge of Office.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the First Minister agree that greater integration and cohesion in OFMDFM would send out a much more positive message to the general public and help to realise the full potential of devolution?

The First Minister: In listening to the Member, the Assembly will recognise that he draws from his experience of the most divided OFMDFM, in which his party and the Ulster Unionist Party held the main positions. At times the atmosphere was so bad that they could not even talk to each other. They produced approximately half the number of decisions that the current OFMDFM has made in a shorter period. I recognise that the Member draws his experience from an Executive that collapsed on four occasions.

Mr K Robinson: If the powers of the First Minister and deputy First Minister really are equal, why do they have different designations? Surely that alone suggests that some are more equal than others.

The First Minister: Let us be clear that certain statutory powers must be exercised jointly, as recognised in the legislation. Effectively, that means that meetings of the Executive have to be jointly chaired, the agendas of those meetings have to be jointly agreed and decisions have to be jointly taken. Outside of that, there is not a statutory requirement. However, in the interests of good practice, there is agreement about how we proceed on most occasions.

3.00 pm

We must recognise that the Executive brings together four parties into a mandatory coalition, but it is not a coalition of those who chose to be together. Therefore, there will be ideological and other differences in our approaches. However, given the differences in the history and backgrounds from which we have come, there have been remarkable levels of agreement. The fact that we were able to agree a Programme for Government, a Budget and an investment strategy in a very short time is to the credit of all those who took part in those negotiations.

Rather than drawing attention to the few areas of disagreement, we should draw attention to the hundreds of areas on which we have been able to agree and move forward, but, of course, that is not a trendy thing for newspapers to emphasise.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Urban Waste Water Directive

1. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the implementation of the urban waste water treatment directive.

(AQO 245/10)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. One of the key aims of Northern Ireland Water's investment programme is to ensure that appropriate treatment is in place in new and existing works to meet the requirements and standards of the directive. The responsibility for implementing the urban waste water treatment directive rests with the Department of the Environment (DOE), which regulates discharges under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Therefore, NI Water needs DOE's permission before it can discharge into waterways or underground strata.

We are currently investing £1 million every working day to improve our water and sewerage infrastructure and services. I will ensure that NI Water continues to provide the investment that is needed to improve our environment and meet the aims of the directive.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his answer. To meet the urban waste water treatment directive, Northern Ireland Water does not propose to treat secondary sewage but to discharge untreated sewage from Ballycarry, Whitehead and Ballystrudder into the mouth of Belfast Lough. Is the Minister aware that the threshold in England for such amounts of water is a population of 2,000, whereas it is 7,500 in Northern Ireland? Will he review that figure and ensure that large amounts of untreated sewage will not be discharged into such an environmentally sensitive area adjacent to areas of special scientific interest and in which the Gobbins cliff path proposal is imminent in the next number of years?

The Minister for Regional Development: I appreciate the Member's concern. He has to bear in mind the difference when it comes to the standards that are applied. He particularly referred to the standards that were adopted in Britain, which are known as the Meacher principles. Those followed a period of very substantial investment in water and sewerage infrastructure in Britain, which was something from which we did not benefit.

It is not correct to describe what is being discharged in places like Cloughfin, Whitehead, Ballycarry and Ballystrudder as raw sewage. I understand that the proposed discharge at Cloughfin, in particular, will consist of secondary treated effluent from a works at Ballycarry, along with screened waste water from Ballystrudder and Whitehead. The combined population equivalent is less than 10,000, and, as the effluent is discharged into coastal water, secondary treatment is not required.

We will continue to invest as best we can. As I said in my original answer, we invest about £1 million every working day to try to secure the best possible system. We work closely in compliance with DOE and the environmental services, and we work to comply with the guidelines that we have been set. We will continue to make that investment to improve all our coastal waters.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline what the DOE's legal obligations are under the current urban waste water treatment directive?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department of the Environment is responsible for implementing the urban waste water treatment directive, which, as I said, regulates discharges under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. Therefore, Northern Ireland Water needs DOE's permission before it can discharge into waterways or underground strata. The Environment Agency has to be satisfied with the propositions that are brought forward by NIW before it will give its consent.

Mr Dallat: The Minister said that £1 million a day is being spent on water treatment. Will he clarify whether there are any additional costs that relate directly to implementing this directive?

The Minister for Regional Development: There would certainly be additional costs if we were not to implement the directive. At one stage, fines for not implementing the waste water treatment directive were threatened by the EU, but we have kept ahead of requirements. Hence the necessity for a sustained high level of investment in water and sewerage infrastructure, which was largely neglected for the previous 20 years in respect of substantial investments. Therefore, there are implications if we do not invest and fully implement the waste water treatment directive. The drive behind securing the necessary finances is to keep us ahead of infraction costs from the EU.

Regional Development Strategy

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to

maximise participation in the public workshops on the regional development strategy. (AQO 246/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I intend to hold consultation events in each of the 11 new council areas. Such events proved productive during the early stages of the review last year. I propose to use a number of ways to maximise participation. The events will be advertised in daily and weekly newspapers and on my Department's website. All those who attended the pre-consultation workshops and for whom we have addresses will be personally invited.

I intend to ask members of the external working group, which was formed to help to ensure that the work on the review and the strategy was carried out in a robust and open manner, to target those they represent. That should capture representatives from NGOs, businesses, local government, house builders, academia, the planning profession and cross-border groups.

Personal invitations will also be sent to individuals and organisations on my Department's consultation list, which includes the Equality Commission; the Community Relations Council; voluntary, community and trade union groups; and organisations representing the various categories included in section 75. All MLAs and local councillors will also be included.

I have asked my officials to ensure that venues are accessible and that timings do not exclude anyone from participating.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister's local team on winning the Armagh junior championship yesterday.

How will the regional development strategy take account of planning reform?

The Minister for Regional Development: We will obviously work in conjunction with all the Departments. The review of the regional development strategy is an Executive document that is being carried forward by the Department for Regional Development (DRD). The redrafting of that document requires us to work with each and every Department. There is a particularly close working relationship between DRD and DOE in developing proposals for new key roles and responsibilities for central government with regard to regional planning. Hence, we have worked with all Government Departments but particularly closely with the DOE, given the overlap between it and my Department.

Mrs Long: What discussions have there been between DRD and DOE about the planning reform process, particularly in ensuring coherence between the local development plans and the overriding, Northern Ireland-wide regional development strategy?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, a key part of the review of the strategy is to make

sure that it works properly. There are a number of issues in the melting pot in relation to that. There is the review of planning itself, but there is also the change in how planning will be processed through the new local government structures. Therefore, we have had to work particularly closely with DOE to ensure that the regional development strategy that we are revising fits in with all of that. I had meetings with Sammy Wilson when he was Minister of the Environment; I believe that I recall meeting Arlene Foster when she was the Minister; and I look forward to continuing that discussion with the new Environment Minister.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he agree with me that regional development for border areas is a cross-border issue? Will he outline what in-depth discussions have taken place with the Irish Government about regional development in areas that overlap the border?

The Minister for Regional Development: Of course that is key to our development. For a number of reasons, I felt that the 'Shaping Our Future' document produced in 2000-02 was out of date. Some of them were environmental issues that had increasingly come to the fore and needed to be addressed, but a key issue was that the all-Ireland dimension of the working institutions needed to be reflected more. Therefore, a number of people whose organisations have a cross-border element are included in the working group to deal with the matter.

The Member will know that we have been working on spatial planning, not just with the Department with which I regularly liaise in the North/South Ministerial Council meetings but with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the South, which is headed by John Gormley. We have launched not only an all-Ireland spatial planning process but specific processes with respect to Newry/Dundalk and the north-west. Although those are key elements, there has been insufficient recognition of the cross-border potential of the regional development strategy, so we will work with the new local councils — a substantial number of which will be in border areas — to ensure that they are also able to develop those relationships.

Public Transport: Bilingual Signage

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to encourage bilingual signage in public transport depots. (AQO 247/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department is considering a Translink paper on the use of bilingual passenger information, which suggests that it would be possible to provide bilingual destination

screens on the real-time information points at bus stops. However, the practicalities need to be worked through, and the bus routes for which that would be appropriate must be identified. We will respond to those proposals in due course.

Translink has informed me that it will respond positively to any requests to improve any forms of information that it provides to the public, as it has done in locations such as Dungannon and west Belfast. That approach applies to bus and rail services. For example, Translink has provided ad hoc information in Irish, including school safety material and timetables, at bus shelters at specific locations. A small number of Goldline cross-border services have bilingual destination screens, and an Irish translation service is available on the Translink website. Translink has also informed me that it will be including multilingual signage at Newry railway station, the practicalities of which are being finalised.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is his Department doing to promote the use of the Irish language through services that are provided by its agencies, such as Translink?

The Minister for Regional Development: Recently, the Department worked with Raidió Fáilte to develop Irish language advertisements to promote our door-to-door transport and concessionary travel services in Belfast. Literature to promote door-to-door services is also being made available in Irish. I have also been told by Translink that it provides school safety information and guides in Irish on how to use its services. At a local level, Translink has made information available in Irish on bus services at two bus stops with known Irish language links. Ulsterbus cross-border services 274 and 296, operating from Derry, have bilingual destination signs, and an Irish translation service is available on the Translink website.

Mr I McCrea: Does the Minister agree that, in Northern Ireland, there is not a large number of people who require information in or are even able to speak the Irish language? Given his and other Departments' efficiency savings requirements, does the Minister agree that providing bilingual information is not a prudent use of public finances?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am disappointed, because I thought that the Member would have been heartened by our efforts to promote the Irish language, which shows that you cannot please all the people all the time.

It is not a matter of the Department throwing money away on a whim. First, in the context of the Department's overall budget, the costs are not substantial. Secondly, under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, we are obliged to

ensure that we promote languages, and my Department and its agencies take that obligation very seriously.

Mr Kennedy: When will appropriate signage be provided at the land frontier between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland where the A1 meets the N1, given that that road has been in operation for some years?

The Minister for Regional Development: I will have to take advice from the Member on what he considers to be appropriate signage because, like him, I am a south Armagh man, and I have yet to get lost on that road. Nor have I had any requests from members of the public who have got lost travelling across the border. If we are really on an efficiency drive, perhaps removing the border would solve all those problems.

3.15 pm

Water Supply

4. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he expects to make a decision on the future funding for water provision. (AQO 248/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have frequently to explain that it is not for me alone to decide the future of funding arrangements for water and sewerage services. It is a matter for the Executive collectively. Over the coming months, the Executive will make decisions on the funding of public services generally for 2010-11, and this will include the funding of water and sewerage services. We remain committed to consulting publicly on any decisions we take arising from the Independent Water Review Panel's strand-two report.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he give the House a full breakdown of the cost of a further deferment of water charges, were such a decision to be taken?

The Minister for Regional Development: The financial implications of a further deferral of water charges beyond 2009-2010 are as follows. The Department is providing about £270 million for 2009-2010. Initial estimates suggest that deferring charges over the period 2010-13 would extend the departmental expenditure limit by something like £1 billion. However, those costs could vary, depending on the nature of any Executive decision.

Whether or not households pay an additional contribution, if we want a world-class water and sewerage service, it must be paid for. As I said in answer to a previous question, it costs around £1 million each working day to deliver water and sewerage services. Were there no additional contributions, money would have to come out of the Executive's overall Budget, because there is a legal obligation under article 213 of the Water and Sewerage Services Order 2006 to meet

those costs in 2009-2010. It would increase the pressure on the Budget and limit the money available for other public services. As I have said, it is a matter for the Executive to decide how that should be done. If we agree to deferral, the Executive will have to balance competing demands, as with any expenditure.

Mr Gallagher: Does the Minister accept that, although we are led to believe that domestic charges have been deferred, some people are being billed for the use of water in their homes? Given that those concerned are mainly vulnerable people in supported housing developments, will the Minister undertake to ensure that they do not receive any further bills for their water? Will he work with his colleagues in the Executive to sort out the problem that has given rise to those domestic charges?

The Minister for Regional Development: Following a decision taken by the Executive some time ago and supported by all the parties represented in the Executive, bills have been introduced for all non-domestic properties. That has led, in some instances, to mistakes in the system for identifying which properties should be billed. The Member has raised the issue of bills issued to vulnerable adults; I regret that that has happened, and I regret any distress that that might have caused.

I constantly emphasise to NIW that its information systems must be as accurate as possible to ensure that both the properties to which it sends bills and the amounts charged are correctly identified. It is inevitable that mistakes will occur in a new system. This is the result of an outworking of a decision taken by the Executive some time ago. It is incumbent on NIW to correct the mistakes as quickly as possible and so ensure that people feel more confident in the system.

A5 Dual Carriageway

5. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the level of concern in the farming community about the proposed A5 route. (AQO 249/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am fully aware of the concern in the farming community that has arisen as a result of the announcement of the preferred route for the proposed A5 dual carriageway. That concern is understandable, given the scale of the project and the number of farmers and other landowners involved.

Roads Service and its project engineers, Mouchel, are nearing completion of their first round of landowner visits. Those meetings have clarified a number of issues for affected landowners, and I understand that they have gone some way to reducing concern in the farming community.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. However, I ask the Minister whether those concerns are being fully addressed and whether the voice of the farming community is being heard. Is there the potential to move the roadway beyond the 20-metre buffer zone in order to prevent the separation of dwelling houses from farmyards?

The Minister for Regional Development: As the Member rightly said, there is a 20-metre buffer zone along the line of the preferred route. There has been particular concern about this project. That is inevitable and unsurprising, and I understand it fully because this is the biggest road project that we have ever undertaken. However, it follows a pattern similar to that of other major road projects in the past 10 to 15 years, all of which have involved land acquisition and, in some cases, property acquisition and discussions and negotiations about compensation and access for farms along the way.

Routing a major road such as this through somebody's land is bound to cause upset; that is accepted. There is scope to alter the route after discussion with landowners. However, the Member must realise — I am sure that he does — that, if the route was to be altered significantly, its line would be thrown off, and that would affect another landowner down the road. Therefore, there is a limit to the amount of alteration. Part of the aim of the negotiations that are going on individually with all the landowners along the way is to secure the best possible solution for those landowners and the road project.

Lord Morrow: I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said about the proposed A5. Will he give an assurance that all issues will be looked at carefully, in particular the alternatives to the preferred route that have been suggested? I am thinking in particular of the section from Aughnacloy to the Ballygawley roundabout.

The Minister for Regional Development: I assure the Member that careful consideration will be given to all aspects of the project. The preferred route has been set. There is some flexibility in it. The Member has raised the issue of the funding of our roads before; I presume that that is what he is referring to in relation to Ballygawley to Aughnacloy. The current upgrading of that route was part of a Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) package that also included the dual carriageway in and around Newry, a number of junctions on the A1 between Newry and Sprucefield, the dualling of the A4 between Dungannon and Ballygawley, and the improvements to the A4 and Annaghilla Road towards Enniskillen, just west of the Ballygawley roundabout.

The cost of that entire package is £320 million; the Tullyvar element is only approximately 2% of that. The decision taken by Roads Service not to renegotiate to remove that element from the package was the

correct one, given the time that it took to put that complete package together.

Other factors that influenced the decision to keep the Tullyvar section as it is being built are that the land had been vested, compensation had been agreed with a number of landowners, and the A5 Tullyvar section will be in service for six years from 2009 to 2015 before the A5 is completed.

Dr Deeny: I welcome the Minister's comments. I also welcome the plans for the A5 from the points of view of infrastructure and safety. First, is there a time frame for construction to start on the A5? Secondly, with regard to safety, will the proposed dual carriageway of the A5 be based on that of the A4, with no right turns off or onto the carriageway?

The Minister for Regional Development: There is a lot of design to be done, negotiation and discussion to go on and compensation issues to be sorted out with landowners. Inevitably, there will be a public inquiry in which people in the area will have a chance to put forward their point of view again and to have it heard by an inspector. However, the intended construction date is 2012 to 2015.

I confirm that it is a high-grade dual carriageway, which does not involve crossing over its central median. The junctions will be grade separated to almost motorway standard. Motorway standard involves a more substantial take of land than a dual carriageway does, and that would have created even more problems for the local farming community than this project has.

Greyabbey: Main Street

6. **Mr Shannon** asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the deteriorating condition of Main Street, Greyabbey and the fact that work on the sewers will not begin until Autumn 2010, what action he intends to take in the interim to repair the road, which is causing damage to vehicles. (AQO 250/10)

7. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department will make temporary arrangements to improve the condition of the road in lower Main Street, Greyabbey. (AQO 251/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 6 and 7 together.

Roads Service has a commitment to carry out a major improvement scheme at Main Street, Greyabbey. However, the extent of that scheme is such that the funding required has not been available. I am not in a position to provide Members with a definite timescale for the implementation of the scheme. NI Water has given notice of its intention to lay a new section of

sewer in Main Street, Greyabbey, in the autumn of 2010. I am sure that Members will appreciate the Roads Service's reluctance to proceed, even were funding available, with the reconstruction/resurfacing scheme where it will be subject to excavation and reinstatement within a relatively short period.

In the interim, Roads Service intends to carry out some areas of extensive patching on the worst sections of the carriageway. The road will continue to be inspected under the Roads Service's cyclical regime, and any actionable defects will be noted for repair, in line with maintenance guidelines.

Mr Shannon: This is the first question that I have had selected for oral answer since the Assembly's return from summer recess. I will pick the lottery numbers today as well; I might have a chance of winning that.

Not only is Greyabbey's Main Street the worst road in the Ards borough and the Strangford constituency, it is the worst road in Northern Ireland. It is even worse than the roads in the west of the Province; I say that for the benefit of the Members from the west of the Province who are in the Chamber.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have to come to a question very soon.

Mr Shannon: Are the Minister and his Department aware, as I am, that the shock absorbers of cars are being broken on that road and that damage is being caused to tractors and trailers? I know that the Minister comes from a farming community. Is he aware of the stress that there is on the vehicles that travel up and down that road? The road resembles a potato field or a war zone; it is the worst road in the world. The Minister should be doing more about it. He should not be putting it off by saying that his Department will do some remedial repairs. It is not remedial repairs that we want; we want long-term repairs carried out now.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Deputy Speaker is sensitive because he knows of worse roads in his constituency.

I understand what Mr Shannon is saying. I have been in Greyabbey at the invitation of Mr Shannon and Kieran McCarthy. I understand that the road is in a poor state, and Roads Service is committed to trying to address that. However, a major sewerage scheme will be dug through the road, so it does not make sense to do anything with the road now. One of the complaints that we receive most frequently relates to the digging up of roads by the likes of NIW, Phoenix Gas or a telecoms company six or nine months or a year after Roads Service has laid a good surface. People always say that the level of reinstatement rarely matches the original scheme. Therefore, given that there is a major scheme to go down in the near future, it makes sense to wait until after that. I am sure that Roads Service

will be contacted on many occasions between now and then by Mr Shannon and Mr McCarthy, but it will continue to try to keep the road in as good a standard as it can in the interim.

Mr McCarthy: I am disappointed with the Minister's response, but it was not unexpected. As the Minister said, he was in Greyabbey, and, at that time, the road was in a deplorable condition. The Minister should know that it is in a hellish condition now; it is in an even worse condition than it was 18 months ago. There should be no excuse for the delay in funding. We have heard about funding over and over again. Come autumn 2010, I have no doubt that the issue will be put on the long finger. Main Street in Greyabbey is the worst road not only in Northern Ireland, but in the Thirty-two Counties.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must come to a question.

Mr McCarthy: It is the worst road in Europe. Rather than spending millions of pounds on consultancy fees, about which we have heard much criticism in recent times, does the Minister agree that Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water should plough money into front line services and give the people of Greyabbey some sort of modern main street that will encourage visitors?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must come to a question and a subject.

Mr McCarthy: It is the main road to the old abbey, and we should —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to resume his seat. I call the Minister to respond.

The Minister for Regional Development: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There is a major scheme to be carried out in that area, and I am sure that, if we relaid the road before that, Mr McCarthy and Mr Shannon would be the first Members to their feet to ask why my Department laid a new surface only to let NIW dig it up six months or a year later.

The spending on consultancy fees assists such major schemes. There is a simplistic view that spending on consultants is, sometimes, a waste of money. However, if we do not seek expertise on waste-water treatment and water systems — NIW does not have it in-house — we will not get the types of system required to bring us up to an appropriate standard. That type of spending is necessary, and it helps deliver the sort of scheme that the Member will be looking for.

I understand the Member's frustration, but his constituency is not the only one with poor roads. Recently, I commissioned the Snaith report, and I invite Members to read it. I do not want to adopt the mantra "Give me the money, and I will build the roads", which is similar to that used by some other

Ministers. However, the report recognises that our roads system, which is largely rural and not built for the volume or weight of traffic that it is experiencing, is under severe pressure and not being repaired properly, and that will store up problems for us in the future.

I have been arguing for that, and I recognise that to be the case. Those roads require more investment, but unfortunately, in the current financial climate, more investments in those roads will leave less money for investment in other services.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place for question 8.

Mr Storey: I can assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I am in my place and don't you forget it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: My apologies. I made a mistake and I apologise for it. I do not wish to be threatened by the Member. *[Laughter.]*

Speed Limits

8. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to bring forward the 'Setting Local Speed Limits' policy. (AQO 252/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am tempted to say that the Member should stay in his place.

Members will be aware that Roads Service published the review of its policy on the setting of speed limits earlier this year. Public consultation was completed in April 2009, and in addition to feedback from other Government Departments and key stakeholders, a total of 54 public responses were received. The feedback was generally supportive of the policy proposals; however, several issues remain to be resolved. Nevertheless, I hope to be in a position to publish the final policy document by the end of 2009.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Personal Protection Weapons

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes the dissident threat to serving and retired military personnel and police officers; and calls on the Chief Constable to review urgently the policy on personal protection weapons. — [Mr B McCrea.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after “this Assembly” and insert

“calls on the Chief Constable to ensure that any application for a personal protection weapon is considered only on the basis of the level of threat against the applicant”. — [Ms Anderson.]

Mr Kennedy: The PSNI policy directive on personal protection weapons, now happily to be reviewed, states:

“It is the intention of Her Majesty’s Government in Northern Ireland to see as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements and a situation where the need for firearms for personal protection firearms is substantially reduced, or no longer necessary.”

That is a desire that the Ulster Unionist Party shares, and it will continue to work for those circumstances to be brought about. However, I am afraid that the current Government and, regrettably, some elements in the PSNI, are engaged in wishful thinking over their assessment of the current security position and the level of threat to former police officers and military personnel. There is a very great danger that in order to uphold Government policy, the senior command of the PSNI will ignore the reality on the ground and put the lives of numerous people in Northern Ireland in danger.

There has been a litany of incidents, most recently the deplorable bomb attack in east Belfast on 16 October 2009. That attack, together with the murders in Antrim early this year and the murder of Constable Stephen Carroll in Craigavon, illustrates that while we have moved forward in recent years, the threat from dissident Republicans is a real and growing one.

The Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) began reporting seven years ago and since then, and particularly with the introduction of the PSNI policy on personal protection weapons, there has been a marked reduction in the granting and renewal of those weapons for ex-service personnel and ex-police officers.

The Ulster Unionist Party is not into scaremongering, and it recognises that an overreaction from the authorities can play into the hands of dissidents and others. However, what we are dealing with is the personal security of thousands of men and women and their families, and the granting of protection to those who have served Northern Ireland through its darkest days, and who often held the line and provided people

in the community with the confidence to go about their daily lives.

Along with other Members of the House, I have received substantial correspondence and representation from former members of the security forces who are concerned for their personal safety. Although I recognise the work that has been carried out by the PSNI and the Garda Síochána to prevent dissident attacks, it is clear from recent events that intelligence does not always adequately reflect those threats. Therefore, I do not fully understand why the PSNI has taken such an inflexible attitude on the issue.

In the current climate of dissident threat, the granting of a PPW only when a specific threat is provable in the past six months is an inadequate and clumsy policy. I hope that the new Chief Constable not only reviews the policy but changes it in line and commensurate with the threat that exists.

The people who hold, or wish to hold, personal protection weapons pose no threat to this society. They are law-abiding citizens who have upheld law and order in Northern Ireland through its most difficult history, and those men and women should not be punished for that service. Nobody wants to go back to the past, and we should all do everything in our power to ensure that dissident murderers are not allowed to drag us back there. However, that desire should not cloud our judgement when it comes to the threats and dangers that exist today. I support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: We all recognise the need for personal protection weapons in certain restricted circumstances. They are, alas, needed in our society. However, applications for personal protection weapons must be based on a considered analysis of people’s personal circumstances and the threat to their personal safety or the safety of their families; it is important to keep that in mind.

The SDLP’s objection to the substantive motion is based on the fact that there cannot be a generalised view of personal protection weapons. There cannot be a policy that says that a class, or classes, of people should be granted those weapons automatically. That is the substance of the motion, and I do not think that I do injury to the motion by saying so. If there were a live threat to an individual, of course a personal protection weapon should be granted.

There is a threat, in particular from so-called dissident republicans. However, that threat should not activate a generalised policy of granting personal protection weapons to a class, or classes, of individuals. The granting of a personal protection weapon (PPW) should be based on an individual assessment, and the Chief Constable and his colleagues had embarked on that policy in an attempt to slow down, or at least limit, the granting of personal protection weapons. If the

security situation were to deteriorate to a point where there is a much greater threat to serving or retired police officers, that policy ought to be reviewed. However, we have not reached that point.

Mr B McCrea: I am interested in the conciliatory tones of the Member. What bases would he use to decide that the threat had changed? Would it be information from the Independent Monitoring Commission, the Chief Constable or the Assembly? How will he know when it is time to issue PPWs to everyone? Will we have to wait until it is too late?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: With respect to the Member, the issuing of personal protection weapons to everyone is not a desirable policy, and the Member should think carefully about that statement.

When the security situation reaches such a level that the Chief Constable, his colleagues and other sources come to the conclusion that there is a real threat to a class of people, the Chief Constable will be duty-bound to change his policy on the granting of personal protection weapons. Until that point, it is right and proper for the Chief Constable to say that personal protection weapons will be granted when a real and live threat to an individual has been shown to be extant. In those circumstances a personal protection weapon should be granted.

It is not desirable for legally held weapons to be widespread in society, because that gives rise to problems. We know that, sadly, there have been circumstances in which personal protection weapons have been misused, not to threaten the peace of society, but in other circumstances. That is to be regretted. The more legally held weapons that there are, the greater the risk that those unfortunate situations may develop. Our view is that the granting of personal protection weapons should be based on a personal assessment of an acute threat to the individual. That is the way it should be done, and that is the way that the Chief Constable is carrying out his duty to his officers, and, indeed, to individual citizens in the community. That is the position that my party supports.

Mr Buchanan: First, I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. I support the motion. Although a review is under way, it is important to bring the matter to the attention and focus of the Chief Constable, Mr Matt Baggott, given the widespread concern across Northern Ireland. This is especially the case in isolated rural areas, where serving and ex-members of the security forces are finding it extremely difficult to have their licences for personal protection weapons renewed.

At the outset, I will state that I do not support the amendment, for the simple reason that it calls for what

is already in place. Time and again, we have seen how that policy is failing the needs of individual members of the security forces because there is no apparent specific threat on their lives. My office is visited continually by people who have been refused the re-granting of their PPW licence simply because there is deemed to be no specific threat to their lives, yet there are clear examples of people who have been murdered when there has been no specific threat on their lives. Members have mentioned the two soldiers in Massereene Army Barracks in Antrim and the police officer in Craigavon. There was no specific threat to their lives, yet they were brutally murdered.

The policy recently adopted by the PSNI, that unless there is a specific —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Buchanan: With all due respect, the Member has had his say. The policy that the renewal of licences for PPWs will not be granted unless there is a specific threat on one's life — irrespective of the increased dissident republican threat — flies in the face of all logic. At almost every meeting of the Policing Board, we are briefed on the increased dissident republican threat and are told that it is higher than it has been for a number of years. We are seeing the results of that threat across Northern Ireland. No later than last Friday, there was an officer in my office who had received a text message from the PSNI reminding him of the increased security threat and advising him to review his personal security; yet, despite that, he is not deemed to have a specific threat to his life.

In rural areas, people who are having PPWs removed are being placed in vulnerable positions by the current policy. The Assembly must give them its full support. The message must go out from the Chamber that Members are giving them our full support.

I will give the House a prime example. One of my constituents served in the UDR and then the RIR for 23 years. During the last 10 years of his service he served along the border in Fermanagh and Tyrone. He knew the terrorists, and was obviously known to them. Following the abandonment of the RIR, he pursued a career as a specialist joiner, and his work with his employer now takes him back into those same areas, along the border in Fermanagh and Tyrone; areas where the dissident threat is taking place and where lives have almost been taken.

However, his application to have his PPW reissued was refused, because it was deemed that there was no specific threat to his life. The irony is that the PSNI in F district, which covers Omagh and Fermanagh, advised that constituent that he was placing his life in extreme danger by working in those areas.

3.45 pm

That is the flaw in the policy, which I ask Matt Baggott to examine and reverse. It is a clear example of a policy that fails individual police members. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the House to give its full support to the people who live and work in isolated rural areas, who feel vulnerable and who are having their PPWs removed and feel that their lives are still at risk. It is disgraceful for the police to simply disregard concern for personal safety, the same concern that led those people to protect the country in the past. That must be addressed urgently, and a clear message must be sent to the Chief Constable that the current policy is wrong. It must be reversed to protect the lives of current and former members of the police and anyone else who holds a PPW.

Mr Spratt: I support the motion, and I declare my membership of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

All Members should be aware and take account of the serious threat that exists in the Province. In the past number of weeks and months, serious incidents have taken place at Meigh and Forkhill, and two soldiers and a police officer, Stevie Carroll, were murdered. In those incidents, no specific information was given that something was going to happen. Moreover, the incident that took place at the weekend was particularly sinister, and we should all bear that in mind. The device that was used in that incident was of a type that has not been used in a long time, and, without mentioning the specific detail that I have heard, we should all be concerned. I know that serving members of the Police Service and of the security forces are very concerned about that incident.

Over the past number of months, there has been no indication whatever of any specific threat to individuals. The policy that the previous Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable, both of whom have now left the Province, adopted was flawed in that it sent out seriously mixed messages to the community. They said, on the one hand, that there was a severe threat across the board, but on the other hand, they took away personal protection weapons.

On Saturday, yesterday and today, I received calls from former Police Service colleagues who have not carried personal protection weapons for a number of years but who have now returned to doing so. Sadly, they have also returned to checking underneath their vehicles. In an earlier debate today, Sir Reg Empey said that Members should also look at their personal security, and we should all be doing that.

I am sad that SDLP and Sinn Féin Members are trying to pull a smokescreen over the issue. Earlier, Dolores Kelly said that she is not aware of a time when a personal protection weapon has ever been used. The counter-argument is whether we know how many lives

have been saved simply because someone was carrying a personal protection weapon. The answer is that we do not. Carrying such a weapon gives folks the reassurance that they need.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Member agree that often the most serious threat is a silent one; a threat of which the intelligence services are unaware and of which they are, therefore, unable to inform an individual? Protection by way of a personal protection weapon is, sadly, necessary for an increasing number of former police and military personnel who still live in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have another minute in which to speak.

Mr Spratt: I agree absolutely with the Member. The silent threat was always the problem because, often, it led to people being shot in the back and murdered like dogs in the streets of Northern Ireland. That happened time and time again. I hope that that situation never returns.

With regard to the Member's point about intelligence, I believe that at present, the intelligence system does not feed back the information that it should. There is a serious deficit in the information that is being obtained by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the security services. We do not know of there having been any feedback about, or warning of, a specific threat against an individual before any of the incidents that have taken place during the past number of months.

The incident that took place on Friday 16 October 2009 was particularly sinister because it was quite obvious that the attackers knew that the police officer normally travelled in the passenger seat of the vehicle. The device was planted under the passenger seat in expectation that the officer would travel in the vehicle. Members will have heard Chief Superintendent Maguire say that in all probability, had the officer been in the passenger seat of the car, he would have lost his life that morning.

My time is almost up. All Members must be aware of those issues. The motion is, certainly, timely. Thankfully, a security review is under way. I would be surprised if the Chief Constable does not have to find a different policy as a result of the ongoing review. I support the motion and reject the amendment.

Mr Weir: Like others, I declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I support the motion and reject the amendment. At the outset, I must say that where the amendment has come from is no great surprise, and the remarks from the party opposite have been, sadly, predictable. Even more disappointing is the attitude that has been taken by the SDLP in the debate. It has been remarked that

personal protection weapons are a comfort blanket. Such blasé remarks are fairly disgraceful.

It has been said that the withdrawal of personal protection weapons is part of the removal of guns from society. As if there were some equivalence, the removal of personal protection weapons has been equated — perhaps, unintentionally, but equated nonetheless — with the disarmament of paramilitary groups. It has also been suggested that dissidents would move in and try to exploit any degree of political impasse. In certain regards, that almost gives cover to their nefarious activities.

One Member to said that the situation should be reviewed only when a more widespread threat has been identified against a group of people. At what point would there be acceptance that the threat has moved from a specific threat against individuals to a general threat towards a wider group? Must we wait until one, two, three, four, or any number of former security forces personnel are murdered before the situation is reviewed?

Although, on occasion, it can be due to a pleasant event, more often the House employs its procedure to bring matters of the day to the Floor of the Chamber because a tragedy has taken place, either in a wider Northern Ireland context or on a more specific basis in a constituency. Must we wait until there are matters of the day in which we must, sadly, comment on the death of a former member of the security forces before that situation changes? Must we wait and try to close the door after the horse has bolted? The time is right to take action now. I, therefore, welcome the Chief Constable's commitment to conduct a review.

Some Members quoted statistics on personal protection weapons, and the SDLP argued for the removal of guns from society. Just over 3,000 of the 62,000 firearm certificates issued in Northern Ireland are for PPWs. The actions that have been taken will not make a significant numerical difference to the overall number of firearms; however, it does make a significant difference to the security of individual officers.

Some Members spoke about the problem of hanging this debate on a specific threat. However, the incidents in the constituencies of South Antrim, Upper Bann and East Belfast send out a message from the dissidents that no area in Northern Ireland is safe. My constituency of North Down is home to a large number of former security force members, and I do not want one of them to tragically lose his or her life before it is accepted that the general threat from dissidents potentially applies to former police officers.

Senior members of the police and the IMC have said that dissidents pose a greater threat to security now than at any stage over the past 10 years. Yet, the way in which the police have applied the policy on

PPWs in recent years shows that they are moving in the opposite direction. In 2005, 25 requests for PPWs were refused.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way in a second. In 2006, nine requests were refused, and in the past year, more than 300 requests have been refused. Similarly, in 2007, one weapon was returned; in 2008, one weapon was returned; and in 2009, 28 weapons were returned.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. I wish to make two points. First, the SDLP is not suggesting that there is equivalence between the disarmament of people involved in paramilitary activity and the removal of personal protection weapons from members of the security forces. Secondly, if the Chief Constable was not satisfied that there was not a threat to those individuals, he certainly would neither remove certificates nor fail to grant them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Weir: I accept that that suggestion was probably inadvertent. However, members of the SDLP need to make their remarks a lot clearer. What Dolores Kelly said earlier about this issue being part of the removal of guns from society put it on an equivalence with paramilitaries. As regards the former Chief Constable's opinion, the situation is moving rapidly, and things have changed over the past year. I look forward to seeing whether, if the new Chief Constable reverses the position on PPWs, the SDLP will embrace that.

Mr A Maginness: [*Interruption.*]

Mr Weir: The Member is making some remarks from a sedentary position that I cannot quite make out.

The reality is —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I have only six seconds left, so I do not have any time to give way. It is important that we put down a marker now to take action that saves lives, rather than wait until it is too late.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Weir: I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion and oppose the amendment. Like other Members, I condemn the car bombing incident in Belfast on Friday. The motion was proposed before that bombing took place, and my colleagues did not imagine that such an incident could happen when they tabled it. However, the incident illustrates the fact that military personnel and police officers are under the same threat and in as much danger as they were 10 years ago.

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

In 2002, weapons had already been issued to some PSNI recruits due to the increase in dissident threat at that time. Some student officers were issued with personal protection weapons because of an increased terrorist threat and the level of threat against them. Trainees have been targeted in the past. Indeed, a Catholic recruit in Antrim escaped injury in July 2002 after a bomb was discovered beneath his car. It was subsequently determined that personal protection weapons should be issued to those who felt that they needed to be protected from a threat. At that time, a very specific policy was sent out.

4.00 pm

In recent months, the threat against on-duty and off-duty officers has increased greatly. I know that my colleagues on the Policing Board are working extremely hard and have been vocal in their warning that the phasing out of the full-time police Reserve will place even more pressure on front line officers, which could lead to a breach in safety.

In recent weeks, dissident republicans have intensified their activities. Over the past year, 30 police officers have been so concerned about their safety that they have been forced to move house, which is a clear illustration of the threat that those officers are under. Statistics show that the targeting of security personnel, and threats against security personnel, are, unfortunately, not a thing of the past. Some of the figures are worrying: in the past two years, 420 viable devices have been found in 750 security alerts across Northern Ireland. There is a problem.

Concern is growing for former members of the security services as it emerges that, in the past 10 months, the police have removed 172 personal protection weapons from them. I have spoken to former constables and sergeants who have had their weapons taken off them and who feel extremely insecure at this time, as well as to ex-members of the UDR and the RIR who feel that they may not be safe in their homes. Those people feel safer when they are carrying a personal protection weapon.

Growing concern over the safety of officers comes amid revelations that, so far this year, the Police Service has removed personal weapons from 170 former members of the security forces. The 'Belfast Telegraph' obtained figures citing that 2,030 former security force members, police and army, have firearm certificates allowing them to carry a personal protection weapon.

Many people who come to my office, and to the offices of other Members, are concerned about losing their PPWs. Those who live and work in republican areas, where the dissident threat is high, need their personal weapons to be returned. Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 show that 172 handguns have been removed from security personnel

this year. Let me make it clear: the 172 handguns that have been removed from security personnel must be returned to give those people some security.

The Police Federation chairman, Terry Spence, said that he was deeply concerned about the security situation, and although the return of military support is not a move that the federation would like to see, he warned that police resources are being stripped to such a level that officers are struggling to deliver an effective Police Service. He said:

"The threat has greatly increased against our officers both on and off-duty. The situation is very serious and we have made it clear that we need the resources. The full-time reserve must be retained. They are very experienced in dealing with this type of activity. If they are going to be phased out this is going to put more pressure on officers on the frontline. It will breach the health, safety and welfare of those officers on the ground and we would have very serious concerns".

Resources are an issue.

Taking weapons from former servicemen and women is nothing short of insanity. People must be able to feel safe in their homes. Hailing from the Strangford area, a constituency that houses a large number of ex-service people, I know that the concern shown in my office is phenomenal. It is my belief that that is a warranted concern. I am concerned for the personal safety of a great many people from my area who have had personal weapons removed.

Our police force is on high alert. Although we are constantly assured that it is only a few dissidents carrying out such activities, they have the capacity to do damage. I do not want to see another family lose a loved one, especially one who had the training and the means with which to defend themselves, yet who had that taken away from them. If anything, more of our ex-security forces should have a PPW designated to them as a means of deterrent.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Shannon: People are less likely to prowl around the home of a member of the security forces if they suspect that that person has a weapon that they are trained to use. I support the motion, but certainly not the amendment.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board.

A number of Members who spoke touched on the attack in east Belfast on Friday, and I join them in condemning that incident. There is no doubt that those responsible for that and similar actions over recent months want to plunge this society back into conflict. We should be mindful that those who carried out that attack want to see a knee-jerk overreaction. We need to be very measured in our response and mindful of that.

As a Member said, there are 61,977 firearm certificates in the North, including 3,334 personal protection weapons. It is clear that this society is awash with legally and illegally held firearms. We do not want our society to have an abundance of legal or illegal firearms. We want that situation to change, and it is changing.

The PSNI's personal protection weapon policy refers to a number of drivers for change, including the report into the Dunblane tragedy in Scotland. That report placed greater emphasis on firearm controls and on the need to re-examine regularly the suitability of a person and their reason for possessing a firearm, without simply renewing the existing certificate. That is a more sensible approach than handing out certificates *carte blanche*.

There were a number of tragedies in the recent conflict. In one incident, an RUC member used a personal firearm to kill three people in the Sinn Féin office on the Falls Road before turning his gun on himself. Therefore, there are examples in which the issuing of certificates for personal firearms can end in tragedy.

Mr Spratt: My understanding of the incident that the Member mentioned was that the officer had a service weapon, not a personal protection weapon. No firearms certificate was issued for that firearm; such weapons are still issued automatically to serving members of the PSNI from all sections of the community.

Mr McKay: That highlights the point that the more weapons there are in society, even those that are held by serving PSNI members, the more likely it is that something will go wrong. That is the case in every society and every police service. The less need there is for guns in society, the better. That is the situation that we need to work towards. The more guns there are in society, the more access there is to guns, and the more tragedies there will be.

Over the weekend, I attended an event on suicide prevention. Some of the workers in that field pointed out the number of tragedies that occur in American society due to the fact that access to guns is too great. Therefore, we need to be mindful of all the facts and statistics.

Martina Anderson said rightly that a verifiable threat to the applicant has to be identified before he or she is considered for a personal protection weapon. That has been discussed widely at the Policing Board's human rights committee.

Dolores Kelly mentioned weapons being stolen. Regardless of the statistics, the more weapons there are, the more risk there is that they will be stolen. As Mrs Kelly said, some retired officers are declining weapons, and I have come across a number of serving officers who feel uncomfortable carrying firearms while they conduct community policing.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member agree that we are not trying to force weapons on officers who do not feel that they need them? We are trying to ensure that those officers who do think that they need them, or those who have had them in the past and still want them, can still have them.

Mr McKay: We are talking about former and serving PSNI officers, and we have to leave it to the Chief Constable to decide whether they are entitled to a weapon. We cannot just say that any serving officer is entitled to a weapon, because there is a risk involved in that. We must be cognisant of that risk before we agree motions such as this.

I want to have a situation in which the need for firearms for personal protection is reduced substantially or they are no longer necessary. There is an onus on us, as politicians, to ensure that the current process continues to work and that we do not give opportunities to those who would like to plunge our society back into conflict. That is why I support the amendment.

Mr Elliott: I thank those Members who took part in the debate. A number of Members expressed their condemnation and sympathy for the person who was injured in east Belfast last week. I want to put on record my condemnation of all terrorist attacks, including that in east Belfast last Friday.

The citizens of this Province have undergone almost 40 years of terrorist attacks, all of which must be condemned equally. They have all brought heartache and pain to society in Northern Ireland and further afield.

I will discuss some comments that Members made during the debate. My party colleague Basil McCrea set the scene for the debate and outlined why the Ulster Unionist Party tabled the motion. He outlined some useful assessments that were made by the Independent Monitoring Commission. The most recent Independent Monitoring Commission report, which Mr McCrea did not mention, said that the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA had been especially active, resulting in a more concentrated period of attacks than at any time since its first report in April 2004. That creates a detrimental situation here and highlights the serious effect on the community.

Martina Anderson proposed the amendment and said that, in cases where no threat is identified, a person should not be issued with a personal protection weapon. Numerous Members outlined the many occasions on which there was no specific threat to people, and explained how that did not prevent them from being murdered. That did not stop the brutal terrorist thugs in society targeting them. Ms Anderson said that people — and pointed the finger at us — were playing on people's worst fears. She should tell that to the families of people who have been murdered in our society and await their reaction.

Ian Paisley Jnr provided a helpful statistical overview of the situation. I thank him and his party colleagues for their support for the motion. He indicated that a review is under way. I sincerely hope that that review is genuine and not just a review for the sake of it, because we have heard during the debate whose policy we are implementing. That is outlined in Sinn Féin's amendment. That party's policy is in place, and we are implementing it. I will return to that matter later.

Dolores Kelly of the SDLP spoke next during the debate. Like many others, I was disappointed at the SDLP's stance and its views on the motion. She said that she was pleased that political interference had been removed from the decision-making process. I contend that the complete opposite is true. We have seen political interference in the existing policy, which the amendment outlines. It is unfortunate that Dolores Kelly attempted, in some way, to link the motion to religious and sectarian affiliation. That is saddening, and I am sorry that she went down that road. However, she made those remarks, and other Members challenged her. I hope that she reflects on her comments and realises that she was wrong.

Kieran McCarthy of the Alliance Party made a helpful contribution.

Mr McCarthy: It was short.

Mr Elliott: It was short but telling. He said that the vast majority of people, if not all of them, who are seeking PPWs at the minute do not want to be in that position. I totally agree. Most of the people who have approached me and others for help say that they do not want a PPW but, given the seriousness of the current situation, feel that they cannot do without them. I await the day when we do not want or need PPWs. At least one of my constituents gave up his PPW in the past, but has now reapplied and received it again.

Mr I McCrea: Does the Member agree that in parts of my constituency, certainly rural parts such as Pomeroy, people in minority communities feel under serious threat because of the increase in dissident activity?

4.15 pm

Mr Elliott: That goes to the heart of the motion and the debate. There are people who feel vulnerable, isolated and threatened, and who no longer want to be in that position, but they are at present.

Mr George Robinson mentioned vulnerable people in society who need protection. Lord Morrow spoke about the state of our society and how there was a need to retain personal protection weapons. My party colleague Danny Kennedy said that those who are affected by the current situation and who have asked for PPWs do not pose any threat, and it is they who feel threatened.

Mr Alban Maginness stated clearly that he supported current policy. However, we could not determine what exactly would change his mind about altering the policy.

Mr Thomas Buchanan spoke about vulnerable people in his constituency and highlighted a couple of specific issues in West Tyrone.

Jimmy Spratt talked about the device that was used in east Belfast, and he said that similar devices had been used in the past but had not been used in more recent times. That is a very worrying development. We have heard about the use of that type of device in one or two other recent incidents and the type of materials that have been used. That poses the question of where that material and expertise is coming from.

I say to the people over here who oppose the motion that, if they know of the people who are behind those incidents, they should give them up. It is time that they told the authorities and helped society in Northern Ireland to move forward.

Mr Peter Weir expressed his concern that it will take a tragedy and a murder before someone will agree to change the policy on PPWs. Jim Shannon quite rightly highlighted the cases of a number of former security force members who have had to move home, which has been on the increase in recent months.

Mr McKay of Sinn Féin made the winding-up speech on the amendment, and he said that he was keen not to provoke an overreaction that would play into the hands of the dissidents. I say to Mr McKay and his party: do not play into the hands of the dissidents, but come out and support the law-abiding citizens of this society. Mr McKay's party is giving oxygen to the dissidents by opposing the motion. Let us all work together. If Mr McKay wants to cut that type of activity out of society, he should come in behind us and rally behind the motion and other policies that relate to the situation in Northern Ireland.

It is quite clear that people who are now asking for personal protection weapons did not have access to the illegal weaponry that many others took the opportunity to use over the past 40 years. Those people lived by the law of the Province and others did not. Others, unfortunately, went out at night and hid behind trees and in ditches, and murdered the citizens of the Province. They had access to illegal weaponry, and many of them, unfortunately, still do.

In 2003, the decision of the then Minister of State to reject an appeal against the refusal of the then Chief Constable to grant a Mr Hugh Herdman a firearms certificate for a personal protection weapon was the subject of a judicial review. The judge held that the idea of a specific threat was overly inflexible, and he suggested that there should be a much more flexible approach in the policy on personal protection weapons.

That is what we are asking for. We want a genuine policy that will not only have an effect on the statistics that we heard about but have an effect on people's lives. We want to support the vulnerable, isolated and threatened people in our society.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 32; Noes 47.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mrs I Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Elliott and Mr Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

4.30 pm

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the dissident threat to serving and retired military personnel and police officers; and calls on the Chief Constable to review urgently the policy on personal protection weapons.

Motion made:

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

ADJOURNMENT

Tor Bank School and Lagan College, South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak and that all other Members will have eight minutes.

Ms Lo: Although I will focus today on the impact that the delay in completing the Lagan College building project has had on my constituents in South Belfast, it clearly also affects people who live in areas beyond South Belfast. My colleagues Stephen Farry, Naomi Long and others have been contacted repeatedly by people who are concerned about the lack of progress in the process.

Lagan College, which was founded in 1981 with just 28 students, is Northern Ireland's first planned integrated school. The central aim of governors and staff is to educate together and to the highest standards Catholics, Protestants and others of goodwill of all abilities. Today, there are 1,230 students, including 200 in the sixth form, the majority of whom will proceed to higher education. The college, which is consistently oversubscribed, is a bilateral school that admits 35% of its annual intake on the basis of the transfer grade. In 2009, 91% of students achieved three or more A levels, and 70% of students achieved five to 10 GCSE passes at an A* to C grade.

The first phases of the permanent buildings were opened in 1991, and the technology and design block was added in 1997. In 2001, it was announced that the college was to receive £11.1 million — now around £20 million — for completion of the permanent buildings, the first suggested date for completion being September 2006. That project comprised three schools: Lagan College, Down High School and Tor Bank School.

Down High School withdrew from the project after one year. However, eight years after the project was announced, the buildings for the remaining two schools appear to be no closer to completion. It is appalling that 70% of teaching takes place in temporary accommodation.

It was decided that Lagan College would take the public-private partnership (PPP) route. The college would not have selected an option that bundles together into a single project three markedly different schools: a special school, an education and library board school and a grant maintained integrated school. The project was also complicated by the fact that

Lagan College is located on a National Trust site that has a 99-year lease, and any extension or change must be approved by the trust's board.

The project is an extension and refurbishment of the main building. The college's staff have worked hard and done everything in their power to keep the process going, but the project has encountered hurdle after hurdle over the past few years.

When the evaluation of the bids was completed at Easter 2008, the schools were confident that they would have had a preferred bidder and be on the way to signing a contract by the spring of 2009. Unfortunately, the issues that have delayed the process must be resolved before a preferred bidder can be announced. Construction has been pushed back to at least the autumn, or even the winter, of 2010. That will be almost nine years after the project was announced. It took until early March 2009 to resolve the majority of the issues. The final issue that threatens to delay the project further is the ability to finance it in the current market conditions. The Department of Education, the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Strategic Investment Board must develop a resolution with the utmost urgency.

The delays are having a detrimental effect on the college's operation and planning. The site and building were designed to accommodate 600 students; the current enrolment is 1,230. Although an agreed allowance has financed an extra general classroom for the past five years, the amount of specialist accommodation has not increased. There is a serious shortage of specialist facilities for physical education, ICT, home economics, art, science and music. The college has one multi-purpose hall of 260 sq m that is constantly overbooked and overused. That is the only facility in which the college can deliver the PE element of the curriculum throughout the Key Stages. The hall is in increasing demand as a venue for extra exams throughout the year. To help to overcome the difficulties in the PE department due to the lack of facilities, a temporary PE unit is being built.

The college lacks the space for a study for sixth-formers, and those students have no common room or recreational facilities. The existing canteen was designed to accommodate 260 students at a sitting; it now caters for 500. It is impossible for the college to draw up a maintenance schedule for permanent, semi-permanent and mobile classrooms, because it has no idea how long it will be before they are moved or demolished as part of the decant phase of the construction. The maintenance of the temporary buildings is costly. Many mechanical and electrical installations are due to be replaced or upgraded, but it is also impossible to budget for any changes until a schedule for the project's completion is agreed.

Due to the large number of mobile classrooms, the college spends a disproportionate amount of its budget on heating and electricity. That is detrimental to the health of students and staff, and it also has a high negative environmental impact. In addition, the college is not able to avail itself of any grants to improve energy efficiency until the new building is due.

The college is constantly writing to the Department about health and safety issues because of the increasing enrolment and the nature of the site. Those issues include car parking, drop-off facilities for parents, bus bays, which cater for a maximum of 14 buses safely, but are now being used by 17 buses, and the need for a perimeter fence around the college. However, the Department has informed the school that it is reluctant to invest money because of the building project. The Department of Education has recently added 20 extra spaces for car parking, replaced five double mobiles and two art mobiles, and extensively repaired one double mobile. However, those are all piecemeal actions: they are not really what the college wants.

The whole situation is totally unacceptable. Lagan College needs those buildings now. Parents send their children to the college in good faith and in the expectation that the building will be completed. Many staff have spent untold hours at meetings and feel utter frustration because of the continual delays. The Department selected Lagan College for this unbelievably complex process, and it is essential that the Department now works closely with the college to draw up an agreed timetable for completion so that staff can plan with those dates in mind. The pupils deserve a proper school building that is fit for purpose.

Mr Spratt: I support what Anna Lo has just said. I apologise to the Minister because I have to leave after I speak, so I will not be here to hear her reply.

Given that the school is in my council area and in the south Belfast area, I have been involved in a fair amount of work with it over the years, particularly at council level. I am aware of its very serious plight. It is unsatisfactory for pupils in any school in any part of Northern Ireland to be taught in mobile classrooms. Unfortunately, however, that is part of the reality of the situation. It is not possible to provide for every school, but Lagan College has substantially increased its pupil numbers over the years. It suffered fairly severe damage to classrooms and computers a while back, and, on that occasion, the board and the Department were very good and sorted out the situation as soon as they could.

I know that Down High School is now out of the scenario, but Lagan College is tied to Tor Bank School. My colleague Iris Robinson, along with political colleagues from many different parties, has been heavily involved in trying to get Tor Bank sorted out for a number of years. It provides accommodation for

pupils from all parts of Belfast and from outside the greater Belfast area. It is disgraceful that it has been in the position of working with mobiles for many years.

When I and other members of the South Eastern Education and Library Board were sacked, which the Minister agitated for, Tor Bank School was a regular topic of discussion. We all tried to do what we could to get the issue resolved, but even now that has not happened. I worry that Tor Bank and Lagan College are linked in a PPP project. The best way to put it is that one school holds back the other.

4.45 pm

I hope that the Department will quickly look at Tor Bank School and Lagan College. I will not go through all the statistics presented to the Assembly by Anna Lo. Needless to say, there are accommodation problems and there is very serious need. Many pupils have left the school having spent their full education there in mobile classrooms. That is totally unsatisfactory and should not happen. Lagan College is a good school that is well used by all sections of the community in south Belfast and Castlereagh.

On the matter of the roads and the increase in traffic for buses, I must be fair and say that Roads Service has done a considerable amount of work over the years to improve the roads outside the entrance to the school. A footpath was also put in. Former board members worked together to move forward that work. However, there is a traffic problem. It is a busy road, and I appreciate that the turning circle in the school grounds is not satisfactory at present. So many buses are going in and out that health and safety issues arise, which puts added strain on teachers, pupils, parents and everyone else who has to deal with the situation.

I ask the Department to take a serious look at the issues affecting Lagan College. I also ask the Minister to look at Tor Bank, which deals with some of society's most vulnerable children. Time is of the essence, and both schools' situations must be sorted out. I urge the Minister, her Department and its officials to do all that they can to resolve the situation after so many years of waiting.

Dr McDonnell: I thank my South Belfast colleague Anna Lo for bringing this important issue to the House. The delay in the extension and refurbishment of Lagan College and the development of permanent buildings there, as well as the slowness in providing the promised new school building at Tor Bank, is nothing short of a disgrace.

I was involved in lobbying the previous Minister of Education, the present deputy First Minister, for improvements at Tor Bank School and Lagan College way back in 2001.

Building projects for each of those sites were announced in early 2002. At that stage, the expected

completion date for Tor Bank was September 2005, and for Lagan College, it was September 2006. More than seven years on from that initial announcement, as we approach the end of 2009, construction work has not yet even begun on either site. Indeed, contracts have yet to be awarded. That is despite the expected timeline of about 18 months from the critical initial planning stage to the final negotiations of the PPP projects, as published on the Department's website. Eighteen months is a lot shorter than seven years, and it is still going on.

The next set of estimated completion dates for the projects, as outlined by the Department, is somewhere in late 2010 or early 2011. If we stick to that timetable, more than eight years will have elapsed since the initial announcement was made.

Even after a seven-year wait, when one obstacle followed another, although it is understandable that there is a lot of hope, there is little confidence among pupils, teachers, parents and principals that that suggested timeline will be fulfilled. Given that Members provided background information on the disastrous delays and ongoing obstacles and made valid points about the detrimental impact that those problems continue to have on pupils and staff at both schools, there is no need for me to repeat what they said.

In the past seven years, needless time, effort and money have gone into both projects. Between the two sites, more than 30 project board meetings have been held, not including meetings with prospective bidders. Furthermore, I am told by the Tor Bank School principal that, in the past seven years, well over 150 meetings were held in an attempt to move the project forward, not to mention the significant amount of time that departmental officials spent on the matter and the consultancy fees that the Department spent.

As Members may have gathered, Tor Bank School is not an ordinary place. Profoundly handicapped children are expected to operate on a steeply inclined site, and many of them cannot get from one part to the other. It is a most unsuitable place even for physically able pupils, and it is an absolute disaster for children who are confined, as many of them are, to wheelchairs. Unfortunately, we are where we are, and the burning task before us is not to look back, but to focus on moving forward.

A month ago, in response to a question for written answer, the Minister of Education said:

"my Department has to be assured that this project is the best way forward."

That frightens me. She went on:

"The Department is therefore working closely with those involved in the project to address this issue as a matter of urgency."

More shakiness, flakiness, uncertainty and indecision seem to be emerging, and that response leaves me

concerned and confused. Therefore, I would welcome further clarification on the Minister's statement. I want her to clarify whether she has reservations about value for money and the use of PPP as a procurement process, or whether her reservations are simply about the Tor Bank School and Lagan College redevelopment projects.

It would also be extremely helpful to all concerned if the Minister would confirm whether the obstacles that are halting the PPP process will be overcome so that the latest completion date of late 2010 or early 2011 can be met. If meeting that deadline is not possible, will the Minister fulfil her commitment to carry out the refurbishment and the newbuild by prioritising the projects under the traditional procurement process so that work can begin immediately?

The SDLP is on record as expressing grave concerns about the ability of PPP to meet essential value-for-money, transparency and accountability criteria. In particular, it felt at the time, and it continues to feel, that Tor Bank School, where the environment must change continually to meet the changing special needs of its pupils, and Lagan College, which is on a National Trust site, are both completely unsuitable for inclusion in a PPP project. The complications and agonising paralysis that have arisen from these projects are, regrettably, testimony to the fact that the SDLP may have been right.

Nevertheless, it is essential that we get a clear decision today, or in the very near future, on how to kick-start the urgent development work that is needed on both schools. Make no mistake, in the past seven years, the pupils in both schools have suffered, and they continue to suffer. Sadly, many children with severe learning difficulties and other shortcomings have died while waiting for the desperately needed improvements to be made to Tor Bank School.

We cannot lose sight of that, as school is for many children, and especially for those children, the only chance of getting a life.

That is why we need a clear decision today from the Minister. Decisions on Tor Bank School and Lagan College have been left hanging for too long; the confusion needs to end and we need decisive action now. The children, their teachers, their parents and all of us deserve it. If the PPP process will not work, we need to switch to a more traditional process that will.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I see that all the parties are represented in the Chamber. I welcome back Jimmy Spratt, and I am glad that he is here to hear my comments.

This is a serious issue. People are aware that I actively encourage and facilitate integrated education along with Irish-medium education; it is a part of my statutory duty that I take very seriously.

A couple of days ago, I attended a meeting with all the integrated schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, and I am conducting a series of meetings with integrated schools across the North.

I agree with Jimmy Spratt on the issue of mobile classrooms. The Irish-medium and integrated sectors are the only sectors in which entire schools are housed in mobile classrooms, and that is simply not good enough. Our children should be educated in top-class buildings, and that is what we are moving towards.

Members know that I have a significant amount of money to invest, but there are rules and regulations about how I invest it. I cannot say that this project will go ahead right now, as Dr McDonnell and every other Member knows. We have to go through processes.

I thank Anna Lo for securing the debate. Since coming into office, I have opposed the use of public-private partnerships in schools. I have not approved any new PPP projects since taking office, and the Lagan College and Tor Bank School cluster is one of a number of legacy PPP projects that were already in procurement when I was appointed.

Bhí roinnt tosca ann a raibh tionchar acu ar sholáthar an PPP do Choláiste an Lagáin agus do Scoil Speisialta Tor Bank. Ar na tosca seo bhí athruithe sa scóip agus athruithe maidir leis na tairgeoirí chomh maith le hathruithe sa pholasaí d'úsáid PPP i scoileanna.

As people know, a number of factors affect the PPP procurement for Lagan College and Tor Bank School, including changes to the scope, the composition of the bidders and policy in relation to the use of PPP in schools. Two key changes referred to by Anna Lo, or perhaps another Member, delayed the procurement of all school-sector PPP projects: the change in policy in 2005, which removed catering; and that in 2006, which removed cleaning from the scope of services that transferred to the PPP operator.

Another significant issue for this PPP proposal was the need for Lagan College to negotiate a revised lease with the National Trust, as the school is situated on a National Trust site. That was mentioned earlier in the debate, and it resulted in some delays to the project.

More recently, a major issue arose as a result of last year's change in financial markets, which was brought about by the banking crisis. The public-sector comparator was recently revised to take account of changing market conditions, and revised costings still indicate a value-for-money deficit, with additional risk attached as the project parameters remain volatile in the period up to financial close.

To appoint a preferred bidder at this stage would contravene the procurement guidance within which the Department must operate. There are also substantial additional consultancy costs on the project, associated with reaching financial close, that have not been agreed

with the Department. The Department has been provided with a business case setting out the details, and I have sought further clarification on the full quantum of consultancy support before making a decision.

A number of those issues have arisen due to circumstances and events that could not have been foreseen or mitigated by the Department or the project board.

5.00 pm

The Lagan College/Tor Bank School PPP project is being procured by the project board, which is made up jointly of members of Lagan College, Tor Bank School, and the South Eastern Education and Library Board. Project management is provided by the PPP education service. The project is not procured by the Department, nor has the Department at any time put an obstacle in the way of moving the project forward.

I appreciate totally the frustration felt by staff and pupils at Lagan College and Tor Bank School, and I share that frustration. However, my Department must ensure that any eventual contract to provide the schools with new facilities is in line with government procurement policy and is affordable to the public purse. The Department is working very closely with those involved in the project to be assured that it is the best way forward.

To answer the question about timelines: the project board is seeking the best and final offer. All being well, the next stages are: the appointment of a preferred bidder, which will take one week or less for the project board to issue a letter; the preparation of the full business case and its approval by the Department, which will take nine to 12 months to financial close, depending on whether there are any planning issues; and the opening of the schools in 2011-12, subject to a 24-month build for Tor Bank School and a 42-month build for Lagan College. Therefore, if a contract were signed in nine months and the contractors went on site in June 2010, Tor Bank School would be completed in June 2012 and Lagan College in December 2013. That is probably not what Members wanted to hear, but I have to abide by procurement guidelines.

As I said at the outset, if I had had a choice, PPP would not have been my preferred way forward. It gives me no joy to be proved right about PPP projects. I assure Members that we will move this project forward as quickly as possible. I absolutely take on board the points that were made about Tor Bank, which I have visited. It is disgraceful that some of our most vulnerable children are being cared for in those conditions. Having said that, I know that Members will join me in paying tribute to the teams at both schools that have managed the difficult situation very well.

Adjourned at 5.02 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 20 October 2009

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Programme-led Apprenticeships

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister for Employment and Learning that he wishes to make a statement regarding programme-led apprenticeships.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): During a debate on 22 June, I announced that I would introduce a new programme-led apprenticeship aimed at school-leavers as a further intervention measure in light of the recession. That announcement was prompted by the declining jobs market and the strong indications that school-leavers would be exceptionally hard hit. The unemployment trends over the summer have confirmed those fears. Failure to address the issue would have presented further problems in subsequent years, such as the assignment of many young people to the not in education, employment or training category and gaps in the skills pool when the recession ends and growth begins.

In the lead-up to that announcement, and since then, I was aware that there has been considerable interest by Members and some industry sectors in how programme-led apprenticeships would impact on employers and the traditional and preferred employer-led apprenticeship model. In making this statement, I want to say up front that this intervention was not a knee-jerk reaction, but a measured response that added to earlier interventions that I had put in place. The new temporary provision secures apprenticeship training.

ApprenticeshipsNI, the employer-led provision, must always be the preferred option. It is our best training model, but it requires the continued support of employers. In the past year, we have seen a number of employers that have, historically, run apprenticeship programmes — such as Northern Ireland Electricity, Bombardier, Wrightbus and companies in the electrical sector — postponing their annual intake or reducing it

significantly. That is why I had to take action to introduce an alternative measure to the employer-led route.

A programme-led apprenticeship does not mean a lesser or second-tier qualification; it offers quality training and the same level of qualification as the employer-led route.

Programme-led apprentices will spend more time with the training organisation, and a strong emphasis will be placed on skills training in a simulated work environment. Time spent in the real work environment will be in the form of a one day a week work placement, with an opportunity for a block placement of six to eight weeks during the summer.

Training will follow the same apprenticeship framework, and it will allow for a seamless progression to the employer-led route should the young person secure employment at any time during their training. Similarly, if an employed apprentice who is under 18 is made redundant, they can join the programme-led route to continue their training.

The new provision will involve an additional cost to the Department of approximately £6.3 million. To have used that money for a wage-subsidy scheme that was to be paid directly to employers would have drawn in issues such as European Union regulations on state aid, and it could have displaced existing higher-paid jobs. Therefore, the funding is targeted at the individual, not the employer.

In a pre-prepared statement that I gave to the House, I included enrolment figures for the scheme up to 6 October 2009. I now have updated figures that show that in the period from the scheme's inception on 7 September 2009 to 19 October 2009, a total of 2,763 trainees enrolled. Those figures demonstrate clearly both the scale of the demand for the training and the potential problems that could have arisen had I not acted. The young people involved have voted with their feet in very large numbers.

Had I not introduced the programme now, provision would still have been made under the existing Training for Success pre-apprenticeship scheme. However, some 2,000 trainees from last year would have been due to leave that scheme with limited job prospects. Programme-led apprenticeships will extend those apprentices' training for a further year, allowing them to complete a full level 2 apprenticeship framework.

In addition to the 2,763 programme-led apprentices who have enrolled since 7 September 2009, most of the pre-apprenticeship intakes from last year have now signed up to complete their second year of training under the programme-led scheme. That means that over 4,700 apprentices are now participating in the scheme.

Some of the arguments that have been made against the initiative are that we are overtraining apprentices, that there will be too many young people trained with too few jobs for them to move into and that too many young people will not be trained to the correct level for some sectors. However, what would the alternative have been? Is it not better to have a pool of young people who are equally equipped to compete for the jobs when they come, rather than to have unskilled young people with few or no qualifications or experience?

Those young people will also be well on track to attain a higher skill level, as required by their employer, when they begin work. The employer-led programme will assist with that training.

I accept that in the lead-up to announcing the programme-led apprenticeship scheme, discussions with the industry sectors could have been more complete. However, I also recognise that the scheme could never meet all the demands of all the sectors. In responding to social issues such as this, there will always be tension. In this case, that tension was between the needs of the young school-leavers and the business needs of the employers. However, the House should be assured that departmental officials will continue to work with employers and their representatives. Hopefully, Members will appreciate that the new provision meets social and economic needs, as it goes a long way to meet the requirements of employers while protecting the Northern Ireland skills base for when we emerge from the recession.

I am content that the programme-led apprenticeship scheme will provide opportunities for young people to follow their chosen careers, to acquire relevant qualifications and to be exposed to the world of work. It will produce young people who will be experienced, qualified and ready to meet the needs of employers when the eventual upturn in the economy arises.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I had a meeting with the Minister just over two weeks ago, at which we discussed some of the issues and concerns that had been brought to my attention. I suggested to the Minister that if he made a statement to the Assembly, that would allow other Members to ask questions, as there is some confusion out there, and nobody is better placed to answer those questions than the Minister.

The Minister said that he is responding to social issues and the economic downturn, and we have all had to respond to the recession in different ways. Does he envisage any scenario in which programme-led apprenticeships will last beyond the current economic downturn? I understand that the programme-led apprenticeship scheme is at capacity, and the Minister

has given amended figures in his statement. However, when does he believe that the numbers will level off, or have they already levelled off? Is there a danger that the scheme will need to be expanded because of the possibility of more apprentice redundancies?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The scheme is a response to the current economic downturn. We have undertaken to keep it under review, and it will be reviewed at least annually. I believe that the numbers are levelling off. From 6 to 19 October, approximately 100 extra apprentices signed up for the programme-led apprenticeship. We are pretty well reaching the stage at which it is too late for people to enrol, because if they enrol now, they will have missed a substantial amount of the programme. Therefore, the numbers are levelling off. However, we had always estimated that there would be provision for between 2,500 and 3,000 places. The figure of approximately £6.3 million for the cost of the scheme was based on having around 3,000 apprentices in post by this stage.

I can confirm to the Chairperson that we said that we would keep the situation under continuous review, because it is a response to a particular set of circumstances. I know that the Committee has argued consistently — as have others — that the best way forward is to go down the employer-led route, and I agree. However, the employer-led route means that an apprentice must have a contract of employment and, in effect, be an employee. We all know that some of our major companies either have failed to recruit apprentices this year or have drastically reduced their numbers. Therefore, what were we to do with the young people? We have more than 4,700 young people in a good programme. If we had done nothing, those 4,700 young people would be out there somewhere. Although the situation is not ideal or perfect, we are in a far better scenario than had we sat back and done nothing.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mr Buchanan): I welcome the Minister's statement and his reassurance that programme-led apprenticeships offer the same quality of training and the same qualifications as employer-led apprenticeships. There was some concern that that was not the case, so I welcome his reassurance.

Will the Minister outline any other options that he considered in response to the rise in apprentice redundancies before he went down the programme-led apprenticeships route? Now that there has been time to consult on the programme-led apprenticeship scheme, will the Minister inform the House whether those who were sceptical about the scheme at the time have now bought into it?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The answer to the Member's last question is that people's

scepticism has, to some extent, been assuaged. Some organisations felt that the scheme would lead to a significant reduction in standards. There is a difference between the two schemes. The employer-led scheme means that an apprentice would spend far more time on a practical job with an employer.

The programme-led scheme, on the other hand, involves the provision of a simulated working environment, which could be in a college or with another training provider. There is no doubt that the better of the two options is for an apprentice to be with an employer in the actual work environment. The programme-led scheme is the next best possible scenario to that.

10.45 am

Let me be clear: the qualifications that the apprentices will be seeking are fully accredited. An apprentice will gain a qualification that is fully accredited and fully recognised; however, the amount of time spent on placement with an employer will be substantially less. That is the essential difference between the two schemes. I would much prefer the scheme to be with an employer, but in circumstances where employers are not taking on apprentices, or are drastically reducing the number of apprentices that they are taking on, what alternatives are open? That is the dilemma that we faced earlier in the year.

The Member asked what other options were considered. We were lobbied, and the suggestion was made that the Department should give a subsidy to employers to maintain or take on apprentices. However, once state money is given to companies, it opens up a Pandora's box of European interventions. For example, if we are subsidising someone's wages, questions will be asked about whether it is state aid. It would open us up to all sorts of issues, and, in fact, it is quite possible that those subsidies would be challenged by the European Commission. Quite frankly, in some cases, we would have a hard job standing up to the criticism. We took the view that we should concentrate our resources on the individual, not on the company, and on the employee, not the employer. By doing that we avoid all the European issues that could trip us up.

There have also been other interventions, including the establishment of Skillsafe, which is designed to help an existing apprentice who, for instance, may be put on short time by an employer. Through that scheme, the Department will take up the slack for one or two days by paying that apprentice at least the minimum wage and providing free training during the time that they are working short time. There has not been a large take-up of that scheme, but those who are availing themselves of it find it helpful. We considered a series of interventions and felt that, on balance, the programme-led scheme offered the best option,

without our having to tangle with the European Commission and get into all sorts of arguments there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Rev Dr Bob Coulter, and in doing so I add my congratulations on his important milestone, which takes him a little bit outside the range of the apprenticeship scheme.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Having been an apprentice at one stage, very long ago, I appreciate your kind words today.

I welcome the Minister's statement, and congratulate him on the time and energy that he has given to solving the problem. Will the curriculum for the programme-led apprenticeship scheme be designed and governed by the industry, and not by remote academics?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I do not know whether the Member is speaking in his capacity as a remote academic. I repeat the point: some industry representative bodies have expressed concern to the Department, the Committee and other Members that somehow, by going in this direction, we would be diminishing apprenticeships in some way. However, when one examines what those organisations have been saying, we see that they are dramatically reducing the number of apprentices that they were going to take on. We have a dilemma. I want employers to take the lead in providing apprenticeships — we all want that — but the employers simply were not providing the places.

The unemployment rates for young people in the UK as a whole are far higher than the national average. In other words, a huge slice of unemployment is concentrated in the younger age group — under the age of 24 — and Northern Ireland is no different. Therefore, the problem had to be resolved by providing people in that age group with work. In the UK, growing numbers of people are classified as "NEETs" — young people not in education, employment or training — although the problem is not quite as bad in Northern Ireland as it is in other regions.

Our measure has taken 4,700 of the young people who might not otherwise have had anything and put them in a simulated work environment in which they can work towards obtaining an accredited qualification. No matter how one looks at it, that is a far better scenario than those people being unable to get a job in the current circumstances.

I accept the argument that, to some extent, we are shielding them from the labour market for at least a year. As I said, people in the pre-apprenticeship programme have now moved on to the programme-led scheme, so many young people are now part of that scheme. An upturn will be needed after a year so that those in the pre-apprenticeship scheme who have moved on to the employer-led scheme can seek their

qualification at the end of the current year. It is my hope that, by that stage, the economic recovery will have started.

We will review the scheme, and I assure the Member that we are doing everything that we can to ensure that a high-quality training regime is in place. All schemes will be subject to inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate. There will be no half measures; the regime that is in place to produce quality will remain exactly as it should, subject to full inspection by the inspectorate.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for coming to the House with such a detailed report, and I hope that programme-led apprenticeships are a success. I understand that the training organisations that are part of the Training for Success scheme are saying that placement levels are as low as 25%. Can the Minister, therefore, explain how he hopes to engage with and encourage employers that are not normally associated with apprenticeship schemes, such as employers in the public sector and in the community and voluntary sector? What is the real incentive for employers to become involved?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department continuously engages with employers. During our contact with employers earlier this year, it became obvious that many of them were going to stop taking on apprentices completely, or at least drastically reduce their numbers. Some excellent apprenticeship schemes are run by some of the best employers in Northern Ireland. The Department received that news some months ago, and we were very concerned.

The Member asked whether the public sector could be encouraged to be associated with apprenticeship schemes. The public sector employs a huge slice of the workforce, and, therefore, it is appropriate that it starts to pull its weight by providing apprenticeships. I have written to ministerial colleagues, and we are at an advanced stage of negotiation with other Departments. We are getting a positive response, not only from the Departments but from non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and other agencies.

I believe that, because of the positive response that we have been receiving from Departments, apprenticeships in the public sector will be provided as soon as possible. That means, I hope, that a new avenue will open up to people. The Department for Employment and Learning is making arrangements to try to put such arrangements in place.

An undertaking was made to link the issuing of public contracts and the employment of apprentices by the successful contractor. That has happened only to a minimal extent, and Pat Ramsey's Foyle constituency is the only place where it has occurred. I understand that eight apprentices were taken on as part of a public

contract there. The scheme has not rolled out to the extent to which I believe it should have done, however. Therefore, there are questions to be asked.

I assure the Member that I believe that employers will respond, provided people receive qualifications under the scheme. Employers will not have to revisit the issue because much of the work will be done for them. They will be able to take on people who already have skills and qualifications, which would be easier than training someone from scratch.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his statement. I strongly welcome his intervention in rolling out programme-led apprenticeships. Like other MLAs, I receive representations and letters from various industries. They have concerns about the future of modern apprenticeships.

We must be realistic. I agree with the Minister that, although we can discuss the pros and cons of the two different programmes, at the end of the day, what will we do with youngsters who leave school? It is much better to give them focus. That could be attending college and, perhaps, one placement day each week. It is much better to give young people that focus so that they can be categorised as active. Going to college and working towards qualifications will focus those young people on getting out of bed in the morning and looking forward to better prospects when the downturn is over.

Pat Ramsey asked the Minister about exploration with the public sector. I am pleased to hear that there has been a good response from that sector. What about the community and voluntary sector, which is a big employer? Has the Minister spoken to the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), for example, on exploring possibilities?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am pleased that the Member got to her question in the end. She is correct: we must be realistic. I believe that we have been realistic.

The Member may recall that, a few weeks ago, the Department announced a programme that, over two years, will create 4,000 job opportunities in the voluntary and community sector, whereby people who have been unemployed for at least 30 months will be employed by that sector for six months. We will give the voluntary and community sector the opportunity to take on 1,000 people for six months and to roll that out over two years.

The sector has responded positively. The programme is being taken up across the board. That means that people who have been unemployed for at least 30 months will have the opportunity to apply for a real job with a proper employment contract. When people finish the six-month period, it will be included on their curriculum vitae when they begin to search for a job. The first question that people are asked by

potential employers is when they last worked. People will now be able to answer that question.

The voluntary and community sector is pulling its weight, but we can ask it only to do so much. The Member will be aware that the sector faces huge funding issues. If the scheme works, it offers significant opportunities to people who have been unemployed long term. However, we also want to reach people at the other end of the scale when they start off their working lives.

As far as the Department is concerned, Northern Ireland's important voluntary and community sector, which is still a significant contributor to the economy — it accounts for around 5% of economic activity — is pulling its weight. Given the financial constraints in the sector, there is little more that we can ask it to do at present.

We will look closely at whether the scheme works. If it does, we will take great satisfaction from that; however, if it is not working, we will have to revisit it and come back with some other suggestions.

11.00 am

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's statement. I appreciate his work and that of his Department in what is a very difficult area in the economy at the minute.

I welcome the idea of progression on the employer-led route and the clarification that those who have been made redundant are also able to avail themselves of the programme-led route. There is a small group of people who have been in apprenticeships and, although they have not been made redundant, have continued to work as labourers, particularly in the building industry. If, at this stage, they wish to drop back into the apprenticeship scheme, is that an option?

The Minister gave us some very encouraging figures; is it possible to have those figures broken down by constituency?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I will reflect on the latter question and see what information can be provided. Normally, we are able to provide figures based on where people reside, but we are unable to provide figures on how many people are working in a constituency. We can give the Member figures based on people's addresses; if the Member wishes to write to me, I will be happy to provide him with those. We cannot provide details of whether an individual is employed in, for example, the Member's constituency, East Antrim; however, we can tell him how many people on the programme-led apprenticeship have addresses in his constituency. That is as close as we can get. I will endeavour to provide the Member with those figures.

The construction industry has provided one of our biggest challenges. There are slightly more than 1,600 apprentices in construction this year, and, as I understand

it, that is around half the number that there would have been a year ago. That is a major concern. The Member will know that we have made provision for apprentices who are put on short time. A scheme is in place, Skillsafe, which can help apprentices to make up the short time by giving them at least a minimum-wage payment.

The construction industry has particular needs. The Member will recall that I made a statement last week on the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the changes that we are making to it. The sector is in a fairly volatile situation, and contractors are struggling to get enough work to keep them going. Therefore, it is very hard to get consistency of apprenticeships among employers. We are working as best we can with the companies, and we have taken steps to try to ease the burden on them by taking a lot of the smaller companies out of the levy. However, the number of apprenticeships has dropped by roughly half, and that is a substantial drop.

It would be foolish of me to say that there was going to be any early change to that situation. The construction industry is in a very difficult position, and it is one of the areas that we are keeping under review. However, if we look at our colleges, we can see that there has been substantial investment in the estate to provide high-quality environments in which people can train in construction skills. There is excellent provision pretty much everywhere. However, it would be misleading of me to tell the Member that I foresee any early improvement to the situation in that sector.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He raised the issue of apprentices getting simulated work experience rather than real work experience.

The Minister mentioned the public sector. I am looking at the reply that I received from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister about capital projects over the next two years. In that period, 232 major capital construction projects will be put out for advertisement, worth somewhere in the region of £2 billion. There will also be an additional £279 million for smaller works.

The Minister touched on that, but he did not get into the detail. I appreciate that there is criticism from employers about simulated work experience for apprentices. However, if the Executive are rolling out a programme of capital projects over the next two years, it is up to the Minister to devise proposals so that we can tap into those projects.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr Butler: Does the Minister accept that we need to look at the public sector, given that the Executive are rolling out such programmes?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Member makes a reasonable point. I touched on the issue in answer to Mr Ramsey. However, given that it has to be dealt with at the contract stage, it might be more fruitful for me to write to the Minister of Finance and Personnel, who is responsible for the procurement directorate. Any conditions that one applies have to be implemented at the contract stage; in other words, they must be contained in the contract.

If I am interpreting the Member correctly, he is saying that that level of public spending is an opportunity to ensure that apprentices are engaged at the stage when the contracts are let. That would have to be done by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) through the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). I will write to the Minister of Finance to inform him of the Member's views and ask him what steps CPD is taking to ensure that apprentices are engaged at the contract stage.

As I said, the roll-out has been very sporadic and has only had a marginal impact, but the Member has a fair point: there is potential to do better.

Mr Savage: I also congratulate the Minister and his Department on the work that they are doing with young apprentices. What is being done for those who are not so young and have lost their jobs? Is anything being done to reskill them?

The Minister for Employment and Learning: As the Member knows, we removed the age limit for apprentices last year. Almost 40% of apprentices are now aged over 24, which would not have been possible until last year.

As I said to Anna Lo, we have introduced a scheme with the voluntary and community sector in which people who have been unemployed for 30 months or longer, many of whom tend to be in the older age spectrum, will be offered a six-month contract of employment. Those jobs will be paid and will have a proper contract. The participants will be able to put the jobs they do on their CVs. During the six months, they will get help with their CVs and receive extra training for interviews. Therefore, in addition to a job, the participants will have access to that form of training and, depending on their employer, other forms of training. That scheme deals with the long-term unemployed who, by definition, tend to be further up the age spectrum. All our programmes aim to get people back to work. The Member will know that there has been, in many cases, more than an 80% increase in the past year in the number of unemployed people registering in each jobcentre. The rate varies substantially from one jobcentre to another, but that is the overall increase.

We offer opportunities to those individuals. For instance, we offer the Pathways to Work programme to people who have become ill or are on incapacity benefit. That programme allows those people to be interviewed

consistently up to six times. We offer them all sorts of opportunities, even the chance to start a business. We provide assistance for the first 26 weeks, and, if the business does not work out, the people who are involved suffer no loss and their benefits are maintained.

Therefore, a range of programmes helps people right across the age spectrum. We must remember that we want to value and help people from when they leave school until the end of their working life. If we follow the example of my good colleague Rev Coulter, the Member will ask me the same question in 20 years. I look forward to that.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. I will put my question into context: the Minister mentioned the programme-led apprenticeship scheme:

"Time spent in the real work environment will be in the form of a one day a week work placement, with an opportunity for a block placement of six to eight weeks during the summer."

The Minister referred to rather large employers, such as Bombardier and NIE. What is the record of those companies in trying to do something over and above reducing the number of apprentices that they are taking on at this time? Those companies should be pressed to do more.

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Those two employers have probably had among the best apprenticeship schemes in Northern Ireland for many years. I have visited both training centres: NIE's at Nutts Corner and Bombardier's on York Street. I have no doubt that, if Bombardier had not used an aggressive and significant apprenticeship programme for many years, that centre would be closed. Many employers walked away from apprenticeships 15 or 20 years ago, but that company did not. I believe that that is why it is still in business. Its record on apprenticeships is exemplary.

NIE has a fantastic training centre. However, it was, sadly, not able to take on any apprentices this year. That was a big blow, because it normally takes on around 40 young people each year. I visited those apprentices either last year or earlier this year; they do fantastic work. They have a wonderful facility, and they were really getting to grips with a technical and difficult but rewarding job. The fact that NIE did not take on any apprentices this year is a reflection of the economic circumstances.

NIE was one of the best examples of a company in Northern Ireland that was committed to apprenticeships. It has made significant investment in apprentices by providing training facilities and staff to teach people. However, because of the economic circumstances, it was not capable of providing the usual numbers this year. We are in regular and constant touch with those providers, because we are looking ahead to next year

and hoping that, where organisations have been unable to take on trainees or have reduced their numbers, the situation will change. If a training centre does not have a first-year intake, that will create an imbalance. In other words, there is no first year, so the second and third years will be affected, and that will disrupt the whole programme.

11.15 am

The time that is spent in the real working environment is the big difference between employer-led and programme-led apprenticeships. I would prefer young people to be in employer-led apprenticeships, where they are constantly in a real work environment. Alongside the colleges and the other training providers, we are trying to give young people the best possible simulated work environment that we can create. It is not perfect, and it will never be a complete substitute for what happens in a business, but it is the best that we can do. We have to realise that there is only so much that government can do. The available jobs are, in most cases, in the private sector, and there is no substitute for working in a real business.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Education Maintenance Allowance

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 Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Ms S Ramsey): I beg to move

That this Assembly agrees that restricting the education maintenance allowance (EMA) specifically to those enrolled in schools or colleges is a key factor which inhibits alternative education providers from reaching those young people who have disengaged from mainstream education; calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to make EMA accessible to all young people who comply with the age criterion and are engaged in appropriate provision, whether this is in schools or colleges, or with a recognised alternative provider; and further calls on the Minister to engage with the alternative education providers to establish whether the current attendance criteria regarding EMA are too prescriptive.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am glad that so many members of the Committee for Employment and Learning are in the Chamber to participate in the debate, as was the case in yesterday's debate on the provision of childcare for students in further and higher education. The Minister for Employment and Learning is here to listen to the debate. He deserves particular thanks because, even though the education maintenance allowance falls also under the Minister of Education's remit, he has agreed to respond to the motion. The issue cuts across a number of Departments, and it is important that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) is willing to take the lead.

Access to the education maintenance allowance (EMA) is complex, as is responsibility for it. The Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning are responsible for disbursing EMA. However, I am struggling to form a clear picture of who has responsibility for the disengaged young people who work with alternative education and training providers outside the usual school or college set-up.

Most if not all Members, at one time or another, have met representatives of some of the organisations that provide support for young people. Those organisations are recognised, and some of their clients can access EMA. Others cannot access EMA, because they are being catered for by organisations that are not recognised, and Members can imagine the confusion that that creates. That is the first point that I want to make: the system is confusing. The Committee believes that widening access further will make things clearer and will also mean that DE and DEL must make clear decisions about their responsibilities.

Since September, the Employment and Learning Committee has engaged with several organisations that specialise in reaching young people who have disengaged from the school and college system. It received presentations from the Prince's Trust, Rathbone, the Alternative Education Providers' (AEP) Forum, Include Youth and others. A common theme in those presentations was that there are few incentives for young people who have had the courage to come to them and admit that they need help.

The Committee also heard from some of those young people about how those organisations have helped them to turn their lives around. However, in cases in which the programme that they follow does not include study in a school or college that would enable them to be eligible for EMA, they have to continue to claim benefits. That means that they have to take time off from their work placements and so forth to sign on. The young people who presented themselves to the Committee told us that they find that humiliating, as it does not reflect the fact that they are trying to change their situation, something for which they deserve recognition.

No one can deny that many of those young people have had a rough time. Some have spent years in care, some have been subject to bad influence and have developed addictions, and some have become estranged from their families, but they have battled those difficulties and have stuck to a programme. They should be rewarded for that, and EMA is just such a reward. They want to take pride in what they do; they do not want handouts.

The Committee understands that there must be criteria for awarding EMA. We are asking that the criteria be reviewed to include programmes, such as those run by Include Youth, in which the focus is not always on re-entry to the formal school or college setting and in which work placements and learning skills in a less formal environment are more common. The young people's efforts should not be ignored just because they are pursuing an alternative route to employment and training.

The criteria for eligibility for EMA are weighted towards a very traditional education or training scenario. The Minister said earlier that we must consider alternative ways to provide opportunities for people to find work because of the recession. That is another issue that we need to examine. In a traditional educational training scenario, there is a necessity to undertake a particular number of hours in education or training in a recognised institution and on a recognised course. The question is whether we should be so prescriptive. The Committee believes that, if EMA was offered in a wider range of scenarios, it would be possible to engage more of those who have been failed by the traditional system. We ask for an acceptance of other routes to the same goal.

The proportion of young people here who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) is high. I recently heard estimates that one quarter of our under 25-year-olds are not in employment, education or training. Although EMA is designed for 16- to 19-year-olds, if we were a bit more creative about who could receive that payment within that age group, perhaps we could make some impact on the appalling number of young people who are not in employment, education or training.

The Committee led a debate yesterday about access to on-campus childcare at colleges and universities. I spoke about public service agreement (PSA) targets in the Programme for Government that are about building our prosperity through increasing skills and productivity and through education and training. We will never achieve our aims if we do not become creative, ask ourselves whether there is a different way in which to do things and whether there is an alternative way to think or act. We do not always have to do something because it has been done before.

In correspondence to the Committee, the Minister indicated that his Department and the Department of Education will undertake a joint review of EMA. The Committee welcomes that review and sees it as a perfect opportunity to consider how we can widen access to EMA and, perhaps by doing so, make greater inroads into dealing with our NEET problem. The Departments must engage fully with organisations that provide programmes that run outside schools and colleges. Greater numbers of programmes and participants must be recognised and rewarded by being brought within the reach of EMA.

I said that the Department of Education plays a big role in EMA; however, as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I ask the Minister to examine how expanded EMA provision can be used to enhance the skills strategy and how it might better feed into the 14 to 19 strategy. The Minister's Department is the linchpin in workforce development, and the Committee believes that the NEET issue could be improved if EMA was a more widely available incentive for the disengaged to rejoin the mainstream.

We must encourage those disengaged people to acquire skills so that they can have a role in increasing prosperity and productivity. We will achieve our economic goals only if we bring everyone along, and I know that the Minister shares our passion for social inclusion and transformation. The Committee truly believes that EMA is not being used to its greatest effect, and we feel that the Minister and his Department could make better use of it. The education maintenance allowance is too closely associated with staying at school; it should be more obviously aligned with technical and professional training outside apprenticeship programmes.

The Minister has worked hard to bring new ways of developing the workforce to the fore. We ask that he takes a fresh look at how EMA could be better used, which, in turn, would help his Department. The review of EMA comes at the perfect time to enable engagement with alternative education and training providers and to ascertain how they can use EMA to tackle the NEET problem. It will also allow us to continue to chip away at the obstacles to greater and more inclusive prosperity. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome today's debate, and, after the recent announcement, I look forward to the review of the education maintenance allowance later this year. The Committee examined the issue closely, and the Chairperson indicated the depth of our considerations. The stories of the young people who appeared before the Committee were both moving and encouraging.

I may be stating the obvious, but young people who leave school with fewer than five GCSEs are more likely to fall into unemployment than those who have more than five GCSEs. That fact highlights the complexity of the issue, and, indeed, it might have been more appropriate for a different Minister to have been present for today's debate. The 2005 Northern Ireland young life and times survey revealed that 20% of young people whose families were not well off decided not go back to school; the figure for young people from well-off families is only 5%. It is unfair that the financial circumstances of young people's families have a significant impact on their choice between full-time education and employment.

The education maintenance allowance will undoubtedly have an influence and make it more financially feasible for some students to return to full-time education. Indeed, the allowance has increased participation in full-time education among eligible 16-year-olds by some 5.9%. I ask the Minister that the review is mindful of potential areas of unfairness. For example, if a family has more than one child in full-time education, will it be possible for all of them to claim the allowance? Students' attendance must be strictly recorded, and absence must be authorised. Will students who have been absent for a week without justification or approval lose their allowance for that week?

I also ask that the application process be simple and that decisions on eligibility be made quickly. Such decisions may be a key factor when students are trying to decide whether to return to education. Currently, some 4,000 applications cannot be processed because certain information is missing from the application forms. That suggests that the application forms are not as straightforward as they could be. Difficulties are being encountered, and assistance may be required. Other problems may arise from the fact that no account is taken of students' income. That needs to be reviewed because many students may have savings or an

inheritance. I ask the Minister and the Department, at the very least, to consider reviewing those criteria and, if possible, to put a cap on the amount of savings that is deemed reasonable before EMA is disallowed.

I congratulate the Minister and the Department on the allowance's success since its introduction in 2004, and I look forward to more students from low-income backgrounds returning to full-time education. There is an obvious need to engage with alternative education providers and to reach out to young people who have disengaged from mainstream education. I acknowledge that it is a very complex issue, but I support the motion.

11.30 am

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for tabling the motion, but I must say that I have great difficulty with it and cannot support it. However, I will not push for a Division.

The main reason why my colleagues and I cannot support the motion is that we believe that it has been tabled by the wrong Committee and is being directed to the wrong Minister. Although DEL has a role in the provision of the EMA, that role seems to me a very small one. The lead Department is very much the Department of Education, and I suggest to the Chairperson that it would have been better if, in the first instance, the matter had been brought to the attention of the Minister of Education. That said, I congratulate the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning on doing an excellent job; her commitment and dedication are remarkable. However, if there is a problem with the EMA, the Chairperson would be best to approach her colleague the Minister of Education about it.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: I cannot let those remarks go —

Mr B McCrea: Were you off getting a departmental briefing there?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning: No, I was actually talking about you.

Bob, I know that it is your birthday week, but I cannot let your remarks go without commenting on them. I know that other Departments are involved with the EMA, but young people have come to the Committee for Employment and Learning about the matter, so responsibility lies with DEL. DEL is responsible for people aged between 16 and 24. We want the Department to take the lead on the EMA. That is not a criticism of the Minister for Employment and Learning, for he is doing a good job. We want DEL to take the lead in targeting those young people, and then we will look at the other Departments that are involved with the EMA.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Chairperson for that explanation, but I must point out that it is the

Department of Education that adjudicates on which courses fall within the scope of the rule on the 15 hours' teaching time, among other rules. I must also highlight the fact that the motion fails to identify where the extra money would come from, which is an especially serious problem at this time of tight budgets.

It may well be that the rules need to be extended, but we need to do much more work to identify whether that is, in fact, the case. At this time of strained public finances, we cannot go around making spending pledges in that way. We must go through a robust process of identifying need, ways to tackle that need and the benefits of the chosen policy tool. It is clear that we have not gone through that process, and, as a result, I cannot support the motion.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the motion from the Committee for Employment and Learning, and I look forward to the contribution from the Minister. The education maintenance allowance is a useful, targeted package that encourages and enables young people to remain in education. It sends a strong signal from the state about the importance of education, and it is an investment in all our people, particularly young people, which will pay clear dividends in future.

I am aware that, in the community sector, the EMA is generally managed by the Department of Education in partnership with DEL, but I am confident that both Ministers will be sympathetic to some of the points raised by my colleague Robert Coulter. I am also confident that they would be sympathetic to the views of the particular group of young people who addressed the Committee and to which we have referred today.

I support the Chairperson's earlier comments. I also recently listened to staff and young people from Include Youth and the Give and Take programme, and I was impressed by their dedication and professionalism. They do valuable work with the young people who have been referred to them, particularly by social services, for a range of reasons. Those young people may have mental health and behavioural problems or be leaving the care system, and they may find that, although they want to pick up on their education, they are unable to cope with the fundamentals of the mainstream education system.

Those young people are doing their best, because they want to be full and active members of society. They want to develop and contribute, and it is important that they are assisted and encouraged in doing so.

The Give and Take programme gives young people confidence, and it equips them with the foundation skills and, more importantly, the qualifications that can lead them to EMA-level courses. It is unfortunate, however, that those young people are unable to avail themselves of the benefits of the EMA. It should be obvious that young people should be educated based

on their current level of development, rather than where they should be, based on their age. The level of a course must be appropriate to their needs. It seems reasonable that those and other young people who need support at a similar educational or developmental level should have access to funding under the EMA or a similar funding stream.

I ask the Minister, along with his counterpart in the Department of Education, to review the workings of the EMA. A cross-departmental approach is required to achieve the objectives of encouraging young people to remain in full-time education and ensuring that they are eligible for the EMA based on courses that are appropriate to their educational needs, no matter what their developmental starting point.

Yesterday, Members talked about how access to childcare provision encourages mothers to remain in education; the funding of young people is no different. The Committee works extremely hard to ensure that everyone has access to employment. However, third-level qualifications are the passport to employment, and those can be made available to vulnerable groups, including isolated young people.

Common sense should prevail. The Chairperson was right that the Committee for Employment and Learning was asked to address a particular problem. We have done so by bringing the motion to the Chamber and asking the Minister for Employment and Learning to contribute to achieving its aims. However, it is also important that he work with his counterpart in the Department of Education. I support the motion.

Ms Lo: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning for bringing the motion, which I support, to the House. Given that DEL is to go ahead with a review of the EMA in Northern Ireland later this year and is also reviewing alternative education provision, the debate on such an important issue is timely.

The situation has been confusing because some alternative education providers (AEPs) are recognised by the Department of Education as offering education and training to young people who are not full-time students at school or college. Some clients claim the EMA via the Department of Education, even when they are associated with a college rather than a school. Therefore, we need clarification on who is entitled to claim the EMA.

I agree that we should consider making the EMA accessible to all young people. Based on the 2004 mid-year population estimate, approximately 39% of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland were in receipt of the EMA in the first year of its roll-out. Members heard earlier that young people on programme-led apprenticeships will be able to claim the EMA. It is, therefore, important to look into and clarify the situation. Will all young people receive the EMA, dependent on their meeting

the age criterion and on whether they are engaged in appropriate educational provision, be that in schools or colleges or through recognised alternative providers?

Far too many school leavers have few or no qualifications, and many of those are from disadvantaged communities. Research shows that four times as many young people from poorer families as from families that are well off do not intend to stay on at school beyond the age for which education is compulsory. Many research studies have also shown that income is strongly related to a person's level of education.

On average in Northern Ireland, an extra year of education adds 8% to male earnings and 12% to female earnings. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those who leave care or are excluded from mainstream education, very much need help and encouragement so that they do not fall into the category of not in education, employment or training. The economic downturn has led to very high youth unemployment. More school leavers want to carry on in education and training. We need investment in our workplace, and the people will be the assets in our educational capital.

Research that was done in England showed that the EMA increased participation in full-time education among eligible 16-year-olds by 5.9%, with the largest effect being on young people from lower socio-economic groups. The EMA also had a substantial impact on young people who had been low or moderate achievers at the end of year 11. It is important that we try to increase the retention of young people in full-time education by providing them with the EMA.

The motion also calls on the Minister to engage with alternative education providers. I very much agree with that. As others have said, young people have told the Committee about the positive impact that they have had through various programmes, such as Include Youth.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw her remarks to a close.

Ms Lo: I very much support the call for the Minister to engage with those providers.

Mr Irwin: This is a very complex issue. Discussions and debate on this matter in the Committee for Employment and Learning have shown that there is a clear cross-departmental onus on the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education to clarify which of the recognised alternative education providers are able to attract the education maintenance allowance and which are not.

Alternative education providers play a very active role in ensuring that a good number of young people who might otherwise have slipped off the radar in relation to continuing in some form of education are assisted in pursuing an alternative course or programme. However, if a section of those young people are engaged by an

alternative provider whose courses do not attract an award of education maintenance allowance, an award should be made in the appropriate circumstances.

I note that a review of the education maintenance allowance is due to take place later this year. I urge the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning to work closely to facilitate those providers that do not currently fall within the EMA criteria.

I know of a few programmes in my constituency that cater for young people who decide to drop out of school. There are notable changes in the young people after they complete those courses. More young people in those circumstances could be targeted if the EMA were more widely available.

The Committee heard at first hand from students who completed alternative courses and who were not entitled to the award. It was much more difficult for them; they felt that if they had been able to access the allowance, it would have made the process more straightforward and less of a financial burden.

Given that a review is due before the end of the year, I hope that the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education take a cross-departmental approach to this issue and work together to provide the allowance across the alternative education sector.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome this motion.

The motion is addressing the fact that a category of young people is missing out on full-time education and training and attending further education colleges. Some groups have told the Committee for Employment and Learning how difficult it was for them to get into training or further education and to get a job and a better life. They were missing out, if one likes, when it came to EMA.

11.45 am

I accept, and it was pointed out by Committee Chairperson Sue Ramsey, that the responsibility extends beyond the Minister for Employment and Learning, Reg Empey. The Minister of Education also has a role. Most young people who avail themselves of EMA do not leave post-primary education; they usually stay on and claim the allowance, or their school is involved in a partnership with a further education college.

However, we recognise that there are people who are involved with alternative education providers, and the Committee has met several such organisations in recent months. Such people have had to overcome barriers in their lives, and we heard compelling stories of those who had overcome such barriers. However, they were facing another barrier, which was having to sign on and not being entitled to receive EMA. The motion is trying to address the fact that, although we

accept that there are two Ministers involved in the issue, the Employment and Learning Committee is putting the issue to the Minister for Employment and Learning, who must take it up with Catriona Ruane.

I am sorry that one of the Committee members, Bob Coulter, does not support the motion. A long time ago, I was told that the older one gets the more militant and cantankerous one becomes. I do not know whether one reaches the outer limits of militancy at the age of 80, but broadly, given what Bob has said, we are not criticising the Minister on the issue. We accept what the Minister has said about reviewing EMA, which I assume will be carried out by his Department and the Education Department.

The Minister spoke earlier about the apprentice-led programme. In his statement, he said that staying on and taking up a place in a further education college was not an option. However, it is one of the options that the young people to whom we have talked over recent months want to take. They want to go on to further education. Entitlement to EMA is a complex issue, but research shows that many people from disadvantaged backgrounds or lower-income families are helped by EMA to first get into full-time employment, from which they progress to a job.

Some people from whom the Committee heard have done just that in the absence of EMA. Therefore, the allowance is an issue that must be addressed. Ways must be found to remove barriers for people, so that they can progress and claim the allowance to which they are entitled. I support the motion, and I hope that Rev Robert Coulter has listened to some of our arguments. I accept that the Minister is reviewing EMA, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's statement. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that all Members agree that Bob is young at heart and definitely not cantankerous.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a Committee member, I support the motion. Notwithstanding Rev Robert Coulter's reservations, I believe that the essence of the motion is about widening access. Yesterday, members debated childcare provision, through a motion that was moved by the Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. I commend the Committee for tabling both those motions.

Widening access to education maintenance allowance is a Programme for Government target, and nothing in the motion conflicts with that goal. As I said yesterday, the Committee wishes to encourage young people to engage with education and to make it, in whatever form, attractive to them. That applies particularly to those who have become disengaged from education or who are from low-income families and find that cost is

a barrier to attending school or college. To some extent, EMA addresses that problem, although not entirely.

As Paul Butler said, the Committee heard from young people who, in order to sign on, had to stop doing the extremely valuable work that they were doing, possibly with a parent. However, they did not want to do that. Therefore, we must respect what those young people were doing, and we must find some way round the problem.

I was looking through some old questions for written answer, and I noticed a reply, on 29 February 2008, to Miss McIlveen, who had asked why EMA is sometimes refused. If I remember correctly, from the beginning of 2007 until 22 January 2008, education maintenance allowance was refused 69 times because the learning centre concerned was not recognised. What kind of work had been going on in those centres? The motion states that young people must be "engaged in appropriate provision"; however, if in that short space of time EMA was refused to 69 people who were attending unrecognised centres, we must look into what happened.

In another question for written answer, the Minister for Employment and Learning's response to my colleague Fra McCann was insightful in distinguishing between education provision that qualifies for EMA and alternative provision that does not. Although it is good that EMA is based on attendance, we have to look at what happens when young people do attend. I am not saying that good work is not being done in centres that are eligible for EMA, but the qualifying criteria emphasise being present. I got a sense from the young people who gave evidence to the Committee that their work is very valuable and helpful and that they had overcome barriers by engaging in it.

I shall finish by mentioning some of the interesting research that Committee members were provided with. I was surprised to discover that pupils who attend a grammar school are more informed about EMA than those who do not attend a grammar school; the figure is something like 96% as opposed to 86%. Those figures may not be accurate, but one key statistic in a Devine and Lloyd research paper was that 51% of people from poor families said that EMA would influence their decision to attend education.

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

Mrs McGill: I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion as it begins a debate on the important issues raised by the Alternative Education Providers' Forum, which gave evidence to the Committee. I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. It is interesting that the praise heaped on my colleague

Reverend Coulter did not last too long. As was said yesterday, no quarter is asked and none given.

Ownership of the EMA policy rests with the Department of Education and my Department. Therefore, I am mindful of the need to take a joint approach when looking at the policy. It will be useful to explain why the EMA scheme was introduced jointly in September 2004 by my Department and the Department of Education.

The main purpose of the scheme is to enable young people from lower-income backgrounds to remain in post-compulsory education at school or college, with the key objective of raising participation, retention and achievement rates in the eligible group and addressing the well-established link between low attainment and low income. Some 23,143 students applied for inclusion in the scheme in the last academic year in Northern Ireland.

The allowance is linked to satisfactory attendance and is paid on a fortnightly basis. In addition to the allowance, young people may also receive periodic bonuses of £100, if they remain on their courses and make good progress with their learning. EMA is provided to eligible students in approved learning centres, which are mainstream schools, colleges, FE colleges and, in a very few cases, alternative education providers outside the mainstream that can deliver education to meet EMA requirements.

My Department is responsible for students in FE colleges and the Department of Education is responsible for those in schools, colleges and other education providers. Provision of EMA is closely monitored in all the learning centres and is dependent upon learning agreements having been signed and agreed by the learning centres and the students. It is attendance based.

It often happens with national schemes that differences exist between devolved Administrations. This is the case with respect to the number of guided or teacher-contact hours each week. In Northern Ireland, there is a requirement for a student to undertake a minimum of 15 guided hours each week to qualify for EMA payments, compared to 12 guided or teacher-contact hours in Wales and 21 guided hours in Scotland. England has a slightly different set of rules whereby each student is required to undertake 12 hours of further education courses and 16 guided hours of work-based and diploma courses.

The term “guided hours” is defined as contact teaching hours that a student must receive in order to be eligible for EMA. Courses must, therefore, be taught in a timetabled teaching slot, when the teacher is engaged in teaching students. Days at home, or at the library, to study do not count as guided hours. The number of guided hours is something that will be considered under the joint Department for Employment and Learning and Department of Education review of EMA, which I will come to later.

The motion focuses on young people who are outside mainstream education. I understand from the Department of Education that there are more than 500 such young people in Northern Ireland, and the number includes those who are not in education, employment or training. It is worth mentioning that the Youth Service, supported by the Department of Education, already provides significant support to young people in that position. That support includes the Prince’s Trust’s xl Programme for 14- to 16-year-olds who are at risk of exclusion, which operates in 40 schools; the Youth Action Community Leadership Programme for 14- to 25-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the Department of Education’s Youth Works Programme for 16- to 17-year-olds in communities suffering the greatest economic social deprivation. My Department also co-funds the Bytes Project with the Department of Education. It operates in 10 centres and is for 16- to 25-year-olds with little or no formal education. Members will be familiar with some of those schemes.

12.00 noon

There is also provision under my Department’s Training for Success programme, specifically the option of “skills for your life”, which addresses the particular needs of young people who have significant barriers to learning, such as poor literacy and numeracy, no qualifications or substance abuse. A weekly allowance of £40, which is not means-tested, is provided. Organisations that have the contract for that provision have significant skills in dealing with those young people. However, despite the support, there are still young people who are not benefiting from adequate education and training.

Alternative education provision is another way to support those young people. The Department of Education has told me that it recognised the need for alternative education provision in 1998 with the publication of ‘Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: A Discipline Strategy for Schools’. That set out a support model of progressively more intensive interventions for pupils whose behaviour was challenging, with the objective of maintaining pupils in mainstream schooling. It was accepted that remaining in mainstream schooling was not a realistic option for a very small number of pupils and that, due to the severity of their behavioural issues or the degree of their disaffection, some form of alternative education provision that was responsive to their needs would be necessary.

The findings that informed the strategy indicated that, across all education and library board areas, around 500 pupils in the last two years of their compulsory schooling — Key Stage 4 — would need that provision each year. The Department of Education expected that provision to be developed by the education and library boards in response to local needs and in partnership with other agencies. I understand that, since 1998, additional funding has been provided to the education and library boards to create new places or secure the continuation

of places on existing projects. In 2007-08, the earmarked allocation to the boards was £4.1 million, which covers the costs of a notional 500 places.

The policy for deciding whether courses warrant an EMA payment is that learners on funded training programmes should be achieving qualifications that are recognised nationally and provide clear progression routes for learners' career advancement. The national database of accredited qualifications is the reference tool that the Department of Education uses to ensure that qualifications have been accredited by the regulators and, therefore, are nationally recognised. I understand from the Department of Education that some community groups which meet the EMA criteria have benefited from the scheme already.

There is provision in the EMA scheme to identify students with special educational needs or vulnerable students. Those students can include homeless young people, those with probation orders, teenaged parents and those with caring responsibilities. Therefore, tailoring the course around the student's ability to attend is important, as is being flexible and aware of additional needs. The courses and the payments of EMA can be extended over a four-year period as opposed to the usual three-year period in order to help to meet those specific needs. On that point of attendance, Mr Hilditch mentioned earlier that illness can lead to absenteeism; I assure Members that students will not lose their allowances if they have a doctor's line.

I understand from the Department of Education that a consultation paper will be issued early in the new year with recommendations that aim to improve the service currently provided in the area of alternative education. Although it is important to keep an open mind on course providers, it is also important to keep a uniform approach to the EMA scheme. I certainly do not want to pre-empt the outcomes of the alternative education provision review, but I would welcome an opportunity for my officials to meet officials from the Department of Education to agree how the EMA scheme could encourage students to re-engage with education in local learning and community centres, provided that those meet the EMA scheme rules.

Later this year, my Department and the Department of Education will commence the first joint review of EMA in Northern Ireland since its introduction in 2004. The aim of the review is to assess whether the scheme is meeting its set goals, which include encouraging students from lower-income families to stay in mainstream education and achieve qualifications, and is delivering value for money.

Methods of delivery and duration will also be reviewed. Any alternative education provision run by the education and library boards or by approved community-based training will be a matter for the Department of Education.

Two separate reviews are being progressed, so it would be prudent for my Department and the Department of Education to consider the reviews' recommendations together in order to determine the best way forward for the EMA scheme and adult education in Northern Ireland. The Minister of Education and I will be studying carefully the Hansard report of today's debate and the points that a number of Members made. Education maintenance allowance is one of those areas that crosses departmental responsibilities. The bulk of the policy lies with the Department of Education, although my Department wields influence. We are undertaking both the reviews, and, hopefully, one will commence later this year, and a paper will be presented early in the new year.

I suspect an added complication will arise, since the existing education and library boards are to be collapsed into the education and skills authority. That may add an extra dimension to the review. Therefore, this may be a timely opportunity for a review. It is a quinquennial review, because the EMA was introduced in 2004. It is difficult to predict what implications the added complication of the introduction of ESA will have for the review. I will ensure that my colleague the Minister of Education receives a copy of the debate for her perusal, and, no doubt, the points that have been raised will be considered when the reviews are commenced.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning (Mr Buchanan): I thank the Members who participated in the debate, as well as those who took an interest in it. I also thank the Minister for coming to the House to respond to the debate. I agree that the EMA falls within the remit of the Department of Education more than that of the Department for Employment and Learning. However, the motion related to a specific need that came before our Committee, and that is why the motion sought a response from the Minister for Employment and Learning. I also thank the Minister for his indication that a joint review of the EMA is to be carried out by his Department and the Department of Education. The Committee hopes that the issues raised in the debate will be taken into account during the review.

Many research figures have shown that a person's income relates to the level of his or her education. In Northern Ireland, an extra year spent in education adds an average of 8% to a male's earnings and 12% to a female's earnings. Moreover, statistics show that young people in Northern Ireland who leave school at the age of 16 with fewer than five GCSEs are more likely to be unemployed than those who leave school with more than five GCSEs. Although such findings provide clear evidence of the benefits available to individuals who stay in education, they also point to the fact that any investment in education is likely to be a sound investment for the Northern Ireland economy. That is why it is so important that the EMA be made accessible to alternative

education providers who are seeking to reach the young people who are disengaged from mainstream education.

David Hilditch said that people who leave school with fewer than five GCSEs are more likely to become unemployed than those with more than five GCSEs, and he highlighted the complexity of that matter. He said that the extension of EMA would encourage many more young people back into full-time education and that the application process should be made simpler for potential students. He encouraged the Minister to engage with all alternative education providers, and the Committee agrees with that sentiment.

Robert Coulter had difficulties with the motion and indicated that he could not support it because it was being directed from the wrong Committee to the wrong Minister. He stated that the lead Department should be the Department of Education and that DEL played only a small role in EMA. He also asked where the extra finance would come from in such tight economic times if EMA were extended beyond schools and colleges. I say to Reverend Coulter that the debate deals with an issue that was raised in Committee, and, although the Committee agrees that the lead Department is the Department of Education, it has tabled the motion as a response to the issue.

Pat Ramsey spoke about how EMA was a useful package that enabled young people to remain in education. He was also mindful of the fact that EMA is managed primarily by the Department of Education, with the support of DEL. Indeed, every Member who spoke in the debate has recognised that EMA is a cross-departmental issue and that the onus is not just on DEL.

Mr Ramsey went on to speak about how EMA helps young people from poor social backgrounds who want to expand their educational potential but who are unable to avail themselves of EMA. That is the issue. He also acknowledged that the Committee was seeking to address a particular issue that it had been presented with.

Anna Lo spoke about the need to clarify who is entitled to EMA. She suggested that the allowance should be made available to all young people. She went on to say that it should be available not just to those who are attending schools and colleges but to those attending all education providers. Ms Lo also said that four times as many young people from poorer families did not intend to stay on at school. Those are the people who need to receive help, encouragement and support that will have a positive impact on our entire community.

William Irwin spoke about the clear cross-departmental onus and which Department should be the lead Department. He said that students who engage with alternative education providers should receive EMA. He also stated that other education providers who take on young people and seek to get them into education and training should be included in the conditions for EMA and that more young people could be brought

into the education and training realm if EMA were made more widely accessible.

Paul Butler accepted that there was an onus on both Ministers on the matter. He said that the motion sought only to address the needs of young people from whom the Committee had taken evidence.

The Minister for Employment and Learning in his response to the debate stated that he was mindful of the need for a joint approach to EMA and explained why it was introduced in the first place. He said that his Department is responsible for students in FE colleges and that only those attendance-based students who undertake 15 guided hours per week qualify for EMA.

The Minister said that provision was being made for 500 young people for whom mainstream schooling was not a realistic option. Furthermore, he indicated that there are forms of support for those not in schools or colleges and highlighted some of the schemes that the Department was involved in either individually or collectively with the Department of Education. Moreover, he acknowledged that, despite all the support that is already available, there were still young people who had not re-engaged with the education sector.

12.15 pm

The Minister referred to the policy on qualification for the EMA scheme and how it was important to ensure that any courses were tailored to fit the needs of the students and allow for flexibility. He talked about the joint review and how we need to ensure that it is delivering value for money. It is an important issue, and we must examine it to ensure that it is delivering value for money. I welcome the fact that the Minister said that he would look closely at the issues raised in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that restricting the education maintenance allowance (EMA) specifically to those enrolled in schools or colleges is a key factor which inhibits alternative education providers from reaching those young people who have disengaged from mainstream education; calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning to make EMA accessible to all young people who comply with the age criterion and are engaged in appropriate provision, whether this is in schools or colleges, or with a recognised alternative provider; and further calls on the Minister to engage with the alternative education providers to establish whether the current attendance criteria regarding EMA are too prescriptive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.16 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —
2.00 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Lisbon Treaty Referendum

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

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the verdict of the Republic of Ireland electorate on the Lisbon Treaty referendum; reaffirms its support for a referendum in the United Kingdom on the treaty; and calls for a declaration from those parties aspiring to form the incoming Government of the United Kingdom to give an unequivocal commitment to hold, within a twelve month period from assuming office in 2010, a binding referendum on the Lisbon Treaty that is unconditional and unrelated to how other member states choose to vote, and the result of which will not be held in abeyance pending a further referendum on the subject.

Every so often, the Assembly is criticised for holding debates on issues that are not relevant or important to people's lives, but I suspect that not many people will put this debate and its subject matter in that category.

There is nothing more fundamental than examining the position that citizens would adopt on the future direction of the nation state to which they belong, its composition — in our case, the composition of the United Kingdom — within the European Union, and where the direction taken is likely to lead to generations from now. The debate on the Lisbon Treaty should go to the very heart of how people view their democratic principles, how they view society as a whole and how they view the way in which the nation state to which they belong is likely to be governed in future years.

The Lisbon Treaty is the latest in a series of such treaties, all of which have been viewed in a particular way by great swathes of society across the United Kingdom. For example, people took up positions on whether they should or should not be consulted over the UK's 1973 accession into what was then the Common Market. Many people considered it a cop-out that its citizens were consulted after the UK entered the Common Market, instead of their being consulted first. In more recent years, the Maastricht Treaty was

signed, and, again, many people viewed that treaty as being fundamental. They felt that it went to the heart of personal individual liberties and signposted how government would be conducted in the United Kingdom in future. Now we have the Lisbon Treaty.

I should say at this stage that although I have no doubt that Members will express views — both personal and party views — on whether they are Euro-sceptic or whether they are intensely or moderately pro-European, that is not the heart of the motion before the Assembly.

The issue of whether people are for or against greater European integration is almost, although not quite, irrelevant. At the heart of the motion is the principle that, if the Lisbon Treaty, or any development that follows it, amounts to a fundamental change in the status of the nation state, the citizens of the nation state ought to have the right to express their view by way of a referendum.

Unfortunately, some people in Brussels appear to think that that is a bad thing. An ardent pro-European might look to previous referendum results. Several EU states held a vote on a European constitution, and the people gave their verdict that they did not want it. An ardent pro-European might say that, if the people are going to say no to a referendum when asked, they should not be asked any more. Alternatively, as was the case with the Irish Republic, an ardent pro-European might say that the people who said no to the Lisbon Treaty should be asked again until they say yes. That appears to be at the heart of the views of some of those who stride the corridors of power in Brussels.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Member concede that, after the Republic of Ireland said no to the initial referendum, some concessions were awarded? Those concessions allowed the people to say yes in the repeat referendum. That is quite often the case when a referendum is carried out a second time.

Mr Campbell: To some degree, the Member is correct, but he omitted to mention the fact that, between the two referendums in the Irish Republic, the most significant economic downturn in the history not only of Europe but of the world took place.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member agree that not a single line, sentence or word of the treaty was changed between the first referendum and the second referendum?

Mr Campbell: That is exactly what I was referring to when I mentioned peripheral and minor issues. Undoubtedly, if fundamental change is to be made to the constitution of a nation state either in the EU or out of it, the last thing that anyone should advocate is that the citizens of that nation state should not be asked what they think about that change. I imagine and hope that no democrat would subscribe to that. That is at the heart of the motion.

As my friend and colleague from Strangford Mr Hamilton said, no change was made to the wording of the treaty. The Lisbon Treaty and the proposed European constitution contained proposals for a politician to be chosen as President of the European Council for two and a half years and for a new post, combining the jobs of the existing foreign affairs supremo and the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy. Those proposals are intended to give the EU more clout on the world stage, a smaller Commission and a redistribution of voting weights among member states.

The proposals were contained in the original proposed European constitution, which several nation states rejected. Once they had been rejected, the bureaucrats in Brussels decided that they would circumvent that annoying aspect of democracy, the principle that people have the right to decide their future, and they came up with the Lisbon Treaty. The Czech President has said that he will sign up to the Lisbon Treaty, and some people in the Conservative Party in GB have said that there is no point in having a referendum on it. There is now even more point in having a referendum. That goes to the very heart of what we can do in Europe after we have said either yes or no to greater integration.

I come back to what I said a few moments ago: there cannot be a political system that permits people to say no to further European integration, but permits them to do that provided that they will be asked again until they say yes. At the same time, the system says that when they have said yes to European integration, they cannot say that they want to rethink their position and, perhaps, say no. That is intolerable and cannot be allowed to happen.

Some members of the Conservative Party seem to advocate that position. They say that when the last nation state to ratify the treaty, the Czech Republic, has done so — Poland having done so already — and we are past that post, we cannot go back. I reject that entirely.

The rights of people of individual nation states must be re-established. Those rights are long cherished and long established, some of which, in certain nation states, including our own, have been established for thousands of years. They cannot simply be set to one side because certain people want Europe to evolve even further and will not allow individual nation states and their citizens to have their say.

The amendment is interesting. I am not sure how much approval it has been given, although I assume that the wording of the amendment has been approved at the very top, by David Cameron.

Mr Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Campbell: I see smiling faces from the Ulster Unionist Party Benches. Therefore, I am sure that it

has been given that approval. I look forward to that party endorsing it at Westminster.

Mr Kennedy: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “calls” and insert

“on the UK Parliament to rescind the United Kingdom’s ratification of the Treaty; and further calls on those parties who aspire to form the next Government to hold a referendum to halt the ratification process across the European Union.”

I thank the DUP Members for bringing forward the motion. However, my party believes that it is necessary to amend the motion, which is flawed, and I will discuss that in a moment.

At the outset, I want to state emphatically that the Ulster Unionist Party is not anti-Europe; nor does it want the United Kingdom to withdraw from Europe. I am not clear about the DUP’s position on that issue. Perhaps, Mr Campbell’s colleagues will take the opportunity to declare whether they wish the United Kingdom to withdraw formally from the European Union.

It is worth mentioning and remembering that there are considerable —

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that withdrawing from or remaining in the EU plays no part in the Lisbon Treaty, which is the subject of the debate?

Mr Kennedy: I accept what the Member has said. However, the difficulty is that he has left vague his view on whether the DUP sees the European Union as important. Bear in mind that membership of the EU has brought significant benefits for the people of Northern Ireland.

That is not to say that the members of my party are uncritical proponents of ever-greater union between European states. We support co-operation between free nations for mutual advantage. However, we oppose over-regulation and harmonisation measures in key areas where we believe Westminster to be the best judge. We have also long campaigned for a referendum on the European constitution, which is now the Treaty of Lisbon.

I remind Members that, as far back as 2004, my party’s European manifesto stated:

“The people should have their say when it is agreed, not when it suits Labour’s electoral interests. An EU Constitution might have been useful if it just consolidated existing treaties. In reality, it is yet another attempt to create an EU super-state.”

We stand over that pledge, which we consider equally applicable now. For even more clarity, let me quote our 2009 European manifesto, which states:

“We pledge that if the Lisbon Treaty is not in force in the event of the election of a Conservative Government this year or next, we will hold a referendum on it, urge its rejection, and — if successful — reverse the UK’s ratification. And if the Constitution is already in force by then, we have made clear that in our view political

integration in the EU would have gone too far, the Treaty would lack democratic legitimacy, and we would not let matters rest there.”

Our position is —

Mr Ford: To stand idly by.

2.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I remind Mr Ford that on 8 October 2007, he told the House:

“A referendum on the EU treaty is long overdue: bring it on.”
— [*Official Report, Bound Volume 24, p248, col 1*].

Is that still his position?

Our position, and the position of our partners, the Conservative Party, has not changed at all, just as the European constitution did not change when it was rebranded the “Lisbon Treaty”. We support a referendum. It is rather curious that the DUP is looking to the next Government, rather than the current Government, to bring forward a referendum. Surely the DUP should be pressing Gordon Brown and the Labour Administration, with whom it has considerable contact, to bring forward a referendum proposal. We support a referendum, and, if in government, we will allow a referendum, should a meaningful one be possible.

My colleagues and I have brought forward an amendment —

Mr Dodds: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, I have to make progress.

We have brought forward an amendment that makes the motion more coherent and grounded in fact. Quite frankly, there are a couple of reasons why the unamended motion is not good. First, in our view, it is constitutionally illiterate, calling, as it does, on the next UK Government to hold a binding referendum. There is no such thing in the British Constitution. The British Constitution is founded on the principle that Parliament is sovereign; therefore, the decisions of Parliament are binding. However, some DUP members, even those who are Members of the House of Commons, appear to have limited knowledge of that. In October 2007, a DUP Member told the House:

“there is no such thing as a British Constitution.” [*Official Report, Bound Volume 24, p255, col 2*].

The DUP can hardly be expected to bring forward a motion that takes account of a constitution that it does not believe exists. For the information of all Members, there are 59 books on the British Constitution in the House of Commons Library. DUP Members may wish to consult some of those before embarrassing themselves again.

Our amendment removes the superfluous word —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am making progress; I gave way earlier to the Member’s colleague.

The amendment removes the superfluous word “binding” and calls on the incoming Government to hold a referendum, but only after asking Parliament to rescind its ratification of the treaty, which was completed on 19 June 2008, which would then have the effect of halting the ratification of the treaty.

It must be made clear that, in the real world, it will not be possible for the UK to do that should the Czech Republic finalise its ratification, a point on which our manifesto is clear. Although it may be desirable and welcome for the British people to have their say on the treaty, a referendum specifically on the Lisbon Treaty would be meaningful only if it had the effect of halting the ratification process. Given that the Czech Republic is on the verge of completing that process, we must recognise that reality.

I am grateful to the DUP Members who sponsored the motion in that they have, at least, acknowledged that the only party with a realistic chance of forming the next national Government is the Ulster Unionist Party, in conjunction with the Conservative Party. Only parties — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Kennedy: Only parties that seek a national mandate can bring change to national politics, and only those parties can bring something new to Northern Ireland.

The DUP does not offer the people of Northern Ireland a referendum on Lisbon: it offers them a commitment to talk about one. The Ulster Unionist Party offers the people of Northern Ireland a say on Europe, a say on defence matters and a say on the United Kingdom’s foreign policy. Therefore, the Ulster Unionist Party offers the people of Northern Ireland something that they have not had for a very long time: a real say in national affairs. While we have been securing our place at the heart of national politics, the DUP has been making sure that it remains on the periphery.

Mrs Robinson’s nine fingers damaged the DUP in the House of Commons. I do not particularly care about that, but it also damaged the reputations of Northern Ireland and unionism. Our alliance with the Conservative Party received a mandate from the people of Northern Ireland in the recent European election. We will continue to seek a referendum for as long as one is possible.

Hopefully, the Ulster Unionists and the Conservatives will pursue that aim and policy from the Government Benches, which is where real influence is exerted and where real change takes place. The Ulster Unionist Party looks forward to the challenge of the Westminster election and other forthcoming elections.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have listened intently to the Member, and it is vitally important that he sticks to the motion. The Member has strayed outside the motion.

Mr Kennedy: The amendment offers action, and I commend it to the House.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I accept and respect the democratic principles on which the European Community was founded. Given the challenges to global economics that emerged, it was inevitable that the European Community would evolve. That is the kernel of Sinn Féin's opposition to the Lisbon Treaty.

The European Union has fundamentally shifted away from being a union that was based on co-operation between nation states to exercise their collective strengths to mutual benefit. Our objection to the Lisbon Treaty is based on a careful analysis of the treaty, which is more than can be said for the "Yes" camp, particularly during the campaign on the first referendum. The rerun of the referendum further demonstrated that fundamental point — and here I acknowledge the unique experience of agreeing with Gregory Campbell on that issue. My party and I will support the motion.

There has been a strategic and fundamental step away from the democratic rights of the citizens of Europe. The electorate in the Twenty-six Counties faced a very difficult challenge, particularly during the rerun of the referendum, given all of the blacklisting and blackballing that resulted from its rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in the first referendum. That illustrated that democratic opinion does not count to those who proposed the Lisbon Treaty.

In the debates on the first and second referendums, we witnessed the spectacle of those who strongly advocated a "Yes" vote not having any familiarity with the document that they were defending and recommending for acceptance.

The contempt for the first result was reflected in the fact that they did not take the time or trouble to read the document in the first place. The changes were cosmetic, which time will demonstrate. Time will also demonstrate that the Southern Irish electorate was sandbagged. This proposition argues the principle that citizens of European Union member states have a democratic right to vote on fundamental decisions that shift power towards the centre, towards the European Commission or towards the Council of Ministers and away from the Parliament. That is a departure from democratic principles.

The treaty could permit the establishment of a standing military force and could give the European Commission the power to authorise military interventions by that

force. Those are fundamental questions on which every citizen has the right to be consulted and to express their opinion. Numerous Governments in the European Union took that decision and removed citizens' rights to participate in referendums. Some broke their manifesto commitments to hold a referendum on that question because they feared the judgement of the people. On that principle, I support the motion. Moreover, if the amendment receives sufficient support and becomes the substantive motion, we will support the amended motion.

The motion is about a British referendum and, as people will understand, is of no particular importance to Sinn Féin. However, people in Britain have a perfect right to express their views, and individual citizens of all member states have an absolute right to express their views. The fundamental departure from democratic principles is a matter of concern for people who, if the treaty is enacted and implemented, will wonder about the direction for the future.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr McLaughlin: There are absolutely no grounds to suggest that the European Union will reverse its position on the matter.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McLaughlin: If the proposition is adopted in Britain, it will perhaps be time to call a halt to this undemocratic march.

Mr A Maginness: It is no surprise that Sinn Féin and the DUP have a common cause on the European Union in the House today. It is sad that two major parties are at one in their anti-Europe stance. It is bad for society, and something that I deeply regret. It is bad for our community to send a Euro-sceptic message to Brussels. Parties should reflect deeply on that thought.

Mr McLaughlin made a point about a military pact, which is, of course, incorrect. He did not point out that all decisions on actions in the European Union must be unanimous. They cannot be subject to the majority vote of members in the European Union. Wendy Austin made a pre-referendum visit to Dublin, where she asked a lady in the street how she would vote. She replied that she would vote "No" and then asked what Europe has done for us. Wendy was flabbergasted by the response, because she recognises that the European Union has rebuilt this Republic.

Members' attitudes reflect that lady's opinion. The European Union has done much to enhance this society and can do a lot more.

2.30 pm

Mr S Wilson: Does the Member not understand that the motion is simply about allowing people to have

their say as to whether they wish Europe to have more of an effect on their lives? Surely the Member is not saying that that in some way represents a slur on those who are calling for people to have their say?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an added minute in which to speak.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I wish that what the Member said were true, but the motion is anti-European and reflects the DUP and Sinn Féin's views on Europe, which are fundamentally against the European Union, no matter how they dress it up. People should have their say; the people in the Republic had their say on the European Union and on the Lisbon Treaty, which they supported. They expressed their views on the first referendum and got changes made to the treaty. That, I believe, shows the responsibility of any Government to go to Brussels and negotiate with our partners in order to —

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No; my time is nearly up.

The Irish Government adopted the correct approach. The Irish people responded to that, and they gave a resounding "Yes" to the Lisbon Treaty. The last hurdle will be whether the Czech Republic decides to support the treaty, which I believe is a formality. All the procedures have been gone through, and the House of Commons has voted on the matter. The House of Commons is sovereign in that regard and is the supreme democratic forum for the British people. To suggest that we rerun that vote —

Mr Dodds: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No; my time is nearly up.

To suggest that we rerun that vote and, in some way, resile from the position that the House of Commons adopted is wrong. It is wrong in law and wrong in parliamentary procedure. It is almost inevitable now that the Czech Republic will endorse the Lisbon Treaty. That is the right thing to do for everyone in Europe. The Lisbon Treaty improves democracy in Europe, it improves the democracy of the European Parliament, and it extends that body's co-decision-making. The treaty permits national Parliaments to scrutinise, at an early stage, proposed EU legislation and allows —

Mr Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: Finally, the Lisbon Treaty allows the European Court of Justice to judicially review any legislation. Those matters are important to the future of Europe.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Ford: I support Alban Maginness's comments in large measure. It will come as no surprise that my colleagues and I will oppose the motion and the amendment.

In proposing the motion, Mr Campbell made much of saying that at its heart was the fundamental issue that the people should be consulted when changes are to be made to a constitution. Leaving aside the minor detail of whether the UK has a constitution — I would have thought that Mr Campbell, as a Member in another place, had views on the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament — the blunt reality is that that was the issue in October 2007, when we debated the matter. Whether we should have had a referendum prior to ratification was a valid debating point, and a point on which, at the time, I disagreed with Alban Maginness. That, however, is not the issue that we face today. The issue is that the UK and 25 other states have ratified the Lisbon Treaty, and it appears that the Czech Republic will do so fairly soon.

The focus of the motion and the amendment is on turning back the clock, but that is simply not recognising the reality of the situation. Where do Members of both unionist parties believe that the UK's relationship with the EU will be, if, having ratified the treaty, the UK Government, whether pre- or post-election next year, do anything to change what has been agreed as being a binding commitment to accept the new treaty? If anything were done, whether the Government were under the control of the current party, a different party or a coalition of parties, how could the Government have any credibility in future relationships with the EU?

Mr Weir: To be fair to colleagues on my right, that does not appear to be their position. Although the UUP has stated that it would "not let matters rest", it has not offered a concrete position on what it will do if the treaty is ratified. I suspect that, rather than not letting the matter rest, the UUP will be gripped by a degree of motionlessness or inertia.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Weir for his intervention. He must have a spy in the Gallery looking over my shoulder, because he is a couple of lines ahead of me in my notes.

I agree: Mr Kennedy said on at least one occasion that Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force (UCUNF) was not anti-European; yet, in practice, it has called for the ratification to be rescinded without saying how that would be done. Perhaps it is not surprising, given some of the strange creatures with whom the UUP associates in the European Parliament, that the UCUNF coalition is not quite sure where it stands. If I were to take my lead from anybody who

had anything to do with that particular grouping, I would rather listen to the views of someone such as Edward McMillan-Scott, the long-standing and rather more sensible Conservative MEP, who is prepared to stand up against the nonsense of those who claim to be a progressive, non-sectarian force in the United Kingdom and who somehow associate with a rather strange bunch of people from some of the recent accession countries, with some of the particular aspects that they have.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ford: No, I think that you have had your chance to make your point. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ford: We have to look at what Mr Kennedy quoted from the UUP's 2009 European manifesto: he said that they "would not let matters rest", as Mr Weir highlighted. I am old enough to remember a day in August 1969, when the then Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, was reported as having said that the Irish army, in the event of difficulties in the North, would not stand idly by — for the sake of accuracy, he did not use the word "idly" — but it seems to me that it is more disingenuous for a party to say that it will do something but will not tell anyone what that "something" is, rather than say it will overturn something even though it is not actually possible to do so.

I supported the concept of a referendum when it was meaningful, realistic and possible, but the position now is that it is none of those: it would be a completely pointless exercise. The UUP says that it will have a real say in national affairs, yet it has chosen to line up in a European cul-de-sac with no realistic aim or objective and no way of saying how it will advance issues within the United Kingdom that will make any sense. The UUP has nothing to offer the House or the wider UK population that could be implemented and that would make a change. To suggest that the UUP will move things forward is nonsense.

Similarly, I listened to Mr McLaughlin with interest. He called the proposition a fundamental departure from democratic principles. I must admit — this point was made by Mr Maginness — that I do not understand how making the institutions of the EU more democratic is somehow a departure from democracy. Neither can I see how giving rights to national Parliaments to have greater consultation and say is anti-democratic or how putting powers into the hands of the European Parliament rather than the alleged Brussels bureaucracy is also anti-democratic.

I firmly believe that the Lisbon Treaty has advanced the ability of Europe to continue to build the peace that was its real meaning, aspiration and success so far and to advance the economy across Europe.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Ford: I reject the motion and the amendment.

Mr S Wilson: The Members who spoke to oppose the motion all failed to address what the motion is about. The motion is not about our views on the Lisbon Treaty. It is about whether the people should have a say on major constitutional change that will impact on the ability of the Assembly and the national Parliament at Westminster to take decisions and will result in dramatic changes to the roles of those institutions.

The motion is not anti-Europe; it is pro-democracy. The Members who spoke against the motion have not addressed that issue. Are they afraid to allow the people who will be affected by the Lisbon Treaty and the centralisation that it represents to have their say? We do not have a chance to debate whether the terms of the treaty are democratic or anti-democratic because the people of the United Kingdom and the people of Northern Ireland have not even been given an opportunity to examine the issue and make a decision on it.

Mr Kennedy: The issue is of considerable importance, but, if it is of such fundamental importance to Mr Wilson, why is he a member of a party that, on at least one famous occasion, propped up a Labour Government who have denied the people a referendum on Europe? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: Why did the Member's party prop up the Government with the famous nine votes?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to his speaking time.

Mr S Wilson: The Member is well aware of the difficulties that his party is having with a member who wants to be able to prop up the Labour Government, not just on one occasion but into the future. Indeed, that party is looking for all sorts of ways to push that member to one side and get rid of her. The one thing that I would say — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr S Wilson: If the Member is so concerned about that matter, why is he trotting along the Cameron line? The Conservative Party, to which the Member's party wants to ally itself, promised a referendum, but it is now backing away from that. Indeed, I notice that the amendment makes no commitment on whether there should be a referendum on Europe, despite what Ulster Unionist Party members have said about the treaty and the constitution. That party, too, is backing away from giving a definite answer about whether there should be a referendum.

Mr Maginness said that we should consider what Europe has done for us, but today's debate is all about examining what the Lisbon Treaty would potentially enable Europe to do to us. The centralisation of power; increases in qualified majority voting; increases in the European Commission's powers; the powers that the president would have; and the powers of the high commissioner — or whatever fancy name he will have — with regard to foreign policy will all lead to more European-wide decisions. It will be difficult for national Parliaments and national Administrations to oppose those decisions.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member not recognise that the Lisbon Treaty will give national Parliaments greater scrutiny of proposed legislation, increase the powers of the European Parliament and provide for judicial reviews by the European Court? Those represent enhancements of democracy.

Mr S Wilson: One has only to look at the European Parliament, whether in its present form or in the promised enhanced form, to recognise that it is and will continue to be a fairly ineffectual body. It is faced with a Commission that will have more powers and on which some nations will not even be represented any longer. Despite that, the Member tries to argue that the Lisbon Treaty will enhance democracy and lead to more input from national Parliaments.

2.45 pm

We could debate the intricacies of the Lisbon Treaty all day, but the fact remains that it is a constitution. It represents 98% of what was in the original EU constitution. No democrat should be afraid to put the treaty to the people, argue its merits, face its critics and let the people decide on it. That is what national sovereignty is about; it is the people who will be affected by the treaty.

Motorcyclists, lorry drivers, bus drivers and farmers are just some of the groups who were affected by European Union decisions when I was Minister of the Environment.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr S Wilson: Many people were affected by European decisions over which I, as Minister, and the Assembly had no control. We can do away with that by giving people the opportunity to have a referendum.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. To oppose the Lisbon Treaty is not to be anti-European, which is an insult often hurled at those who oppose it. I strongly suspect that Sinn Féin opposes the Lisbon Treaty for very different reasons from the parties opposite. However, we can all agree on the basic principle that the citizens of Europe have a right to vote on the Lisbon Treaty because it will

bring about a fundamental change in the relationship between the European power bloc, the Commission and the citizens of Europe. That, in itself, should ensure the right of citizens to a vote.

The SDLP now opposes the treaty, which I find remarkable. Dominic Bradley, for example, represents south Armagh, which is part of a border constituency.

Dr McDonnell: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just let me finish my point. Dominic Bradley represents a constituency that runs along the Armagh/Louth border. Is it acceptable for a citizen in Louth to have a vote in a referendum but unacceptable for a citizen in Armagh? The SDLP lobbied for a "Yes" vote in Louth; therefore surely it would want the right to lobby for a "Yes" vote in Armagh.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Member accept that, contrary to what he just said, the SDLP is not opposed to the treaty?

Mr O'Dowd: I apologise if I said that the SDLP was opposed to the treaty; what I meant to say was that the SDLP is opposed to a referendum. I thank the Member for that intervention.

The shift of power to the Commission under the treaty is alarming. The Commission, not the European Parliament, the Assembly, Westminster or Dáil Éireann, would elect a president, appoint a Minister for foreign affairs and direct European foreign policy. There is no guarantee that the Twenty-six Counties will have a commissioner for all time; its position could be removed.

Alban Maginness's view that Europe could not go to war or use the European army without a unanimous decision is, in my opinion, deeply flawed. The power blocs in —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will let you in in a minute.

In the past, the power blocs in the European Commission used their unhealthy influence to coerce people into making decisions that were not in the interests of their citizens, and they will continue to use that unhealthy influence.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. Any decision in that area must be unanimous; no decision can be made that is not unanimous. That is in the treaty.

Mr O'Dowd: The same democrats who support the Lisbon Treaty and who tell us that it contains safeguards turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the wishes of the citizens of the Twenty-six Counties when they voted against the Lisbon Treaty.

Mr A Maginness: No.

Mr O'Dowd: They did; there is no change to the Lisbon Treaty whatsoever. Guarantees were given, but no legal amendments were made to it.

Those who say that they are democrats, that decisions will be unanimous and that they will listen to the smaller nations are the same people who told the Dublin Government that the "No" vote was the wrong result and that they should go back and get the right one. The people in the Twenty-six Counties were coerced into voting "Yes". As Members in the Chamber have been told, the people were told that a "No" vote was anti-European and it let down their European neighbours.

More importantly, citizens of the Twenty-six Counties were told that, if they did not vote "Yes", the country would be economically crippled. The economy is in bad shape as it is. Are the people who said that the same people who guarantee that they will not go to war or use foreign policy against the wishes of smaller nations? Those people omitted to tell the citizens of the Twenty-six Counties that they had been in charge when the economy went down the pan in the first place and that they had had their hands on the tiller of economic policy and direction.

I have no difficulty with working in co-operation or forming agreements with my European neighbours. Ireland must not be isolationist; we have to work with our European neighbours in a joined-up way that benefits all nations. I want Europe to take a new direction. I want a Europe that is prepared to stand up to countries such as Israel and to have a positive and strong role in bringing forward a Middle East peace settlement. I do not want a Europe that simply sits back and allows Israel to continue with the same policies. I want a Europe that ensures that its economic policies do not undermine or restrict the economic growth of the developing world.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr O'Dowd: There is no point in Europe making lofty statements about bringing poverty to an end. As an economic entity, Europe can help to bring poverty to an end throughout the world.

Mr Ross: The debate centres on the right of UK subjects to express their view on the relationship with the EU and particularly on the Lisbon Treaty, which will further dilute national sovereignty and centralise more power in the EU. As Members have heard, the Assembly endorsed the view that a national referendum should be held to give people a voice. Circumstances have changed since the vote took place in the Irish Republic, but the right of the people in the United Kingdom to speak on such a constitutional change has not.

As with the vote on the Treaty of Nice, the vote in the Irish Republic adhered to the old adage "If at first you don't succeed; try, try, try again." Undoubtedly, had the Irish Republic voted "No" a second time, a third referendum would have been held. That should not surprise us because we have become used to that type of European democracy. When France and the Netherlands voted "No" on the constitutional treaty, the treaty's name was changed. Thus, the opportunity for those countries to have their voice heard on the Lisbon Treaty was circumvented, and the treaty was endorsed through other means.

At least those countries had the opportunity to voice their opposition to the transfer of further power to the European Union. Despite manifesto commitments by the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, the people of the United Kingdom have not had that opportunity. As we have heard, as David Cameron prepares to take over Number 10, he is positioning himself to deny a referendum. Some in his party, such as Daniel Hannan, other MEPs and, indeed, other MPs, take a different view. David Cameron fears a referendum because it would highlight the Euro-sceptic wing in his party and the splits over Europe that he has been trying so hard to cover up.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member acknowledge that, on 5 March 2008, the Conservative Party tabled an amendment in the House of Commons that called for a referendum but was voted down and that, subsequently, on 11 March 2008, the European Union (Amendment) Bill cleared the House of Commons? Does he further acknowledge that, on 11 June 2008, had the DUP's nine MPs voted differently, the Government would have fallen and a Conservative Government would now be in power? There would have been a vote, and the people of the United Kingdom would have had the opportunity of a referendum. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member who had the Floor took an intervention. A Member who intervenes must be careful not to turn an intervention into a statement, but that is exactly what Mr McCrea did. The Member may carry on.

Mr Ross: Mr McCrea became extremely excited for a moment. Perhaps his time would be better spent asking his party colleague or indeed his entire party's representation in the House Commons over the past few years how they voted on a number of issues and how many times they propped up the Labour Government. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us be absolutely clear: everybody who wants to speak in the debate will have the opportunity to do so. However, the Member has the Floor, and other Members should allow him to continue.

Mr S Wilson: The hysterical reaction from Mr McCrea illustrates how vulnerable he and his party feel about the issue. Does he accept that the vote to which he referred, which concerned terrorists and whether there should be a detention period of 42 days, would not have brought down the Government and had nothing to do with the issue?

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us be absolutely clear: I will not allow interventions to become political statements. I will not allow that to happen in the House.

Mr Ross: I totally agree with my colleague. The Ulster Unionist Party increasingly finds itself in difficult positions when it answers questions about its relationship with the Conservative Party. The fact remains that the two major parties in the House of Commons are scared to have a referendum because of what the result would be.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will not give way. Too much of my time has already gone.

The people of the United Kingdom deserve their say about our relationship with Europe. Earlier, we heard about the many EU laws and directives that we can do nothing about. Such laws and directives are presented to Members at Committee meetings, but we have no chance to amend them or vote against them. We have experienced that in Northern Ireland because, for so long under direct rule, decisions were made at Westminster through Orders in Council. There was no opportunity for us to debate or amend those decisions, so we know all about the democratic deficit.

The people of the UK were promised that the EU was about a common market and free trade, but of course it was not. Over the years, the EU has accumulated power through various treaties and is becoming closer to the federal state that we all fear.

The Lisbon Treaty is almost identical to the constitutional treaty, and it will create two positions. We remember the famous speech by Mr William Hague in the House of Commons in which he described Gordon's nightmare: Gordon Brown hung on for so long waiting for Tony Blair to stand aside, only for Tony Blair to now have the opportunity to become the president of Europe. The treaty will also create the position of a high representative for foreign affairs, which is a foreign secretary in all but name. Foreign secretaries are required for nation states but not for the type of arrangement that the EU is meant to be. However, the EU is increasingly becoming a union of European citizens rather than a union of member states; we should be afraid of that. We even saw President Barroso pointing to the European flag and saying that that was the flag of his country. That tells us an awful lot about what Europe is becoming.

We also heard about the further centralisation of power in Brussels and how parts of our vetoes are being eroded. Therefore, for an issue as significant as the Lisbon Treaty, it is important that people in the United Kingdom have an opportunity to speak and have a serious debate about the role that the United Kingdom plays in an ever more powerful EU.

Mr Speaker: Order. As Question Time will commence at 3.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Danny Kinahan.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Parades

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department will direct the Arts Council to deny funding to bands which participate in parades commemorating loyalist paramilitaries.

(AQO 259/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland): My Department is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. Any organisation that receives funding from my Department and its arm's-length bodies must comply with the equality and good relations policies of the relevant funding organisations. Any body that does not do so is not eligible for funding.

The Arts Council's musical instruments for bands scheme and its small grants programme provide funding to bands for musical tuition costs and instruments. All bands that receive funding are required to comply fully with the Arts Council's commitment to equality of opportunity and good relations. The Arts Council has advised that it does not fund or support any bands that do not comply with that requirement.

For both funding programmes, the council checks individual band websites to ensure that there is no evidence of any content that would breach the equality and good relations commitments.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle agus a Aire. Given the Minister's answer, is he willing to enquire whether confidence is lost by allowing some loyalist bands that march past nationalist communities every year to commemorate what I would call loyalist paramilitaries? If he does not, people from my community, who have very little confidence in the Minister, will lose what little they had.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I made it clear that the position was that all bands are required to comply fully with the Arts Council's equality of opportunity and good relations commitments. The council has looked into the matter and has advised that it does not fund or support any bands that do not comply with that requirement.

Mr McNarry: There is obviously a list of bands — the Minister referred to it — that have received Arts

Council funding. Does the Minister know whether the Arts Council holds a list of bands that participate in parades?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is no single list that notes the bands that participate in parades. That would be the case for loyalist and nationalist or republican parades. A band may say in its application that, as part of its contribution to the community, it participates in community events. However, I do not think that any list of bands that participate in parades exists.

Mr Weir: Has the Arts Council ever rejected an application for funding for a band on the grounds that it had links with a paramilitary organisation?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As part of the assessment process, the Arts Council examines entries on a band's website and details of its activities. If the council considers that a band has contravened the necessary good relations commitment, which, as I said, is a condition for funding, that application is rejected. The Arts Council would not accept further applications from such a band until there was satisfactory evidence of a shift in attitude to the good relations commitment and a change in the website's content.

On the basis of contravening the good relations commitment, the Arts Council rejected two applications from bands in the recent funding round in the musical instruments for bands scheme. The council wrote to both bands to outline the reasons for rejection.

Places for Sport

2. **Mr Doherty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if 'Places for Sport' funding will be available in the 2010-11 financial year. (AQO 260/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is planned that £2.13 million will be provided for Places for Sport in 2010 and 2011. That is additional to the planned allocation for the current financial year of £6.35 million and an actual allocation for the previous financial year of £1.62 million. That gives an approximate total allocation of £10.1 million over the period 2008-2011.

That represents a significant investment by my Department in facilities across Northern Ireland. The £2.13 million planned allocation for 2010-2011 relates to awards that are anticipated to be made later this year for a phase of the programme for which applications closed in June 2009.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister's Department provide the maximum possible support for the Edendork GAC in County Tyrone, which needs help to replace the clubhouse

that was burned down in an arson attack in November 2008?

I shall also take this opportunity to ask the Minister whether funds are available to repair the recently vandalised facilities at the Mary Peters track.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Member asked whether financial support is available for a particular club. I outlined the funding that has been allocated to the scheme, which is open to all clubs for applications, all of which, I am sure, will be treated fairly and properly. However, I cannot comment on funding for a particular club, so there the matter must rest.

The Mary Peters track is owned by Belfast City Council, to which questions about how it intends to deal with the damage should be addressed. The council may have insurance cover for the facility, so it should look into that. The Member should also be aware that the council intends to carry out a more comprehensive refurbishment of the Mary Peters track.

Mr Gardiner: How many applications failed to be approved by the scheme due to late submission?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I do not have that information to hand, but I will endeavour to respond to the Member in due course.

Lord Browne: What benefits will the investment of public funds in sporting programmes and facilities bring before, during and after the London Olympics in 2012?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The investment of public funds in the elite facilities programme will provide a legacy of world-class sports facilities for use by the Northern Ireland community both at performance and grass-roots level, including by schoolchildren. The programme is about creating a facility, performance and participation legacy for Northern Ireland beyond 2012 that will also cover key gaps in facility provision across the sports infrastructure and that will significantly contribute to delivering the strategy for sport and physical recreation.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Windsor Park Football Ground

4. **Ms Purvis** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps he is taking to ensure that Linfield Football Club is not given an unfair financial advantage as a result of the redevelopment of Windsor Park. (AQO 262/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It has been made absolutely clear to both the IFA and Linfield Football Club that any development at Windsor Park that involves significant public expenditure is conditional on the contractual arrangements being agreed to the

satisfaction of all concerned, and, wherever possible, my Department will facilitate that process. The issue will also feature prominently in the outline business case for regional stadia development that has been commissioned by Sport NI. It is vital that any new contractual arrangements that are put in place provide a sustainable long-term future for international football in Northern Ireland. As far as the commercial arrangement between the IFA and Linfield Football Club is concerned, the IFA is, in the first instance, responsible for addressing the concerns of the other football clubs, and I anticipate that that, too, will be a factor when re-examining the present contract arrangements.

Ms Purvis: I thank the Minister for his response. Is he confident that no unfair financial advantage will be given to Linfield Football Club in the ongoing discussions on contractual arrangements between that club and the IFA?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I said that the arrangement reached has to be fair, acceptable and to the satisfaction of all concerned. I look forward to receiving the consultants' report in due course, and I will look at it very carefully. I hope that the report will be made before the end of the year so that we can make an initial approach to the Executive.

Mr Spratt: What is the position in relation to the provision of a stadium for the three sports?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As I outlined during questions for oral answer last month, my predecessor earlier this year asked the three governing bodies of the sports involved to submit their preferred options on regional stadium provision. In June 2009, the Executive received an update on stadium development and a broad outline of the options submitted and agreed the process for advancing regional stadium development.

Since taking office, I have actively encouraged that process and I have met representatives of the governing bodies. A strategic outline case confirming the options to be tested in a full economic appraisal has been produced and has been approved by DFP. Consultants have been appointed recently to undertake an economic appraisal of the options. As I indicated, I expect to be able to return to the Executive before the end of the year with the outcome and proposals to take forward the strategic development of regional sports stadiums.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members to switch off their mobile phones, which affect the recording system in the Chamber. Once again, I remind Members to rise continually in their places. The key word is "continually".

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister reassure Members that the distribution of grants to football clubs will be

balanced geographically and will include football clubs that do not play in the Irish League? I mean Derry City Football Club.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I made a useful visit to Fermanagh recently and viewed facilities at Ballinamallard United Football Club. I was most impressed by the good work that goes on there, not only with the main teams, but with the youth and, Members will be glad to hear, several ladies' football teams.

Mr McNarry: So that's why you were there.
[Laughter].

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I assure Members that no football teams were playing on the day when I visited. David McNarry must be greatly disappointed.

It is important that a fair and equitable spread of resources across the Province is achieved, not just geographically, but at all levels and across all sports. A conversation about this is taking place with Sport NI. Members should be reassured that that is indeed the case.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that the decision to proceed with the investment at Windsor Park was equality-impact assessed? If not, what consideration did he give before allocating the resources to make investment available for health and safety work by the other two sports at Ravenhill and Casement Park?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Some time ago, the Executive decided to look at the needs of the three sports. That decision was made during my predecessor's term as Minister. When I took over, I engaged immediately with all three sports at the same time and at the one meeting. I said to them that I wanted their proposals, and they have each presented them. I am pursuing that, and I am pressing forward as quickly as possible.

3.15 pm

The point that all three governing bodies expressed most emphatically was that they did not want any delay; they were simply concerned that the matter be progressed as quickly as possible. That is why I indicated that we would have something back before the end of the year.

Any assessments would have been made earlier, but we were past that point. The Executive decided earlier in the year to proceed in that way.

Ulster Museum

5. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the budget and timescale for the refurbishment of the Ulster Museum. (AQO 263/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster Museum will reopen on 22 October 2009, with an additional 1,225 sq m of gallery space. That increases the public areas by more than 10%.

The overall budget for the project is £17.2 million, which is made up of the following contributions: £11.2 million from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure; £4.7 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is the largest Heritage Lottery Fund grant to be awarded to a project in Northern Ireland to date; and £1.3 million from trusts, private grants and donations, including a £500,000 donation from private individuals in the USA.

The removal and storage of the collections from the museum, together with the construction and fit out, has taken three years to complete. When the public come to see the end product of the refurbishment, I am sure that they will appreciate that the project has been time and money well spent.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Can he advise whether a value for money assessment has been carried out on the deployment of museum staff over those three years?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The period that the project has lasted has been a very difficult time for the museum staff, who were endeavouring to do what they could. The other two sites at Cultra and Omagh were open during that time. There were difficulties regarding the staff at the Ulster Museum, and most were relocated to Cultra at various times. They were also involved in the development of the new museum.

The Member asked whether a value for money study was carried out. That is the sort of thing that might have been done at an earlier stage. As I indicated earlier, I arrived at the Department at the beginning of July 2009, at which point the project's completion was only a few months away. The museum reopens on Thursday. I have every confidence that the management in National Museums Northern Ireland ensured that staff were deployed properly and that the refurbishment was carried out to the best of its ability, making the maximum use of staff. However, I can enquire further into whether a study was carried out.

There can be a tendency in our country to spend a great deal of time, resources and money on asking consultants and experts to do all sorts of studies. I would prefer that we devote staff, money and resources to front line services to ensure that, as in this case, we get the best outcome. The museum has a very important role to play in the cultural infrastructure of Northern Ireland.

Mr T Clarke: Will the Minister tell us how the timescale and budget of the project to refurbish the

Ulster Museum compares with similar projects in the rest of the UK?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: National Museums Northern Ireland has sought to maximise the benefits and opportunities that the project presented throughout its five-year life cycle. Consequently, the project has expanded to provide maximum value for money for stakeholders and the public. Additional work has included the construction of a new applied art gallery, which was not in the original concept. The project has released an additional 1,200 sq m of public space. The Ulster Museum project compares favourably with other national museums' projects in its quality of build, exhibition fit out and value for money. Those other projects include one worked on by National Museums Liverpool at a cost of £72 million and National Museums Scotland's £46 million Royal Museum project in Edinburgh, which is due to open in 2011.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister will be aware that Northern Ireland is awash with visitors and tourists, and we welcome that. However, following the investment of £17 million into the refurbishment of the Ulster Museum, it is to close on Mondays. How will visitors to Belfast be accommodated on Mondays if all the museums are closed?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: National Museums Northern Ireland has been reviewing how best to support tourism, learning and community engagement. With that in mind, National Museums Northern Ireland has introduced revised opening hours to ensure that its services are aligned more closely with the needs and expectations of visitors. After it reopens at the end of October, the Ulster Museum will be open to the public from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Before the investment was made, the museum was closed on Saturday and Sunday mornings and open only in the afternoons.

Recent market research has shown that more than 70% of people prefer to visit a museum on a Saturday or a Sunday; only 3% cited Monday as the preferred day for a visit. That figure might not please Mr McCarthy, but it is the result of market research that was carried out by National Museums Northern Ireland.

National Museums Northern Ireland will keep its opening hours under review, ensuring that it continues to respond to visitor demands and expectations, and the revised opening hours will be implemented across its estate. Opening hours is an operational matter for the trustees of National Museums Northern Ireland.

North/South Implementation Bodies

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efficiency savings the North/South

bodies, which are under his Department's remit, will be implementing this year. (AQO 264/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in the Irish Republic have agreed guidance on the delivery of efficiency savings, which will affect Waterways Ireland and the North/South Language Body, which are in my remit. The bodies will be required to achieve a minimum of 3% per annum cumulative cash-releasing efficiencies in 2009 and 2010. The baseline figures to be used will be the indicative budgets for 2009, which were established at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings in language body sectoral format and in inland waterways sectoral format on 16 January 2009. The bodies will also be required to develop an initial review process, which will encourage efficiency savings on a continual basis. Savings will be removed from the budget grants to the bodies, resulting in reductions in the contributions from Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in line with funding ratios.

The bodies are redrafting their 2009 business plans in line with the agreed efficiency guidance. They will be forwarded to the sponsor Departments for clearance by DCAL and DFP Ministers in advance of business plans being presented for approval at a future NSMC meeting. The Department will also wish to consider any scope for efficiencies in discharging its sponsorship role.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's answer and the news that there will be efficiency savings in "North/Southery". Will the Minister detail any plans for savings that he has implemented and changes that he has made in respect of North/South bodies and ministerial meetings over which he has control?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My predecessor, Gregory Campbell, reduced the cost of meetings by holding the NSMC meetings in language body sectoral format and in inland waterways sectoral format on one day and in one place, thereby reducing the cost of travel and accommodation and making a more efficient use of the time of Ministers and officials. I intend to continue that process and hold the two meetings consecutively on one day and in the same place.

I also intend to reduce costs as far as possible when hosting the NSMC meetings. For example, the next meetings will be held in December in my offices in Belfast, and I intend to use departmental premises to hold future meetings, because there is no need to hire plush premises or to put on extravagant lunches. In future, we may even take matters a stage further. There may be some instances where videoconferencing could be used to do business, and that would save on time and

on travel costs. Therefore, things can be done, and the Department will seek to do what it can in that regard.

Mr Attwood: Is the Minister not tempted to sow confusion in the minds of all those who harbour doubts about him and his ability as a Minister, by cutting through the fog and endorsing the proposal for an all-Ireland arts council? That would save money, it would be a non-threatening way of doing arts business on this island and —

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr Attwood: My question is about saving money, Mr Speaker. The creation of that arts council would define the Minister, in this part of the world, as a visionary rather than as some people portray him.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Mr Attwood has been a bit slow on the uptake. He has not grasped the fact that the Executive's vision — as set out in the Programme for Government, which was signed up to by all the political parties — is to create “a shared and better future” in Northern Ireland. We must get that right in Northern Ireland. In doing so, it is important that we recognise that Northern Ireland's cultural links with Scotland, England and Wales are just as strong as those with the Irish Republic.

I recently took the opportunity of travelling to Edinburgh to meet my corresponding colleagues in the Scottish Government, and the folk there —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor. Allow him to answer.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I travelled to Scotland to meet the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture and the Minister for Public Health and Sport, to begin a process of developing those east-west links. The scenario that Mr Attwood set out does not recognise or reflect the complexity and nature of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland. He seems to be very insular — that is a good word — in his approach. On this side of the Chamber, we approach things in a much more broad-minded manner.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister states that he has been involved in cost-cutting measures with respect to where he will hold future North/South Ministerial Council meetings. However, he could hold meetings in the bus shelter at the bottom of the hill, but he must still hold those meetings. He is involved in the North/South Ministerial Council, and he cannot get away from that fact.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As yet, I have not considered the possibility of using bus shelters to hold meetings. However, I think that we

will settle for the comfort of the DCAL offices in Belfast, which are very satisfactory.

The DUP's position has always been that there is opportunity and benefit in having good relationships with our neighbours in other countries. Therefore, meeting, from time to time, to discuss matters of mutual interest — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It seems that some have not grasped the fact that God gave us one mouth and two ears. It is good to listen, and I suggest that Mr O'Dowd should listen more and say a little bit less: he might learn something.

It is good to have the opportunity to meet folk from the Irish Republic and to do things that are of mutual benefit, just as it good to meet our colleagues in the other parts of the United Kingdom, of which we are an integral part.

Ulster-Scots Language and Culture

7. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he determines the proportion of funding to be given to the development of Ulster-Scots language and culture. (AQO 265/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The proportionality or ratio of funding that is provided by Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic for the North/South Language Body, which comprises the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge, was agreed when that body was established, on the basis of the assessed benefit to each country from the activities of each body. Currently, my Department funds 75% of the budget of the Ulster-Scots Agency and 25% of the budget of Foras na Gaeilge.

3.30 pm

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Lisbon Treaty Referendum

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes the verdict of the Republic of Ireland electorate on the Lisbon Treaty referendum; reaffirms its support for a referendum in the United Kingdom on the treaty; and calls for a declaration from those parties aspiring to form the incoming Government of the United Kingdom to give an unequivocal commitment to hold, within a twelve month period from assuming office in 2010, a binding referendum on the Lisbon Treaty that is unconditional and unrelated to how other member states choose to vote, and the result of which will not be held in abeyance pending a further referendum on the subject. — [Mr Campbell.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after “calls” and insert

“on the UK Parliament to rescind the United Kingdom’s ratification of the Treaty; and further calls on those parties who aspire to form the next Government to hold a referendum to halt the ratification process across the European Union.” — [Mr Kennedy.]

Mr Kinahan: I look forward to speaking on the serious subject of the Lisbon Treaty referendum. I support the Ulster Unionist Party’s amendment, which proposes to rescind the treaty and hold a referendum. If the public are watching, many will be extremely muddled as to who is for Europe and who is against it.

The motion is muddled in that it looks for a binding promise that we cannot give on an issue that we may not be able to deliver. ‘The Economist’ has stated that the Lisbon Treaty had made Europe too complicated and that it is difficult for all of us to understand. The Ulster Unionist Party is pro-Europe, most Members are pro-Europe to varying degrees, and most Members support a referendum. The Ulster Unionist Party is for Europe, and I will point out what Europe has done for us. It has brought together 27 very different countries, which has been an enormous success; it has helped struggling nations; and it has opened discussions on the issue of climate change and introduced environmental legislation that the House may not even have considered, given that one corner of the House does not believe in global warming.

Nevertheless, the Lisbon Treaty may take away our sovereignty and part of our history, of which we are very proud. The European Union is complicated, and it is becoming too big and too expensive.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that the anti-European or Euro-sceptic views that have been expressed by some Members are to be regretted? We should be at the heart of, and show our wholehearted support for, Europe, which the Member has just done.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you. I look forward to an extra minute.

I do not agree fully with the Member. In varying degrees, we are all for Europe. ‘The Economist’ has stated that politics is local and that economics is global. We joined Europe for economic reasons, and we want that to continue. However, we want Europe to have less influence in our politics.

Mr T Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No. If I may, I would like to keep going.

The Lisbon Treaty may take all of that away. Recently, I was lucky enough to visit Brussels, where, in one of the many meetings that I attended, it was explained that, if we want to influence European legislation, we need to look at it two years before it is introduced. Once it is introduced, there is very little that we can do about it. The UK must not throw away its influence with the Commonwealth and its special relationship with America. Europe has been weak in certain areas, particularly in defence. Remember Rwanda, when Europe stood by and did absolutely nothing. A referendum is needed.

The motion refers to parties that have aspirations. That is a reference to the UUP, which is not part of the sideshow or of little Ulster. We want to have influence through our link with the Conservative Party, and we want to be with it in influencing what happens in Europe and what happens here. We are proud of the Union, and we are ready for change.

The Ulster Unionist Party wants a referendum for two reasons. First, the public must have their chance and their say. We must all educate the public on European issues and on where we are going. Secondly, a referendum is needed so that Europe knows exactly where the UK stands.

Dr McDonnell: I thank all the Members who have taken part in the debate, because I think it is very useful. Although some are suggesting that it is merely about a referendum, I have not missed — I do not think anybody could miss — the anti-European undertone of most of those who are proposing that there should be a referendum. It is a referendum with a view to undermining our commitment to Europe, and, indeed, undermining the commitment of Europe to us.

We in the SDLP have never been uncritical supporters of the European Union, but we examine each situation that arises rationally and on its merits. Over many years, I have repeatedly drawn the conclusion that the European Union as a whole, and European integration generally, works in our best interests. The simple — maybe too simple — illustration of that is the fact that over €1.65 billion, around £1.5 billion, has been invested

in Northern Ireland from the European Union via the peace and reconciliation funds. That funding has, without question, provided a vital lifeline in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic.

The European Union continues to prove that it is essential for securing and promoting jobs, the development of tourism, and the protection of our agriculture sector. Although things can sometimes be bad when we are inside, and working with, the European Union, they would be an awful lot worse if we were outside.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for giving way. Although the Member mentioned how good Europe has been for the farming industry, it has not been equally as good for the fishing industry. That industry is one of the poor relations, with all the regulations that come from Europe, and the so-called scientific evidence that results in restricting the days at sea and restricting quotas. Does the Member accept that the European Union is not helping the fishing industry? Indeed, if anything, it is killing it.

Dr McDonnell: I thank my colleague for reminding me. Fishing is one of the issues that I was thinking of when I said that the SDLP had never been uncritical. Seas have been overfished and overworked, and the European Union has tried to curtail fishing, and sometimes to conserve fishing. Had it not been for some of the conservation — and I feel uncomfortable about it — many of the stocks of fish would have been wiped out. However, it is a concern that the fishing industry has been squeezed again and again. It is not so much a European problem as a global problem. There is overfishing, and one of these days, there will be very few fish left; they will become harder to find.

I am suggesting that Europe has been, and continues to be, good to us, with our infrastructure and community development funded from Brussels. It has continued to be good to us through key infrastructure investments such as the Kelvin project, which will ensure that at least eight towns in Northern Ireland and five just south of the border acquire the fastest telecoms connection to North America from anywhere in Europe. That new infrastructure will help us to attract international business and give us a much better trading platform. In many ways, it may have helped to create the atmosphere for the jobs announcement that we heard earlier this week.

Through the reforms of the Lisbon Treaty, Europe can be even better for us in the future. I am at a loss to understand why there is an intrinsic hostility to Europe espoused by many in the DUP and Sinn Féin, and, indeed, the Ulster Unionist Party. It strikes me as a paranoid view that one cannot trust foreigners.

Mr T Clarke: Perhaps I have missed the point, but surely the essence of the motion is that it is not the DUP's

view. The motion calls for the public to be given an opportunity to have a view; it does not necessarily force the view of the proposers upon others.

Dr McDonnell: Maybe I will get to that in a second. Our suspicion of foreigners is unhealthy. It is wise to be sensible and cautious, but we can sometimes be too cautious.

The Lisbon Treaty is an attempt to bring the institutions of Europe out of the 1970s, when they were set up to manage 15 states, and into the twenty-first century, when the European Union comprises 27 states. I warmly welcome a union of 27 states, because, like a lot of Members, I did not like the concepts of the Iron Curtain and of eastern Europe under the jackboot of Russia. We had an obligation to help those states, and I am glad that the European Union has taken them on board.

Mr Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Dr McDonnell: Globally and locally, we face unprecedented economic and social challenges. Member states cannot rise and overcome those challenges alone.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin believes that every citizen of the European Union should have a say in such fundamental decisions about how society is run, whether that is in Ireland, Britain, France or Holland. Sinn Féin is not hostile to Europe, as the previous Member who spoke alleged. All politicians, elected representatives and members of the public have a right to scrutinise legislation and to make decisions on legislation such as the Lisbon Treaty. It is unhealthy for democracy and democratic debate that some parties adopt a *carte blanche* approach to any legislation that comes out of Europe. The treaty is not about staying in Europe or about economic investment, and some Members must recognise that.

The European Union will advance towards common foreign policies. Funding will increase for a European defence agency, there will be an EU foreign minister, and military alliances will be formed to carry out common foreign and defence initiatives. Those are facts, and that goes above and beyond the peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance that is already taking place.

Lisbon II was not a referendum on whether the Twenty-six Counties should stay in the European Union. It was not a referendum on job creation, as some in the Government alleged. The treaty contains nothing that will incentivise investment or stimulate growth. Ironically, the economic policies that the Lisbon Treaty promotes are exactly the same policies that drove us into the current economic crisis.

For the past 20 years, the European Union has pushed a right-wing economic agenda, promoting deregulation and liberalisation. It has aggressively promoted competition in all areas of the economy, including in public services. The European Union has weakened the ability of the state to manage the economy, leading to privatisation and inequality.

Much is revealed by an interesting quote from the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). It told the National Forum on Europe that the treaty:

“creates the legal basis for the liberalisation of services of general economic interest (Art. 106). A yes vote for the Lisbon Treaty creates the potential for increased opportunities for Irish business particularly in areas subject to increasing liberalisation such as Health, Education”.

Mr Shannon: Will the Member agree that the Lisbon Treaty will affect 60 important areas, including policing, the army, justice, the finance system and employment? The treaty will make life easier for criminals. Will the Member agree that the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom should have the right to vote on it and to say no to it?

Mr McKay: I agree that everyone has the right to vote on issues that are as fundamental as that. It affects a wide range of issues, which must be addressed.

Public services, such as healthcare and education, will, under article 16 of the Lisbon Treaty, be subject to new economic and financial conditions. Healthcare and education will be subject to further privatisation, and, in turn, greater levels of inequality. We do not wish to see a united states of Europe.

We do not want to go down the same road as the United States, not only with regard to foreign policy and a unified army, but on critical issues such as health and education. We are aware of the gross health inequalities in the United States. There is little wonder that politicians such as Silvio Berlusconi have backed the Lisbon Treaty. It is fundamentally a right-wing treaty that will do nothing for Irish people's quality of life.

3.45 pm

SDLP member Alban Maginness suggested that a number of changes to the Lisbon Treaty were secured. That is just wrong: not one word of the treaty was changed between Lisbon I and Lisbon II. He said that a number of guarantees were secured by the Irish Government. In saying that, does he not recognise that Lisbon I was wrong in the first place and that Sinn Féin was, therefore, right to lobby for a “No” vote?

He talks about enhanced democracy. Article 48 of the Lisbon Treaty gives the European Union power to amend treaties without referenda. Clearly, therefore, it takes away from the democratic agenda. As regards nuclear power — an issue that SDLP members allege is close to their hearts — the Lisbon Treaty again

reaffirms and mandates the European Union to promote nuclear energy.

All in all, Cheann Comhairle, I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House. It is important that the House debate European issues. It does not do so often enough. The European Union has a great deal of power to set legislation that affects members of the public on the island. We must ensure that our voices are heard and that the views of the people of Europe are heard on fundamental changes to legislation. I support the motion.

Mr Beggs: Why are there concerns about the Lisbon Treaty? If the treaty is enacted throughout Europe, the European community will change. UK citizens will no longer determine their own future. It will frequently be decided by others.

My colleague Danny Kinahan quoted ‘The Economist’; he said, rightly, that politics are local and economics are global. How true that statement is. The European Economic Community will become a political union. It will not be local. There will not be local politics. Decisions will be made remotely and will be unaccountable.

At present, European decisions must have the approval of the democratically elected Government in the European Council, or of the European Parliament. In future, a wide range of decisions will be made by the new proportionality voting system. Gregory Campbell, rightly, highlighted that as the fundamental shift that comes with the Lisbon Treaty. That means that other people can impose laws on us that do not have the British people's support.

We are expected to be content that the Parliament will be consulted for eight weeks, instead of six weeks. Although I respect Alban Maginness's comments, consultation of merely eight weeks, rather than six, does not improve democratic accountability. I question why the Alliance Party seems to be content with that.

We must ask what the purpose of the motion is as it is originally worded. Is it designed to achieve a particular outcome, or is it merely playing at party politics? It calls for parties to give a commitment to hold a referendum within 12 months of the next Westminster election. Why wait, possibly, up to 18 months? Such a delay could enable ratification of the treaty, to which the proposers claim to object.

My colleague Danny Kennedy indicated that the Ulster Unionist Party has given commitments to hold a referendum prior to the ratification of the treaty. That is what my party wishes to do. The proposers of the motion either fail to understand the nature of British parliamentary democracy or EU law, or are being mischievous. The key time is now, not 18 months from now, by which time ratification could have come into effect.

Mr Easton: Does the Member not agree that the DUP put down a motion a year ago that called for a referendum? Therefore, the DUP has been ahead of the game on the issue. My party has been pushing for a referendum — not the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr Beggs: The Member did not answer the question that I posed: why does his party want to wait 18 months when, during that time, the treaty could be ratified? Perhaps, in summing up, a member of that party could answer the question.

It will be extremely difficult and painful to change the treaty once it comes into effect. Indeed, how will the outcome of a successful referendum to end the treaty be put into effect? Are the proposers of the motion, who indicate that they wish to hold a referendum in 18 months' time and after the enactment of the treaty, going to bind the UK to withdrawal from Europe? That could be the outcome.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: No, I have given way already.

I notice that the proposers of the motion have not stated that that will be the case. However, if that is what they are stating, they should do so clearly.

Mitchel McLaughlin supports both the opposition to the Lisbon Treaty and the DUP motion. However, what consultation has there been with the business community or the community and voluntary sector about a possible withdrawal from Europe? I have major businesses in my constituency to think about; for example, FG Wilson and Schrader Electronics, two companies that trade extensively in Europe. That is a key reason why jobs are located here, why companies invest here and why new investment may come here. Have the proposers of the motion consulted the business community on how withdrawal from Europe could threaten jobs?

The Ulster Unionist Party has its differences with how we are governed in Europe, but withdrawal is not an option at this time. We would rather improve the structures in Europe to meet the needs of the United Kingdom.

The British Labour Party made a commitment to hold a referendum, and then welshed on it. That commitment should be honoured before the Lisbon Treaty is enacted.

Sammy Wilson failed to explain why nine DUP MPs supported the Government, gave them a lifeline, and thus enabled this law to come into effect. Had the Government fallen, and had there been an election, the treaty would not have been ratified. Someone should explain that.

I ask Members to support the amendment, follow the proper procedures to ensure that Parliament withdraws

its approval for the treaty and have an urgent referendum on the issue so that the United Kingdom can legally withdraw from the process. That will allow for a much better process to be put in place, one that enables continuing co-operation in Europe yet respects nation states.

Mr Hamilton: On a personal basis, I am much opposed to the Lisbon Treaty. In particular, I am opposed to the furtherance of EU power at the centre, the erosion of nation-state status, and the weakening of the powers of national Parliaments. I am concerned by the increasing development of the EU as a state, as seen in the Lisbon Treaty; by the idea of a permanent president of the European Council, in effect, a European foreign minister; by the legal personality of the EU; and by the 29 new areas in which qualified majority voting will be the decision-making mechanism, and not unanimity as before.

A Member mentioned the “citizens” of Europe. There is no such thing as a “citizen” of the EU at the moment. However, the Lisbon Treaty will create EU citizens. In many ways, the issue is not so much about the precise provisions of the Lisbon Treaty; rather, it is about further extension of EU power without recourse to the British people and without allowing them to have their say.

On 8 October 2007, David Burnside said that the British people had been sold a pup. There is such a contrast between Mr Burnside's virulent anti-European comments and those of the individual who replaced him in the House. However, in this case, I agree with David Burnside. The British people were sold what was, in effect, a very tame trading block within Europe. That is being replaced with something that is taking on, ever more, the personality of a superstate, as we see in the Lisbon Treaty.

However, this is not about my view, the DUP's view, or the view of any party in the Assembly. It is about the view of the people of the United Kingdom. The British people have been betrayed by the Labour Party, which promised in its 2005 manifesto that it would:

“put it to the British people in a referendum and campaign whole-heartedly for a ‘Yes’ vote to keep Britain a leading nation in Europe.”

It is the Labour Party's right to support a “yes” vote, but the point is its support for a referendum on the treaty. Despite what the previous Member who spoke said, the DUP would welcome a referendum immediately. We want the British people to get their say as soon as possible.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: The Member will have to hold on; I want to expand my point.

If the Member and his colleagues look at the motion, they will see that it reaffirms the Assembly's support for an immediate referendum. The motion demands a referendum today as much as it demands one from the next Government.

The Labour Party's manifesto pledge has been completely ignored. The Conservative Party manifesto states:

"We oppose the EU Constitution and would give the British people the chance to reject its provisions in a referendum".

That pledge has, to be polite, been nuanced to the extent that there is real concern and confusion about the party's position. The Conservative Party moves from unequivocal endorsement of a referendum to a position that is unclear, not just to me and others in this Chamber, but to members of that party.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that the Lisbon Treaty would create a president, a motto, a flag, an anthem and all the trappings of constitutional power? It seems that the Ulster Unionists are backtracking and are supporting the creation of a European superstate.

Mr Hamilton: Like the Member, I am concerned by the European Union's attempt to develop trappings of power that would be centralised in Brussels, particularly the creation of a permanent president and foreign minister. Those are positions that every state has, so if the European Union is not a developing superstate, why does it want to take on those characteristics?

Mr Kennedy: It seems that the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party agree on the need for a referendum. If the DUP regards a referendum as fundamental, why did its parliamentary team at Westminster not, through their votes and influence, take their opportunity to bring down a Labour Government that failed to honour the promise to hold a referendum that they made to the electorate? Why did the DUP not take that opportunity and create circumstances in which a referendum could be held?

Mr Hamilton: After he made that point twice and had it knocked down on both occasions, I did not think that the Member would want to embarrass himself any further. He is accusing my party of propping up a Government by supporting them in a vote on stronger anti-terrorism measures, even though his party's sole MP also supported it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is making a winding-up speech on the motion and has the Floor.

Mr Hamilton: Throughout her tenure at Westminster, the Ulster Unionist Party's sole Member of Parliament has habitually propped up the Labour Government, so much so that she is probably more loyal to the Labour Whip than many of the Labour Party's Back-Benchers.

I am not confused about the Tory position and neither are the people of the United Kingdom; it is the Conservative Party that is confused. One need only look at the mess that it has got itself into over recent weeks to see that. For example, David Heathcoat-Amory said of David Cameron:

"He simply can't fudge his way through this".

On the other side, David Curry said of the treaty:

@We should accept it."

In contrast, Andrew Rosindell said:

"I speak to people in my own constituency and I can tell you that everybody wants a referendum."

Roger Helmer MEP said — *[Interruption.]*

The Ulster Unionist Members do not want to hear about the very difficult position that they have got themselves into with the Conservative Party.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No; I have already given way to the Member.

The Ulster Unionist Party Members are scared stiff of the difficulties that the issue poses in the ranks of their new political alliance. When someone as pro-European as Kenneth Clarke says that he is content with the Conservative Party's position on the Lisbon Treaty, it should be cause for concern for those of us who oppose it, including the Ulster Unionist Party Members who say that they oppose it.

Although the Conservative Party is not in government, it has moved away from the position that is stated in its manifesto about its credentials in opposing a federalist, growing superstate in Europe. After all, the Conservative Party took us into Europe and expanded the remit of the European Union through successive treaties.

4.00 pm

It is clear from today's debate that there is no clarity whatsoever on the possible position of a Conservative Government. The party says that it will not let matters rest, but there is no clarity about whether it will let people have their say. It plays up the issue to win support but, on every occasion, falls short of allowing the British people to have their say on this important issue. If the matter is of such serious political consequence, why have the people of the UK been denied a say? The people of Ireland have had their say on two occasions, whereas the people of the United Kingdom have not once had a say. In fact, we have had no say on the expansion of Europe since the second referendum in the 1970s.

I am concerned about the outsourcing of the constitutional status of the United Kingdom, which is an important issue, to the President of the Czech

Republic. In essence, a matter that should be in the hands of the British people has been given to the head of state of another nation. The British people have been treated abysmally by successive Governments on the European issue. What do the Labour Party and the Conservative Party fear? Why have the people of Britain not been allowed, as they were promised, to have a say on the fundamental constitutional issue? I want a referendum as soon as possible. The party in government in the United Kingdom, and the party that aspires to be, have promised us a referendum; it is high time that we had our referendum.

Mr Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Hamilton: We need an unequivocal commitment to a referendum on an issue that is important to the people of the United Kingdom.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 12; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Beggs and Mr Kinahan.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Burns, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dallat, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Gallagher, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr O'Loan, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Hamilton and Mr Shannon.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 47; Noes 19.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Brolly, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Doherty, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Ms Gildernew,

Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mrs McGill, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hamilton and Mr Shannon.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Burns, Mr Dallat, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCarthy, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mr McHugh, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCarthy and Mr O'Loan.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland.

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the verdict of the Republic of Ireland electorate on the Lisbon Treaty referendum; reaffirms its support for a referendum in the United Kingdom on the treaty; and calls for a declaration from those parties aspiring to form the incoming Government of the United Kingdom to give an unequivocal commitment to hold, within a twelve month period from assuming office in 2010, a binding referendum on the Lisbon Treaty that is unconditional and unrelated to how other member states choose to vote, and the result of which will not be held in abeyance pending a further referendum on the subject.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Local Government Reform Programme

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement on the local government reform programme.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement on the local government reform programme and on my intention to launch a short period of stakeholder engagement on the economic appraisal — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

The Minister of the Environment: — of options for local government service delivery that I am publishing today.

Members will be aware of speculation in the media, in councils and in the corridors of the Assembly that the local government reform programme will not proceed; that it is too costly to implement; that it will not yield significant savings for taxpayers and ratepayers; that it no longer makes sense in difficult economic times; and that insufficient time is available between now and May 2011 to implement the move to 11 new councils.

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

Today, I want to scotch those rumours. First, I want to make it clear to Members, to our colleagues on councils and to the public that local government reform is proceeding and that I am committed to delivering that programme successfully. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that we have made, and are making, real progress in implementing local government reform. Finally, by publishing the economic appraisal of options for local government service delivery today, I want to demonstrate that, if we make the right political choices on the detailed design of new local government, proceeding with its reform makes sense, because it will improve efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

Members will recall that my predecessor Arlene Foster announced the Executive's decisions on the future of local government in a statement to the Assembly on 31 March 2008. She announced that the 26 councils would be rationalised to 11 new councils that would take on a significant range of functions from central government and other bodies in May 2011. She also announced that the new councils would need a new statute-based community planning process and that, working within a new statutory governance framework, they would have available a power of well-being. Importantly, Arlene set out the Executive's vision of local government, and that vision bears repeating today:

“our vision is of a strong, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of all citizens at their core. Central to that vision is the provision of high-quality, efficient services that respond to people's needs and continuously improve over time.” — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p2, col 1]*.

That vision resonates with the Executive's Programme for Government and strategic priorities. It is even more relevant now that there are difficult economic times than it was 18 months ago.

Where do I and my Executive colleagues stand on the reform of local government some 18 months after the Executive made those decisions? There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that, in order to deliver strong, effective local government and improve services for all citizens, the Executive mean to deliver local government reform in May 2011. I am fully committed to ensuring that that happens because, as a long-standing councillor, I understand the potential of local government.

The reform programme can and will unlock that potential and enable local councils to become effective local champions that respond to the aspirations and concerns of their communities, and, in partnership with others, guide the future development of their areas.

4.30 pm

Since the Executive took those decisions in March 2008, my predecessors and I have worked hard to ensure that the necessary policy, legislation and practical arrangements are put in place to create the new 11 councils in May 2011 and to transfer a significant range of central government functions and staff to local government. In doing so, we have worked closely with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, the five main political parties and the existing councils to prepare the way for the change.

The strategic leadership board, which I chair, supported by three politically led policy development panels, has agreed a suite of policies and processes to underpin the development and operation of the 11 new councils. That work has underpinned the development of the four Bills that I will take through the Assembly in the course of the next 18 months, which will provide for the creation of the new councils; put in place new governance mechanisms; provide for fair and effective decision-making; create a new performance management and ethical standards regime; provide new powers of community planning and well-being; and transfer reformed planning functions to local government.

The first of those Bills, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, is already before the Assembly and has just completed its Committee Stage. I thank the Committee for its effective, rational and timely response. I very much look forward to the Consideration Stage debate in this Chamber in the not-too-distant future. The second Bill, the local

government finance Bill, will modernise the financial framework within which local government works. It is currently being consulted on. I look forward to introducing that Bill to the Assembly early next spring.

The final two Bills will give effect to the reorganisation of local government and to the reform and transfer of planning functions. As Members will know, I have just completed a period of intensive and wide-ranging consultation on planning reform. I will consider the outcome of that consultation before I bring detailed legislative proposals before the Executive for agreement.

Policy proposals for local government reorganisation are currently before the Executive. Subject to the Executive's agreement, I propose to publish those proposals for consultation in November. I will also bring Bills through the Assembly on nuisance hedges and on a clean neighbourhoods agenda, two issues in which local government will have a significant role to play. I intend to bring those Bills before the Assembly next summer.

I have considered the report of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner and have issued a paper to the Executive. Subject to the Executive's agreement, the final report, the draft Order and the statement about modifications will be laid before this Assembly. My intention is that that order should be debated before the Christmas recess. If it is approved by Members, it will take effect at the next local government election.

Members will also know that we have established and provided a range of guidance to voluntary transition committees across the 11 council groups, and that those committees have driven forward the implementation programme at local level. I will take time to visit each and every transition committee of the merging councils in the coming weeks to brief them on the progress of the programme of change, to thank them for the efforts that they have made in preparing the way for the new councils and to encourage them to continue to do so. I have already had the pleasure of visiting three transition committees and have been impressed by the work that they are doing to prepare the way for the creation of the new councils. None of us underestimates the complexity and difficulty of the task that lies ahead.

I have also established negotiating machinery — the local government reform joint forum — to enable the employer organisations that are affected by the programme to come together with trade unions to negotiate and agree the detailed arrangements for dealing with staffing issues that arise from the change process. That forum is making rapid progress in addressing and agreeing some of the most complex change-management issues that we face in taking forward this programme.

We have made good progress in addressing a wide range of policy, legislative and practical arrangements for delivering the programme. I pay tribute to my predecessors and all others who were involved in the regional and local implementation machinery for what has already been achieved.

I have also been working with my colleagues on the strategic leadership board to conduct a full economic appraisal of the options for local government service delivery. In January 2009, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) was commissioned by the strategic leadership board to identify the operational arrangements of the functions to be transferred from central to local government, and those currently delivered, on a group basis, by local government.

PWC was also required to analyse the proposed operating models for delivering functions after the May 2011 transfer. In taking forward that work, PWC identified and assessed options for the delivery of local government services and made preliminary recommendations on a preferred option to the strategic leadership board in July.

The key recommendations arising from the phase 1 report were: the adoption of a design approach to the development of a consistent operating model for the new councils, giving local government a unique opportunity to design a purpose-built solution for Northern Ireland; that a full economic appraisal should be conducted on the shortlisting options for the design of operating models in the new councils; that the definition of each option in the economic appraisal should articulate the associated role and responsibilities of transition committees, the key elements of support that each committee will be offered, and the key actions; dependencies and milestones on the overall implementation plan for which transitional committees will be responsible; and that decisions should be taken on the design of appropriate regional structures for local government in Northern Ireland.

The phase 1 report was accepted by the strategic leadership board on 3 July 2009 and is available on my Department's website. PWC then moved to the second phase of its assignment, which it completed and presented to the strategic leadership board last week for initial discussion. However, my colleagues and I on that board felt that it was important to widen the debate on the report's recommendations by seeking the views of key stakeholders.

That is why I am publishing that report today and have arranged for copies to be made available to Members. It will be placed on the Department of the Environment's (DOE) website and will be made available to a wide range of stakeholders who have an interest in local government reform. I intend to allow six weeks for stakeholders to consider and discuss the

report and to submit their views to me on its recommendations.

I will also seek the views of my Executive colleagues, most notably the Ministers who are responsible for the functions that are due to transfer to local government in May 2011. I will also discuss the report with my colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explore the implementation and longer-term funding options that may be available to the Executive, with a view to putting detailed proposals to the Executive towards the end of the year.

For the most part, Members will not have had an opportunity to consider the report. However, I encourage all of them to do so. I want to take the opportunity to set out the report's core recommendations, which include 11 new councils in Northern Ireland, each of which will deliver the full range of local government services. Current group-working arrangements for environmental health and building control will cease, and each council will develop a self-contained capacity to deliver those services. A regional business services organisation will be formed that is wholly owned, operated and run by local government, which will enable collaborative solutions across local government. A single waste disposal authority wholly owned and operated by local government will be created, aimed at delivering efficiencies in future procurement and contract-management activities.

The reform creates a new local government association that revitalises the representation of local councils; it enhances the Northern Ireland Audit Office to reflect its new role of monitoring the new comprehensive performance-management framework for local government; and that of the Northern Ireland Ombudsman to reflect its monitoring of a code of ethics for councillors. The report recognises that such a scale of change cannot be delivered overnight and that the transformation process will not end in May 2011 with the creation of the 11 new councils, but will continue up to 2015.

The report also recognises that change of such a scale and complexity does not happen without significant, up-front investment. PWC has taken a prudent approach to its estimated costs and the benefits of implementing the programme. Its estimates of implementation costs are likely to be on the high side, and, conversely, estimates of savings may be on the low side.

The report concludes that the programme delivery will require an up-front investment, at today's prices, of approximately £118 million over a five-year period. However, that investment will deliver projected savings of £438 million, again at today's prices, over a 25-year period. Under the preferred option that is set out in the report, the reform programme will begin to

realise a reduction in local government operating costs by 2013-14, with the break-even point on the return on the initial investment being reached by 2016-17. That makes economic sense, and it represents long-term value for citizens, ratepayers and taxpayers.

I shall pick out two of the recommendations and explore them in a little more detail. The first is the proposed single waste disposal authority. I pay tribute to the work of the three waste management groups in bringing us this far in dealing with our municipal waste. Nevertheless, the single waste disposal authority is a better model to take us on the remainder of that journey.

Reducing, reusing, recycling and managing waste effectively are the most important environmental challenges that we face. Unless we learn to recognise our waste for what it is — a valuable resource — and manage it effectively, we run the risk of damaging our environment and economy and of placing a huge financial burden on families throughout Northern Ireland as a result of European Union infraction fines that could amount to £500,000 a day.

It is my long-held view that the best way to meet those challenges is through a single waste disposal authority. There are three reasons for that. First, a single waste disposal authority would ensure that there is a strategic approach to waste management, and it would make the best use of that valuable resource. In addition, a single corporate body that is accountable to the new councils would establish a clear and transparent line of authority. Working on behalf of those councils, the authority would seek to reduce the amount of waste that is generated and to maximise reuse, recycling and recovery. It would also manage waste in a way that minimises its impact on the environment and on public health.

Secondly, a single waste disposal authority would ensure that ratepayers receive the best value for money, driving efficiencies in future waste management procurement procedures and in managing waste handling contracts. The three waste management groups have achieved efficiencies already, working on a subregional basis. A single waste disposal authority could build on those efficiencies by encouraging Northern Ireland-wide competition in the waste market.

Thirdly, a single waste disposal authority could promote the best and most practical environmentally sensitive solutions to waste management. Working on behalf of the councils, it would, by its nature, be responsive to the needs of individual councils and the ratepayers that they represent. It would have a responsibility to take on board the real concerns that people have about various types of waste treatment facilities and to promote the highest sustainability standards. At the same time, a single authority would

recognise our collective responsibility to ensure that Northern Ireland people are not faced with the environmental and financial consequences of failing to manage waste effectively.

It is too early to set out details of the structure of the single waste authority, but there are some obvious characteristics that I believe it should have. First and foremost, it would be a local government organisation that is accountable to, and includes representation from, the 11 councils. It would be a mandatory, joint committee of the councils, and it would be incorporated. Such an authority would take on the responsibilities of the existing waste management groups, including managing existing waste contracts and procuring new contracts as necessary. The body would have the necessary specialist expertise to ensure that it achieves the highest procurement standards, and it would be a centre of procurement excellence. Finally, it would be a lean structure that is designed to deliver efficient services with low overheads.

The proposal for a single waste disposal authority cannot, and will not, put current infrastructure procurement processes at risk in any way. The ongoing infrastructure development programme will proceed to completion, and, on its establishment, the contracts will move to the new authority.

4.45 pm

The second recommendation that I want to highlight is the proposed business services organisation. The report proposes the establishment of a business services organisation whose key characteristics are that it is wholly owned, operated and governed by local government and that should deliver a range of collaborative solutions across local government. There are a number of functional areas where it is likely that the councils will be able to gain financial efficiencies and service improvements through collaboration with other councils in the design and implementation of shared solutions.

It is recommended that the new business organisation should lead on the design and implementation of collaborative solutions for local government. Councils will be fully involved in the design of the most appropriate solution for each of the functional areas that is selected for collaborative delivery. There should be no fixed approach to the design of collaborative regional solutions across local government. Approaches to service delivery that should be adopted by the business service organisation include: a network of council-based resources; lead councils; centres of excellence; shared service centres; public sector solutions; and commercial providers. It will be the responsibility of the business service organisation to agree the most appropriate solution, or range of solutions, for the provision of each service and to

negotiate and agree with the 11 councils how and by what means that service might be delivered.

On the question of collaborative working, it strikes me that there are, potentially, areas to which the new councils could give early consideration, especially the new planning functions. I encourage stakeholders, in considering this report, to think about the possibility of collaboration in delivering citizen-facing planning functions.

The report's recommendations offer the opportunity to deliver a world-class, cutting-edge, effective, efficient and value-for-money system of local government in Northern Ireland. I strongly encourage Members, and all local government stakeholders, to consider the report fully and carefully and let me know their views by the end of November. I am particularly keen to hear from the political parties, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), the councils and the transition committees. I also welcome the views of other interested stakeholders.

This is a uniquely challenging change process to manage and deliver and no one involved underestimates the challenges. However, I am confident that, by working together, we will achieve our goals of creating 11 strong and effective councils in May 2011 and of transforming the way in which those councils and the local government sector operate by 2015. The Executive believe that the local government reform programme will yield real benefits for citizens, ratepayers and taxpayers. The reforms will produce better performing, stronger and more effective councils to deliver real improvements in services to local communities.

The economic appraisal published today clearly demonstrates how that can be achieved and what the benefits will be. That is what the programme is about, and that is what I intend to deliver.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mrs D Kelly): I thank the Minister for his statement and his commitment to strong, effective local government, which is something that all Members wish to secure. I thank him also for his remarks in relation to the work of the Committee. Through the programme of Bills that he intends to bring before the House over the year, he has given the Committee a very challenging programme of work. However, we look forward to ensuring that the legislation is robust and delivered in a timely fashion.

The costs of the implementation of the proposals will be a major concern for Committee members of all parties and are particularly concerning for ratepayers. Some £90 million has already been spent on the review of public administration (RPA). As I understand it, the Minister's statement referred to costs of £118 million

and £130 million; we need clarity as to which represents the total cost. Does that cost include the £90 million, or is it an additional cost? At what stage will the Minister seek commitment from the Finance Minister that those costs will be met, in part or in total, by the central Government, as opposed to by the local councils?

Given the challenge of the timescale, are the proposals predicated on the Executive's acceptance of the boundary change recommendations, and when will those be tabled at the Executive?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for her questions and for the commitment of the Environment Committee in helping to drive the programme through by dealing with the legislative process. I recognise that a heavy burden is being placed on the Committee, but it is the public's desire that the Assembly work hard. The Committee will have to deal with six Bills related to one particular issue, and with other Bills, as will I; that is a demonstration that the Assembly is working hard. There might not be anyone outside listening to that, but nonetheless it is a fact.

Of the £90 million that was referred to, £75 million was associated with health reform and has nothing to do with this programme. This programme has to do with local government. The cost is £118 million. We believe that that estimate is at the upper end, and the cost is likely to come in lower than that. The savings are identified at £438 million. Again, that is at the lower end, and we believe that the savings could be considerably greater. The difference between £438 million and £118 million is £320 million, and that is the benefit to the taxpayers and ratepayers.

The fact is that this is being hit up front, so how do we work out a scheme to deal with it? I will be in negotiations with the Finance Minister. However, what happened previously in other parts of the United Kingdom was that government loans were given to local authorities and, once they started to generate savings, those loans were paid back over a period at a preferential interest rate. That has to be negotiated. I will have my negotiations with the Minister and local government, and I will consult the House on the best way forward in respect of finance. Nothing is set in stone at this point, but I have indicated the route that was taken in the rest of the UK.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive statement and, indeed, for the very sensible road map that has been put forward for the progress of the RPA and service delivery.

Will the Minister take an open-minded approach to the structure of the three regional service organisations — the single waste authority, the business service organisation, and the local government association

— and any linkages between them, in order to ensure that service delivery is efficient and flexible? Also, when looking at the suite of services that could go into a business service organisation, will the Minister take cognisance of the evaluation of the experience in Scotland, which showed that a number of services did not lend themselves particularly well to shared services, but that some shared services were implemented very successfully?

The Minister of the Environment: If the reform is to work, it is essential that it be supported. Buy-in is needed from local government in order to gain its support. Local government will establish what it wants from a central business service office and will make the decision to buy those services for its district. That decision will be taken when there are identifiable and considerable savings to be made in the local government area. If local government chooses not to buy those services in and has greater costs for delivering them locally, it will be depriving its ratepayers financially by having to raise rates to meet the services, or it will be denying them of some other service.

There will be a common sense and logical approach to this. I believe that most local government organisations will want to buy into it, but we need to put it before them and for them to take that decision themselves.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement.

The Minister paid tribute to the three groups that are already there and have carried out much valuable work in implementing waste strategies and plans.

The Minister will also recognise that there is an element of doubt about the benefits of change, and there are concerns about the waste strategy in particular. In the Minister's statement, he said that PricewaterhouseCoopers' estimates of cash savings are likely to be on the low side, but, in the following paragraph, he said that there are projected savings over a 25-year period. However, I am not convinced.

Given that the report has no firm indications of any possible significant savings, will the Minister outline how the proposals for a single waste authority will facilitate the ongoing work of the three waste management groups and allow them the autonomy to deliver their individual strategies, meet pressing EU targets and avoid the EU infractions that he mentioned in his statement?

The Minister of the Environment: I paid a sincere tribute to the three waste management organisations that have delivered since they were established. We have been operating under a 26-council model. It would have been impossible for 26 councils to feed into a single waste authority, but it is possible for 11 councils to do that, and to do so reasonably. Members

have heard a fair degree of criticism over the past weeks about how much we spend on consultants, for example. We have three waste authorities, and each of those has had to buy in expertise from consultants. If the costs incurred by one of those authorities are multiplied by three, one will see the total cost to the public. Therefore, it is common sense to opt for a single waste disposal authority, with one procurement exercise and one management body. I recognise the fears that have been expressed by the Member, but, in establishing a single waste disposal authority, it is important that there is local influence and buy-in and that local areas are involved in the implementation of local decision-making processes that are right for the local area. Waste does not travel, and, for the most part, it has to be dealt with locally.

In establishing a regional authority rather than a subregional authority, let us not move away from a model that provides a strong local influence to the outcomes. I am happy to discuss the issue with the Committee for the Environment or with Members. It is imperative that we get the right model, which delivers for taxpayers and ratepayers, and one which provides waste solutions locally.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that questions should be reasonably short.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister acknowledge that the devolution of planning to local government will be crucial in enabling new councils to have a key local relevance? I am thinking about local planning decisions, local area plans and the development of community planning, and so forth. Will those roles be devolved by 2011? Given the decision not to have shadow councils, how will new councillors be trained in preparation for their first day when they will have to make such decisions?

The Minister of the Environment: Ninety-nine per cent of planning decisions will be made by local councils. Strategic decisions will continue to be made at planning headquarters, on behalf of the DOE, but all major and small planning applications will be dealt with by local authorities.

The training of staff is part of the programme of work that the transition committees will address. The DOE will assist the transition committees in providing them with support and advice on how best to train individuals, and we will seek to identify the best way forward in conjunction with the strategic leadership board, which, I understand, the Member will join soon. I recognise that, if councillors' functions are to be changed, there is a need to train councillors who wish to stand for re-election.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for his statement, and, as a member of the Committee for the Environment, I thank him for his compliment to the Committee. He

gave a considerable rundown of the work that has been achieved to date. Will he inform the House whether he will feel the need to add any financial issues to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill when it reaches its Consideration Stage? Given the work that still has to be done, is the Minister satisfied with the operation, so far, of all 11 transition committees?

There is a strong economic case for a single waste management organisation, as can be seen from the context in which the Minister set out his argument. Will the Minister assure the House that a single organisation will be more successful in meeting the needs of waste disposal than, for example, Arc21 has been when dealing with Belfast City Council?

5.00 pm

The Minister of the Environment: I understand what the Member said, but I do not wish to decry the work of Arc21.

The Department has been set high standards to be achieved across Northern Ireland. Indeed, just seven years ago, less than 5% of municipal waste was recycled, and today more than 30% is recycled, which is a sixfold increase and an indication of a success story. I am proud of the successes that have taken place, and I will not allow people to decry the work that has been done, or the achievements that have been made. The Department will drive the issue forward, and it will seek to find the best local solutions to waste generally and to municipal waste in particular.

Mr I McCrea: I also welcome the Minister's statement. He stated that the transition committees will train the new councillors. Will he outline any other roles that the statutory transition committees will have in the implementation of the reform programme?

The Minister of the Environment: The transition committees have a hugely important role to play, particularly as they move to a statutory footing.

Mr Ford wanted to know how well the transitional committees are working, and I can tell him that some are working very well, while others have some catching up to do. However, those committees recognise that, and as the change managers come into position, a great deal of that work will fall into place quickly.

One of the essential tasks that the transition committees will carry out is the appointment of the senior management teams of the new councils, including the new chief executives. They will also have the task of identifying the future income and expenditure of the new councils, and will set the rates for 2011-12. Effectively, in the last year of the existing council arrangements, the transition committees will be the body that will ensure the smooth transition from the 26-council model to the new 11-council model.

The responsibility that is being placed on the transition committees is huge. Those who are involved in that work are undertaking a significant role that will make a very real and positive contribution to creating a more efficient and better form of local government in Northern Ireland.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as a member of Ballymoney Borough Council.

I thank the Minister for his statement. How will he ensure that no potential contractors who are involved in the tendering process will be discouraged with the introduction of the new governance arrangements? Will he particularly give that assurance about the proposed single waste authority?

The Minister of the Environment: There is certainly no shortage of contractors who wish to become involved, which is evident from the bidding and procurement regimes. Whatever bids are made in a procurement exercise, and whoever is eventually successful in being awarded a contract will find that that contract, will be honoured. Furthermore, there will be no divergence from the contracts that are established.

A single management process will be established for a region as opposed to a subregion, but there is no hidden agenda. A subregional method has been used so far to award those contracts, but that process can be managed more efficiently on a regional basis, and that will reduce the cost to the ratepayers. There is no hidden agenda and contractors have nothing to fear.

Mr Craig: I also welcome the Minister's statement, and I declare an interest not only as a member of Lisburn City Council but as the chairman of the Castlereagh/Lisburn transition committee.

Will the Minister outline the timetable for the drawing up of legislation for a legislative transition committee? Furthermore, does the Minister have any plans to legislate for a transition committee for Belfast City Council, as its strategic policy and resources committee is attempting to carry out that function?

The Minister of the Environment: The establishment of the statutory committees is dealt with in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, which has just gone through Committee Stage. The legislation will be completed before Christmas, and we will be ready to move to the statutory transition committees in the new year.

As regards the Belfast transition committee, I have made some minor modifications to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner report, which will go to the Executive. On the basis of the Executive accepting those modifications and moving forward, we will be in a position to look at the Belfast transition committee subsuming substantial chunks of Castlereagh and

Lisburn council areas. Therefore, the ratepayers in those areas will have to be entitled to have their voices heard on the establishment of the new Belfast City Council, as it will not be the same Belfast City Council but a greatly expanded Belfast City Council. Ratepayers in both areas that will become part of that council area should have their voices heard and recognised through their public representatives.

Mr Kinahan: I congratulate the Minister for his commitment, and I congratulate both him and his Department for all their hard work.

I welcome the idea of a business service organisation and the answer he has already given on that. However, I need to tease that out a little bit more. Will the need for financial benefits in having some form of central expertise for the legal, insurance and consultancy work be within that business service organisation, and how does he see that working? Will pressure have to be put on councils to ensure that they do not do things in their own way? It looks as though the Minister is giving the organisation most of the tasks to do and that, therefore, councillors may be waiting another four years before they get the work that they are expecting.

The Minister of the Environment: I think that that will be the case. Indeed, areas such as human resources and payrolls, where there is no particular necessity for them to be carried out by the local area, could be added. Someone asked whether the organisation needs to be in Belfast, and I said no, it could be in Derrylin, because it provides and shares information, and, therefore, it does not need to be based in the capital city. Again, an exercise will be carried out to identify the best location.

There are huge advantages in all of this, although they will probably not be delivered by 2011, but some time thereafter; and this area will deliver significant cost benefits to the local authorities.

Mr Gallagher: The Minister has tied up a number of loose ends regarding the reorganisation of councils that have been outstanding for some time. Some questions arise as the result of the report and, in particular, about the implications for ratepayers. The PWC report refers to additional costs of £119 million and, indeed, underlines key works such as that the full additional costs will be passed from central government to local government. In other words, they will be passed to the ratepayers. Another page is devoted to the convergence of the rates in each of the new 11 councils. In Fermanagh's case, for example, it is noticeable that the rate will go up by around 20%, while that in Omagh will drop by about 20%.

If the Minister will ensure that the three new organisations at the centre are based in Fermanagh, it might help to offset the ill effects. If not, can he give

us an assurance for councils that will be negatively affected by the new rating arrangements? Will there be any other cushion from central government?

Mr Deputy Speaker: There were loads of questions there, Minister.

The Minister of the Environment: It was a very good speech. I have demonstrated how much I think of County Fermanagh: I was instrumental in delivering the Waterways Ireland headquarters to Enniskillen, so I would not necessarily oppose those three organisations being based in County Fermanagh.

I suspect that, when the Member says that the £118 million of costs will be a burden on the ratepayers, he would not want central government taking any of the £438 million of savings from local government. We need to facilitate the period between the costs kicking in and the savings kicking in so that no burden falls on the ratepayers in the intervening period and so that costs can be met through the savings made. That can be achieved, and there will be considerable long-term benefits as councils may not have to increase rates by so much because identifiable savings have been made as a result of what we are doing today.

The Member refers to an issue with which I suspect the Finance Minister will have to deal: in some council areas rates will have to increase considerably, while in others they will decrease considerably. My thought on that — I am not the Finance Minister — is that it would be impossible to deliver that in one year and that there must be a period of convergence that would be acceptable to ratepayers. That is something that my ministerial colleague Sammy Wilson will have to consider, but my immediate thought is that a new council could not be established successfully if ratepayers were being hit with a 20% rate rise in the first year of that council. That would be hugely detrimental to the entire process.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement; it is very appropriate. I declare an interest as a local government representative and also as a member of the Southern Waste Management Partnership (SWaMP), one of the regional waste management authorities. The Minister said that a single waste management authority would promote a more practical, environmentally sensitive solution, but it would also incorporate Arc21 and its incinerator into that solution. How can he equate those two things? SWaMP and the north-west group have been able to provide a solution that does not include incineration. It would be a retrograde step to amalgamate the three waste management groups into one.

Will the business services organisation that the Minister mentioned be a local-government-owned association or company? How will the waste management

organisation and the services organisation be constructed with regard to democratic accountability?

The Minister of the Environment: In relation to the waste management process, I would dearly love Northern Ireland to be able to reuse and recycle all its waste; however, I do not think we will be in that situation in the foreseeable future. There are other treatments, such as anaerobic digestion and mechanical biological treatments, but energy from waste has to be considered. The alternative to energy from waste is dumping waste in landfills, and that will come at a considerable cost to the taxpayer and ratepayer. There will be a charge of £72 per ton of waste that goes to landfill. We have to consider those situations and come to logical conclusions.

Were an energy-from-waste proposal to be the logical conclusion for a particular area or areas, then that decision would have to be taken. We do not need to make decisions today on the Floor of the House on how exactly we should handle our waste. We have a problem that must be dealt with, and we must deal with it and get our heads around it.

5.15 pm

The business services organisation that was referred to will be a council-owned organisation that will be answerable to local authorities, with representatives from each local authority. Given the nature of Northern Ireland, it must be ensured that each sector of Northern Ireland is represented on such bodies and that the organisations have cross-party membership in order to work effectively.

Mr B McCrea: I do not doubt the Minister's personal commitment to the project. I will be interested to see whether the projected savings can be trapped; 25 years is a fairly long time, even in politics, and we are being asked to spend £118 million to save £438 million. It is not yet entirely clear how that will be paid for in the early stages.

I take on board the Minister's suggestion that some discussion will take place with DFP, but surely ratepayers in one existing council will pay lower rates than those in another council, and I am interested to know how the Minister will deal with that disparity.

I note that the report mentions that some modifications may be made to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioners proposals. What does the Minister have in mind? Do those new proposals have cross-party support, and are there any knock-on implications for elections?

The Minister of the Environment: The Member raised a number of issues. He is right to say that 25 years is a long time; he may even have received his free TV licence by then and not only his free bus pass. We will have to negotiate with the Department of

Finance and Personnel to identify a solution to finding the £118 million. Central government may make the entire contribution or part of it, local government may make the full contribution, or it may be a combination. Loans, through which councils borrow at very favourable rates and start to pay back the loan when they are financially better off as a result of the savings that are made, may be sanctioned. All that must be worked out.

The Member also identified the issue of convergence. That is a separate and distinct issue that must be resolved among the councils. Mr Gallagher rightly identified that the largest difference is in the new Fermanagh/Omagh council area.

I took on board the lobbying that took place on behalf of the residents of Dunmurry on the boundary changes, through the submission that was made to the Executive. I identified a stronger boundary than the one that was included in the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner's proposal. Modest modifications have been made. For example, the civic offices in Castlereagh will remain in the Castlereagh council area, and the leisure development to the Dundonald side will be in the Belfast council area.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, if Members' questions get any longer, we will all receive free TV licences by the time we are finished.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for his substantial and detailed statement. I wish to follow up on a question that Tommy Gallagher asked. If the proposals go through, several new bodies will be created. Will the Minister guarantee that those bodies will be located outside Belfast?

The Minister of the Environment: I cannot guarantee that, because I will not be making that decision. That will be a decision for local government organisations. I would always give respect to democratically elected politicians and their ability to make their own decisions. I am not a dictator. I tend to listen to people and try to arrive at common-sense decisions. I will leave it to the good people who will set up that body and who will buy its services to identify the best location for its office.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement, but I found it to be rather disappointing, particularly its financial projections. Does the Minister not agree that savings of £17 million per annum fall far short of previous projections of savings that would be made from the reform of local government?

The decision to set up councils in 2011 and increase powers until 2015 sounds a bit like Prior's rolling devolution, which never rolled. Can the Minister give a timetable for the transfer of powers up to 2015?

The Minister of the Environment: I am sorry that the Member is disappointed. However, he is, apparently,

confused. Perhaps, that has led to some of his disappointment.

Powers will be transferred in 2011. However, some services that councils will buy in will not be available until later. Therefore, there is an interim period in which those councils must establish those services themselves in conjunction with DOE.

As regards savings, the Department has worked out prudent figures. I expect that ratepayers will be considerably better off. It is better to be prudent than to come out with silly, outlandish figures that, perhaps, were previously in the ether and which the Member has bought into. I never bought into those figures. I welcome the fact that the way forward is realistic.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. I wonder whether consideration was given to making efficiency savings under option 1 — maintaining the status quo. The Minister mentioned the increase in waste recycling from 6% to 30%, which clearly indicates the current local government system's positives. Has genuine thought been given to making efficiency savings in the current system, including, perhaps, the waste disposal proposals that have come out of that?

The Minister of the Environment: That was not part of work in which PricewaterhouseCoopers was engaged. Obviously, the councils have been around for 36 or 37 years. Joined-up working and identifiable savings were implemented when there were three subregional bodies to deal with waste. There has been joined-up local government in building control and environmental health, although those are possibly not two of the best examples of local authorities working together. Therefore, that period has allowed those efficiencies to be demonstrated, and PricewaterhouseCoopers did not have to do a stream of work on it.

The Department is moving ahead with the 11-council model that has been proposed. We want to identify the best way to proceed under that 11-council model.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the Minister's comprehensive presentation. It contains a number of interesting features. The single waste disposal authority, in particular, is attractive. However, the Assembly would certainly have to consider the details of it before it could give its approval.

The Minister mentioned a saving of £438 million over 25 years. I believe that that works out at around £17.5 million each year for local councils. Yet, upfront investment of £118 million is needed over five years, which represents around £23 million each year. Does being asked to pay a lot of money initially for little return, profit or saving over an extended period of 25 years not place an unfair burden on local government?

The Minister of the Environment: There is certainly a debate to be had on that matter. I have no doubt that local government will make that case, and it will be included in our discussions with the Finance Minister. If the House and the Executive decide that they wish to contribute to the matter, such a decision will be accommodated. However, Members should remember that the review of local government is not about cost savings exclusively; the transfer of functions is a considerable element of the reforms. I believe that the functions proposed for transfer to local government will be better delivered by local government; they will be delivered closer to the people, and that will give the councillors who represent those people greater powers and greater ability to represent the views of constituents at local level.

We have identified significant financial benefits. However, leaving finance to one side, it can be seen that the transfer of powers and functions is of even greater benefit to the local communities. That is a key element that we should never lose sight of. It is one thing to talk about money, but service delivery is the greater prize to be achieved. I encourage all my colleagues to go for the greater prize and to deliver a better service of local government to the local community at a lower cost. I hope that the House is with me on that.

Mr Lunn: In his own words, the Minister has scotched the rumours that have been rife for the past few months about what is going to happen in local government. It is good to have that clarification.

As most of the questions have been asked, I will take a risk and ask the Minister about something that was not in his statement but is of massive interest to a lot of elderly local councillors. I am sure that the Minister knows what is coming. Will he tell us anything about the severance arrangements for local councillors? I declare an interest.

The Minister of the Environment: I think that Trevor Lunn is far too young to be stepping down from local government, but if that is his choice, so be it.

For some time, I have been engaging with Paul Goggins, who is responsible for elections, by-elections, co-options and so on. We have been trying to come to an arrangement that would allow us to proceed with severance arrangements. Paul Goggins has put forward proposals that will be put to public consultation. The proposals will enable us to proceed with some form of severance arrangements in the next financial year; in other words, the last year of the existing councils. That is something that we will most likely proceed with.

I am sympathetic to the notion of severance pay for retiring councillors. The media questioned me earlier on that issue. Sometimes, I cannot get over the level of resentment towards giving a retiring councillor

£15,000 or £20,000, and yet nobody cares about senior officers on councils getting £200,000 or £300,000.

I have huge respect for people who served in local government with, on many occasions, very few responsibilities, at great risk to themselves, and at great loss to their families over a long period of time. Many of those people, across the parties, are the salt of the earth and did it purely for public service. Given that almost a quarter of council places are being lost, I am fully convinced that many of the councillors who wish to retire, having given such good service, are as entitled to some form of compensation as the senior directors who will be losing their jobs as a result of the review of local government. I make no apologies for that.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Invest NI

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 wish to speak will have five minutes.

5.30 pm

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the criticism of the performance of Invest NI reported in the Independent Review of Economic Policy; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure that any future spending by Invest NI is distributed in an equitable and accountable manner.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the recent announcement on the creation of jobs in Derry and Belfast, and I congratulate all those who were involved in bringing about that much-needed breakthrough in job creation.

The Independent Review of Economic Policy provides clear evidence of the need for a new approach in developing the economy. It also outlines the failings of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and, particularly, those of Invest NI.

Both inside and outside the Chamber, my party has expressed its concern consistently about Invest NI's performance. We have highlighted regional investment inequalities and uncovered the spending of tens of millions of pounds by Invest NI on the rental of empty properties and on its new Belfast headquarters. That amounts to at least £115 million of public money being spent over 25 years through a public-private partnership arrangement.

The report also illustrates a clear need to push on the small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) sector and to grow the export potential of existing businesses. However, although there is a need to drive forward innovation, particularly R&D, I am concerned that the report recommends phasing out support for business expansion. That is a concern, because there is space to move smaller businesses into our export market.

Growing the economy and tackling poverty and disadvantage are two of the key pillars in the Programme for Government and investment strategy. All opportunities must be used to drive both those pillars together. In a recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, it was stated that £7 an hour was the minimum wage

necessary for a socially acceptable standard of living. However, in the North of Ireland, half the population falls below that standard.

We need to be clear about how we use public money to grow the economy, but that cannot be dealt with in isolation from the need to keep people in employment and to create jobs. For decades, the focus of Invest NI and its predecessors has been on drawing investment into the greater Belfast area. That approach has failed people in the north-west, west of the Bann and even in certain areas of Belfast.

When the west Belfast economic task force published its report, Invest NI was known as the IDB. The IDB's appalling record on job creation was cited in that document. A number of recommendations related to the investment body, including its being assigned to take a lead role or to act as a funding channel for certain intergrated development fund (IDF) projects. The task force recommended the creation of an enterprise ark, or an enterprise action zone, throughout the task force area. The idea was to have a range of special incentives from government, especially Invest NI, for investing in that area.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member give way?

Ms J McCann: I want to get through my speech; I am sure that the Member will have plenty of time to make his comments.

Invest NI has spent £10.3 million on landscaping the former Mackie site, yet it still has no strategy for generating employment and inward investment there. The former Mackie site is 12.5 acres, and there are another 36 acres in the hands of Invest NI throughout west Belfast, yet almost half of that land lies vacant.

Over a three-year period, west Belfast received the lowest number of offers of assistance in the Six Counties and nearly 5% of Invest NI's investment. That was despite several of the wards in the area being in the top 10 indices for social and economic deprivation and despite one third of Belfast's population living in the area. That is just another example of how Invest NI has failed people in disadvantaged areas.

The Barnett review identifies relatively high levels of selective financial assistance. Despite that, there are huge failures. I am sure that many people will question the value of 30% of Invest NI's grants going to just 10 companies and of almost 50% of assistance going to just 30 companies, many of which have received support year on year. Invest NI needs to move beyond the world of favoured clients to provide more professional support to all businesses.

For too long, Invest NI has failed to provide value for money. Too often, the promise of jobs has been grossly inflated, and companies have pocketed grants and given little in return. Many companies, such as

Visteon, Seagate and Valence, received grants from Invest NI only to up and leave when they found cheaper labour elsewhere.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is important; no one here is suggesting otherwise. However, small and medium-sized local businesses are equally important, including those that operate in the social economy sector. The economic downturn has affected the anticipated level of FDI. Therefore, given the present adverse conditions, it is even more important that small and medium-sized businesses and social economy enterprises be given the resources that they need to sustain themselves in the short term and to develop and grow in the longer term. We need a new and innovative way of thinking if we are to sustain existing businesses and jobs and offset further job losses. Although a mix of different jobs is necessary, too many jobs have been low-waged and insecure. That has done nothing to raise living standards or tackle poverty and inequality at the heart of our economy.

I welcome the report's recognition of the importance of the social economy and its potential to reduce deprivation and increase labour force participation in disadvantaged areas. We should encourage local investment opportunities, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and the social economy sector. Such investment will not only sustain and grow the economy, but develop communities. However, the budget and resources that have been allocated to the social economy sector by Invest NI do not reflect that.

The social entrepreneurship programme, which will be delivered in the three years up to March 2012, has been allocated just under £3 million for 2008-2012. The social economy fund, which is a special initiative aimed at the long-term unemployed in west Belfast and greater Shankill, runs alongside that programme. Through that, just under £4 million will be allocated to the social economy sector here. The fact that €40.8 million was allocated to such initiatives in the South of Ireland in 2007 alone and that Scotland has allocated £30 million between 2008 and 2011 shows how little is given to the social economy sector.

Regional disparities on inward investment and social and economic inequality in certain areas of the North, particularly west of the Bann and in west and north Belfast, are clear indicators that the current economic policy is not delivering for large sections of the population that are in most need. Those areas are consistently worst served by Invest NI. Those inequalities must be challenged and prioritised and must become the focus of corrective action. Setting targets and measuring outcomes is an important element of performance assessment; it is also a recognised and accepted practice in reducing inequality and alleviating deprivation.

A raft of other measures in the gift of the Executive, such as their economic and social policies, will lift people out of poverty and give them the standard of living to which they are entitled. They have an opportunity to maximise social and employment opportunities for everyone through, for instance, their public procurement processes, which will secure jobs and create new employment opportunities for those in most need. They can relocate public sector jobs in order to help workers who have to travel and to help to develop rural economies.

More accountability is required in public spending to ensure that the most deprived members of society receive the same economic and social equality of opportunity as everyone else. Given the huge amounts of public money that Invest NI spends, there must be an onus on the Department to ensure that it is spent in an equitable and accountable manner. I support the motion.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I welcome the opportunity to speak about Professor Barnett's report as Chairperson of the Committee. The Committee has yet to reach a collective view on the report. However, it has indicated that it takes the report seriously and will, in due course, examine it carefully and come to a considered view.

It has to be accepted that the report contains criticisms of Invest Northern Ireland. Those are constructive criticisms, however, and they must be viewed in the round rather than in a selective way. Professor Barnett gave very useful evidence to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in which he emphasised that the real problem was the failure to bridge the productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The closing of that gap is central to the Programme for Government, in which it is regarded as a particular target that ought to be achieved. Professor Barnett made that point as part of his general critique of Invest Northern Ireland.

Professor Barnett put tremendous emphasis on the need for investment in research and development, which, he said, was vital to the future of Northern Ireland's economic expansion. He said that working on a programme-based approach offers:

"a defence mechanism against audits".

However, he also said that:

"change is required",

not because Invest Northern Ireland is not equitable or accountable, but:

"because of the government structures that have been imposed on DETI and Invest NI."

Professor Barnett told the Committee that under such circumstances, we:

"should not be surprised that people are very cautious when making decisions."

That is one of the problems that he highlighted. The over-emphasis on auditing has led to the development of a risk-averse culture. Professor Barnett said that in order to develop and expand business, people must take risks. There is a tension between auditing and accountability and taking reasonable risks to develop our economy. We must get that into perspective.

Professor Barnett told the Committee that it has a role in ensuring accountability and that we, as politicians, ought to take that role seriously. I agree with that, but the Committee must also exercise its responsibility in a balanced and reasonable way so that it encourages people into economic activity and developing business schemes that will attract high-value jobs to Northern Ireland. It is the lack of high-value jobs that creates the productivity gap. That is not to say that Invest Northern Ireland has not attracted jobs or made investment. It has invested £1 billion and has produced 28,000 new jobs while safeguarding 15,000 existing jobs. It has also attracted over £2.4 billion in investment.

That is a reasonable sketch of what Professor Barnett's review of Invest Northern Ireland put forward. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Moutray: I begin by commending the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, for commissioning the review of Invest Northern Ireland. She has demonstrated great prudence and forethought on what is economically best for Northern Ireland. Furthermore, I have no hesitation in welcoming the publication of the independent review of economic policy. I believe that it is important, at this stage, to place on record our thanks to Professor Barnett and his colleagues on the review panel, who worked tirelessly on a wide range of highly important and complex issues. Compiling the review was a mammoth task, and one that has been carried out at a time when we face immediate economic challenges, as well as looking to the future.

5.45 pm

The report is highly detailed and wide ranging. Its 58 recommendations are direct and forthright, and should doubtless be addressed. If we as a Government are to meet the challenging Programme for Government priorities and targets on the economy, it is vital that DETI and Invest NI are as efficient and effective as possible.

It is important that the report is given full and balanced consideration by the Minister and the Executive as a whole. By commissioning a short period of consultation on the content of the report, the

Minister demonstrated her commitment to take on board and address the issues that it raised. That will allow stakeholders and other interested parties to take the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing debate on how the Government should respond to the report as we seek to grow a dynamic and innovative economy that will improve the living standards of everyone in the Province.

The media has doubtless played a major role in sensationalising the issue. Many media reports were at odds with the balanced tone of the review. Some in the media have hijacked and misrepresented the findings and conclusions of the report. Although I acknowledge the criticism of the performance of Invest Northern Ireland, I do not believe that it calls into question its accountability standards, nor the equitability of its distribution of funding at any point; both of which are implied in the text of the motion. The report does not raise any question of accountability; in fact, Professor Barnett suggests awarding Invest Northern Ireland further autonomy to allow more flexibility and responsiveness to the business community, which will be welcomed by businesses.

The report gives much food for thought on improvements that can be made in Invest Northern Ireland. I do not need to remind the House that there has been considerable criticism of Invest Northern Ireland over the years, but not all of it has been justified; indeed, some of it has been far from justified. Some criticism has been driven by other political agendas. However, the report commends Invest Northern Ireland on its positive contribution to the Province. The report provides important and constructive insights, not only into Invest Northern Ireland and DETI but into the broader economic issues.

I welcome the fact that the Minister, the chairperson and the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland welcomed the report, and are already progressing some of the suggested recommendations. The report comes at a time of considerable change for the local economy. If there are green shoots of recovery, they are very fragile and barely visible. We need to do all that we can to ensure that our economic strategies and policies are efficient and effective.

I do not support the motion. The report provides terms of reference and recommendations that we can glean and learn from. The review covered the period between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2008, much of which was during the time of direct rule. The report shows that direct rule had a detrimental effect. I am glad that we now have a local Minister in situ who is committed and willing to take on board and address the issues that were raised in the report.

I call on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to report to the Assembly, after careful and

balanced consideration of the review, on how she intends to implement its findings following the public consultation, and on her discussions with Executive colleagues.

Mr Cree: I thank the Members for tabling the motion, although I am afraid that Sinn Féin has presented a rather confused argument that does little justice to the independent review of economic policy report, the economic reality on the ground or the needs of the business community throughout Northern Ireland.

In addition to proposing a motion on a detailed report that is out for consideration, Sinn Féin has shoehorned its longstanding issue with Invest Northern Ireland into a discussion on that report. The report provides clear evidence that Invest Northern Ireland needs to reform; it puts forward concise arguments that many of its practices are outdated and not reflective of best practice. However, Sinn Féin's jump from those findings to a policy whereby Invest Northern Ireland should distribute money based on geographical equity is at best naive and at worst a hindrance to the development of Northern Ireland's economy as a whole.

Much of Sinn Féin's argument would have been better placed at the door of the Minister for Regional Development. He is in charge of the regional development strategy, which provides greater potential for our infrastructure to be developed in a way that makes it more attractive for businesses to set up and flourish in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is a small place, with one medium-sized city that will continue to be the centre of economic growth. All Invest Northern Ireland's investment must be based on objective criteria that are linked to businesses' potential to flourish and increase productivity, employment and exports.

I welcome the report's focus on the productivity gap, and I was pleased by the Chairperson's reference to that. We have been successful in creating employment in the past decade. However, that employment has often been at relatively low wages and created as the result of unsustainable investment that can leave Northern Ireland as quickly as it arrived; call-centre jobs are one example. The report is right that we must make greater investment in research, development and innovation if we are to bridge the productivity gap. The report also confirms what many of us have known for a long time: Invest Northern Ireland has continued a dated industrial development policy, and the selective financial assistance benefits too few client companies and does not help to develop a dynamic and competitive economy.

The report is rightly critical of Invest Northern Ireland's bureaucratic structures. I welcome its statement:

"High-performing investment agencies have cultures that are responsive, fast moving and work to overcome bureaucracy. They are outcome, and not process, focused."

It is time that Invest Northern Ireland became more entrepreneurial and more responsive to business needs. Northern Ireland has come a long way in the past 10 years, and we have made excellent economic progress. However, we must come to terms with the fact that we will not always be able to plead special status, and nor should we want to do that. We must realise that public spending will be extremely tight in the current economic climate. Our private sector must take up some of the slack, and that means bold reform and taking our opportunities.

We have excellent universities, and we produce innovative and brilliant businesspeople. We must give them the opportunities and support that they need to flourish in Northern Ireland. As Wombat Financial Software Ltd has proven, successful, innovative SMEs will deliver the type of inward investment that we need. The Minister must be bold when she makes decisions on the report. It is not an exaggeration to say that Northern Ireland is at a crossroads. We can move forward and participate more fully in the UK and world economy and adapt to take advantage of the economic opportunities that the recession presents. Alternatively, we can continue on the same course.

The report provides the Minister with an excellent opportunity to lay the foundations of a change in the economic vision for Northern Ireland, and I hope that she will not waste it. I am glad that Sinn Féin is not in charge of DETI, because its opinions are 10 times more outdated and counterproductive than Invest Northern Ireland's have ever been. Although the report still requires much detailed analysis, I welcome it and oppose the motion.

Mr Lunn: I thank Sinn Féin for proposing the motion. As a small society, Northern Ireland will always be more dependent on inward investment than many other places. However, the report poses important questions about Invest NI's performance that need to be answered, and I welcome the fact that the Assembly has a chance to do that.

Like others, the Alliance Party sought to amend the motion, but the Speaker must have decided that there were too many amendments and that he would not take any of them, so we must judge the motion on its merits. Unfortunately, the Alliance Party has difficulty in supporting the motion, and that difficulty comes down to the words "equitable and accountable" and the context in which they are used; Mr Moutray made a similar point. Including those words seems to indicate that Invest NI has not operated in an equitable and accountable manner in the past. However, I believe that it did act in such a manner, so I do not think that we can level that accusation at it.

Attracting inward investment and locating it in one place rather than in another is only a small part of

tackling poverty here. Jobs are already located in areas of high deprivation: the Gasworks site is a classic example. However, those jobs are frequently inaccessible to the most deprived people who are living in the communities nearby.

Of the 20 most deprived wards in Northern Ireland, 15 are located within two and a half miles of Belfast city centre and a further three are within a mile and a half of the centre of Londonderry. The Shankill Road, Falls Road and New Lodge areas are among the most deprived 1% of communities here, yet all have thousands of jobs at all skill levels on their doorsteps. At the same time, hundreds of people from those communities travel daily to work in the greater Belfast area and beyond.

Our most deprived communities deserve access to good jobs, but that means more than just creating jobs. We have all heard the stories about companies in north and west Belfast that attract the bulk of their workforce from areas further afield. To give our poorest communities the future that they deserve, we must remove the barriers preventing people from taking up work. As well as more jobs, people need better skills, easier routes back into education, better childcare and better transport. For many mothers seeking to return to work, affordable childcare is a massive barrier, and it is often in the most deprived areas that it is most difficult to find.

Another serious problem is the weakness in Northern Ireland's public transport system. It is often good enough along radial routes in the main towns and cities but very poor at their outskirts. With so much work now being based in edge-of-town industrial estates, people are in a catch-22 situation: they need a car to access work, but they need work to be able to afford to purchase and run a car. Although Invest NI plays a crucial part in tackling those problems, it is only part of the solution. The Alliance Party's concern is that the motion reads as if locating jobs in areas of deprivation is the magic bullet that will eradicate poverty overnight. To tackle poverty, we need joined-up action across government; job creation is only the first step.

Some of Invest NI's failures must be acknowledged, and Members mentioned many today. I am thinking of Visteon and Valence Technology; indeed, I could go back as far as DeLorean. I know that those failures were the fault of Invest NI's predecessor companies, but they were certainly fairly disastrous projects. Decisions were taken in times of pressure and very high unemployment, and there was a fear that jobs and investment would be lost. At times, I think that decisions were taken too hastily.

The report's criticism of Invest NI seems to be balanced and fairly constructive. The job of Invest NI or any inward investment agency will always involve risk. Risk sometimes means failure, but it can also mean more reward. We cannot have one without the

other. The number of jobs that Invest NI created, which Ms McCann called appalling but which I do not think was that bad, would be even fewer if Invest NI took a really cautious approach in everything it did. Indeed, it might have some money left at the end of the year: that would be the reward for caution. We need to approach the report even-handedly, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. However, the Alliance Party will have to oppose the motion.

Mr Hamilton: If we are to grow the vibrant and dynamic economy that we all want and, indeed, have set as our primary goal in the Programme for Government, then our economic development agency and our economic development policy must be fit for purpose.

6.00 pm

That is why I welcomed the review that the Minister initiated some time ago on Invest Northern Ireland and the wider economic development policy. Although that recently published report is critical about some aspects of Invest Northern Ireland, it is also far-reaching, challenging and comprehensive, in that it deals with a wide range of issues. It proves that, in the pursuit of the goal of developing a more high-tech and productive economy, there are no sacred cows or untouchables. To achieve that aim, to which everyone should aspire, nothing will escape scrutiny. If only every Minister in the Executive would do the same by tackling sacred cows and untouchables in their respective Departments, the Assembly would be firing on all cylinders.

It is easy to attack Invest Northern Ireland in the middle of a downturn when times are tough. Despite that, massive investment has been made in recent days to create high-tech and productive well-paid jobs. Invest Northern Ireland must get credit for that good work. I do not subscribe to the mass hysteria in the media and from some in the House that the £1 billion invested by Invest Northern Ireland over the past 10 years was wasted. Some 28,000 jobs were created and 15,000 were secured, many of which were high-tech. Even those jobs deemed to be less high-tech suited people with certain skill sets and may have been an improvement on their previous employment.

I am pleased with many aspects of the report, such as the freedom to operate. If we want a dynamic economy, we must allow our economic development agency to be dynamic. It should not be constrained or overburdened by bureaucracy. If we want that agency to take risks with investment, we must remove its shackles and allow it to take the same risks that we expect from businesses.

It is good that the report focuses on innovation and R&D. It also mentions the important planning process on which much work is ongoing. It mentions the realignment of the education system, which is a critical

element of the economic development policy. The report suggests the creation of a small-business unit, which would be useful, because Invest Northern Ireland has lost its focus on small businesses. I do not know what name could be conjured up for that new unit — LEDU, perhaps?

Members would expect me to be enthusiastic about the proposal to create a Department of the economy by merging DETI and elements of the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL). One Department, rather than two, would focus on the development of the economy. Elements of other Departments could be merged into that Department of the economy to create a centralised focus on economic development, rather than the current hotchpotch.

I also oppose the motion, principally because I agree with Mr Lunn about its use of the phrase “equitable and accountable manner”. When Sinn Féin uses such a phrase, it is a code for investment in certain areas of Northern Ireland. It is a call not for widespread investment, but for investment in specific areas in which, strangely, Sinn Féin is well represented, such as West Belfast and Foyle. Sinn Féin misses the fundamental point that no company can be forced to invest in a particular place. You cannot have a factory —

Mr P Maskey: I have been going through information provided by the Research and Library Service on the subject. In connection with what Mr Hamilton said about investment in particular areas, the research includes figures for the expenditure on job creation in the Belfast constituencies: £7·6 million in North Belfast, £9·36 million in West Belfast, £60-odd million in East Belfast and £43 million in South Belfast. The total planned investment for East Belfast is £711 million, whereas the figure for West Belfast is only £41 million. That is why Sinn Féin is complaining.

Mr Hamilton: I thought that the Member was a Belfast man and would, therefore, appreciate that East Belfast includes the harbour estate and that South Belfast takes in the city centre, in which a sizeable amount of investment will be made. Sinn Féin is whingeing and whining about which areas receive investment.

I could make an even more conclusive and convincing case than the Member because, in my Strangford constituency, the investment assistance per capita is habitually 10 times lower than that in West Belfast or Foyle. I could make a convincing case that investment in my area is lower but I will not, because I am mature enough to realise that a job in Belfast, whether it is in South or East Belfast, is good for my constituents. Members from North Belfast and West Belfast should be grateful that they have on their doorsteps one of the biggest development opportunities in the whole of

Northern Ireland; namely, the Titanic Quarter. I wish that that were in my constituency.

One cannot seek to sectarianise investment in Northern Ireland. Investors will go where they want to. If there are problems attracting jobs to certain areas, that is an issue in respect of skills, education and abilities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Hamilton: It is those issues that should be tackled, not what Invest Northern Ireland is doing, because, in many respects, it is doing a very good job in very difficult circumstances.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is appropriate to welcome the report because it has developed some very interesting and challenging ideas. It is a recognition that we can change. I particularly welcome the fact that senior executives of Invest NI have acknowledged the report and have said that they will not be complacent and they are not averse to recommendations and changes that would help them to improve their performance.

My party is not here to bash Invest NI. It is a soft target, but the reality is that we welcome yesterday's jobs announcement. In the present economic circumstances, we could not do otherwise. However, it is fair and appropriate to reflect on the quality of jobs that went to Belfast, which were high-end jobs, whereas the jobs that went to Derry — although they are welcome in the circumstances of economic underdevelopment — are low-end, call-centre-type jobs that are mobile and unreliable. I hope that the Minister understands the issue, particularly as she represents a constituency that is at the extreme end of this region, in relation to the Belfast economic centre.

I understand all the arguments about the metropolitan pull. Many economies suffer from the centrist approach that is sometimes reflected in relation to capital cities and seats of Government, etc. We are clearly not of that scale, but it is important to note that, in many instances, Administrations have been forced to reverse that trend because the so-called metropolitan pull had the effect of overheating the economy, with very significant stresses and strains put on infrastructure, transportation and the environment, etc.

Two weeks ago, when the Minister announced the six-week consultation period, I expressed some disappointment because I thought that an opportunity had been missed. I am not overly critical because the consultation process will provide some interesting feedback. Invest NI excites a lot of diverse opinion and, similarly, the report will attract different arguments and perspectives. It will be important to hear those. However, value would have been added to that process had the Minister, guided and supported by the views of her senior officials, provided some of the preliminary

responses. That would have helped the consultation process because it is an opportunity for a strategic review.

The issue that we have to address is the question of regional disparity. It is not a question of saying that there must be investment in a particular area to the detriment of another. It is, in fact, a matter of looking at the remit of Invest NI because the existing remit does not contain any requirement — policy or otherwise — for Invest NI to address that question. Instead, it attempts to approach the issue on the basis of the entire North being regarded as a travel-to-work area for the centre of Belfast. That is unfair and creates many injustices.

In relation to the discussion that we have previously had, and to which we will return, about the relocation of Departments, there are many people, including —

Mr O'Loan: I note what the Member has said. Does he agree with the report that, when attracting jobs to disadvantaged areas:

“It is therefore important to allow companies the scope to locate where they can operate most profitably.”?

That is in chapter 3. Chapter 5 goes on to state that, under such circumstances:

“public policy can, and should, help to mitigate these shortcomings.”

Does the Member agree with me, and will he ask the Minister to look again at her departmental colleague's dismissal of the Bain report on the location of public sector jobs?

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Member and I accept the point that he made. It was pretty much what I was leading to. We have to consider the value that is added by stimulating economic development in areas that have not always enjoyed such a stimulus. The economy receives an added value from the development of a wider reach in the economic opportunities that present themselves.

I appeal for the Minister to use the report to give Invest NI the remit and direction that allows it to address, and be measured on the effectiveness of how it addresses, the question of regional disparity. In the modern economic era, the distances involved and recent telecommunication advances have spelt the death of distance in the North, when it comes to location. A proactive policy would bear a lot of good for us all.

Mr Bresland: The motion raises important economic issues. However, the way in which it is worded raises serious doubts about the motives of the Members who tabled it. Invest Northern Ireland is far from a perfect organisation, but the Barnett report does not condemn it. It is a pity that so much press reporting of the Barnett report was negative and over the top.

The motion adopts the same sort of negative approach. Reading between the lines, I am not sure whether the motion's proposers or their party are fully committed to developing the Northern Ireland economy. They would much prefer to see an all-Ireland approach. That is one reason why they are not happy with Invest Northern Ireland.

No organisation on this earth is perfect. I commend my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for establishing the independent review of her own Department's performance and that of Invest Northern Ireland. By doing so, she has shown commitment to ensuring that the key players in the economy are as effective and efficient as possible.

The Barnett report is helpful, balanced and timely. I note that it has been welcomed by the chairman of Invest Northern Ireland, Stephen Kingon, and its chief executive, Alistair Hamilton. I also note that Mr Hamilton has said that some recommendations in the Barnett report are already being implemented, which is good.

I fully accept that Invest Northern Ireland has not always delivered and that some of the criticism has been justified. There has been too much dependence on call-centre jobs that are here today and gone tomorrow. My own constituency of West Tyrone, and the north-west in general, have traditionally suffered from high rates of unemployment, and we need more jobs.

However, in line with the targets in the Programme for Government, those jobs must last and add value to the economy. Invest Northern Ireland needs to focus much more on innovation and on research and development. That will help to increase productivity and to ensure that we are ready to take full advantage of the economic recovery, when it comes.

Many criticisms of Invest Northern Ireland relate to the period before restoration of the Assembly and devolution in May 2007. I am confident that change for the better is already occurring. I oppose the motion.

6.15 pm

Mr McFarland: I share my colleague Mr Cree's concern that the motion is more a reflection on Sinn Féin's dodgy political ideology than a considered reflection on a worthwhile report. Indeed, it is questionable why we are having the debate, because the report is out for consultation. Perhaps it deserves a thorough and detailed analysis before receiving a public judgement.

Sinn Féin and, in particular, the Member for Foyle Ms Martina Anderson's accusation is that Invest Northern Ireland routinely fails the north-west region. The premise of that argument is that Invest NI should not allocate investments on objective criteria that are based on potential economic success. Rather, there should be some sort of state command and control

policy. Ms Anderson recently outlined that position when she said:

“This report provides further evidence of the need for a complete restructuring of Invest NI and strict direction on its functions if we are to change the laissez faire approach it presently has to developing the economy.”

That quotation reveals many things. First, it shows us that Sinn Féin has not even read the report. If it had, it would have noted one of the report's major recommendations:

“Invest NI should be allowed more freedom to operate, with DETI having less involvement in operational matters, to enable the organisation to be more entrepreneurial and responsive to business needs.”

The report also recommends that:

“Invest NI should disengage its direct involvement with venture capital (VC) funds. Rather than direct participation in the market, Invest NI should act as a facilitator between companies and VCs.”

One the one hand, the report says that Invest NI must be much less controlled by government and set free to foster organic activity. On the other hand, Sinn Féin says that Invest NI must be strictly directed to invest in certain places and, logically, no doubt, in certain businesses. To follow Sinn Féin's line would sound the death knell for Northern Ireland's economy and its economic prospects.

The report makes some incisive and clear observations and some timely and necessary recommendations, and I congratulate the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for commissioning it. Nevertheless, after consultation, I hope that she acts decisively and courageously to implement its recommendations. Although the report's remit was limited, it creates a potential blueprint for a new vision and an innovative direction for Northern Ireland.

The report envisages a reformed Invest NI, which should:

“concentrate support mainly to small firms and to projects with a high Innovative content”.

I welcome that shift of emphasis, and I hope that such firms develop further throughout Northern Ireland.

I share my colleague's view that linking innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into export markets will attract foreign direct investment (FDI) more readily than any number of expensive trade forums. Innovation and R&D are the most important long-term productivity drivers in Northern Ireland. If we are to compete in world markets, we surely have to become world market leaders. Institutional change is needed in Invest NI and in DETI. However, I am glad that that change is not being driven by Sinn Féin. I welcome the report, which provides us with a genuine opportunity, but I reject the motion.

Dr McDonnell: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. At the outset, I thank the Minister of Enterprise,

Trade and Investment for requesting this important review, which was long overdue. I also thank Professor Richard Barnett for his analysis and for compiling the subsequent recommendations. Furthermore, I congratulate the Minister for her pragmatic and businesslike approach since taking up the Enterprise, Trade and Investment portfolio. She brings a sense of robustness to the position that is long overdue, and I hope that she will long continue to do so.

As Members will have discovered from my colleague's speech, the SDLP warmly welcomes the publication of the ‘Independent Review of Economic Policy’, which rightly points out that productivity levels in Northern Ireland lag seriously behind those in Britain, while the gap in living standards continues to widen and deepen.

The SDLP believes that it is the responsibility of the Executive and various delivery agencies, including Invest Northern Ireland, to reduce the gaps in productivity and living standards. To a large extent, they have failed to do so. They fail to do so, in spite of Northern Ireland being a relatively attractive place for investors. We have competitive wages, a skilled labour force and generous incentives on offer. Yet, over the years, we have failed to significantly increase productivity levels.

To a large extent the impact of Invest Northern Ireland has been badly hampered by red tape, over-bureaucratic bureaucrats and a risk-averse approach. Equally, to be honest, Northern Ireland has had some resounding successes. One has to go back only a few days to the announcement that the New York Stock Exchange is to bring some 400 high-end jobs to our city. Invest Northern Ireland was critical in securing that investment, which is good for the whole city, not just economically, but in the confidence that it creates and the image that it portrays about the investment potential here. Invest Northern Ireland can repeat that success on a firmer and more frequent footing. However, that will require that the recommendations be implemented. Invest Northern Ireland needs urgent restructuring, reform and much greater autonomy. That is just a summary of the recommendations.

The SDLP has long called for greater clarity and co-ordination in the responsibility for, and delivery of, economic policy, which is why we strongly support the creation of a cross-departmental standing Committee on economic development, as was recommended in the report. Public finances are tight and will get tighter. EU state aid rules mean that we will steadily lose the ability to provide the financial assistance that brings work and business to Northern Ireland. Therefore, Invest Northern Ireland will have to be more focused on how, and on what, it spends. As the independent review points out, the key focus should be on attracting,

developing and retaining high-value-added investment, both indigenous and foreign direct investment.

If we are to attract higher-value-added jobs and address the productivity gap, which is a key objective of the Programme for Government, our priority should be to support innovation and R&D. It is only via that route that we can begin to raise private sector productivity levels, ensuring better wages and a better standard of living for our people.

I am confident that, in the very capable and dynamic hands of the new chief executive, Alastair Hamilton, Invest Northern Ireland (INI) will rise to the challenges that we face. However, to do that he needs the full support of the House; half-hearted support is not enough. We must work with him, not against him or casually in the background.

It is important that the focus on economic and business development should not be to the exclusion of our local small and medium-sized enterprises. Small indigenous enterprises must also be supported. They need assistance and targeted training programmes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Dr McDonnell: There is much room for discussion on what is the best way to deliver such programmes.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún agus lena rá go bhfuil mé an-sásta go bhfuil muid ag plé an ábhair thábhachtaigh seo inniu.

I support the motion, and I appeal to Members not to react in knee-jerk fashion to it simply because it is a Sinn Féin motion. If they listen to what is being said, Members will find that this is not an INI-bashing session. We strive to critically appraise and analyse INI.

The backdrop to the motion is the recent report on the work of INI by Professor Richard Barnett. The report has a particular focus, which other Members have touched on in their contributions. In my opinion, the report provides an opportunity to critically appraise the work of INI in tackling regional disparity and economic disadvantage. It also provides an opportunity for the Minister to bring forward a focused and strategic approach in delivering the pledge in the Programme for Government that undertakes:

“to develop new and innovative measures that will address existing patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and target resources and efforts towards those in greatest objective need.”

The Minister for Regional Development has a role in that, and one of the first things that he did was to call for a review of the regional development strategy. However, it is not the sole remit of one Minister. Indeed, as far as I am aware, all four parties in the Executive signed up to it. The Programme for Government states that all Government agencies should play a constructive

role in honouring that pledge. I believe that INI has a leading role in assisting to make that pledge a reality.

However, where we have to be critical is that, as the report highlights, any objective analysis of INI shows that it fails to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of that pledge. In its defence, INI will state — as it has stated at every presentation that I have heard it make — that its remit is to sell or market the North as a single entity and marketplace; therein lies the problem for my party and me. As long as that remains the strategic framework within which INI operates, it will have a curtailed and limited impact in tackling regional disparity and, indeed, may compound it.

With this report and with her consultation on the way forward, the Minister should ensure that the way forward gives clear indicators on how INI will play a role in tackling regional disparity and economic disadvantage in a measurable way. I welcome the Minister's view and her acceptance in her public response to the report that there are short- and long-term challenges to building a dynamic and innovative local economy. I hope that she includes putting structures and programmes in place to bring an end to regional disparities and to social and economic disadvantage among those challenges. After all, that is what the Programme for Government says. The Minister must also ensure that where the report recommends the need for structural change she applies that right across INI policy.

There is a tendency that when this analysis is put forward it is viewed as Derry versus the rest. In fact, Alan McFarland mentioned that today. My role is to stand up for Derry. However, I remind Members of two telling statistics that highlight that this issue and the work of INI affect many constituencies. To my knowledge, in 10 years, there has not been a single first-time inward investment project in the constituencies of East Derry and North Antrim. In the same period, the number of jobs promoted in South Belfast exceeded the combined total in the West Tyrone, Newry and Armagh, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and Foyle constituencies.

Irrespective of the review of INI and of Sinn Féin's view, that cannot continue if we are to deliver the Programme for Government; nor can the debate be reduced to the well-worn mantra of “Will we refuse jobs?”. Of course not; job announcements such as the one made yesterday are to be welcomed. The debate cannot be reduced to the “travel-to-work thesis” either. That thesis on its own undermines tackling regional disparity.

I remind the parties in the Executive that all those issues have to be viewed in the context of the Programme for Government pledge. The Assembly must be seen to be tackling regional disparity, and all

its agencies must play a role in that, not by indirect consequence but by policy direction. That opportunity is now before the Minister. The challenge is obvious: this is the time for delivery.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Events have overtaken this debate — indeed, this motion — to a large degree. It comes less than 24 hours after Invest Northern Ireland landed one of the biggest and most prestigious inward investment fish that could have come to our economy. Had the movers of the motion reflected on what the New York Stock Exchange announced in Belfast yesterday, they would, with some modesty, have withdrawn it and waited, as Alan McFarland said, until the consultation process was over.

Let us stop for one moment and think about it: almost 400 jobs from the New York Stock Exchange come to where? London? Zürich? Hong Kong? Shanghai? No; they came to Belfast. Why have they come to Northern Ireland? Think about it for a moment. All those places were competing equally for those jobs, yet they came here.

6.30 pm

We need to stop gurning and yapping about the economy. Members must stop saying that they want jobs on their doorsteps, in west Belfast or elsewhere. We have to stop knocking the economy and recognise that we are privileged that a tiny country called Northern Ireland was able to attract 400 jobs from the New York Stock Exchange 12 hours ago. We should recognise the tremendous opportunity that we have and the role that was played by Invest Northern Ireland in delivering those jobs. That demonstrates that the Government of Northern Ireland were right to put the economy at the centre of the Programme for Government.

It would be wrong for us to justify prescribing where businesses should go, as the proposer of the motion has tried to do. One cannot attract the type of high-end jobs and develop the sort of economy that Raymond McCartney spoke about and, at the same time, curtail the investor by giving rules and regulations about whether the jobs should be Catholic jobs, or in Protestant catchment areas, or in areas that suit a Member's political motivations.

Ms J McCann: We did not say that.

Mr Paisley Jnr: The Member might not have said it, but the code is clear.

Ms J McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Paisley Jnr: No. I could get unity tonight with the Member for North Antrim Declan O'Loan if I said that I wanted to see every inward investment job for Northern Ireland coming to Ballymena, Ballycastle and Ballymoney. That would sort out my problems, thank you very much. It is not realistic to expect that;

it is not right. Members should wise up and recognise that if they want the sort of investments that were announced yesterday, they cannot gurn and whinge and say that the jobs must be in Turf Lodge. Neither can Members use the Barnett report as a foundation for the criticism that has been launched today. I think that it was Alan McFarland who quoted from the report the conclusion that companies should be allowed to locate where they wish.

The review is not a foundation stone from which to throw bricks at the Minister or at Invest Northern Ireland; it is a foundation stone from which to congratulate them for what should be done and what is being proposed to be done.

Belfast is not a vast metropolis that is so far stretched in either direction that people in Turf Lodge, Ballygomartin, Tigers Bay and Ballybeen cannot come into the city centre and work. It is a wee place, and we should be delighted that we are receiving the sort of investment that is being made. Members should stop whingeing about the fact that it has not come to their backyards.

My colleague Simon Hamilton informed the House that the £1 billion investment that has been made has created approximately 21,000 new jobs; that is a remarkable investment. We should also recognise that the investment has gone to areas in which there has been need.

Raymond McCartney was wrong to say that there has not been investment in North Antrim. If Invest Northern Ireland did not exist, another 200 people in North Antrim would be unemployed, because Wrightbus would not have been supported by inward investment activities in respect of research and development. That investment kept people in employment in the past year. Furthermore, Michelin would not have been able to carry out the training schemes that it ran for the past year to keep people in employment.

I welcome the work and the flexibility that we are seeing at the heart of Invest Northern Ireland, because it is sustaining employment in areas where it has to be sustained. I look forward to the day when we will see more people queuing up to bring to Northern Ireland — and, hopefully, to Ballymena — the sort of investments that have been announced in the past 24 hours.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): Members might think that I am not thankful that they tabled the motion, but I do thank them, because it has given Members an opportunity to comment on the issue. Most of what Members have said has made an important contribution to the wider debate on the conclusions of the Barnett review, and I hope that it will form part of the ongoing consultation on the report.

In my statement to the Assembly on 5 October, when I informed Members of my intention to launch the consultation on the independent review of economic policy, I emphasised that there was a need to give the report careful and balanced consideration. At the outset, let me be clear that at no point does the report call into question Invest Northern Ireland's standards of accountability or challenge the equity of its distribution of funding — both of which, regrettably, have been implied in the wording of the motion.

I do not accept that there is any need for Invest Northern Ireland to be made more accountable. Indeed, robust governance systems are in place between the Department and Invest Northern Ireland, and I am fully satisfied that those arrangements are fit for purpose. There is nothing in the findings of the report to suggest that there were any issues of accountability, and that has been recognised by the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and many other Members during the debate. In fact, the report clearly states that Invest Northern Ireland should be given more autonomy to allow it to become more flexible and responsive to the needs of the business community here, and to the needs of those who seek to invest in Northern Ireland. However, those needs must be balanced against the facts that Invest Northern Ireland deals with public money, and that it must be accountable for that expenditure. Indeed, the issue of Invest Northern Ireland's accountability versus the need for it to be innovative and flexible in what it does is something that must be kept under constant review.

In the context of the debate, I want to highlight that I specifically asked the review panel to consider the subregional distribution of inward investment, other support mechanisms for indigenous businesses and the effectiveness of policy in encouraging the location of investment. I specifically asked the review team to examine those areas, and for them to insert those areas in the report's terms of reference. Indeed, point 1.7 of the report's terms of reference states that the review team were asked to analyse and make recommendations about:

"The sub-regional distribution of an inward investment and other support measures to indigenous businesses, and the effectiveness of policy in encouraging the location of investment".

As I had asked the Barnett review to specifically examine those areas, I find the wording of the motion somewhat contradictory. On one hand, the proposers of the motion state that they note the report and what is contained in it, and then go on to say something that frankly is not in the report. That is disappointing.

Page 115 of the report states:

"Evidence reviewed by the Panel suggests that competitiveness varies between places in a region, with cities offering significant agglomeration and spillover benefits. The implication is that firms should be allowed to locate where they generate the highest returns,

although this should not be at the expense of where people in NI wish to live."

That relates to the issue of the regional development strategy that Mr Cree mentioned earlier.

The report goes on to state:

"This approach will seek to efficiently connect people and jobs given their location preference, but it demands the full co-ordination of policy toward business, housing, the labour market/skill formation, transport, regulation and planning."

Therefore, it is not jobs alone that bring equality to communities; rather, such communities require much more than just jobs.

An Adjournment debate on economic development in West Belfast will follow this debate, and 61% of the people who are employed in that area do not live there. We must ask why that is the case. Wider social, housing and skills issues are at play, and the motion that has been tabled does not address those issues.

Mr P Maskey: The Minister stated that 61% of the people who work in West Belfast do not live there. However, when I have asked Invest NI or the Minister's Department for information on how many people from West Belfast work on the Boucher Road, or in other areas, that information can never be obtained. I have requested that information on several occasions and it has never been forthcoming.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am surprised that my Department has not been able to provide that information for the Member, but I will endeavour to provide it for him. I give him that commitment today. When I was considering information about the Adjournment topic, I wanted to know how many people travelled into West Belfast to work, as opposed to how many people travelled out of it.

Returning to the motion under debate, I said on many occasions that Invest Northern Ireland works with a base across Northern Ireland, and in the case of new foreign direct investment, it is the companies that make the decision on where to locate. I am aware that some Members may not accept that, but that is the case. For larger-scale investments, that will usually mean that a location is chosen that is close to the main centres of population, and where a full range of infrastructural support already exists. That point is also noted in the findings of the report. Indeed, when we examined some of the findings that relate to productivity, infrastructure was a key issue. I will return to that issue later.

The report also acknowledges the importance of ensuring that rural areas are better linked to urban areas to allow workers to live where they want to live and work where the jobs are located; I will give that issue careful consideration. When I take the matter to the Executive, I hope that my Executive colleagues

will also recognise the role that they have to play on the important issue of economic growth. The panel believes that other Departments have a key role to play in addressing regional disparities, particularly in the development of adequate transportation links.

Ms McCann referred to the important contribution of the social economy, and, obviously, that is recognised in the report. I am disappointed that, when she quotes figures from Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, she does not give the percentage of the Budget that the relevant Departments are allocated. Perhaps she can find that out for me, because I would be interested to see the figures. Stark figures do not mean anything if they are not examined in conjunction with the total amount available to spend.

The panel also recognises the importance of tourism to the economy, and I am disappointed that nobody mentioned that issue in the debate. The Barnett review specifically stated that tourism, given the beautiful areas of Northern Ireland, could be a key innovator for us. The panel said that increased prosperity for Northern Ireland, particularly in rural areas, could be significantly addressed by building a more vibrant tourism sector. I look forward to the forthcoming tourism strategy to find out whether that can be moved on. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board recently announced its new branding strategy, which was a huge success, and I look forward to that strategy being rolled out in the coming months.

The report makes a total of 58 recommendations, including the need to place greater emphasis on supporting innovation and research and development. Several Members spoke about the aforementioned need to provide greater autonomy and improve the way in which economic policy is developed and co-ordinated in the public sector. *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor, and there is a lot of conversation going on.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am disappointed that I am not holding their attention, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The report also outlines a number of recommendations in other areas of government that help to deliver on the Programme for Government productivity goal, including important areas such as skills, infrastructure and planning. Members who read the report in full will know that it offers a balanced assessment of the work of Invest Northern Ireland, but it is incorrect to conclude that the report represents an indictment of Invest Northern Ireland's performance. I welcome the balanced nature of today's debate.

The report highlights good areas of performance, but it is also critical. However, as I have said on previous occasions, I have sought and wanted constructive criticism, and we now need a debate on the way forward.

Mention was made of the 10 companies that received 30% of the grants. *[Interruption]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members to refrain from conversations. The Minister has the Floor, and Members should pay attention.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I note that most of the noise is coming from behind me, which is a bit disconcerting.

There are 14,500 jobs in those 10 companies, and we must reflect on that. We also need to reflect on the fact that a large company such as Bombardier has a huge supply chain in Northern Ireland; I refer to Bombardier because I was reading about it recently. I have a map with me, and I am happy to share it with colleagues. Bombardier reaches many places in Northern Ireland because of its supply chain. I am not only talking about the jobs in Bombardier but jobs in all the other little companies that are associated with Bombardier, which we must also consider.

6.45 pm

Ms McCann referred to business expansion; she was concerned about the criticism of that in the report. I know that Invest Northern Ireland is also concerned about that; it believes that that business-expansion role gives it the ability to support local and international companies as they grow to scale. It is an important tool in developing the private sector, and ceasing to support such growth ambitions, as the review suggests, would, in the opinion of the board of Invest Northern Ireland, be a lost opportunity. I am increasingly coming to that view myself, and it is something that I am taking on board and considering at present.

It is also important to note that the report states:

"Since its inception, Invest NI has made a strong and positive contribution to economic development."

However, we cannot be complacent. We need to move on and determine how that contribution could be greater still. That is one of the reasons why I asked for the report to be produced. I have been particularly encouraged that many of the recommendations in the report are consistent with changes that are already under way in Invest NI. Someone has already made that point. For example, the increasing focus on innovation, levels of R&D, widening the reach of support for business and encouraging the development of higher-added-value sectors are all central elements of the agency's current corporate plan.

I think that it was the Chairperson of the Committee who said that the main criticism for him and for a lot of people was in relation to productivity issues. However, I think he will accept that that productivity goal was only set in 2008, and it is therefore something that we really need to concentrate on now. The productivity deficit arises for three reasons: the high

levels of economic inactivity; the structural composition of our economy; and the predominantly small business base, which lacks the critical mass to be fully competitive. We really need to look at those three areas to see what we can do about them. It is fair to say that dealing with that productivity gap will be the focus for us in the coming months.

Many of the recommendations in the report, particularly those aimed at reducing bureaucracy and proposing greater operational freedom for Invest NI, would, if implemented in a timely and proper manner, have the potential to aid the work of Invest NI and improve the economic landscape of Northern Ireland enormously; I endorse that.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the review highlights both the areas where Invest NI has performed well — I have outlined them — and where it could do much better. I welcome that, because, if we are going to have the step change that our economy needs to move forward and deal with those productivity issues, we need to look critically at those areas.

I stress again that we are in a period of consultation. I urge everyone who has taken part in the debate and those who are here to listen to it to continue to contribute fully to that process. In relation to the motion, I say genuinely that the report did consider the issue and expressed the view that it was not the job of Invest NI to do those sorts of things. However, I say to Members in areas like my own where there is difficulty in getting foreign direct investment that we may need to do more in relation to that and to work with Invest NI. I hope that the Members opposite will accept that Invest NI has been more proactive in recent months and years and that there is a determination in that organisation to work with local communities. I hope that that will be recognised in the concluding remarks.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have had a long debate about Invest NI, and I welcome the Minister and her comments. There were two parts to the motion: first, it welcomed Professor Barnett's report on Invest NI. We also welcome the fact that the Minister asked for that report to be produced. My colleague Jennifer McCann, who moved the motion, said that it was not about bashing Invest NI or the Minister. Mitchel McLaughlin also made that point. As Jennifer McCann, who is a Member for West Belfast, said, there has been criticism over many years that Invest NI failed to invest in some areas. People referred to some of those years being under direct rule.

It was unfortunate that one Member, Ian Paisley Jnr, tried to sectarianise the debate. Regardless of whether Members support or oppose the motion, it should be acknowledged that it has nothing to do with religion. Mr Paisley Jnr mentioned some areas in west Belfast,

and I should remind him that the Shankill Road is part of the West Belfast constituency and is probably one of the most deprived parts of the constituency. Sinn Féin believes that investment should be made to areas that are deprived and in need, regardless of people's background or religion.

Jennifer McCann referred to the importance that the report placed on the social economy. Professor Barnett told the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment about how the social economy can bring about change, particularly for people who are unemployed. Jennifer McCann said that £4 million or £5 million is invested in the social economy here, whereas around £30 million is invested in Scotland. She also spoke about how public procurement could help.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Alban Maginness, mentioned the productivity gap, which Professor Barnett referred to in his report. Mr Maginness mentioned the emphasis on research and development and innovation and the way that government structures that are imposed on Invest NI restrict its progress on economic development.

Stephen Moutray mentioned the objectives of the Programme for Government. He did not seem to accept the criticisms that were made of Invest NI. He said that some of the report covers the period of direct rule.

Leslie Cree said that many companies had not benefited from special financial assistance. Professor Barnett was critical of that in his report, and he said that Invest NI should be more responsive to the needs of businesses here, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Trevor Lunn referred to areas of deprivation and disadvantage, an issue that was a theme of the debate. He said that more is needed than jobs to tackle disadvantage and educational underachievement. He said that better educational attainment, childcare facilities and transport links were needed.

Simon Hamilton did not accept the main thrust of the motion, but he referred to how the planning process can help to regenerate the economy by getting rid of much of the red tape so that businesses, particularly those in the construction sector, can get on. The report referred to that, and that is welcome.

The issue of merging DETI with DEL is a bit controversial. That has been suggested because DEL is responsible for skills. That is for a future debate.

My colleague Mitchel McLaughlin said that the motion was not about bashing Invest NI. Sinn Féin welcomes the comments by the Minister that she will look at the issue of regional disparities and whether investment should go to major cities rather than rural areas. I take it on board that she said that there should

be better connection between urban and rural areas. Mitchel McLaughlin developed that theme of regional disparities, and he said that Invest NI must have a responsibility to address that.

Allan Bresland said that many of the criticisms that the report makes of Invest NI are for the period of direct rule. He made the point that, although some jobs were announced yesterday, there is a dependence on call centres. Several Members mentioned yesterday's announcement of New York Stock Exchange jobs that will come here, as well as the announcement on the call centre in Derry.

Mr McFarland suggested that Invest NI should be freed up and have fewer controls and restrictions on it; he said that its risk-averse culture should be dealt with. Alasdair McDonnell said that the North lags behind other regions in productivity and living standards, which, I believe, is also mentioned in the report. He said that Invest NI needs to be restructured urgently. He also referred to the report's recommendation to set up an Executive subcommittee to take forward economic policy.

My colleague Raymond McCartney mentioned economic disadvantage and regional disparities, particularly in Derry, and said that Invest NI had failed to address that issue. As we take the report forward, the Minister must take that on board.

Although Ian Paisley Jnr referred to parts of west Belfast in a way that, I believe, sectarianised the debate, he at least welcomed the jobs that were announced by the New York Stock Exchange and also jobs in Derry. He also said that Wrightbus and Michelin in his constituency would not be where they are today without Invest NI.

The Minister was fairly balanced in her remarks. However, some heated debate took place, and we are not agreed on how Invest NI should go forward. Sinn Féin has certain criticisms. The report refers to places such as west Belfast, Derry and some rural areas where, in the past, Invest NI has not invested. I take on board the Minister's comments about the regional development strategy; it also needs to come into play. The matter is not just about Invest NI investment and jobs creation but about transport links and other issues.

Declan O'Loan discussed the Bain report and whether jobs will be relocated to rural areas. Professor Barnett told the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment that the Executive and the Assembly must look at such policies. That would be welcome.

No one except the Minister mentioned tourism and how it can create jobs and attract investors. All the political parties missed the opportunity to comment on that issue. Tourism can bring positive developments.

All in all, I welcome all Members' comments in the debate. Although we may not find agreement on the issue, at least we debated it.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 23; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mrs Hanna, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Dr McDonnell, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Ms S Ramsey.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr W Clarke and Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Cobain, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Lunn, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bresland and Mr Shannon.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made:

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

ADJOURNMENT

Economic Development in West Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic has 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who wish to speak will have up to 10 minutes.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Business Committee for accepting this Adjournment debate. I also thank those who remain in the Chamber to contribute to it, including the Minister, who has a long distance to travel this evening.

Everybody who knows west Belfast will acknowledge and thank the people of the area, who, across the walls and divisions, have developed over the years a common and shared agenda for the needs of the community and its economic development.

I will begin by offering some answers to the problems that west Belfast faces as a deeply deprived community. I want to flag up five or six issues, some of which apply to west Belfast in particular and others that can be broadly applied to areas of need and unemployment in the North of Ireland.

First, the Government tell us that more investment is being rolled out in the North than in any phase of our history. However, that is not reflected by social clauses in the award of public contracts. Only one public contract that has been awarded recently contains a social clause requiring the employment of unemployed people. The contract is for a footbridge in Derry, and there is a requirement to employ one unemployed person for every £1 million of spend, which, in that case, means employing eight people. If big investment is to be rolled out, subject to the financial situation in the coming years, such a requirement must become a mainstay in the award of public contracts. That is true for west Belfast, especially in the event of the award of a contract for a new hospital for women and babies on the Royal Hospitals site. I will return to that matter later.

When the new chief executive of Invest NI was appointed, I sensed that the door was more open than it had been heretofore; I still believe that that is the case. Without discussing the details of specific ongoing negotiations, I say to the Minister and to Invest NI that now is the time to open that door fully to employers, especially the indigenous employers of west Belfast. I have no doubt that conversations are ongoing and that business cases have been presented to Invest NI and its new chief executive. It is now time to deliver on those

conversations. In the event that those conversations do not reach maturity and success, then, potentially, indigenous employers in west Belfast who compete in the global market and have a substantial and growing workforce and are the best example of manufacturing in Northern Ireland, as regards outreach into the world — one business in particular — might not fulfil their economic potential here and may go overseas.

I listened attentively to the Minister's comments during her conclusion to the previous debate. She was right: job location is dictated by many factors, and she named some of them. However, job location is also influenced by the intention and ambition of economic agencies when it comes to deprived areas such as west Belfast. The hard figures show that, in the past year, west Belfast received the fourth lowest amount of assistance for economic development from Invest NI. It is well down the league table of visits by potential investors, but it is not as low as Derry and south Down. Nonetheless, the number of visits is so low that it is virtually meaningless. Unless Invest NI sets hard targets and is judged by its results, people will continue to believe that its interests are in south and east Belfast, regardless of the Minister's assertion that contracts in south and east Belfast will lead to business in other parts of the North. The imbalance in economic investment between north and west Belfast and south and east Belfast is too enormous and requires remedial action.

I mentioned the Royal Hospitals earlier. There would be no better economic investment in west Belfast than in a hospital for women and babies on the Royal Hospitals site. There is no better way to define west Belfast than through that investment. In 2000, a Minister said that a building would be erected on the site in five years; in 2003, another Minister said that funding was available to commence the work quickly. Therefore, it is a matter of grave regret that, nine years later, the cost of a newbuild hospital is £400 million, which is much greater than it was previously. That issue must be addressed. Negotiations are ongoing on the devolution of policing and justice, and some reassurances have been given about capital projects for the justice side, perhaps the new prison or the police college. I am worried that, when it comes down to it, there will be greater pain in relation to other capital projects in the North, such as the new maternity hospital on the Royal Victoria Hospital site. I hope that that fear is not realised, but it could be.

7.15 pm

I want to briefly mention Visteon, to which the Minister has been attentive. When I contacted the Pensions Regulator recently, he told me that he was about to open four boxes of documents relating to the matter. It will be of residual reassurance to the people who lost good jobs that should never have been lost if the Government and Members of the Assembly

continue to press the Pensions Regulator to correct what were, in my view, irregularities in the management of Visteon's pension fund.

I ask the Minister and her colleagues to consider the need for better joined-up activity between agencies and Departments on the requirements of west Belfast. The closure of Bass Ireland, Trivirix, Mackies International, Boxmore International plc, Richardsons, Westside and Ford Visteon has raised many issues. The lands that were zoned for economic development should be protected so that, in the event of a turn in fortunes of the constituency of West Belfast, they are developed for economic purposes.

I want the Minister to re-examine an unfair clause that legislates against places such as west Belfast by not allowing the development of office accommodation that exceeds 2,000 sq m. That is an impediment in a situation of grave difficulty for west Belfast, and it must be revisited, as should the bar on financial assistance for hotel developments within a 10-mile radius of Belfast city centre. The lack of hotel accommodation outside Belfast is an impediment to tourism development in the North and must be addressed. All the indicators show that, based on all the tourist interests in west Belfast, hotel development in that part of the city should be forthcoming.

Mr F McCann: The Member has covered many issues. Living in inner-city west Belfast, I know that, for many years, there has been a belief that the city centre has been pushed eastwards on the western and eastern sides of the River Lagan. That has left an almost total dereliction of the north and west ends of the city centre. Major investment there could create hundreds — if not thousands — of new jobs.

Mr Attwood: I concur with my colleague from West Belfast. There are many other proposals that I could make to the Minister in writing in due course, but that is why, in an indicative way, the adjustments that I have recommended, along with others, can reprofile west Belfast so that it becomes that much more attractive to any new investors that INI may bring in in the coming year and beyond.

Ultimately, a strategic approach to development is required. No constituency in the North has, by itself and through external advice, developed better projects to sustain and accelerate its economic development. Consider the Department for Social Development (DSD) proposal for the Andersonstown gateway, the enterprise proposals for the Black Mountain, the Andersonstown village, the Gaeltacht quarter, Fernhill House and the village communities in the Shankill and elsewhere. Consider the proposals that have come from the West Belfast Partnership Board, which is a mature organisation that has experienced a great deal of growth and pain over the years. It is not for want of

visionary proposals that are right for the constituency that economic development has not gone as far as it should have. It needs a strategic approach, and the time has come for the constituency and government to decide what such an approach should be.

There are many options. Some people argue for an urban development strategy, such as those of Laganside Corporation or the Maze/Long Kesh. Others say that the strategic regeneration framework, which knits together the city and could knit together the constituency, is in place and is the right model. Some people in the community sector in west Belfast, for whom I have the greatest regard, just say, "Get on with it". They do not want us to get too heavily involved in the architecture.

I have a view about how that issue should be resolved, but it needs to be resolved so that proposals such as those for the Andersonstown gateway, which Margaret Ritchie described as far-reaching and transformative, and those which the Enterprise Council calls "Think Transformation" can be realised over the next decade. It could, realistically, take that amount of time.

I have offered some solutions to the problem of the lack of development in west Belfast, but the question is why it is so. It is not just because this part of our country has suffered, along with north Belfast, the greatest loss of life and the greatest upset and disorder through the years of conflict; it is also because west Belfast, when measured across virtually every multiple deprivation index, comes out bottom or near bottom of the league. That is confirmed by figures released in August, which state that the West Belfast constituency — I have not mentioned any part of West Belfast, I refer to the entire constituency — has the fourth highest unemployment rate of any Westminster constituency. That rate includes 22·6% of males and 7·3% of females: 15·8% overall. Imagine a street where 22·6% of the adult male population are not in work.

Although those figures are harsh, they do not begin to tell the story of the struggle that some people face in order to live in those conditions. Those figures cannot convey the hopelessness and exasperation of people in that condition. They cannot and do not convey how alienating life can be for people in that condition. They cannot measure the damage done to the soul of an individual or of a community that has displayed such resilience in the face of adversity in every other way over the past 30 or 40 years. For all those reasons, I hope that the debate might be a catalyst to further, urgent actions around those matters.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. Someone recently said that, over the past 10 or 20 years, there have been five Presidents, five Prime Ministers, three Secretaries-General of the UN and enormous global change, but, for all the change in our society, a lot of that has yet to impact on the abject

conditions of poverty and deprivation faced by far too many in west Belfast.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my constituency colleague for bringing the Adjournment debate to the House, because economic development in west Belfast is very important.

To pick up on one of the points that Mr Attwood mentioned, there are many ideas, proposals and master plans. On occasion, I have argued that there are too many. All those plans allow all the Departments to escape their responsibilities, because they can blame each other. They can also blame each other for the number of proposals and feasibility studies that have been carried out. I guarantee that dozens of those documents can be seen in any community organisation or constituency office in West Belfast. That is wrong.

I have the Enterprise Council's feasibility study, 'Think Transformation', as well as the Department for Social Development's Andersonstown gateway feasibility study.

The inclusion of timeframes in some of the documents provides Departments with an escape route. The regeneration of west Belfast may take 20 years, and such a time frame may allow Departments to put projects on the long finger. The women and children's hospital at the Royal is one example; it will now cost far more than was originally anticipated.

It is worth reflecting that one third of Belfast's population lives in the west of the city, including the Shankill. I refer to the constituency as a whole and do not segregate it in any way. We have a duty to ensure that those people have good employment opportunities and that they can create businesses in the constituency of West Belfast. Many Departments have managed to escape dealing directly with west Belfast; indeed, some of the recommendations in the task force reports have yet to be implemented. Departments must step up to the mark; we have heard all about how much certain Departments will invest, but that investment is often put on the long finger. That is not good enough; it is time that Departments gave the people of west Belfast a fair crack of the whip in respect to investment opportunities.

I must thank a number of community organisations. The West Belfast Partnership Board has worked on many issues over the years, and it has had a lead role in economic development, including the strategic regeneration framework, and in bringing traders' forums together. The Enterprise Council, which is funded by Invest NI, is also important, and we must recognise the role of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in that. Some Departments have been better than others in implementing the task force's recommendations.

Gerry Adams, Jennifer McCann, Fra McCann and I recently met Alastair Hamilton in the constituency. Compared to other Invest NI representatives with whom we have dealt, he said many of the right things; however, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Areas such as west Belfast need delivery. We must give people a chance to work together, and one of the highlights of the meeting was the idea that more can be achieved if we work together. Hopefully, the meeting with Invest NI's new chief executive represents a positive new start. We can delve into the past, but people such as Alastair Hamilton must be given the opportunity to take us forward. Complaining about the past will not change it; instead, we must work together to ensure that we achieve more.

There have been significant changes. For example, the Tourist Board recently held a meeting in west Belfast for the first time. That reflects positively on both the Tourist Board and the Minister's Department. The meeting was held in An Cultúrlann, and Tourist Board officials also visited some of west Belfast's tourist attractions, including the graveyards. I recently received a letter of thanks from Howard Wells of the Tourist Board. He said that he and the other representatives had really enjoyed their trip to the west of the city. Those are positive signs, and I hope that we can ensure that such good work continues. Tourism is a very —

Mr McCausland: Perhaps the Member will help me, because I am a little confused about the sudden mention of Howard Wells. Howard Wells may have certain skills in the football world, but I did not know that he was involved in tourism.

7.30 pm

Mr P Maskey: I appreciate that. Minister, I think that it was your Department's arm's-length bodies that did the job of getting rid of Howard Wells, but that was before you became Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I hope that Howard Hastings will stay in post a lot longer than Howard Wells did.

A number of exciting initiatives are planned for the west of the city. For example, the rapid transit system will allow connectivity between east and west Belfast and other parts of the city, and, if we get it right, it will allow people from east Belfast to enjoy employment opportunities in west Belfast.

There is also the proposed redevelopment of Casement Park. I see that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has just joined us in the Chamber, so we have the luxury of having two Ministers present for the debate. I urge the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to do all that he can to ensure that that redevelopment happens as smoothly and quickly as possible. We talked about the Andersonstown gateway and the regeneration of that area, and the redevelopment of

Casement Park would be a massive step in the right direction in that it would create employment opportunities in west Belfast. That positive step should be taken sooner rather than later.

We have had many issues with the Tourist Board, and Alex Attwood touched on the fact that west Belfast is the only part of Belfast that does not yet have a hotel. I know that, at one time, Lisburn was the only city that did not have a hotel, but it now has one. I hope that in the not-too-distant future, there will be hotels in west Belfast. Thousands upon thousands of tourists come to the west of the city daily, but they do not stay in the west; they spend their money and the evening in other parts of the city.

I ask the Minister to consider whether it is possible to introduce pilot schemes that will tackle the severe shortage of tourist accommodation in the west of the city; for example, schemes to establish bed and breakfasts. Over the years, many people have bought into the tourism concept for west Belfast. Sometimes people there feel like goldfish in a bowl; people drive in and drive back out again. We need to work hard to change that. Perhaps, Minister, we could look at that issue together to see what possibilities exist. I would be very grateful if your Department could consider the matter.

The Gaeltacht Quarter is very important because it promotes both language and culture, and that distinguishes the area from other parts of the city, such as the Titanic Quarter, the Cathedral Quarter or Queen's Quarter. I am not sure how many quarters there are in Belfast now; the last time I counted, there were around seven. Those who work in the area and who sit on the Gaeltacht Quarter board — most of whom do so in a voluntary capacity — have worked hard to ensure that the quarter has developed. The Minister can ask Howard Hastings and the board about the respect that they were shown in the meeting at An Cultúrlann, which is in the heart of the Gaeltacht Quarter.

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

Mr P Maskey: People from the Greater Shankill Partnership were at the meeting also. Minister, I leave those thoughts with you.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Attwood for securing the debate, and I will concentrate on some issues that have not been covered, rather than repeat what other Members have said.

The previous debate was on Invest NI, and the Minister was present for that, too. I must repeat that people in west Belfast feel very let down by organisations such as Invest NI. Whether people agree with that statement or not, we must consider the issue from the viewpoint of those who live in that area. Let me return

to some of the recommendations in the report by the West Belfast and greater Shankill task forces. For example, when consideration was being given to which areas would be designated as major employment locations in the Belfast metropolitan area plan, Invest NI did not heed the task force call for west Belfast to be designated as one such location. I wanted to touch on that point.

There is a clear need for a focus on economic development in west Belfast. The last two Members to speak have mentioned various proposals, and I have also been involved in some of the proposals from the development stage. Some worthy proposals can sit for too long at the planning stage or remain as strategies that do not go anywhere. The Enterprise Council's Belfast Hills project is a good proposal. As Members mentioned, in the constituency that I am from and in which I live, money has been secured to continue the Colin Glen gateway project that had stalled for years. That is all good news.

In Fra McCann's area, projects include the Andersonstown gateway at Castle Street and the Andersonstown village. There are a lot of good projects in the system, and I hope that they can be taken forward. West Belfast is a good area for business to locate and for foreign direct investment. The large Mackie's site, for instance, is not being used. It is on the Springfield Road, which leads directly to Belfast International Airport. People could, therefore, fly in and out without having to go through the city centre. There is plenty of office space.

Some people may say that the social economy is my hobby horse, but I have to mention it. Many social enterprises, particularly in areas such as west Belfast, came from the community and voluntary sector, and they had to reinvent themselves when their funding began to dry up.

Last week, I attended a launch of the social economy fund at the Farset centre. I listened to some of the stories, and there was one of a young girl who was working in the Shankill Women's Centre. She told how she had left school aged 16 and become pregnant at the age of 17. She had no qualifications, and no one was offering her an employment opportunity. The Shankill Women's Centre offered an NVQ course in childcare, and she now works in the childcare project there. The Shankill Women's Centre is now in the process of trying to create and develop a second childcare project, because it is needed.

Mr F McCann: It goes back to what I said earlier, and Alex Attwood also touched on it: in many of the streets in west Belfast, the rate of unemployment may be 26% or even higher. The Member mentioned the Shankill and the Falls, where the rate could be 50% or

60%. Most of that unemployment is not recent; in some areas, it is generational.

In my constituency, a young man told me that he could not wait to leave school and start working in McDonald's. Something drastic is needed right away to allow such children to buy into the situation. Ms McCann mentioned the Mackie's site, where the prospect of west Belfast having a university was taken away. Something must be done in those areas that will have an immediate impact over the next year or two, and that will tell the people of the area that they are worth something, not only in that community but in the broader scheme of political life.

Ms J McCann: I agree. Other successful projects in the social economy sector include the Ardmonagh Family Centre, the Footprints Women's Centre and Colin Care. As they are businesses, they generate profit, but they invest that profit in creating more jobs for people in, for example, women's centres.

Alex Attwood talked about public procurement, which, particularly at local council level, could generate employment in those areas. The earlier debate touched on the idea that some businesses do not want to locate to areas like west Belfast because they do not see a skilled workforce there. The skills are there, but I recognise that not everybody would be at the level to do those jobs straight away. However, there are ways to create employment for people like the young girl who was mentioned earlier, for instance. Perhaps she is doing an NVQ this year, but she may go on to gain other skills and qualifications.

Mention was made of a project in the Colin area that is dealing with graffiti, picking up litter and generally keeping the area tidy. It is trying to get a contract from Lisburn City Council. There are ways in which local councils could use their public procurement policies to achieve value for money, add value to the regeneration of a local community and the local economy, and create jobs. There are all those ways of looking at economic development in west Belfast, but we should not take our eye off the ball in relation to getting major investment into the area.

People say that if investment was made in east Belfast or south Belfast, people from west Belfast could travel there. However, the reality is that, depending on where the investment is made in those areas, there may not be a public transport system. Therefore, unless people have cars, they may have to get two buses. If people live at the further end of west Belfast, in places like Twinbrook and Poleglass, they would have to come right down into the city centre and then get another bus. I am not saying that that is not doable, especially if people need the jobs, but, when we are looking at the proposed rapid-transit system, for instance — which, hopefully, will be put in place —

there will be better connections throughout north, south, east and west Belfast, which is a good thing.

The people of west Belfast must get inward investment into their area. As I said, the area is ripe for it, and it would be good because it would create a confidence in people. My colleague Fra McCann mentioned the long-term unemployed and the economically inactive — they would all benefit from investment, so those issues should run as a twin track.

I mentioned the social economy. A number of small and medium-sized businesses, which perhaps employ 20 or 30 people, are located in the area, and I have visited some of them over the past six or seven months. We could help them to create a dynamic. Some of those businesses export their products, which is good. If we can get that help from organisations like Invest NI, we will go a long way.

Mr McCausland: Issues have been raised today about employment, unemployment and employment opportunities in west Belfast. I want to draw attention to some of those points in relation to a particular area of west Belfast, namely the Shankill. Not all of the Shankill area is in west Belfast, but a substantial part of it is. The comments that I will make concern that part in west Belfast and the wider community of the greater Shankill.

Many of the points that have already been made are common right across west Belfast and the greater Shankill. I will pick up on a few of those. In regard to the points Paul Maskey made about the potential for tourism, we have seen a tremendous growth in tourism over the years. More and more people from abroad come to Belfast. A number of cruise ships bring people to the city, and many weekend visitors come for short breaks in Belfast.

7.45 pm

The difficulty is that all too often people stay in the city centre and do not really go out to the various communities. If they do, it is probably in a bus that drives through those areas but does not actually stop. The visitors look at people and continue on their way, without stopping in those communities to use facilities or to spend money in shops and so on. We must find ways of ensuring that tourism is broadened from the city centre to communities across Belfast — north, south, east and west.

Progress is being made in developing tourism in the Shankill area. The Greater Shankill Partnership and Shankill Tourism, which is part of the partnership, carried out a piece of work some time ago to brand the Shankill. They came up with the brand "Original Belfast" because the Shankill is the oldest part of Belfast. The graveyard on the Shankill Road is at the site of the original Christian settlement in the area; it is the oldest community in Belfast, hence the area was

branded as “Original Belfast”. There is a nice picture in the newspaper of the Minister dressed in her “Original Belfast” T-shirt on the occasion of that launch.

Thus, there is potential in the idea of having city quarters, although I accept that there is no limit to the apparently endless number of quarters that a city can have. A proposal is emerging for a Shankill cultural quarter. That should be encouraged, because the Shankill has a good brand name that is known across the world. People from the Shankill have travelled around the world, and it has a rich cultural heritage.

The report of the West Belfast and greater Shankill task forces has been referred to. I sometimes think that it is almost as though such projects develop with a primary emphasis on west Belfast; the greater Shankill can sometimes be almost forgotten and be a bit of an afterthought. That can be for a number of reasons, particularly historic, because during the period that that report was being prepared, there were internal difficulties in the Shankill that militated against proper engagement in the process.

However, we need to flag up that whenever people talk about west Belfast and the greater Shankill, whether about this or other initiatives, there must be a general recognition that the Shankill community needs to be engaged fully and properly. In some ways, the greater Shankill, and even the west Belfast part of it, is as much linked to north Belfast as it is to west Belfast. I think, for example, of the opportunities that will be presented by the development of the Crumlin Road jail and the courthouse, which sit in north Belfast. However, the streets across the road from those buildings, which are in the lower Shankill, are part of west Belfast. I think that there is huge potential for the Shankill part of west Belfast, in that it is adjacent to and contiguous with the Crumlin Road jail and courthouse. That will be a major tourism draw in the future that will benefit not just north, but west Belfast.

There is also the potential to draw people from that area into the city centre and to draw people up from the Cathedral Quarter as it develops. The Belfast Education and Library Board, and now the Northern Ireland Library Authority, have mooted proposals to redevelop Belfast Central Library into a much bigger facility with a full provincial significance. With greater development in that area, we will see some movement of the city’s centre of gravity in that direction. Councillors who represent the north of the city have discussed the idea of using a cultural corridor to link the Cathedral Quarter to the jail and the courthouse so that people can be drawn to that area.

There are as many really significant historic buildings in that short stretch of road as there are in any part of Belfast. From St Patrick’s and the former school beside it, up to the poorhouse, the Orange Hall,

the old synagogue in Annesley Street, the Clifton Street graveyard, St Malachy’s, the Mater Hospital and so on, right up to the jail —

Mr F McCann: I notice that the Member spoke about the Shankill end of west Belfast being very much part of north Belfast, but all the areas that he spoke about go into north Belfast. I spoke about both sides earlier on.

I have spoken to councillors, and the area around Union Street, North Street, Castle Street and Berry Street is totally derelict. We will get nowhere unless we start to deal with that.

Mr McCausland: I do not disagree. The route to the Shankill Road along North Street to Peter’s Hill is very depressing, and the area between North Street and Donegall Street requires significant development. There is the potential to do something, and there is no disagreement about that. I was simply saying that if we are trying to draw people from the Cathedral Quarter, which will become more of a tourist attraction because of developments such as the Metropolitan Arts Centre and the new hotels, the link-up to the Shankill Road has real strategic significance.

I picked up on Jennifer McCann’s point about the young lady from the Shankill Women’s Centre. One of the big challenges is to provide educational support in those areas. I have visited the Shankill Women’s Centre on a number of occasions, as have my party colleagues, and I am familiar with the marvellous job that it does to bring young women who may have missed out on education back into it. Such women may not have the confidence to engage with education providers, so, in that way, the centre does a valuable job.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Impact Training in Lanark Way, which also addresses the needs of young people who have gone through school without gaining qualifications and have little in the way of job or life skills. Therefore, I commend Joe Stewart and the folk at Impact Training for their good work with those young people. There is a particular need, they have particular skills, and they do a very good job.

In all those ways, it is important to ensure that young and older people in the area have the skills to get jobs in areas such as tourism, where there is potential for growth. We should also be broad-minded enough to recognise that not all jobs will be in the immediate area. However, if young people have the job skills, life skills and confidence to go out and get jobs, they will be willing to go to other parts of the city. It is important that we do what we can to develop employment in the area and to ensure that people have the skills to get jobs there and elsewhere.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): Even though the hour is late, this has been an incredibly useful exchange. I can

assure Mr Attwood that, after the debate, I am going to a dinner with Chinese aviators, so I am not going home. Nevertheless, I thank him for securing the debate and for affording me the opportunity to address the issue.

I have listened with interest to Members' points. I was going to detail the amount of assistance that Invest NI has given in the past seven years and what has happened with that funding, but I think that Members are fully aware of everything that has happened in west Belfast. Some Members said that the issue is one of perception, be that with Invest NI or with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Therefore, at the outset of my response to Members, I want to say that I hope that that perception will change in the coming months and years.

We have already heard that Howard Hastings held an NITB board meeting in the Cultúrlann in west Belfast, and he regaled me with stories of people jumping out from behind gravestones. Nevertheless, the board members had a genuine engagement, and I think that they enjoyed their time and saw a lot when they were there. In addition, Alastair Hamilton has been proactive in engaging with West Belfast Members, and he will continue to do so. People say that it is not about whether he can talk the talk but whether he can walk the walk, so I hope that he will do that.

Mr Attwood was talking in code when he mentioned a particular employer, and I think that I know the employer to which he was referring. If it is the one that I am thinking of, I can assure the Member that things are going very well, and I hope that we will be able to do something about it in the near future. I will leave the code there.

Nelson referred to the cultural corridor from the centre of town, past St Patrick's Church and up to Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church, which is a beautiful building that was recently put on a list of the most endangered buildings in the world.

Physical infrastructure has a key role. That was starkly obvious recently when the Department for Employment and Learning held a meeting about skills in the Europa Hotel, yet there was no one there from Sandy Row because the inhabitants did not think that the Europa was in a part of their area. I come from a rural background, and I find that incredible. I travel 14 or 15 miles into Enniskillen to attend my constituency office, and travelling such distances is normal for me as I live in a large constituency. It is significant that people have mindset problems to overcome. Ms McCann referred to having the appropriate skills to travel to different parts of the city. Physical infrastructure is important to enable people to do that, and improvements are being made so that people can go about the city.

There is also the issue of not being ghettoised, and I say that about the whole of Belfast as there are ghettos all across the city. I understand that people who live in the Markets did not apply for jobs in the Radisson SAS Hotel because they do not think of it as being in their part of Belfast. For me, that is significant, as it shows that people do not move around the city, which is a huge issue. Is it an issue for DETI? I am not sure that it is, but it is one that needs to be addressed right across the Government, which is a point that some Members made.

There is increasing evidence that tradable service projects are going to city centre locations. That is accepted. They offer access to a large and skilled labour pool and are within a reasonable travel-to-work area. However, will people travel out of their own areas for that work? That issue is closely related to aspiration. Mr McCann talked of the long-term unemployed, which is also a huge issue, as is the number of economically inactive people. Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of economically inactive people in the UK, and it gives me no satisfaction to say so. We need to consider those issues, but that is not something I alone can do; rather, it is something that must be addressed by the Executive as a whole. It is difficult for me, a person from a rural constituency, to understand why people in west Belfast cannot work in the city centre, but I am beginning to understand that more fully, and we need to deal with those issues.

As I said during the previous debate, the majority of the working residents of west Belfast are employed outside the constituency. Therefore, it is fair to assume that many people from that area will have positively benefited from the type of investments that we announced earlier in the week, because they are travelling to work.

It is also worth noting that, in the wider context, despite the constraints on Invest NI's ability to influence the location decision of investors, a high proportion — about 53% — of assistance has been offered to businesses within designated areas of economic disadvantage.

Over the past few years, significant progress has been made in addressing many of the issues that were identified by the West Belfast and greater Shankill task forces, and a subsequent bid for the integrated development fund has resulted in a substantive package of support for the area. I understand what Members said about there being too many strategies, too many ideas floating about and how it is time for action. However, 16 of the 17 projects included in the integrated development fund (IDF) bid have been completed or are in the process of being implemented. Mention was made of some of those, including the establishment of the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise

Council, the implementation of a £1 million pilot social economy fund initiative, the extension to the facilities at the Whiterock Children's Centre and the development of two new business units at Lanark Way.

A couple of Members mentioned the tourism issue, and the fact that west Belfast has benefited indirectly from Tourist Board assistance to tourism projects across the Belfast City Council area, and I put that in the context of what I said about the greater Belfast area. I take Alex Attwood's point about hotels and the ban on the opening of hotels 10 miles or 20 miles outside the city centre. That point was made to me by Members representing East Antrim and Lagan Valley. Lagan Valley only recently received its first hotel, as Members are aware.

8.00 pm

I am happy to look at that matter again, and I have no difficulty in doing so. However, it is something that Members need to look at with me. As Nelson McCausland said, we need to get more people to stay in those areas. The new brand issued by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board talks about authenticity and being real about our tourism. If we are to follow that through, then we need more accommodation — albeit, not hotels initially — in those areas, so that people who want to stay there have choice.

The social economy is a huge part of the economy in west Belfast. Nowhere is the contribution more evident than in west Belfast and greater Shankill, particularly in organisations such as the Colin Glen Trust, Farset International, and Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd. Ms McCann referred to the Shankill Women's Centre. I had the great privilege of visiting the centre and seeing the work that is going on there. It is incredible to see so many young children being looked after so expertly there, sometimes by their mothers who have taken qualifications and are doing very well because of that. Again, it is back to the issue of getting those young women, in that case, to have the aspiration to achieve that qualification and the support to do so. I was greatly encouraged when I saw what was happening in the Shankill, and indeed throughout the constituency.

I reassure Members that the Department, Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board are committed to playing their part and will continue to work with clients and local partners to encourage further investment and employment opportunities to those living in areas such as west Belfast. I commented that we are working with a significant employer in the area already. We will continue to do that. It is important that we are as open as possible. I believe that we are getting to that stage, and, hopefully, we will be able to develop those relationships that may have been lacking in the past. I

hope that having a devolved Administration means that we can have those relationships in a way in which we may not have been able to in the past, under direct rule Ministers.

In saying all of that, we have face up to the realities of modern business and competitive pressures. It was interesting that Mr Attwood opened by saying that the public sector has a role to play in relation to social clauses in public contracts. That is something that should be looked at. The Committee for Finance and Personnel is looking at the whole area of public procurement and, perhaps, social clauses can be looked at as part of that. I do not think that social clauses are possible in the private sector. However, if the public sector is playing a role, then it is something that public procurement and, particularly, the Department of Finance and Personnel can look at in particular areas.

I welcome the debate. If there is any issue that I have not addressed, I am happy to follow it up. It has been a hugely useful debate and I thank the Members for bringing it to the House.

Adjourned at 8.03 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Corporate Social Responsibility

Published at 10:00am on 26 October 2009

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I am pleased to inform Assembly Members of the publication of the Department for Regional Development's (DRD) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Policy.

We are committed to being a socially and environmentally responsible organisation and a good employer. The policy takes account of the wide spectrum of measures we will take now and in the future in the areas of community engagement, environmental sustainability, responsible procurement and the workplace.

I will be continuing to personally engage in my Department's CSR policy going forward, to implement further new initiatives, and to drive through its implementation.

I believe that CSR provides an opportunity for us to make a positive impact on the community and I am keen to help staff make a personal contribution. For example, 16 officials from my Department have enrolled in Business in the Community's Time to Read Initiative for the 2009-10 academic year. Each volunteer will dedicate one hour per week to read on a one-to-one basis with two children from primary 5-7. The initiative aims to help improve literacy skills in primary schools and is particularly worth while for both the children and the DRD staff involved.

The CSR policy is available for viewing on the DRD internet site at www.drdni.gov.uk. Hard copies of the plan are available from the Library. Additional copies can be obtained by contacting the Department's Strategic Planning Branch on (028) 9054 0930.

Committee Stages

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

8 October 2009

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL (NIA 10/08)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr David Ford
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Ms Julie Broadway	}	Department of the Environment
Mr Ian Maye		
Mr Jim Stewart		

The Chairperson (Mrs D Kelly): We move to the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. Members have been e-mailed a copy of the draft Committee report, and a copy of the key issues from the report has been tabled. I apologise for the late tabling of so many papers, but our visit to Brussels meant that our deadline was moved forward. We will ask that papers not be given to members on the day of the Committee meeting so that they will have an opportunity to read through them.

The Committee Clerk: Where possible, papers are e-mailed to members when we receive them.

The Chairperson: Are members content to agree the key issues paper that has been tabled?

Members will be aware that concerns have been raised by local government councillors' representatives and by the community and voluntary sectors about funding and communications, as well as the Department's position on the inclusion of provisions for community planning and well-being. There is concern that that seems to have fallen off the scale. There is a need for local authorities to be consulted before the introduction of subordinate

legislation. Concerns, which are detailed in the paper, have been raised about some clauses.

The Committee Clerk: Most of those were issues on which the Committee did not feel informed enough to agree last week, and further information was sought from the Department. I will update the key issues. I wanted to be satisfied that the Committee felt that all the issues raised during the scrutiny of the Bill had been included in the paper and that we had captured the Committee's concerns about them, because that paper will form the key part of the Committee's report on the Bill. I will amend or update the paper before members see it again as part of the full report.

The Chairperson: Are members content at this stage?

Mr Ford: I have one technical point; there is mention in the document of the three mechanisms for selecting representatives on statutory transition committees (STC): d'Hondt, Sainte-Laguë or alternative votes. Surely the third mechanism is the single transferable vote.

The Committee Clerk: I read something to suggest that it is.

The Chairperson: Subject to that amendment, we will agree it at this stage. We will return to it.

The Committee Clerk: This is not a full agreement to it; it is just to agree that we have covered all the key points that were raised last week. Those will change.

The Chairperson: Members have copies of letters from the Department of the Environment (DOE) with details of the mechanisms that the Department is using to brief local councils on local government reform, and a Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) reply on statutory transition committees. Members may wish to take those into account when discussing the clauses with officials. There is also an offer — if members are so inclined — to be included in the DOE/NILGA communications strategy. I think that that would be advisable. Do members have comments or questions? Are members content that this information be incorporated into the final Committee report on the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: As members will recall, on 1 October the Committee commenced its formal clause-by-clause scrutiny. Members agreed 14 clauses and the long title, and one clause subject to amendment. Eight clauses were left pending further information from the Department and, perhaps, discussion. Today the Committee will consider the clauses that it did not formally agree at the meeting on 1 October: clauses 2, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17. We now have an opportunity to consider each clause and decide whether we are content with it or whether we wish to seek an amendment to it. I invite the departmental officials to come to the table.

The Committee Clerk: I advise members that the Department has provided a table of responses to the issues raised by the Committee. Presumably the officials will give us more information on those responses.

The Chairperson: Mr Maye, I welcome you and your colleagues, Jim and Julie, back to the Committee.

Mr Ian Maye (Department of the Environment): It is good to be back with you today. We have been working hard in the past week to address the issues that were raised by the Committee in discussions. We discussed several of those issues with the Minister before he left for the USA. We will take you through the considered responses. The Committee's suggestions were very constructive, and we have dealt with them as such. I will now pass over to Jim Stewart to take you through the responses line by line, and we will then be happy to answer questions.

Clause 2 (Certified contracts to be intra vires)

Mr Jim Stewart (Department of the Environment): The first issue was in relation to clause 2, "Certified contracts to be intra vires". The Department proposes to delete clause 2(5)(a) at Consideration Stage. The other issue that you raised was waste vires. The Department intends to bring forward additional waste vires provisions to be included in the Bill at Consideration Stage. I think that you are already familiar with those provisions.

Mr Beggs: Will you clarify exactly what you mean by that? One area of concern that I had was the issue of unintended consequences that the certification process could go much wider than the waste contracts potentially than it was originally intended for to give confidence to those who would be involved in the considerable new waste infrastructure which is required.

How can we be certain that it cannot go much wider than that and give legal protection when it should not be given?

Mr Stewart: I am not sure of the member's point. Would you like to expand on it?

Mr Beggs: I have asked questions on the subject before. A certification process is applied to contracts after a certain date; that was the extent to which certification was required in order to prevent a challenge or make one more difficult. I want clarification on how that will apply specifically to the waste infrastructure process, which will be under considerable scrutiny and which must therefore be more trustworthy, rather than possibly being applied to many other signed contracts.

Mr Stewart: In theory, the process could be applied to any contract entered into after the Bill becomes law. However, the Bill is aimed specifically at large waste infrastructure projects that are online at the moment and the contracts that will be signed in 2011. Those

contracts are being dealt with by the three local government joint committees: Arc21, SWaMP and the North West Region Waste Management Group.

There are clauses that apply contracts' provisions to Arc21 and SWaMP. Those provisions apply to the North West Region Waste Management Group as a council because Derry City Council, as the lead council, will take forward those contracts for the group.

Mr Beggs: That has triggered a declaration of interest on my part: I am a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

The Chairperson: Several members will want their interests to be noted.

Mr Maye: The principle is that those clauses relate to waste-management issues; their scope is limited to waste-management matters.

The Chairperson: I have asked the Committee Clerk to note the interests of all members who are members of local authorities. That has been done. Do members have any other questions on clause 2?

Mr Ford: The Department's proposal to delete clause 2(5)(a) at Consideration Stage is fair enough, and the Committee can agree to that. However, I am not sure how our clause-by-clause scrutiny deals with the Department's statement that it intends to include additional waste vires in the Bill at Consideration Stage. Are we now also agreeing to the Department's making unspecified amendments in future that it has not shown the Committee at this stage?

The Clerk of Bills: I will return to the Committee after considering that point in detail to provide formal advice. However, the Committee's primary responsibility is to agree its position on the clauses, subject to specific amendments from the Department. Therefore, the Committee can agree clause 2, subject to the Department's proposed amendment.

The Committee cannot take a position on other forthcoming amendments until it has seen them, but it may wish to note that it has discussed matters related to such amendments with officials and recommended that certain things be done. However, in respect of the detail, a formal position would be adopted after those amendments have been produced.

Mr Maye: The Department intends to bring those proposed amendments to the Committee before Consideration Stage so that members can debate them and give the Department their views before the amendments are tabled.

Mr Ford: I appreciate Ian's point, but at this stage we are approving only the clause, subject to the deletion of 2(5)(a).

The Chairperson: Yes, and as per the amendments proposed.

Mr Ford: As per the specific amendments, but we cannot give formal approval to anything else.

The Chairperson: No.

Mr Stewart: Clause 2 will not include the vires amendments; the vires will be included in separate clauses. I mention that because the issue has been raised in connexion with clause 2, but members may wish to consider clause 2, with the proposed deletion of 2(5)(a).

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.

The Chairperson: We note that there will be further consideration of waste vires.

Clause 9 (Introductory)

Mr Stewart: Clause 9 was parked pending further information from the Department on the implications for the citizens and resources of Lisburn and Castlereagh councils and their incorporation into the new greater Belfast local government district. Since our last meeting, officials met the Minister, who concurs with the Committee's views and has asked us to introduce proposals to ensure the direct representation of Castlereagh and Lisburn councils on the Belfast statutory transition committee. Any necessary amendments will be included at Consideration Stage. Lisburn City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, the Belfast voluntary transition committees and, when established, the statutory transition committees need to continue to engage in order to address the transfer of assets between councils and to ensure the continued delivery of public services.

Mr Maye: The principal point that the Minister wants to address is establishing a mechanism to allow district electoral areas (DEAs) that are directly affected by the Boundaries Commissioner report to be represented on the Belfast transition committee. Not necessarily every member should be represented, but a proportionate number from each of those two councils should be included.

The Chairperson: The voice of the elected representatives has been heard, and the Minister has asked you to introduce a mechanism that meets the needs of the DEAs and that is in the best interests of the new committee.

Mr Ford: That is an extremely helpful response to the points that we made last week. However, I am confused about the status of this clause, even more so given Eilis's earlier answer. On that basis, we cannot agree the clause even though I am happy with the Department's sentiments.

The Clerk of Bills: It is open to the Committee to agree the clause subject to the Committee's recommendation that the clause be amended to take account of its concerns. The Committee can note the Department's willingness to take the issue on board. The Committee cannot formally agree the clause subject to an amendment, because there is no amendment yet. However, the Committee can agree the clause subject to the Committee's recommendation that the clause be amended.

Mr Ford: The Committee can accept the clause subject to the amendment rather than reject it or say that we have seen the specific wording. Is that right?

The Clerk of Bills: I have not been terribly clear. The Committee can agree the clause subject to its recommendation that an amendment be produced to allay the concerns that councils raised and that are discussed elsewhere in the report. The Committee would not be agreeing the clause subject to an amendment, because there is no amendment. Furthermore, it is not possible for the Committee to agree to an amendment that it has not yet seen. The Committee can agree only the clause, subject to a recommendation that it be amended to reflect certain concerns. The Committee should set out those concerns, which are included in the papers, in its report.

The Chairperson: We are agreeing the clause in principle, subject to the Committee's recommendations being incorporated into it. We look forward to the new amendment.

The Clerk of Bills: The Committee will have a chance to read the amendment in the draft report, which the Committee Clerk will bring to the Committee. The Committee can leave that for a while, but that will have implications for the deadline.

Mr Ford: How quickly can the sentiments that Ian expressed this morning be turned into a formal amendment?

Mr Maye: We spoke to the legislative draftsmen this morning.

Mr Ford: I presume that, apart from anything else, the amendment has to be agreed between the Department and the legislative draftsmen before being submitted to the Executive. We know how long that might take.

Mr Beggs: Can the Committee suggest an amendment?

The Clerk of Bills: It is open for the Committee's draft report to reflect that. I could work with the Committee Clerk on the draft report to reflect that, subject to the Committee's recommendation, an amendment be provided to achieve that objective. It is normal for a Committee report to do that. It is also normal for Committees not to have received the wording of amendments that have been agreed at this stage from Departments. It is normal for a Committee

to reflect what it is recommending, to note a willingness on the part of the Department to take it forward, and to set out in the report what it wants to achieve by the amendment.

Mr Ford: That is probably the best that we can do at this stage. I suspect that the Committee can probably agree an amendment more quickly than the Department. If the Department is willing to consider the amendment that we might propose, it might be the speediest way of resolving the matter. I am not sure whether Hansard will record that Ian is nodding at that point. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Fortunately, I do not think that we are on camera this morning.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 9, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 10 (Control of disposals and contracts of existing councils)

The Chairperson: We move to clause 10.

Mr Stewart: Clause 10 is parked pending further information from the Department regarding the powers of statutory transition committees and the role of the Department during the transition period. When the statutory transition committees are established and the Department has made regulations under this clause, statutory transition committees will be responsible for considering applications from the constituent councils to dispose of land or to enter into contracts above specified sums. Statutory transition committees may give consent to such applications with or without conditions. Such consents are in addition to any other necessary statutory requirements.

During the transition period, the Department will mediate with statutory transition committees where agreement is not reached regarding the value of any consideration. The Department will also continue, subject to any necessary statutory transition committee consents, to consider applications for loan sanctions from existing councils.

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 10?

Mr Ford: I have a question about when mediation will occur. Jim said that the Department will mediate with statutory transition committees where agreement is not reached regarding the value of any consideration. Can you tease that out a bit for me?

Ms Julie Broadway (Department of the Environment): It is where consideration is other than the monetary terms.

Mr Maye: If a disagreement between a council and a statutory transition committee comes to the attention

of the Department, the Department can make a determination and mediate between the two, as it continues to have the final say on loan sanction applications.

The Chairperson: What happens should the stalemate remain?

Mr Maye: The Department will determine the outcome.

Mr Ford: Is that what the clause says or would that be the effect of a departmental amendment?

Mr Stewart: That is what the clause states at present.

The Chairperson: It is simply further information; it is not an amendment.

Mr Ford: Sorry, I may be particularly thick this morning, but clause 10(1) states:

"The Department may direct that ... an existing council shall not, without the written consent of a specified statutory transition committee".

What is being said is that the Department retains final powers.

Mr Maye: Mr Beggs raised that at last week's meeting. The fact that loan sanction approval is involved means that the final determination on whether the loan sanction is granted rests with the Department. However, the Department seeks to achieve agreement and consensus between the statutory transition committee representing all the councils involved in that group and an individual council. It seeks to blend the best of both approaches: encouraging local agreement on issues before they are brought to the Department, in which case the Department should be able to reach a decision and grant approval to loan sanction very quickly, while giving the Department the ultimate power, which it has at present, to consider whether the loan sanction is granted where there is continuing disagreement between the statutory transition committee and an individual council.

Mr Ford: As I read it, clause 10(1) imposes on councils the additional burden of getting the approval of the statutory transition committee, without specifying the grounds on which the Department could overrule the transition committee.

Ms Broadway: That provision relates to clause 11(3), which states that if a contract is disputed, the Department can mediate: "Where the consideration or any of the consideration under a contract is not in money".

Mr Ford: I accept that. However, I mean where the consideration relates specifically to money and a capital programme. The concerns expressed — particularly by Omagh District Council — do not seem to have changed. If there is no agreement from the transition committee for capital expenditure, councils cannot go to the

Department for loan sanction. Is that not the meaning of clauses 10 and 11?

Ms Broadway: Yes.

Mr Ford: Given what the Department has said about mediation, does that indicate willingness for it to consider an amendment that would allow an appeal to the Department by a council that felt aggrieved by a decision of an STC?

Mr Maye: We will have to think about that and discuss it with the Minister.

Mr Ford: It is a situation that we all hope will not arise. However, we are legislating for what might arise, not for what we hope will arise.

Mr Maye: If a statutory transition committee attached conditions with which a council was not happy, the council would still be free to engage with the Department. When the Department receives the proposal from a statutory transition committee, with the attached conditions, it will automatically be up to the Department, if representations are received, to determine the outcome.

Mr Ford: That is the irony: if conditions are attached, an appeal is possible; if there is an outright refusal, an appeal is not possible.

Mr Maye: That is a valid issue.

Mr Ford: That seems to me — to use the technical term — cockeyed.

The Chairperson: Rather than Mr Ford's proposing an amendment for next week, will the Department reflect on his comments and bring clause 10 back for further consideration? Does Mr Ford wish to propose an amendment to the Committee next week?

Mr Ford: I would like the help of a legislative draftsman. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Maye: As with the previous clause, it might be helpful for the Committee report to express those views, and we could work with them.

The Clerk of Bills: Once again, it is open to the Committee to agree the clause, subject to a recommendation that the clause be amended to reflect members' concerns. We can work on the wording of that, and I offer my services in that regard for next week's draft report.

Mr Ford: I am happy with that.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 10, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 13 (Contravention of direction)

Mr Stewart: The Committee asked for further information regarding the enforcement of clause 13. The legal effect of clause 13 is that any disposal without the requisite consent would be unlawful. That reinforces that the proposed disposals must be referred to statutory transition committees for such consent.

The Chairperson: Do members have any comments?

Mr Ford: "See clause 9". This is rehashing the same argument.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 13, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 14 (Statutory transition committees: constitution)

Mr Stewart: Clause 14 was parked, pending further information from the Department on representation on STCs, specifically the Lisburn/Castlereagh STC. An associated paper accompanies our clause-by-clause analysis; it was compiled by the Department and NILGA and sets out the representation on STCs.

The Chairperson: We received that paper only this morning.

Mr Maye: At last week's meeting, I undertook to share the papers that were produced by policy development panel A. We sought and have acted on advice from policy panel A on the composition of the transition committees, so it was important to share papers that it produced.

Mr Stewart: The paper is dated March 2009, so it does not reflect recent conversations of the Minister's in which he agreed that there should be representation from Lisburn and Castlereagh on the Belfast STC.

The Chairperson: Who produced the paper?

Mr Maye: Policy development panel A, after which it was considered and agreed to by the strategic leadership board. The paper forms the basis of our policy development; we stuck closely to the recommendations of the policy development panel, because it represented the consensus view across the five parties involved in the process.

The Chairperson: Was the view unanimous or was there a majority vote?

Mr Maye: In every respect, there was a consensus view across all the parties. There were one or two areas of slight disagreement on very minor issues, not on the principal points.

The Chairperson: Thank you; it is helpful to know that.

Do members want to park clause 14 until next week, or, given that it has a consensus of support from all the political parties that are represented on the panel, are they content with the clause?

Mr Beggs: I would prefer to park it.

Mr Kinahan: I agree.

Clause 14 referred for further consideration.

Clause 15 (Statutory transition committees: functions)

Mr Stewart: Clause 15 was also parked, pending further information from the Department on the cost to ratepayers of a staff redundancy scheme and the timing and the role of the STCs in the process.

The cost of staff redundancies is being considered as part of the business case being prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) on the reform of local government. The local government reform joint forum has been discussing the detail of a redundancy package and the respective roles of STCs, existing councils and the new councils in the decision-making process. That discussion will also address the timing of the scheme.

The Chairperson: Do you have an answer on the cost to ratepayers?

Mr Maye: Not yet. The PWC report will go before the strategic leadership board, and it will be shared with the party representatives on the board either tomorrow or Monday. At that point, we will have a much clearer idea of the scale of costs involved in officer severance.

In response to an Assembly question, my Minister said that he intends to publish the report once the strategic leadership board and the parties represented on it have given it consideration.

Clause 15 referred for further consideration.

The Chairperson: Could members of the Committee be circulated with the PWC report as soon as possible?

Mr Maye: Yes. We would be happy to do that.

Clause 16 (Power to modify existing legislation)

Mr Stewart: This clause was parked pending further information from the Department about the strength and range of the powers that will go to the STCs and the role of local authorities after STCs have been set up. The main functions of STCs will be the appointment of chief executives designate and key staff for the new councils. They will be involved in, and have responsibility for, the setting of rates for 2011-12. They will also, where appropriate, determine the future status of some councils; in addition, they will be responsible for developing a short-term implementation plan for them. When STCs are established, existing councils will, apart from the functions that I mentioned, continue to

be responsible for the day-to-day delivery of public services.

Mr Boylan: I am sure that Mr Ford does not want to sit on the steps of Stormont to discuss the matter.

Mr Ford: I notice that the Department still does not list setting the capital programme for existing councils as one of the main functions, but I think that we have covered that issue adequately.

The Chairperson: I think so.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clause 17 (Severance payments to councillors)

The Chairperson: We remind ourselves of the guidance on this matter that was provided to members of the Committee who are also councillors.

The Committee Clerk: The Clerk Assistant advised that this could in no way be seen as advocacy. The Committee is, in fact, merely agreeing the provision of the power to introduce a severance scheme if that remains the position of the Executive.

Question, That the Committee is content the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 17 agreed to.

The Chairperson: Thank you all very much indeed.

Mr Stewart: I think that clause 1 still needs to be agreed.

The Chairperson: I wondered whether we had agreed it.

The Committee Clerk: We agreed that last week.

The Chairperson: No; we did not.

Mr Maye: It was subject to deletion.

The Chairperson: Yes, I wondered. Clause 1 was agreed, subject to the deletion of clause 1(3). The advice of the Office of the Legislative Counsel was that it will not be deleted but will be amended at Consideration Stage.

Mr Stewart: It will be amended to read:

“This Part applies to any contract which a district council enters into after the commencing of this section.”

The rest of the provisions in relation to the contracts will apply to any contract that is entered into after the date that that section has commenced.

Mr Beggs: Earlier, I asked how it was restricted purely to the waste sector. That wording would apply to any contract, so can you highlight where the certification process could limit it to waste contracts?

Mr Stewart: Certified contracts will not apply solely or specifically to waste-management contracts.

The legislation is to deal with the extensive waste infrastructure schemes; it is purposely designed for those contracts. However, there is nothing to prevent a council from entering into a public and private partnership (PPP) contract and using those provisions if it needs to. However, PPP contracts require critical mass, perhaps as much as £20 million, to be viable.

It is unlikely that councils over here will have the same scope as local authorities in Great Britain to enter into such contracts. I am unaware of any contracts of that magnitude that councils might have that would make a PPP or private finance initiative (PFI) scheme viable. There is nothing to prevent them using those provisions for purposes besides waste if it were appropriate and if it were value for money.

Mr Beggs: I am not aware of any such contracts either; but there is talk of an educational campus in Omagh, and a PPP arrangement of that scale could be put through in that instance. Does that mean that if it is signed after this date, it is legal and one cannot challenge it?

Mr Maye: The provisions are specifically limited to the actions of councils and bodies associated with them; the previous management of councils, in particular, not the other bodies.

Mr Beggs: What if the council negotiated such a contract?

Mr Maye: If the council wished to do so, that would be all right. The PPP or PFI powers would be available for its other functions. This clause is to give a degree of comfort to the organisations that would be providing a service and the financial institutions that would be providing the money to make it happen for those companies. It is primarily a matter of giving comfort to those who would be providing services to councils.

Mr Beggs: Will the Department also have to approve any borrowings?

Mr Maye: At present, we envisage that the clause will be needed only for major waste-infrastructure contracts. However, it is there for possible future use if there are other major contracts or if the new councils decide that they want to engage in PPP or PFI contracts.

The Chairperson: Is this is an amendment or a deletion?

Mr Maye: It is an amendment.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 1, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: That concludes our scrutiny of the Bill. Thank you all very much for attending.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

13 October 2009

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL (NIA 10/08)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mrs Dolores Kelly (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr John Dallat
Mr David Ford
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Daithí McKay
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Ian Maye	} Department of the Environment
Mr John Murphy	
Mr Jim Stewart	

The Chairperson (Mrs D Kelly): I thank members for accommodating this meeting, which has been brought forward to 11.00 am. We have a quorum to proceed and to make decisions. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones. That is important for Hansard's purposes and for anyone who uses a hearing aid. I invite members of the public to come into the room.

The agenda comprises one main item of business: to complete the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. We shall proceed to the clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill.

Members will recall that on 1 and 8 October 2009, the Committee formally considered the Bill's clauses. The clause-by-clause consideration table has been provided at tab 1 of members' meeting packs. Also provided in members' packs is a copy of policy proposals from policy development panel A, at tab 2; and a copy of the draft Committee report, at tab 3. The report will be amended following the outcome of today's meeting

and tabled for further consideration for the meeting on 15 October.

At our meeting on 8 October, members decided to refer clauses 14 and 15 for further consideration. Those clauses are at the top of the clause-by-clause table that provides the departmental response to Committee concerns. Members need to decide whether they are content with the response and content to agree to the clauses.

Departmental officials are present at today's meeting. I invite them to join us at the table. They are available to answer questions and to provide further information. I also note for the record that some Committee members are also members of local authorities. With the exception of Mr Boylan and Mr Ross, every other member who is present is a member of a local authority. Are members happy for that to be noted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Before we look at clauses 9, 10 and 13, we shall consider clauses 14 and 15. I welcome departmental officials Mr Ian Maye, Mr Jim Stewart, and Mr John Murphy to the meeting.

Clause 14 (Statutory transition committees: constitution)

The Committee Clerk: Clause 14 was parked at our previous meeting. Information on it had been provided at the last moment. Members decided to park the clause until a future meeting so that they would have time to read that information. The clause deals with the composition of statutory transition committees (STCs). The information provided more details on the structure of those committees. The question is whether members are happy to agree to the clause, now that they have had a chance to read the information.

The Chairperson: I think that that was in relation to Lisburn and Castlereagh authorities having representation on the statutory transition committees of Belfast and Causeway authorities. Mr Maye, would you like to add anything?

Mr Ian Maye (Department of the Environment): We are working with our lawyers and legislative counsel to develop a model, and we propose to bring forward amendments at the Bill's Consideration Stage, if the Committee has not done so, to enable the affected district electoral areas (DEAs) in Lisburn and Castlereagh to be directly represented as full voting members on the Belfast transition committee.

The Chairperson: Members should take some comfort from the fact that it will be subject to draft affirmative proposals, not a negative resolution. Therefore, at Consideration Stage, there will be an opportunity to agree or disagree with the amendments that are brought forward.

Mr Kinahan: Does that mean that we are parking this until we hear more?

The Chairperson: We will agree the clause, but we will recognise that the amendment will be tabled and that it will be subject to affirmative approval. Is that the case?

The Committee Clerk: That is not quite correct. The powers that clause 14 will bring forward will be subject to draft affirmative procedures. Therefore, any secondary regulations that come under that clause would have to go to the Floor of the House for affirmative approval, rather than by the negative procedure. That will enable Members to have more of an opportunity to make a decision on those regulations.

The real problem is that members wanted more information on how the decision in respect of membership of the transition committees would be made. Information that you received from the strategic leadership board, which emanated from policy development panel A, provides information on that.

Mr Kinahan: There is a good example at paragraph 17 of the paper, which describes how the SDLP made sure of its representation. That is good and should be kept in mind.

Mr Ford: I have a problem with discussing clause 14 before we have agreed clause 9. Clause 14(4) states:

“Those regulations shall ensure that the statutory transition committee in relation to a new council consists of members of the predecessor council or councils.”

“Predecessor council”, as defined in clause 9, does not deal with the Castlereagh/Lisburn problem within Belfast. We need to agree clause 9 before agreeing clause 14.

The Chairperson: That is a helpful way forward. If members agree, we will move to clause 9 and come back to clause 14.

Clause 14 referred for further consideration.

Clause 9 (Introductory)

The Chairperson: Clause 9 was parked on 1 October, pending further information from the Department regarding the implications for the citizens and resources of Lisburn and Castlereagh being incorporated into the new greater Belfast council. It was agreed on 8 October, subject to a recommendation, that the clause be amended to reflect the concerns of the Committee, and it was noted that the Department was willing to adopt that approach. Are we any further forward on that?

The Committee Clerk: Based on your discussion last week, the Bill Clerk and myself, have made the suggested recommendation. You will find the recommendation for clause 9 in the table. Owing to the shortage of time, it will be difficult to come forward with an amendment to the clause during Committee Stage, but the Committee

will make a recommendation for an amendment to provide for direct representation of the existing councils of Castlereagh and Lisburn on the Belfast statutory transition committee.

Between now and the Bill's Consideration Stage, I will work with the Bill Clerk and bring to the Committee for discussion an amendment based on that recommendation.

The Chairperson: A point was made about the strategic leadership board, and Mr Kinahan mentioned shortfalls in the representation of some areas.

The Committee Clerk: Mr Ford's particular concern on the Castlereagh/Lisburn issue was that there would not be assimilation of four councils, but rather parts of existing councils.

Mr Ford: There is a problem, because the current definitions of a successor council and a predecessor council assume that whole councils will merge. That does not apply to the new greater Belfast local government district. If we do not get that definition right, there will be problems with clause 14. For that purpose, I wondered whether we could add “except in relation to Belfast” to clause 9(2). However, the definitions for successor councils in clause 14 will still cause problems unless clause 9 is worded carefully. There are people who are paid more than me to work out such wording.

Mr Weir: It may be useful to get the Department's view on the issue. If we tabled an amendment to clause 14 about the greater Belfast situation, I suspect that a similar amendment would be needed to clause 9 to deal purely with the greater Belfast situation. It should not be beyond the wit of the Committee or the Department to come up with a form of words to cover that situation. I am not asking the Department to write a blank cheque, but if there were amendments to both clauses that dealt specifically with the Belfast/Castlereagh/Lisburn situation, I presume that it would be happy to accommodate them.

Mr Jim Stewart (Department of the Environment): We are in touch with our colleagues in the Office of the Legislative Counsel about the necessary amendments. Although we have not received any definite instruction, the need to include representatives from Castlereagh and Lisburn councils on the Belfast STC will almost certainly require some amendments to clause 9 and clause 14. However, we have not yet received any details.

Mr Maye: We are also very happy to work with the Committee Clerk and the Bill Clerk to work out the detail of the proposed amendments.

The Chairperson: The concern about the assimilated parts is that the representatives who move onto statutory transition committees reflect the ward, rather than the whole council. That is an important principle.

Mr Weir: That is a sensible way forward. There is also the quid pro quo: if the Belfast STC is to reflect the wards that it is assimilating, there should not be representatives of those wards on the Lisburn/Castlereagh STC. We cannot have a situation in which people get two bites at the cherry.

The Chairperson: I have heard the concerns of both the strategic leadership board and the Committee.

The Committee Clerk: Last week, the recommendation was that an amendment would reflect the concerns of the Committee. The hope was that the recommendation in front of members would reflect those concerns, but I sense that it is not specific enough. Can we reword it now, or in time for Thursday's meeting?

Mr Ford: Clause 9(2)(a) and clause 9(2)(b) refer to: "the whole or the major part of the district".

In a non-legal way, although I look to my left to see if there is an instant legal response free of charge, I suggest that it may be possible to change that to:

"the whole or a substantial part of the district".

Mr Weir: There would then need to be a definition of "substantial". For example, in my area, there are approximately 300 constituents for whom council representation will move from North Down to Belfast.

That would be more of a minor tidying-up exercise than a substantial amendment. Therefore, "substantial" must be defined. I do not know the figures from Castlereagh and Lisburn, but to deal with this particular set of circumstances, it may be that "substantial" is defined as consisting of at least 15%, or 20% of the area from which it is moved.

Mr Ford: I think that something around 10% would do.

Mr Weir: Whatever it may be, a definitive figure must be agreed.

Mr Kinahan: Is that proportionate?

Mr Weir: No; it not just a question of that. There is no problem with introducing terminology. The issue is that there must be a definition of terminology such as "substantial" or "proportionate", because one person's view of "proportionate" may not be another's.

The Chairperson: The devil is in the detail, as usual.

Mr Weir: From what I have gathered from Mr Ford's suggestion, the definition is needed to deal specifically with the Belfast/Castlereagh/Lisburn situation. That is the only case involving a proportionately large area.

Mr Ford: It is to include the Lisburn and Castlereagh segments, while excluding the minor boundary tweak between Holywood and Belfast, or the minor issue around Banbridge with Newry/Down.

Mr Stewart: I think that the Department can address that sort of detail in the statutory transition committee regulations, which we can produce later. If the Committee agrees that the Department can make the necessary amendments to allow the inclusion of representation from Castlereagh and Lisburn on the Belfast STC, we can address the detail of where those representatives should come from in the STC regulations.

Mr Ford: That is fair enough. However, we must be absolutely sure that we properly define "successor" and "predecessor" councils, or the Department will be unable to draft the regulations.

Mr Maye: The legislative draftsman is considering precisely that issue: how we circumvent that definitional problem.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee may want to have another go at suggesting an amendment with which members are happy. Then they can agree the clause, and the amendment will be proposed between now and Consideration Stage.

Therefore, we could recommend an amendment to clause 9 that provides for direct representation of the existing parts of the councils of Castlereagh and Lisburn moving to Belfast City Council on the Belfast statutory transition committee, if not already represented.

Mr Ford: At present, they are not already represented, so the last few words are not needed. Bearing in mind Peter Weir's point, must the primary legislation, as opposed to the regulations, take into account the issue that only the parts of Lisburn and Castlereagh that are moving to that new council should be represented on the Belfast statutory transition committee?

The Committee Clerk: We could cover that in the proposed amendment, which will be brought back to the Committee when there is more time for discussion. What the Committee is debating is just a recommendation.

Mr Weir: I am relaxed about whether a direct amendment or affirmative resolution covers specifically how representation will be drawn from particular wards or a district electoral area. In the case of Lisburn, I think that the bulk of a DEA is involved, so at some stage it may be necessary to list the wards.

Once the principle is established, I believe that the regulations should spell out the exact detail. If I understand it correctly, about six wards from Lisburn and nine or 10 from Castlereagh are affected. However, neither case involves complete DEAs. I believe that the Lisburn case involves six out of seven wards at Dunmurry Cross. The Castlereagh example takes in a DEA that is split between Castlereagh and Belfast. To take account of that may require a level of detail that is better included in regulations or by way of an amendment that introduces the principle, rather

than the Committee's getting too specific in its recommendation. Does that make sense, or is that clearer?

The Committee Clerk: On that basis, will you look at the recommendation as written?

The Chairperson: Yes?

Mr Ford: Sorry, will you just read it? Everybody else wanted me to say it, so I have said it for you.

The Committee Clerk: It is the suggested recommendation that you have in front of you:

"For an amendment to provide for direct representation of the existing councils of Castlereagh and Lisburn on the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee."

Mr Boylan: That reads better.

The Chairperson: It is clear anyway.

Mr Beggs: Perhaps it should read:

"direct representation from the relevant boards".

Without making that explicit, the representation could be from irrelevant wards.

The Chairperson: It should be direct representation from the relevant wards, rather than from the council as a whole.

Mr Weir: I am persuaded of the general logic of it being purely the wards. The only issue that might slightly muddy the waters is if, in one sense, Belfast is to almost absorb the representation from those councils. In which case, are there any implications for Castlereagh and Lisburn councils themselves? For example, would that affect roughly a quarter or 20% of their council areas? Are there any institutional issues? What I mean is this: are we simply accepting that, for example, all of the assets of Lisburn and all issues that affect that remain with Lisburn? For example, there may well be an issue for Lisburn staff who work in the areas that may be related to the entire council.

The Chairperson: We are only discussing representation on the statutory transition committee. Ian, would you like to clarify this?

Mr Maye: The suggested recommendation is in addition to a direct discussion and negotiation between the two sovereign transition committees on matters affecting staff, assets and liabilities. Both need to happen. I will pick up on the point that Mr Ford raised; there needs to be a mechanism to allow the representatives of those wards and district electoral areas to put forward their views on how Belfast should develop, since those people are moving into Belfast. Equally, there still needs to be a direct negotiation between the two transition committees as a whole on issues that affect the councils as a whole.

The Chairperson: That seems rational. Are members content?

Mr Dallat: As I have only recently joined the Committee, I am not terribly au fait with the issue. Has the Committee been focusing on those councils that are moving as a whole but are perhaps transferring from one particular allegiance to another, to put it broadly? For example, two nationalist-controlled councils and two unionist-controlled councils will be brought together to constitute the new Causeway and Glens council area. Is there a need for anything in the Bill to ensure that the rights and assets of those who will be undergoing quite a transformation are protected?

The Chairperson: That is not directly related to the clauses we are considering, but there are overall checks and balances that have to be addressed in the legislation.

Mr Weir: At a broader level, it may be useful for Mr Dallat —

Mr Dallat: You are always helpful to me.

Mr Weir: That is what I was born into this life to do. In relation to the statutory transition committees, it has been agreed at policy development panel A that protections for minorities be put in place in relation to things like call-in mechanisms and weighted votes in certain circumstances where something can be shown to be detrimental to one community or another. That has been agreed among all of the parties. The intention is for that to be in place for the establishment of the new councils, but it has also been agreed at policy development panel A that, whatever protections are put in place for the new councils would also, by way of regulations, cover the statutory transition committees. There is a nuclear option in case there is some attempt at some degree of abuse of position.

The Chairperson: The policy panel A's deliberations on that point are at tab 2 of the papers and a number of mechanisms are outlined.

Mr Dallat: I always rely on what Peter advises me, especially on such issues. It is unique, and the Committee understands that. So long as I have intimated my concerns about it, I will take all the advice that is available on how it will be achieved. It is better to mention it now, rather than have something happen in the future.

The Chairperson: It will come before the Committee for further deliberation.

Mr Boylan: I would like the Committee Clerk to read over again where we are going to go with that issue.

The Chairperson: We are at clause 9. Do members want to include this specification to the wards or not? I was left in some doubt.

Mr Ford: There may be a technical difference in specifying wards or DEAs on the basis that the new boundaries do not coincide exactly with the old boundaries.

The Chairperson: Could we say “relevant areas”?

Mr Maye: “DEA” is probably the safest option, because individual members, as you know, are not elected to wards. The model that we are thinking of is that we identify the DEAs that are substantially affected and that then forms the pool from which candidates are drawn.

Mr Ford: I accept the principles of how you are trying to operate. To take one example: Castlereagh East is a seven-member DEA, two wards of which are transferring to Belfast and five are remaining in Lisburn and Castlereagh. I am not sure how one starts to define that in the primary legislation, but I am sure that we could give the draftsman the job of putting it into the secondary regulations, and give him longer to do it.

Mr Maye: It will be a matter for the regulations. The draftsman’s job is to ensure that the clause is sufficiently wide to allow for specific arrangements to be put in place for Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh so that that issue can be addressed in the detailed regulations.

The Chairperson: We seem to be agreed on the principle of inclusion. It is just a matter of finding a form of words to achieve that. However, it will be subject to affirmative resolution when there will be an opportunity for members who are not content to vote against it.

Mr Ford: I still think that putting in the relevant DEAs is creating a problem. I think that, at this stage, it should be providing for representation from the councils, and the secondary regulations are words that should be precisely determined. There is not, strictly, a “relevant” DEA. Ian might know: am I not correct that all four DEAs of Castlereagh are affected, but only in small parts?

Mr Beggs: That is a valid point.

The Chairperson: So we are back to the original, where we started.

Mr Beggs: We have made a clear marker as to what we are expecting in the regulations.

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mr Ford: We have informed the thinking of the Department by having this discussion in front of them.

Mr Weir: I am glad that somebody is informed.

The Chairperson: The suggested recommendation is for an amendment to provide for direct representation of the existing councils of Castlereagh and Lisburn on the Belfast statutory transition committee.

Do members agree that form of words?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee’s proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 14 (Statutory transition committees: constitution)

The Chairperson: We shall return to clause 14. Are members content?

Mr Ford: I am content, so long as the amendments to clause 9 cover the concerns that I raised previously about clause 14(4). The amendments will have to be done in a particular way to cover that, otherwise clause 14(4) may also have to be amended.

The Chairperson: There two ways of doing it. We can accept it on the basis that clause 9 covers it, or we can make a recommendation similar to that made for clause 9. Members will see it in blue font in the table.

Mr Ford: I am content with either option, so long as we recognise that it has to be done.

Mr Beggs: Does the Department acknowledge that there is a preferred option?

The Chairperson: We will check with the Department on that.

Mr Beggs: For the record, Mr Maye is nodding.

Mr Maye: It will need to be checked. I do not see any reason why you should not use the same form of words that you have agreed for clause 9.

The Chairperson: The suggested form of words is: “For an amendment to provide for direct representation of the existing councils of Castlereagh and Lisburn on the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee”.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee’s proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 14, subject to the Committee’s proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 15 (Statutory transition committees: functions)

The Chairperson: We move to clause 15, which was parked on 1 October, pending further information from the Department on the cost to the ratepayers of the staff redundancy scheme and the time and the role of the statutory transition committees in the process. There was a commitment to share with the Committee the PricewaterhouseCoopers report, but we have not yet received that.

Mr Maye: Agreement has been sought from the Minister on the release of the report to the Committee. It is preferable that the Committee receive the report today, because it is also going to the members of the strategic leadership board today. Unfortunately, we did not hear back from the Minister in advance of the start of the meeting, but we hope to do so in the course of the day.

Mr Weir: My informed understanding of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report is that it stretches to

about 200 or 300 pages. Even if we were to receive it immediately, the best speed readers among us would have difficulty going through it.

Mr Maye: The specific question was about the cost of redundancy for staff. Our best guess at this point in the economic appraisal is that it will be somewhere under £18 million. That is a worst-case scenario, and it is based on the premise that all of the people who are eligible will decide to leave or will not have a job in the new council.

Mr Weir: My understanding is that the PricewaterhouseCoopers report was drafted on the basis of a worst-case scenario. The report also suggests a range of funding models. Is it not also the case that, as well as the one-off cost of redundancies, the councils will need fewer high-level staff? The number of councils will be reduced from 26 to 11, so there will be considerable revenue savings. Have you any indication of what those savings will be?

Mr Maye: I have not seen the final version of the report, because it was going out only this morning. However, there were considerable offset savings, not only due to the need for less staff at senior levels across the new councils, but from other areas.

The Chairperson: We will await the details with interest and see if the proof of the pudding is in the eating. However, that has not been the experience in the review of public administration to date. We are concerned about who will pick up the tab for the £18 million costs. Will that be foisted onto the ratepayer? Will central government pick it up?

Mr Maye: We do not know yet. The purpose of commissioning the economic appraisal was to get a firm idea as to what the upfront implementation costs, the longer-term cash benefits and the known cash benefits would be. That will enable the Minister, with the benefit of advice from the strategic leadership board, to put a case to the Executive to put in place a funding mechanism and programme. Those decisions have yet to be made by the Executive, but the economic appraisal will stand at the heart of the case that our Minister puts forward to the Executive for a funding programme to be put in place.

The Chairperson: Clause 15 allows only for regulations to be put in place that will facilitate the RPA.

Mr Ford: To clarify, clause 15 does not prevent the Department from being the body that funds anybody's redundancy packages?

The Chairperson: No.

Mr Ford: Clearly, there is a particular issue for some cases of amalgamation of smaller councils where there could be quite significant costs, as opposed to, for example, Belfast, where, presumably, there should

be no reason for redundancies at all. The application of those expenses is likely to be somewhat lopsided. If that is not picked up by the Department, it could create major difficulties in some areas.

The Chairperson: Ian, do you want to respond to that?

Mr Maye: I do not believe that there is much that I can add to what I have already said. The Minister and his colleagues in the Executive are conscious of all of those issues. Recent media reporting of the potential implications for ratepayers as a result of amalgamation have brought those issues into sharp relief for Ministers and others who are involved in the process, particularly members of the strategic leadership board.

The Chairperson: There is further clarification to come. It will not impact on that particular clause, which simply allows for the winding up of older councils and the formation of new transition committees.

Mr Maye: Mr Ford is correct: the clause does not determine who pays. It simply provides that councils act as the vehicle for paying redundancy costs to individual members of staff.

The Chairperson: On that basis, therefore, are members content with clause 15 as drafted?

Mr Beggs: Given the decision not to go with shadow councils, and to go with that route instead, I am content that that is appropriate.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 15 agreed to.

The Chairperson: We need to look again at clauses 10 and 13, which are in the table. Last week, the Committee agreed that those clauses be amended, subject to a Committee recommendation, to reflect its concerns. We now need to reach agreement on the recommendations for each of those clauses. Recommendations are in blue font in the central column of the table.

Clause 10 (Control of disposals and contracts of existing councils)

The Chairperson: It is recommended that clause 10 be amended to allow for an appeals mechanism by which councils could challenge decisions made by statutory transition committees under the clause. Members will recall that the issue was the power of veto and whether member councils could have an appeals mechanism, which seems to be fair. Are members, therefore, content with the clause subject to that proposed amendment?

Mr Ford: The only issue with that is whether the clause should specify to whom an appeal should be made, given that the final arbiters in those matters are the Minister and the Department. They have the responsibility to sanction loans. Therefore, obviously, appeals would be made to the Department. Perhaps it

should be specified that appeals would be made to the Department, in effect, on the basis of the reasonableness of the transition committee's decision.

Mr Beggs: I concur with that.

Mr Weir: That could be done fairly easily. Presumably, part of that is the power of direction that is given to the Minister and the Department. In a sense, the Minister would be able to intervene at any stage. There is concern that there would be gridlock in some transition committees.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 10, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clause 13 (Contravention of direction)

The Chairperson: It is recommended that clause 13 be amended to provide clarification of the definition of "successor council", as per clause 9.

The Committee Clerk: The problem with clause 13 was directly related to the definition in clause 9.

Mr Ford: There is direct read-across.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, *put and agreed to.*

Clause 13, subject to the Committee's proposed amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: The Committee Clerk and the Bill Clerk will now prepare Committee amendments in accordance with those recommendations for discussion and approval by the Committee before the Bill's Consideration Stage. Members have also been provided with the draft Committee report on the Bill. That will be updated to reflect today's proceedings and tabled for members' formal approval at our Committee meeting on Thursday 15 October 2009. Thank you very much.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

14 October 2009

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BILL (NIA 1/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Francie Molloy
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jim Shannon
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Tony Canavan	} Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Geoffrey Simpson	

The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy): Following last week's meeting, the Committee agreed to conduct its clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill at this meeting. We have already heard from Eilis Haughey from the Bill Office.

Members' papers contain a copy of a letter from Jim Allister QC, leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice, concerning the Department of Justice Bill. The letter was received into the public e-mail of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on Thursday 8 October, six days after the closing date for submissions to the Committee.

There are a number of options. We can ignore the letter because it was received late; accept and consider it and include it in the Committee report; or accept and consider it and agree not to include it in the Committee report, but place it in the Library.

Mr Spratt: The letter came in after the closing date. No changes can be made for anybody. Everybody was

publicly notified of the date by which submissions should be in.

The Chairperson: Are you saying that we should ignore it completely?

Mr Spratt: Yes.

The Chairperson: Are there any other views?

Mr Spratt: It was not even sent to the right Committee.

Mr Elliott: I do not think that there is any harm in noting it. We can note it as part of the consideration. How do we stand legally? What is the legal point of view?

Mr Molloy: If there was a closing date on the submissions, anything received after that date is not valid. Otherwise, we would have to be open to submissions from anybody at any time.

Mr Elliott: To be fair, whenever the Planning Service has a 14-day period to accept responses to planning applications, it still accepts representations that come in outside of that period. Maybe we should check the legal standpoint. If that is the situation, so be it.

The Chairperson: We would have to respond to the letter anyway to indicate to the person that it had been received late, and therefore would not form part of the inquiry report.

Mr Attwood: I have no sympathy with the contents of the letter, but, to stand back, it is a racing certainty that everybody around this table has replied to public consultations out of time at one time or another. We have all done it. We would be rightly annoyed at having gone to the bother of sending a response if we then did not have any recognition that we responded.

Yes, the letter is out of time; we have all been in that place. However, it would not pain anyone to include it in the report. Practically, to choose to go down another road is to give people easy ammunition when they should not be given any ammunition. My sense is that we should include it, not get too preoccupied by it, and move on. It will be buried deep in the memory of this Committee's work.

The Chairperson: The suggestion is that we either ignore the letter completely and do not publish it anywhere or include it in the report but specify that it was too late for inclusion and consideration.

Mr Spratt: If I heard the conversation right earlier, someone asked for legal clarification; however, I have yet to hear that.

The Chairperson: We can get a legal view on that for next week.

Ms Anderson: Am I right to say that the two options are either to ignore the letter or to include it in the report, or is there a third option of putting it the Library?

The Chairperson: Yes. A letter can be put in the Library in all cases, apparently. Whether this is a legal matter, however, is open to debate; it is for us to decide. I am not sure that there are legal points to be debated, because the fact is that the letter was received late.

Mr Spratt: Are we now saying, for example, that it is all right for someone to submit a tender for a procurement contract two or three days late and that it will be considered? If there is a date being worked to, there must be some sort of legal process. If that were allowed to happen, it would make a nonsense of the public procurement process.

The Chairperson: We are not talking about public procurement.

Mr Spratt: That does not matter; I am making a point.

The Chairperson: I accept your point. We have had a discussion. Are there any proposals?

Mr Elliott: I propose that we accept the letter and put it in the report, as Mr Attwood suggested.

The Chairperson: Do other members have any proposals?

Mr McElduff: I propose that we ignore the letter. I am not going to propose that we do not ignore it, so I propose that we ignore it.

The Chairperson: There are two counter-proposals. I will deal with the first proposal, Mr Elliott's, first. He proposed that the letter be published with a note clearly confirming that it was received late and is, therefore, not to be considered for consultation purposes. Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Mr McElduff, do you still wish to pursue your proposal?

Mr McElduff: No.

The Chairperson: Then the decision is made.

The Chairperson: We now move to the clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Department of Justice Bill. With us today are Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) officials Mr Tony Canavan and Mr Geoffrey Simpson. Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for your attendance and patience. I remind members that this session is being recorded by Hansard for inclusion in the Committee's report.

Mr Canavan and Mr Simpson are here simply to assist with any questions or queries that members might have. Members will have the opportunity to raise concerns and suggest amendments. Members should read the relevant clauses in and schedule to the Bill along with the relevant commentary in the memorandum.

The Bill has three clauses and one schedule. Each clause will be considered in turn. The Committee has three options: to agree that it is content with the clause as drafted, to agree to recommend to the Assembly that a clause be amended, or to reject the clause as drafted. Members will have the opportunity to consider any amendments to each clause following the reading of the clause.

Clause 1 (The Department of Justice)

The Chairperson: Clause 1 provides for the establishment of the Department of justice as a Northern Ireland Department, describes its intended functions and makes consequential amendments to other Orders. Paragraphs 1 to 20 of the schedule detail amendments to legislation to change references to:

“justice department (within the meaning of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002)”

to “Department of Justice”. Paragraphs 21 and 22 detail amendments to legislation to omit references to:

“the justice department”.

Are there any recommendations for amendments?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

Clause 2 (Minister in charge of Department of Justice)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 sets out the arrangements for appointing the Minister of justice. Do members have any recommendations for amendments?

Mr Attwood: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out clause 2.

This should not detain us too long, because the politics of this have been well rehearsed. My amendment is to delete clause 2, the consequence of which is that the Department of justice will get established, but the provisions for the filling of the post of justice Minister fall to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the d'Hondt mechanism for democratic inclusion.

Clause 2 is drafted as it is because, in order to go down that particular road of bypassing d'Hondt and the 1998 Act, one has to put into the legislation and the Assembly one of the prior models that are outlined in a number of pieces of Westminster legislation. The relevant Westminster legislation for the purposes of clause 2 is legislation that was passed in 2006, 2007 and 2009, where there were a family of models for the filling of the justice Ministry. The 2006 legislation, as I recall, laid down provisions for the appointment of the Minister by rotation, the appointment of joint Ministers and the appointment of a single Minister on a cross-community vote.

The 2007 legislation, which is known as the Hain legislation, contained provision for the appointment of a senior and a junior Minister. The 2009 legislation outlined nine different models for the appointment of the Minister. If clause 2 is deleted, one does not opt in to any of the models that are in the 2006, 2007 or 2009 legislation. In those circumstances, one falls back on the original legislation, namely the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and the provision therein for the appointment of Ministers save OFMDFM, which is the principle of d'Hondt.

I propose to delete clause 2, which deletes the cross-community provision that has been recommended by OFMDFM and reinstates the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement — the democratic wishes of the people of Ireland.

The Chairperson: Your proposal is, basically, to leave out clause 2 in its entirety. Has anyone any comments or questions for the officials?

Mr Elliott: I want to ask Mr Attwood a question in respect of his proposed amendment. Would it mean a total rerun of d'Hondt after the appointment, in the first instance, or a follow-on to the appointments that have already been made?

Mr Attwood: That would be a matter of political judgement for the various parties. D'hondt could be rerun, or there could be an arrangement among parties as to what will happen in respect of the eleventh Ministry, which will be the justice Ministry. We are neutral on whether d'Hondt should be rerun. That is a matter for political judgement. If that is what parties decide to do, so be it. If there is another mechanism for the appointment to the justice Ministry by arrangement between political parties, so be it. That is a matter for political judgement after the legislation has been passed. We are saying that the appointment should be made strictly on the basis of d'Hondt and the principle of democratic inclusion.

The Chairperson: We do not doubt your view. However, I wonder whether Eilis Haughey or any of the officials could guide us. What is your understanding of the consequences of the removal of clause 2 for the appointment of a policing and justice Minister?

Mr Tony Canavan (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): My understanding is that Mr Attwood is correct: the default mechanism would be d'Hondt. It would require a rerun of d'Hondt.

The Chairperson: That is not what Mr Attwood said.

Mr Geoffrey Simpson (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Under section 18 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all Northern Ireland Ministers shall cease to hold office in the event of a resolution that causes one or more ministerial offices to become vacant.

The Chairperson: And the way to correct that under the current law, the 1998 Act, is by d'Hondt?

Mr G Simpson: It would require d'Hondt to be run in totality.

The Chairperson: Therefore, it is not a matter of adding a ministerial post by d'Hondt: it requires a total rerun of d'Hondt.

Mr Canavan: That is our understanding. Another consequence that Mr Attwood did not mention is that the 2012 sunset effect would not apply, because that is conditional on the model, which is contained in this legislation, being used.

The Chairperson: And that is part of clause 2? Therefore, the sunset clause would fall as well, effectively. What is your understanding of how the sunset clause works?

Mr Canavan: I recall Mr Attwood's comment at the previous meeting. Subsequently, there was a letter from OFMDFM on that subject. We stand by that letter, which is dated 21 September.

At Second Stage, we heard a slightly fuller theory about the application of the sunset clause. After that, we took the opportunity to consult people who were closer to the drafting of the Northern Ireland Act 2009. They stated that it was never the intention that the interpretation that Mr Attwood's Assembly colleague placed on a particular provision in the 2009 Act would apply to frustrate the operation of the sunset clause. It was not intended that there would be a hidden fallback mechanism.

The Chairperson: Is that the law of unintended consequences?

Mr Canavan: It would be a matter for the courts to decide on the appropriate interpretation. We have an interpretation of the legislation as it stands. Other people may have a different interpretation. Ultimately, the interpretation would be decided by the courts. We find it hard to see how the clause that relates to the application of the imposed model, which was put into the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in 2007, could apply in the circumstances that have been suggested — to frustrate the sunset clause — because of the condition that is attached to that in the 2007 amendment to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Chairperson: Is there any way that we can seek certainty on the issue? Should we do so? Can anyone provide certainty on the issue, let alone a judge?

Mr Canavan: Ultimately, certainty can be provided only by a court, but there may be a range of legal interpretations. We would point to the fact that there is a condition attached to the application of the imposed mechanism — the Minister and junior Minister approach — which Mr Attwood suggests would be

imposed by the Northern Ireland Office in advance of the sunset clause's applying. That condition is that the Secretary of State has to be of the view that there is no possibility of the Assembly's passing legislation. The sort of legislation that would be relevant to that is this Bill: should this Bill be passed, our view is that the possibility of imposing a solution would fall, because the condition could not be met.

The Chairperson: You would then, presumably, rely on the Secretary of State to intervene?

Mr Canavan: In what sense?

The Chairperson: Who would fix it? If there was deadlock, and it was clear that the Assembly might not renew the legislation or pass similar legislation, would it be up to the Secretary of State to deal with it? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Canavan: It would not be the task of the Secretary of State to impose the solution that was created in 2007. The Secretary of State may have other policies and plans; the First Minister said words to that effect in the Second Stage debate. In our view there is no secret fallback position or a hidden default clause in the legislation.

The Chairperson: If it falls, it falls.

Mr Canavan: Yes.

The Chairperson: What would be the consequence of that?

Mr Canavan: The consequence would be that the Department of justice would be dissolved on 1 May 2012.

The Chairperson: And revert where?

Mr Canavan: It would not revert anywhere. It would dissolve.

Mr Elliott: Where would the powers revert to?

The Chairperson: Through the Chair — I am the Chairperson, sorry. *[Laughter.]* In your view, where would the powers revert to at that stage?

Mr Canavan: There is no provision in the legislation for a reversion of the powers.

Mr Elliott: What are the consequences of that? Do the powers stay with the Executive — if there is a functioning Executive — or do they revert to the Northern Ireland Office or Westminster?

The Chairperson: Do they simply disappear?

Mr Canavan: They would disappear in the sense that the responsibility for carrying out those functions would be with the Department that had ceased to exist and had dissolved. It creates a constitutional conundrum, but the theory is that that imposes on the Assembly the requirement to do something about it before that.

Mr Attwood: In our interpretation, one of the consequences would be —

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Chairperson. By asking those questions, I think that you are putting the officials into a position that they should not be put into. You are asking “what if” questions about 2012. It is totally unreasonable to put the officials in that position at this stage.

Mr Elliott: We are only asking questions. The officials are here to try to answer them, and if they cannot answer them, so be it. We are trying to get answers today.

The Chairperson: The officials do not appear to be either unwilling or incapable of answering. That is important. The questions that have been asked so far have been reasonable; they have been about the Bill and its consequences and even its potential. We could say that we are in a “what if” situation. It is possible for such circumstances to prevail.

Mr Attwood: In the note that I sent the Committee Clerk, I said that I would share my party's legal advice with members of the Committee and the witnesses. I will now do so, so that you can assess whether the critical part of our legal advice is stronger, given that there are a number of interpretations. I can distribute it now or later in the meeting; it is up to you.

I was going to come back to this after clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill, but, now that the matter has arisen, these are the points I want to make. I am firmer in my view than I was two or three weeks ago in relation to the legal interpretation of this. The reason for that is that we can take a number of the commentaries on the SDLP view of the legislation. In the debate on 22 September, to which you have referred, it is clear that the First Minister acknowledged that there may be another interpretation. For example, on page 244 of the Hansard report, he says:

“I am aware of the section that he is referring to, and I am aware that it is possible to put on it the construction that he puts on it.”

Then, later, he adds:

“in some legal sense, the Member may be able to construct an argument that that is what might happen”,

meaning our view about the default position being election by parallel consent.

What you have said in your evidence to the Committee is that the view that the SDLP has was “never the intention” of the legislation. However, it might be the intention of the legislation. Whether it was designed that way or somehow people fell into it, nonetheless our view is that the First Minister perceives a bit of doubt on that matter, and the fact that you are prepared to say to the Committee that it was never the intention of the legislation to lead to those consequences both suggest that the views that the SDLP has on the matter are correct.

The reason that I am so convinced that we are correct is that Westminster does not legislate for a vacuum. You know the parliamentary draftsmen better than I do, but I worked very closely with the parliamentary draftsmen on various pieces of legislation over the past 10 years, including difficult legislation such as the two police Acts and the two criminal justice Acts, and they got neuralgic about legislating for a vacuum. One has to have certainty. Whatever about the political situation in 2012, one has to have legal certainty in 2009 or at any previous time. So the entire convention of the parliamentary draftsmen in legislating at Westminster is to create certainty. That is why I believe that there is a legal answer to what happens after 2012. Given that this matter is open now, I ask you to consider my party's legal advice and see whether it enlightens you and others as to what happens.

Let me read into the record our view. The Northern Ireland Act 2009, schedule 1, paragraph 5(2)(b) states that paragraphs 6 to 8 are:

"not to apply at all if an Order in Council has been made under section 21A(7C) of the 1998 Act."

The consequence of section 21A(7C), and the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, allows the Secretary of State to impose the model of senior and junior Ministers acting by parallel consent. That is our view and I ask you to consider it, for all the reasons that I have outlined. There is marginal doubt in the First Minister's mind; it may not have been the intention of the legislation but, in my view, it is the effect; Westminster does not legislate for a vacuum; and the nature of the parliamentary draftsman's office at Westminster is very demanding.

There is not a vacuum, there is a fallback. The fallback position is that parallel consent from a junior Minister and a senior Minister will come into effect at the same time the sunset clause comes into effect, in 2012. Moreover, parallel consent can be used as a veto by either party, which is the political point that the SDLP has always made.

The Chairperson: Do you wish to comment on that?

Mr Canavan: My initial response is the same as before: subsection (7A), the imposed solution, is conditional on the following words:

"If it appears to the Secretary of State that there is no reasonable prospect that the Assembly will pass an Act of the kind described in subsection (1)(a) and (b), he may".

At that point, the Order in Council process is brought into play. An Act of the kind that is described in subsection (1)(a) and (b) is one that establishes a new Northern Ireland Department to exercise policing and justice functions, which is precisely what the proposed Bill will do.

Mr Attwood: Until 2012.

Mr Canavan: Our view is that that condition will be fulfilled until 2012, in which case the condition that would be required to apply subsection (7A) would not be valid.

Mr Attwood: Except in 2012, when it becomes valid and consequences arise. You are applying a judgement about what will transpire between now and 2012, and we are saying that we do not disagree with you. However, in law, and given the volatility of politics in this part of the world — and although I hope that it will not be the case — in 2012 the Secretary of State may determine that there is no prospect for agreement and impose a model, otherwise the situation may arise where the Department is dissolved and the civil servants that make up the entire justice family will not be able to act as such. Some people may think it desirable that some civil servants are not able to act as such, but the more fundamental point is that one cannot have the civil servants in the Department of justice and all the Next Steps agencies not having the authority to conduct their business. It would be chaos. What would happen to the prison system, the courts and the police? Legislators do not legislate for chaos.

Mr Canavan: Our understanding is that, not simply up to but beyond 2012, subsection (7A) cannot be applied, because, in effect, it is spent. The condition will be met from the point at which the Bill is enacted.

The Chairperson: Therefore, in spite of hearing Mr Attwood's alternative legal advice, you are content with the legal view that you have expressed.

Mr Canavan: Yes.

Mr Attwood: I will share this advice with officials and members to see whether any further light can be thrown on the matter.

Mr Spratt: In the last paragraph of Mr Attwood's e-mail to the Committee Clerk today, he states:

"I have in confidence shared with Eilis Haughey our legal advice on the issue of a sunset clause. I will table an abridged version of the legal advice at Committee."

Therefore, if the Committee is getting an abridged version, where does sharing a party's legal advice leave Assembly officials? I just want to protect the Committee's officials. Perhaps we could hear what the Bill Clerk intends to do with that piece of advice.

The Chairperson: Earlier, Eilis indicated that her office is available to clarify legal aspects of the Bill for individual members or political parties. Is that correct?

The Clerk of Bills: It is entirely in order for Members in their own capacity or as a party to approach the Bill Office to seek to pave the way or prepare for amendments that are to be tabled by a party or an individual MLA. At last week's meeting, members anticipated that the Committee might seek some advice from the Bill Office and that other advice would be available to

individuals or to parties, should that be sought. Unless I am otherwise instructed, I presume something that I receive from a Member has come from them in their capacity as a Member. I presume that anything that I receive from the Committee comes in its capacity as the Committee.

Mr Spratt: I am not questioning your integrity; my question is to do with the fact that Committee will be given an abridged version. Why is there a difference? Perhaps Mr Attwood will be good enough to tell us why.

Mr Attwood: To be very honest with you, the last three lines —

The Chairperson: Please address the Chair.

Mr Attwood: Sorry. The last three lines of the legal advice have been deleted because they stray into issues of politics, not issues of law. If the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee wish to review the document that I gave to the Bill Office, I have no difficulty with that. I am sure that they will be in a position to confirm that the last three lines of the document are not issues of law but of politics. That is why I abridged the advice. Other than that, it is the exact same piece of paper.

Mr Spratt: I am happy with that.

The Chairperson: That presents an issue for the Committee as to whether it wishes not only to review the legal advice that is being offered by Mr Attwood or anyone else but to refer that legal advice or opinion for further consideration.

Ms Anderson: If the last three lines of the legal advice give some kind of political opinion, I question the impartiality of the legal advice that has been put forward. I know that we could get legal advice that is contrary to that, depending on who was asked. We could be opening up something that is not necessary.

Mr Elliott: Mr Attwood has done quite a bit of work on what is an important issue and something that I also have a concern about. Is it not reasonable for the Committee to get its own legal advice on the matter? I think that that would be more useful. I am not discounting Mr Attwood's legal advice, which I am happy also to look at. However, it might be also be useful for the Committee to get our own legal advice.

The Chairperson: You mean the Committee's own legal advice on the issue, rather than legal advice on Mr Attwood's legal advice? Independent legal advice.

Mr Attwood: I agree. I thought that Mr Canavan's information was useful, and I certainly took a note of the comment that the condition's having been met changes things. That is not our view, but I will get our people to reflect upon that, just as you might want to reflect on our comments.

I will not comment on Martina's point. People should get legal advice and be prepared to share it, rather than try to rely on it in secret. People should be up front and say that there is an issue.

Ms Anderson: That is only if they think that there is an issue.

Mr Attwood: Mr Canavan said that there are ways of interpreting this, and the First Minister has also said so. You may think that there is no other way of interpreting it, but I think differently, and the First Minister thinks differently. Mr Canavan said that there is, at least, room for argument on the matter. In those circumstances, the balance should be on seeking independent advice, and that is what we should do.

The Chairperson: It is not yet a proposal, but the suggestion is that the Committee take its own legal advice on clause 2, particularly on the sunset clause.

Mr Elliott: We should also take advice on the mechanisms for what happens following that.

The Chairperson: Is there a consequence to taking that advice?

The Committee Clerk: Yes: delay. The Committee may want to table a motion to extend the Committee Stage just in case.

The Chairperson: Would there necessarily be delay? Can the Committee not get legal advice within a prescribed period?

Mr Spratt: We might need more legal advice.

The Committee Clerk: We would have to pass that to Legal Services and, as I said, we only have until 10 November to complete the Committee Stage of the Bill. Hopefully, we would get that legal advice before next week's meeting. However, if the Committee agrees to seek legal advice, I advise that it should table a motion to extend the Committee Stage, in case there is any hiccup and we cannot meet that 10 November deadline.

The Chairperson: Surely it is not unreasonable for the Committee to expect to get legal advice within a prescribed period.

Mr Elliott: I assume that even if we tabled a motion to extend the Committee Stage, that would not mean that it had to be extended.

The Committee Clerk: Exactly; it would be a contingency.

The Chairperson: A precaution.

The Committee Clerk: Bear in mind that if the Committee tables an extension motion, that motion has to go before the Business Committee to get on to the Order Paper.

The Chairperson: Therefore, the Committee understands, that voting either for or against what it is being asked to vote on comes with that consequence.

Mr Attwood: A potential consequence; I do not think that an extension will be necessary.

The Chairperson: Therefore are we in favour of Mr Elliott's proposal?

Members indicated dissent.

The Chairperson: That is the issue of precise legal advice. Mr Attwood is pressing to avoke his amendment to clause 2, which, effectively, wipes out that clause.

Question put.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3; Noes 7.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Kennedy.

NOES

Ms G Anderson, Mr McElduff, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr I Robinson, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt.

Question accordingly negated.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 3.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr McElduff, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr G Robinson, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Kennedy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Short title and commencement)

The Chairperson: Subsection (1) gives the short title of the Bill as the "Department of Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2009"; subsection (2) provides for the commencement of the Bill. Mr Attwood has proposed an amendment.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move the following amendment: In page 2, line 6, replace

"such day or days as the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, may by order appoint"

with "7 December 2009".

The impact of the amendment is self-evident. Rather than create further delay and doubt around the devolution of justice, the Committee, and, subsequently, the Assembly, would agree that on Monday 7 December,

the last Monday of term before Christmas, the transfer of powers as outlined in the legislation would occur. The purpose of the amendment is to create certainty; to avoid further delay, doubt and mischief-making; and to empower the Assembly to do that which it should always have been doing in respect of justice and policing obligations.

The Chairperson: Do members have any comments on Mr Attwood's amendment? Does anyone second that? If not, the amendment falls.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Chairperson. When Mr Spratt and I were on the Committee for Employment and Learning, I understood that as long as there was a proposer, there could be a vote.

Mr Spratt: That is my understanding. The proposal does not need to be seconded in any Committee.

The Chairperson: Will the Committee Clerk confirm that?

The Committee Clerk: Yes, the Committee can take a vote.

The Chairperson: I am keen to obey the law. We can take a vote.

Question put.

The Committee divided: Ayes 1; Noes 9.

AYES

Mr Attwood.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Elliott, Mr Kennedy, Mr McElduff, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr G Robinson, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt.

Question accordingly negated.

Mr Shannon: Alex, you are the Lone Ranger.

The Chairperson: It is getting worse for you, Alex.

Mr Shannon: All you need is for your horse to run away.

The Chairperson: The darkest hour is always before the dawn.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 2.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr McElduff, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr G Robinson, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Elliott.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the long title.

The Committee divided: Ayes 7; Noes 2.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr McElduff, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr G Robinson, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt.

NOES

Mr Attwood, Mr Elliott.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: To aid with the timescale for the Committee's reporting back to the Assembly, there will be a two-day turnaround for members and officials on the Hansard report of today's meeting. I thank the officials for attending the meetings and for the advice that they were asked to give.

Mr Attwood: I said last week that other amendments might be tabled today. I have indicated to the Clerk that further amendments on different matters will be proposed to the Assembly in due course.

There was another issue of uncertainty over the Executive status of the justice Minister. Our view is that — and this goes back to Jim's Committee — the justice Minister will have full authority, status and equality in the Executive. That is provided for in sections 20 and 21 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; to change the status of the justice Minister to be something less than that would require Westminster legislation, which is clearly not going to arise in the situation that we face.

Mr Spratt: I do not want the business of my Committee discussed at this Committee.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your input. That appears not to be the remit of this Committee.

Mr Attwood: It is just for completeness. I raised the point last week.

Mr Spratt: It is really a political point.

Mr Attwood: It is only as a matter of courtesy; I would report back at the earliest possible moment.

The Chairperson: Order, please. I remind members that the discussions, debate, and votes that we have had today do not preclude the possibility of Members or parties bringing forward amendments at the Further Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Thank you. The draft report will be prepared for Committee consideration on 21 October, and the Committee is required to report to the Assembly by 10 November. That concludes the business; thank you for your attendance.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

22 October 2009

HOUSING (AMENDMENT) BILL (NIA 7/08)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Simon Hamilton (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Billy Armstrong
Mrs Mary Bradley
Mr Mickey Brady
Mr Thomas Burns
Mr Jonathan Craig
Mr Alex Easton
Ms Anna Lo
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín

Witnesses:

Mr Stephen Baird	} Department for Social Development
Mr Stephen Martin	
Mr Michael Sands	

The Chairperson (Mr Hamilton): The next item on the agenda is clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Housing (Amendment) Bill. Relevant papers, including the Committee's scrutiny table containing proposed amendments, are included in members' packs.

The Committee Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill commenced in June 2009. The Committee has received over 40 written responses on the Bill, around half of which were substantive. The Committee has considered oral evidence from 10 key stakeholder organisations as well as the Department. Given the Committee's extensive consideration of evidence and responses from the Department, it is proposed that formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill commences today. If members are content, we shall proceed.

Previously, members set out their interim positions on possible amendments to the Bill. During the clause-by-clause scrutiny, members will be asked to set out their final positions in respect of possible amendments to the clauses of the Bill. When the majority of members

support an amendment, the Clerk of Bills will take away the proposal and draft appropriate wording for consideration at a subsequent Committee meeting. If members do not feel that they are able to agree to or amend a clause, that must be clearly stated during the clause-by-clause scrutiny. Issues that are raised can be tackled at a subsequent meeting.

If members wish to introduce a new Committee amendment or addition, they must do so clearly during the clause-by-clause scrutiny session. The Department has suggested amendments to the Bill. In those cases, although the Committee may accept the Department's proposal, that is conditional on the actual wording of the departmental amendment. It is intended that the Committee will finally accept departmental amendments only when they are presented for approval at a subsequent meeting.

It is hoped that the entire Bill can be reviewed during today's clause-by-clause scrutiny session. If that proves impossible, the Committee will return to clause-by-clause scrutiny on 5 November 2009. All being well, the final version of all amendments will be submitted for Committee approval at its meeting on 12 November 2009. The final version of the Committee's report on the Bill will be submitted for Committee approval on 19 November 2009, in good time for the reporting date of 1 December 2009.

To speed up the process of clause-by-clause scrutiny and to answer any queries, the Department has been invited to attend the Committee's scrutiny sessions, and I welcome back Michael Sands, Stephen Martin and Stephen Baird from the Department. The Department has also submitted a further written response, which members have received.

I would appreciate members' patience during the clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. We will endeavour to get through it as quickly as possible, but it will be quite time-consuming. I also ask members to forgive any mistakes that may be made, as there is quite a lot of information to get through.

Clause 1 (Homelessness strategy)

The Chairperson: Clause 1 deals with the Housing Executive's duty to produce a homelessness strategy every five years and for certain bodies to take account of that strategy in the exercise of their functions. The Committee previously agreed to propose an amendment to clause 1 to emphasise that the requirement for the Housing Executive to produce the homelessness strategy is a duty, not a power. Specifically, the Committee proposed changing the word "may" on page 1, line 8 of the Bill for "shall". The Department has responded to say that that change would be purely presentational. Michael, do you have anything more to say on that?

Mr Michael Sands (Department for Social Development): No, Chairman. The Department took

advice from the Office of the Legislative Counsel on whether we should change “may” to “shall”, and the advice that was given was that that change was not necessary to give effect to the requirements. However, if the Committee feels that it wants to propose an amendment to change that wording the Department will support it.

The Chairperson: Are members agreed to propose an amendment to replace the word “may” on page 1, line 8 of the Bill with “shall”?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee previously considered whether councils should be added to the list of organisations that are required to take the homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions. The Department has indicated that it does not believe that the councils have a significant role to play with respect to homelessness. The Committee Clerk will provide the Committee with a further briefing on the role that councils play in respect of homelessness at our meeting on 12 November.

Michael, can you clarify whether proposed new article 6B(3) will allow the Housing Executive to include specific actions for any statutory body, including councils, in its homelessness strategy?

Mr Sands: As we discussed last week, it depends on what role councils will play with respect to homelessness; for example, it may form part of their community planning activities. We examined the functions that will be transferred to councils and had difficulty in identifying anything that would require councils to have a homelessness duty. The jury is still out on that issue.

Mr Stephen Martin (Department for Social Development): If councils were to have functions relating to homelessness, proposed new article 6B(3) would allow those functions to be taken account of in the homelessness strategy. There is no doubt about that.

The Chairperson: It is unclear what community planning will involve for councils. Although nothing specific may be transferred from the Department to councils, many Committee members have council experience and believe that as community planning develops, councils may adopt a wider housing role, rather than a specific homelessness role.

Mr Martin: Rather than this being relevant to community planning, given the way that that is being designed, we feel that it could be relevant to the power of well-being. We are happy to look at the matter again in that context, almost to future-proof the Bill. We do not think that there is an issue for councils now, but there may well be if the power of well-being rolls out in a certain way. We will come back to the Committee with a view on that.

The Chairperson: That is fine. Homelessness is relevant to several areas, including community planning, planning, the power of well-being and building control. As I have said, many of the Committee members have a council background —

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes; we deal with the residue of it all.

Mr Craig: It is important that something is put in legislation that puts an onus on councils to take note of the public housing regime. As a councillor, I know that there being no legal imperative of any description on local authorities with regard to housing — and I mean none whatsoever — has had unfortunate consequences.

The Minister tried very hard to get local authorities, along with all other Government bodies, to free up and identify land for transfer, or even sale. There was no legal imperative on councils to do that, and that needs to be addressed so that there is an onus on councils to at least consider doing that. Councils are major landowners in Northern Ireland, so we would be missing out badly if that were not dealt with.

The Chairperson: That has posed a problem in the past in areas where an attempt has been made to transfer land.

Mr F McCann: Jonathan is correct. Taking the matter a step further; the Committee looks at, discusses and debates the strategies as they affect homelessness. However, in a lot of ways, many councillors work at the coalface of homelessness and deal with its impact on people, so they can bring a different approach and attitude to the issue. Therefore, I cannot understand why they would not be included in the process.

I know that the Housing Council will have an opinion on this. Many councillors would argue that more attention needs to be paid to the opinion of local government on certain matters, with that being fed through councils or through the Housing Council. Homelessness is one such matter.

The Chairperson: The Department has said that it will reconsider the issue and come back to the Committee. Is the Committee content to defer consideration of the matter?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee agreed that the Prison Service should be added to the list of organisations that are required to take the homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions. The Department said that it will introduce an amendment in line with the Committee’s proposal. The Committee agreed to accept the Department’s amendment, subject to a review of the wording of that. Are members content with that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee was minded to support an amendment requiring those organisations listed in proposed new article 6A(5) to include homelessness actions and outcomes in their annual plans and reports. The Department has said that annual plans and reports are not always statutory documents and could not be the subject of legislation.

Mr Sands: The Department's line remains exactly the same: because those are not statutory documents, it is not possible to legislate for them.

Mr Martin: An alternative is to utilise accountability mechanisms. There is a scrutiny Committee for each Department and, if it were appropriate, this Committee could use the accountability mechanisms that exist to achieve the same end, but without legislation.

Mr Sands: The situation does occur whereby Ministers and Departments look at and approve the business plans of non-departmental public bodies and, as Stephen said, those can be forwarded to the relevant scrutiny Committees. In fact, I am sure that there is an inclusion in them.

The Chairperson: Do any members have any views on that? Is the Housing Executive's report a statutory document?

Mr Sands: The business plan is not statutory. It is required as part of the Housing Executive's management statement and financial memorandum, which is the main administrative tool between the Department and the Housing Executive.

The Chairperson: What about its annual report?

Mr Sands: Its annual report is statutory. The Housing Executive is required to publish that.

The Chairperson: Is it possible to make an amendment stating that the actions and so forth in respect of the homelessness strategy should be included in the Housing Executive's annual report?

Mr Sands: Again, the requirement is to produce an annual report. We can place a requirement in the management statement's financial memorandum for the Housing Executive to report on homelessness or whatever issue we are addressing. That would be cleaner and would keep all the provisions in one place.

The Chairperson: You could put it into the Bill then?

Mr Sands: Yes. We can take that forward.

Mr Martin: Just to clarify that, it would not be in the Bill but in the management statement. We, as the Housing Executive's regulator, could place that requirement on the Housing Executive without needing to put it in legislation.

The Chairperson: Are members content with that as a way forward, rather than amending the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The Committee did not express a clear view on the funding of emergency accommodation for ineligible homeless people or on the automatic referral of ineligible people who are in danger of destitution. The Department has responded in writing to indicate that such an amendment may leave the Department in breach of immigration law. Do members agree that the Committee accepts the Department's response and wishes to abandon any amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Although the Committee indicated that it was not minded to support the amendment to the effect that the homelessness strategy should include a commitment to provide accommodation and support for families who are victims of intimidation where a conviction of a family member is not tenancy related, members indicated that they wish to bring forward amendments related to antisocial behaviour. I suggest that we deal with that when we come to clause 10, which relates to antisocial behaviour. Do members agree?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: If members do not have any further amendments to propose for clause 1, does the Committee agree that, notwithstanding any deferred amendments, clause 1 is agreed?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 1 referred for further consideration.

Clause 2 (Duty of Executive to provide advice)

The Chairperson: Clause 2 refers to the Housing Executive's duty to provide homelessness advice. Clarity is required from members on the proposed amendment that relates to consultation on the homelessness strategy. The Department's response points out that proposed new article 6B(8), which is found in clause 1 of the Bill, on page 3, lines 10 to 12, requires the Housing Executive to consult on the homelessness strategy. Does the Committee accept the Department's response and are members, therefore, content to abandon the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The next proposed amendment emphasises that it is a duty and not a power of the Department to support advice providers. Specifically, it suggests that the word "may" on page 3, line 38 of the Bill should be replaced with the word "shall". Michael, have you any comment?

Mr Sands: In proposed new article 6D, paragraph (1) makes it clear that it is a duty and it uses the word "shall". In the same article, paragraphs (2) and (3) outline how the Housing Executive can discharge that duty and, because the word "shall" is used in paragraph (1), it is clear that that is a mandatory requirement, and that covers the rest of it.

The Chairperson: So, are you saying that we should not amend that clause?

Mr Sands: There is no need for it. It is already made mandatory in proposed new article 6D(1), so that requirement has to be complied with.

Mr Martin: If I may clarify that; in paragraph D of proposed new article 6, paragraphs (2) and (3) state how the Housing Executive should discharge that duty. A certain level of discretion as to how that duty should be discharged is given, and that is standard practice in legislation because circumstances change and to fetter the Housing Executive's flexibility too much would be counterproductive. The Housing Executive has a duty to ensure that homelessness advice is available free of charge, and the Bill goes on to say how that duty should be delivered, but it does not unduly fetter discretion. If circumstances change, the Housing Executive could meet that duty in a different or more cost-effective way.

The Chairperson: I understand the point that you are making; the word "may" can sometimes make a requirement more robust. In proposed new article 6D(2) it says: "The Executive may give". It would be helpful if you could outline in what circumstances the Executive may not give advice.

Mr Martin: The clause, as currently drafted, states that the Housing Executive has a duty to provide information free of charge. Proposed new article 6D(2) allows the Housing Executive to pay other bodies, such as the Housing Rights Service or Citizens Advice, to provide that advice on its behalf. Proposed new article 6D(3) allows the Housing Executive to provide other services and support to allow such bodies to provide advice. It could be that the situation changes and it becomes more cost effective to meet that duty in a different way. It would be unfair to fetter discretion too much, but the intention is that the duty would be met through funding for a third party.

The Chairperson: Would an amendment that read "the Executive shall" compel the Housing Executive to delegate that function to other bodies?

Mr Martin: Yes; the Housing Executive could then not perform that function under any circumstances. There will be circumstances in which it is more appropriate for the Housing Executive to deliver that advice directly. The proposed new article allows flexibility for a mixed approach, depending on the circumstances.

The Chairperson: The Housing Executive could do it in certain circumstances, or the organisations that you mentioned could do it in other circumstances; it is about what is most appropriate.

Are members happy with that explanation and content that we do not need to proceed with an amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: We do not like the word "may"; we think that someone is going to get one over on us. Thank you; that was helpful.

I refer members to correspondence that the Committee has received from the Housing Rights Service. It argues that the Bill currently only requires the Department to prescribe homelessness advice to people who present as homeless. The Housing Rights Service suggests that the Bill should extend that requirement to prescribe advice in relation to homelessness to everyone, regardless of whether or not they present as homeless.

Mr Sands: As you can imagine, Chairman, the Housing Executive and the other housing advisory services can give all sorts of advice to lots of people. A requirement to include a provision about prescribing homelessness advice to people who would never have recourse to such a course of action seems over the top. We should certainly be able to address the concerns of people who present as homeless, but to widen that requirement would be too much.

The Chairperson: I understand the argument that you could not allow all and sundry to walk in.

Mr Sands: It would mean that the Housing Executive would have to tick a box to say that it informed people on homelessness provisions even if homelessness advice were not relevant to their circumstances.

The Chairperson: What about people who might need advice to prevent them from becoming homeless?

Mr Martin: There is a similar provision in the legislation in Scotland and England. The reason for having that provision is that there is a large number of local authorities in those jurisdictions for which consistency of homelessness advice is an issue, under clause 2-type duties. That consistency issue does not apply here, but we recognise that it would be useful to consult publicly on the types of advice that would be offered on a non-statutory basis. However, we do not currently see any value in doing that on a statutory basis. In other regions there is an impetus to have consistency, but this is a much smaller place with one regional housing authority. There is value in giving guidance to the Housing Executive on a non-statutory basis, which is then consulted on.

Mr F McCann: Having talked to the Housing Rights Service, it was my impression that the issue is about preventing homelessness and not just dealing with people who walk through the door and present as homeless. The people from the Housing Rights Service said that the cross-departmental, cross-sectoral group agreed that that provision should be included.

Mr Martin: We chaired that group and provided support to it. We have checked back through all our records, which show that what was asked for was a duty to produce regulations under clause 4, not under

clause 2. That claim does not tally with our recollection or any of our records on the issue.

Mr F McCann: There seems to be a conflict between what the Department believes was said and what the Housing Rights Service people believe was said.

The Chairperson: We can try to clarify that.

Mr Brady: That probably does need clarification. The Housing Rights Service, with its experience, is perhaps coming from a different perspective. However, it seems to me that it would not have suggested that unless it felt that it was necessary.

You mention England and Scotland. There is such diversity in local authorities there; it depends which political party runs which council and what funding is available. There are all sorts of different agendas. We have one central regional housing authority, and that is an opportunity to be innovative and to provide what, for various reasons, England and Scotland do not. The Housing Rights Service is an organisation with which I have had dealings for 20-odd years, and I do not think that it would suggest something such as this unless it felt that it was on fairly solid ground.

The Chairperson: We will take on board the points that the Department has made and seek face-to-face clarity from the Housing Rights Service at the first opportunity after the Halloween recess. The departmental officials will be at our meeting in the first week after recess.

If members do not have any further amendments to propose for clause 2, does the Committee agree that, notwithstanding any deferred amendments, clause 2 is agreed?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 2 referred for further consideration.

Clause 3 (Eligibility for housing assistance)

The Chairperson: Clause 3 refers to a specific change to eligibility for housing assistance. Clarity is required from members on the proposed amendment that relates to the adoption of plain English standards, alternative formats and non-UK languages. Previously, the Department provided assurance that a minimum standards document relating to the form of homelessness advice would be subject to Committee approval when the Bill is passed. Does the Department have anything to add to that?

Mr Sands: No; it is an operational matter.

The Chairperson: Does the Committee accept the Department's response and agree to abandon the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Brady: I have one point in relation to that. At a function in the Long Gallery with the Royal National

Institute of Blind People, one issue that came up was the lack of information that is available to partially sighted people and those who are blind; perhaps that is something to factor in.

Mr Sands: Yes; we will look at that, Mr Brady.

Mr Brady: Providing an audio format, such as CD, is something else to think about because Braille can be more expensive.

Mr Sands: Audio assistance can be provided at present. Perhaps it is a matter of making sure that more people are aware that it is available.

Mr Brady: Yes; it is important to make people aware that it is available.

The Chairperson: The Department has provided evidence of the guidance issue in relation to the treatment of spent convictions for those who are seeking homelessness support. If the Department does not have anything to add to that, are members happy with the Department's response in respect of that issue and content to abandon the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: If members do not have any further amendments to propose on clause 3, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Power of the Department to prescribe form of advice and assistance)

The Chairperson: Clause 4 refers to the Housing Executive's power to prescribe homelessness advice. The Committee was not previously minded to support any amendments relating to clause 4. Do members have any further amendments to propose for clause 4?

Ms Ní Chuilín: During our discussion on clause 2, Michael suggested that the issue regarding the Housing Rights Service might be more relevant to clause 4.

Mr Sands: Are you referring to the provision of advice?

The Chairperson: Yes; it was said that that matter might be more relevant to clause 4.

Ms Ní Chuilín: If we agree the clause, we should do with the caveat that we may need to come back to it.

The Chairperson: That is fair enough.

Is the Committee happy to agree clause 4, notwithstanding the issue raised by Housing Rights Service?

Mr Martin: The confusion relates to clause 2. When Housing Rights Service presented evidence to the Committee, the issue became confused. The clause

4 duty is the old duty for prescribing, which has been in housing legislation since 1988. The concern of Housing Rights Service relates to the clause 2 duty, which is a new duty, rather than the duty in clause 4.

The Chairperson: We will come back to it and the benefit of your presence will, perhaps, clear that up.

Are members content with clause 4, notwithstanding the matter that was raised?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 4 referred for further consideration.

Clause 5 (Reviews of decisions in relation to homelessness)

The Chairperson: Clause 5 refers to the review of homelessness decisions. The Committee was minded to support an amendment to extend the period during which a review of decisions could be requested from 21 days to 28 days. The Department advised that it was seeking the views of the Housing Executive and the Court Service on the issue.

Mr Sands: We sought their advice on the amendment, and they have no difficulty with it.

The Chairperson: So, you will bring forward an amendment in respect of that?

Mr Sands: Yes.

The Chairperson: If members are content to accept that, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 5, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

The Chairperson: Clauses 6, 7, 8 and 9 refer to issues relating to housing associations and introductory tenancies. The Committee was not minded to support amendments relating to clauses 6, 7, 8 and 9. If members do not wish to propose any further amendments, the Committee can agree the clauses.

Clauses 6 to 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 (Anti-social behaviour: Executive's policies and procedures)

The Chairperson: Clause 10 refers to antisocial behaviour. Members were minded to support an amendment to require the Housing Executive to consult on its antisocial behaviour policies. In response to another question, the Department indicated that the Housing Executive, as a statutory body, is generally required to consult on policies. Are members content with that response and content to abandon the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Members were also minded to support an amendment that would require housing associations to publish their antisocial behaviour policies. The Department indicated that it is seeking advice from the Office of the Legislative Counsel on the matter.

Mr Sands: We have checked with the Office of the Legislative Counsel, and its concern is that we would be placing a statutory duty on housing associations, and that would mean that they would be treated as if they were statutory bodies, which they are not. It would bring them within the scope of a judicial review.

Thinking about the dynamics of issuing particular policy papers; the Housing Executive is a regional housing authority, so it has to issue one policy. However, since there are 33 housing associations, there would have to be 33 different policies, unless, as was suggested last week, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) could establish one composite policy, which it could issue on behalf of all housing associations. To put the requirement onto every housing association, some of which are small community housing associations, would be exceptionally onerous.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not understand the legal difficulties, but I do know that when neighbourhoods experience antisocial behaviour, regardless of who the social landlord is, it is the same for them; it is all relative. If one composite policy were brought in for all social landlords, regardless of their size and function, it would be a measure of goodwill. Of the tenancy documents that all social landlords provide, those dealing with good behaviour and antisocial behaviour are the only ones that are standardised. The rest are far from standardised, which has caused inequalities for some social housing tenants, but in that respect they are by and large the same; we actually had a look at them. Sometimes I think that the legal stuff is used to try to deter us, although I am not saying that it is not a reality.

Mr Martin: We have said before that the Department can achieve the same ends through its powers of regulation over housing associations. That would allow a bit more flexibility. As Michael said, we could get NIFHA to draft a policy on behalf of all associations, or each association could draft its own policy. If we take the statutory duty route, not only do we have concerns about the judicial review — which I will speak about in a moment — but it will result in less flexibility. Each housing association would have to publish its own policy. The Department can achieve the same thing without an amendment, and that is our preferred route.

The point about judicial review is important, because the more a housing association is treated as a statutory

body, the more it can be subject to the regime to which a statutory body is subject, such as a judicial review, which is a very costly process. There is quite a serious financial implication for housing associations if we go down the statutory route.

Mr Stephen Baird (Department for Social Development): We want to standardise the procedures. If we tackle that through imposing duties on individual associations to publish their procedures, those procedures may not be adequate or consistent with what other associations are doing. That may not be the best way to do it. Stephen Martin spoke about the need for a consistent approach, which could be achieved through NIFHA, which is the co-ordinating body. I think that that is more important.

Mr Brady: The mechanisms are already there, so it seems the most logical route to take.

The Chairperson: You can appreciate that, at a constituency level, we see increasing numbers of tenants in housing association properties, as is inevitably the case. We do not draw a distinction, and certainly the people living in those properties do not draw a distinction. However, I understand the legal position that you mentioned. Sometimes I think that housing associations are treated as statutory bodies when it suits and not treated that way when it does not suit. However, members seem to be content with the assurance that we can achieve the same aim through existing powers without putting very onerous duties on small housing associations.

Mr Sands: We will place the requirement on NIFHA to produce a composite policy.

The Chairperson: Are members happy to abandon the possible amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Before we move away from clause 10, I invite members to set out any further proposed amendments in relation to that clause or to antisocial behaviour issues. Fra, I know that you wanted to give us your ideas.

Mr F McCann: I have explained at a number of meetings, and you mentioned earlier, that all of us, including the Department, the Housing Executive, and housing associations, come under tremendous pressure in relation to antisocial activity. It seems that that will be with us forever and a day. We may get on top of the issue at different stages, but it always raises its head again. One of the issues that we constantly come up against is the duty of care. Housing associations and the Housing Executive say that they have a duty of care to applicants, but no duty of care to tenants when someone is moving into a neighbourhood. That has been a sore point.

Another matter is the position of residents associations, which, if they are formed and funded properly, can,

among other things, be an effective tool to combat antisocial activity. Therefore, I would like to suggest a couple of amendments.

First, the Housing Executive and housing associations should be required to provide resources and training for residents associations to help them to combat antisocial behaviour.

Mr Sands: Primary legislation is not the place to include that sort of requirement. Mr McCann's suggestion would be much easier to deal with by amending the housing association guide and the Housing Executive's management statement. The Office of the Legislative Counsel would not be happy about putting such detail into primary legislation, which is designed to enable things to happen. Therefore, getting into that sort of detail would not be appropriate. Nevertheless, Mr McCann, we will certainly look at amending the guide to include requirements on housing associations and the Housing Executive to share that information.

Mr F McCann: I appreciate what you said about amending the guide; however, over the years, it has been difficult to get housing associations and the Housing Executive to work with residents associations and to provide them with whatever meagre resources there might have been. That amendment would oblige housing associations and the Housing Executive to actively consider funding residents associations.

Mr Sands: We can look at and address that point, but I cannot comment on it now. There are even more difficult funding situations.

Mr F McCann: I appreciate that but, given the nature of the work that residents associations do, they are excluded from almost all funding opportunities.

The Chairperson: Before we move on, Fra, are you happy with that response?

Mr F McCann: I take that it we will be coming back to this point during this period. I would like to go ahead with it, but Mr Sands said that he wants to come back to it.

Mr Sands: We can come back to the Committee about amending the guide to introduce that suggestion.

Mr Martin: I wish to clarify two points about that. First, the Housing Executive works with a number of organisations in the voluntary and community sector and although that work may not be deemed sufficient, it is ongoing. Antisocial behaviour is not just a housing issue; it is a big community safety issue, and each council has a community safety partnership, which also funds residents associations. It is important that the Committee bears that in mind when considering any amendment in respect of this issue.

Mr F McCann: I understand what Stephen said, but I sit on some of the bodies and groups that he was

talking about, so I know how they work and the impact that they have on areas. Nevertheless, in many areas, residents associations are fairly weak because they have not had any direct input, funding or training from the Housing Executive. I am talking about putting that funding requirement on a statutory basis. If possible, I would like to move ahead with that amendment.

The Chairperson: The Department is saying that it is not minded to amend on that point. Is the Committee happy with the Department's assurance that it will look into amending the relevant guidance, and can we defer this matter and come back to it later? Fra indicated that he would like to proceed, but it might be fairer to give members time to consider the matter and come back to it.

Mr F McCann: Come back to it when, Chairperson; next week or the week after?

The Chairperson: We have until the week after next, so we could look at it on 5 November.

Mr F McCann: My second proposed amendment is that, prior to transferring tenants from one area to another as a result of antisocial behaviour, the Housing Executive and housing associations should be required to carry out an area impact assessment.

Mr Sands: Again, that brings us to questions about how much detail should be included in primary legislation. Nevertheless, if I might clarify the position: the Housing Executive does not simply transfer housing association tenants who have been found guilty of antisocial behaviour in an effort to transfer that problem elsewhere.

Mr F McCann: Most people around this table would tell you a different story. It happens quite regularly, and, at the end of the day, tenants have no recourse to argue against it. On some occasions, depending on the individual Housing Executive managers and workers involved, they may sit down and talk to tenants but, as a general rule, the Housing Executive does move such people.

Mr Sands: The Housing Executive cannot force a tenant to move; a tenant has to request a transfer before the Housing Executive will consider moving him. The Housing Executive cannot tell a tenant that it is moving him to a different area. I take your word that you may have evidence of that happening. However, under the rules, the Housing Executive cannot do that.

Mr F McCann: I think that you are picking me up wrong. There are families that have destroyed the areas that they live in. When those families put in for a transfer, they end up being given priority and being moved to other areas. The Housing Executive or housing associations move those families into another area because they are at the top of the list, without any discussion with the host community. That is what I am talking about. The Housing Executive and the housing

associations need to carry out an assessment on the impact that such a family will have in an area.

Mr Sands: I am not aware of that happening, Mr McCann. As far as the regulations are concerned, that is our line on them. We will have to talk to the Housing Executive about that and find out what exactly it is doing. That should not be happening.

Mr Brady: It happened in my area.

Mr Sands: We will have to check with the Housing Executive and see what its position is and try to ensure that it is complying with the regulations as set out and the provisions of the inspection scheme. We will come back to you on that issue.

Mr Craig: If I am picking it up right, what we are talking about is that a person's tenancy history is not being taken into account when that person is moved to another area. There is a huge issue around that. Some individuals have created mayhem and caused huge problems for housing associations and the Housing Executive. However, that history is totally ignored when such individuals are rehoused. There should be a mechanism that takes that history into account when people are being rehoused.

Mr Sands: Perhaps what you are looking for is an assurance from the Housing Executive that it will take that into account.

Ms Ní Chuilín: As you can see, Michael, we are not very assured.

Mr Sands: I cannot answer the question, but I will find out about it.

Mr F McCann: There is some overlap in my suggested amendments, another of which refers to the duty of care. I have suggested that the Housing Executive and housing associations should be required to have a duty of care to existing residents. However, if the previous amendment is taken forward, that might take care of that.

My other suggestion is that the Housing Executive and housing associations be required to share information on applicants who are moving due to antisocial behaviour. That goes to the heart of the issue that Jonathan just raised. The lack of information being shared among the Housing Executive and the housing associations is a serious problem. The Housing Executive will tell you that, on a number of occasions, even it does not know whether somebody has been moved from a housing association house.

Mr Martin: We are aware of that issue, and it is part of the package of proposals that we are developing for the second housing Bill. We could not consider that in the Housing (Amendment) Bill because, as it opens a data gateway under the Data Protection Act 1998, the issue will need consultation and approval from the

Secretary of State. It is something that we are aware of and are trying to address. However, as far as we are concerned, it is not possible to address that in the time frame that is available for this Bill.

Mr F McCann: When will the next Bill be coming to the Committee?

Mr Martin: The current timetable is that the next Bill will be introduced before the summer recess next year. Therefore, it would be with the Committee around June.

The Chairperson: Same time, same place, next year.

We heard before that a lot of the second Bill is going to focus on antisocial behaviour, and you say that it might be better to consider Fra's suggested amendment in relation to the second Bill. What about the other issues that he raised? I understand the point that you are making about not having too much nitty-gritty in primary legislation and how that is better left to secondary legislation or guidance. Is it possible that any of his other suggested amendments could be dealt with in the second housing Bill?

Mr Martin: Although it may be doing it, the Housing Executive cannot simply decide to transfer people from one area to another. However, we are aware that there is a policy loophole around swaps. If two households agree to swap houses, antisocial behaviour cannot be taken into account. That is a loophole that we are looking to close in the second housing Bill.

Mr F McCann: The only thing that the Housing Executive and housing associations consider is whether both properties meet the needs of the people involved in the swap. Antisocial behaviour is a separate issue. I was surprised that you said that the Housing Executive should be looking at the behaviour of tenants before they move to another area; that does not happen. As you have heard this morning, unless there is something in legislation that dictates a procedure by which the Housing Executive and housing associations must abide, the problem will persist.

I recently spoke to representatives from the Housing Executive, who complained about housing associations not passing on information about the past behaviour of tenants. One family can destroy a street, and two families can destroy an area.

The Chairperson: If the Committee were to submit such amendments, they would perhaps fall foul of consultation requirements, for example. Therefore, a second Bill may be the best method of addressing those issues. I think that everyone will agree that there are major issues linked to antisocial behaviour; if it were not recognised as a problem, clause 10 would not exist and there would not be the possibility of a second Bill to address issues connected to it.

The Committee can make it clear that it expects to see such issues addressed in the second Bill. We can say that in our report and on the Floor of the House during the Housing (Amendment) Bill's Consideration Stage. Instead of bringing forward those issues as part of this Bill, we can say that we expect the Department to bring them forward in the next Bill.

Mr F McCann: You are right. The officials have said that they will look at those issues, and I accept that.

During our scrutiny of the Housing (Amendment) Bill, we have raised a number of issues, not least the funding and training of residents associations and the other elements connected to antisocial activity. Can we have some feedback on those issues in the mean time?

Mr Sands: We will check with the Housing Executive on those points. The Department welcomes any suggestions or guidance from the Committee on provisions that its members feel should be included in the second housing Bill. It is early in the process, so provision can still be included.

Mr Brady: The private landlords association raised the issue of people who were guilty of antisocial behaviour moving out of Housing Executive or housing association accommodation into private-rented accommodation. In such instances, private landlords are given no history. Therefore, someone could move out of a Housing Executive or housing association house and into a private-rented house two doors down. The problem covers a range of sectors.

Mr Sands: Someone who is evicted is homeless but cannot be considered under homelessness legislation, because of the reasons for that eviction. Unfortunately, they have to go somewhere.

Mr Brady: With respect, it is a self-inflicted wound. Such people are remaining in the same communities but are being housed by a different sector. Private landlords are saying that they have no idea that those people are serial antisocial offenders.

Mr F McCann: Some of the legislation in England and in other jurisdictions goes much further, especially in respect of the powers for local councils. There are behavioural charters by which families and individuals have to abide, and there are parenting and behaviour classes. That is the road that we need to go down. We need to take the best of what is happening in other jurisdictions. We all know that one of the biggest issues on people's doorsteps is antisocial activity. On the point that Mickey made, known drug dealers have left areas and gone straight to the top of the waiting list because they were deemed to have been intimidated out of an area. Such people have also walked into the private-rented sector. Something must be done so that local residents and communities have recourse to prevent those people ending up in their areas.

The Chairperson: The Department can see that, because of its nature, that subject arouses much emotion in members. We deal with the matter regularly. Are members content to abandon Fra's amendments at this stage?

Mr F McCann: I feel suitably abandoned.

The Chairperson: We will do so with the proviso that we will contact the Department about the points that Fra raised. Clarity is needed on some of the specific points, and we will make it clear in our report at Consideration Stage that we want those issues to be addressed in the second Bill.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no doubt that Fra will mention that.

The Chairperson: I have absolutely no doubt that he will do so at every opportunity.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 (Increase in Housing Council representation on Executive)

The Chairperson: This clause refers to representation of the Housing Council on the Housing Executive board. Members considered the issue of enhanced democratisation of the Housing Executive and were minded to explore an amendment that would increase Housing Council representation, with the addition of a tenancy advocate. I wrote to the Minister on those issues, and the Department gave a response in its letter, of which members have a copy. Are Members happy to defer any further consideration on that clause until we get a more substantive response to our letter?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 12 referred for further consideration.

Clause 13 agreed to.

Clause 14 (Definition of "house in multiple occupation")

The Chairperson: Members were minded to support the amendment to the definition of a "housing in multiple occupation", which would be limited to an extension of the definition of "family" to include uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews. The Department advised that it would introduce an amendment to that effect.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 14, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, agreed to.

Clauses 15 to 19 agreed to.

The Chairperson: Part of the Committee's scrutiny table contained other amendments that were not specific to particular clauses. Section AJ deals with the issue of registered rents. The Committee was minded to support an amendment to add Assembly procedure to the review of registered rents. The Department advised that it is to seek legal advice on how best Assembly procedure in that regard could be added.

Mr Sands: We are taking legal advice on that, and we would certainly be prepared to seek an amendment if legal advice were to confirm that there is a requirement for the review to be subject to Assembly procedure. We think that it will, and we have no difficulty with that.

The Chairperson: Are members happy with that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: You said that the Department would be happy to seek an amendment; one of the issues was about high rent in some areas, even for association housing. Is this about capping it?

Mr Sands: No; it is about the form of Assembly control over the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. It will require the Committee or the Assembly to give negative resolution.

The Chairperson: It gives us a say over whether to accept or amend the review.

Mr Sands: It is about procedures in the Assembly and in the Committee.

Ms Ní Chuilín: So, it will involve another statutory rule appearing before the Committee?

The Chairperson: Yes. Are members happy, subject to a review of the final wording, to agree to the amendment?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Section AK deals with the common housing selection scheme. I am aware that Fra wants to propose amendments at this stage.

Mr F McCann: I am open to advice on the first two of my proposed amendments. I have met three different Ministers to discuss the serious discrepancies in the common selection scheme, which discriminates against some people, particularly those in hostels or those who live in areas of high demand. One suggestion is that the selection scheme be amended to award 20 points to applicants for every six months that they stay in hostel accommodation. I am suggesting that because, for the past five years, I have been promised that a review will be set up to consider such matters. To date, nothing has been done.

My other amendment relates to people with mental or physical illnesses. I know that a needs assessment takes place. However, on many occasions, the system does not allocate additional points, which would allow those people to flow through the system. Somebody told me that legislation may not be required to deal

with that matter because the system can be tweaked or changed.

Mr Sands: That is true. I will pass over to my colleague in a minute. The Bill contains no real housing management processes; therefore, we could not include such a provision. However, as Fra rightly suggests, it is an operational matter, and the scheme could be tweaked. Such details are not covered by primary legislation.

Mr Martin: The Minister asked my team to consider how to modernise the common selection scheme. I understand that one point deals with temporary accommodation, and we are considering the exact issue that Mr McCann has raised.

The issue of mental and physical illness is more problematic. The priority need provision in the legislation means that if somebody has a particular condition, it is taken into account. Therefore, it would be difficult to award additional points, and medical judgements introduce many complexities.

Mr F McCann: By and large, medical certificates confirming an illness go into files and do not add much to a person's case, even though their doctor may have recommended a certain course of action. Under the old priorities system, one priority specifically recognised the level of people's sickness. I know that, under certain circumstances, people will go for a needs assessment. However, the results do not always favour the applicant and may run counter to their doctor's suggestion. That happens to a number of people, and I ask you to take it on board. I understand that it may involve difficulties, but people face that problem on a regular basis.

Mr Martin: I am happy to take specific examples into account as part of the process and respond at a later date.

Ms Ní Chuilín: One example is the placement of people with suicidal tendencies in the seven towers of high-rise flats in the New Lodge. One would imagine that a common-sense approach would be employed, but often it is not.

Mr Martin: A common-sense approach should be taken, because accommodation must be reasonable.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Some people even had a letter even from their GP or consultant that stated that they should be placed in suitable accommodation.

Mr Sands: I agree entirely.

Mr F McCann: Weight must be given to what a doctor or consultant says about the impact of where people are housed. People in areas of high demand get trapped, and the points system does not allow them to progress. There was supposed to be a conveyor belt system whereby people would graduate according to their level of points. Earlier this year, someone could have got a two-bedroom flat for 120 or 130 points.

Today, people cannot get a two-bedroom flat in certain areas for 180,190 or even 200 points. It is almost impossible for people to reach such points levels, so they get stuck where they are.

My last amendment is that the Housing Executive should undertake a review of the common selection scheme every three years to ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants. That goes to the heart of the matter, and it seems like a fairly simple requirement that could be included in the Bill.

Mr Sands: Yes; that does seem like a simple requirement that could be put in. However, in areas such as west Belfast, some people may be on the waiting list for more than three years because they want to be housed almost on a specific street. The difficulty of undertaking a review is that it may change those people's position and shunt their application back even further. Three years is a narrow window in which to expect a review of such important criteria.

The Chairperson: How often is the system reviewed?

Mr Sands: There is no set date or time for reviews. A review is carried out when it becomes apparent to the Department that one is needed. We have instigated a review now because of, for example, comments that have been made to the Committee as well as other things that come into play as we move forward with different provisions.

Mr Brady: When was the last review?

Mr Baird: The system is updated and reviewed on an ongoing basis, as and when required; amendments are made from time to time.

Mr Brady: With respect, that seems like an ad hoc approach.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Was the last review carried out in 2005?

Mr Sands: It may have been; I am honestly not sure.

Mr Brady: Surely the fact that people have been on the waiting list for more than three years indicates the need for reviews to happen at regularly intervals.

Mr Sands: That would not necessarily help people who only want to move within a narrow area.

Mr Brady: I take your point; some people only want to live beside their mummies.

Mr Sands: That is part of the problem.

Mr Brady: Other people just want a house.

Mr F McCann: I agree with Mickey that that seems like an ad hoc approach. I have raised the point for five or six years that people are getting trapped in a system that is unable to deal with the problem. By and large, it is people in areas of high demand who cannot graduate through that system. One of the specific problems is

people being trapped in hostels for perhaps three or four years. Those people may have had children just before moving into a hostel and those children are now going to primary school.

A system of single lets has recently been introduced, and that may help some of the people who have been waiting longest. However, a lot of people end up living their lives in hostel accommodation that was not built for that purpose. I am not saying that more regular reviews would deal with individual cases, but they would address the problem of people being trapped in hostel accommodation or at a particular point in the system for a long period.

The Chairperson: Perhaps, before the Committee takes a definitive view on whether it supports such an amendment, you could come back to us on 5 November with an outline of what specifically triggers a review of the common selection scheme; what you look at in particular, and what you specifically consider in respect of equality of opportunity, which is something that Fra referred to. That would be helpful in allowing us to determine whether an amendment is necessary.

Mr Martin: I may be incorrect; however, my understanding of Assembly procedure is that an amendment can only be proposed on a particular issue if it can be closely linked to a part of the Bill. My understanding is that there is nothing in the Bill that would allow that such an amendment to be added. The common selection scheme is provided for in the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, which deals with housing management. I understand that there is nothing in the Bill on which to hook that amendment. It could be incorrect; perhaps other could guide me on that.

The Chairperson: I am not sure that that is correct. Given that it is an amendment Bill, I believe that its scope is fairly wide. That is why we are considering all those matters.

The Clerk of Bills: I agree; that is not always the case. It depends on the scope of the Bill. The Housing (Amendment) Bill is particularly wide-ranging. Therefore, it may be possible to make amendments that go beyond what is stated on the cover of the Bill. We can look at that. It is a wide-ranging Bill and when you have that situation, it is possible to maintain that width by adding to clauses.

Mr Sands: We will take that on board.

The Chairperson: I am worried that Fra will now see other opportunities. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F McCann: Roll on next week.

The Chairperson: We are just trying to get over the finishing line. *[Laughter.]*

We can come back to that issue. Fra, I take it that you are happy with the responses to the previous two

points. We will wait for the Department's response in respect of a review.

Section AL of the Committee's scrutiny table deals with the regulation of private landlords. Do members want to set out any proposed amendments on that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not wish to do so at present. However, rather than simply having regulation of private landlords, I would go further and say that it should be mandatory.

The Chairperson: We await further information on that. I am, therefore, happy that we do not propose any amendments in relation to that.

Do the departmental officials have any final comments to make?

Mr Sands: None; except to thank the Committee for its consideration of the Bill. *[Laughter.]* I mean that.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Do you miss us already? *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Have we convinced you of the merits of any of the amendments that we have suggested? Are there any, apart from those that you have already indicated, that you would like to adopt?

Mr Sands: Absolutely, Chairman. One always depends upon the Committee's credibility in suggesting amendments that will contribute to the Bill.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I think that our Committee is incredible, rather than just credible.

The Chairperson: I seek agreement that, apart from any deferred matters that were identified today and pending outstanding evidence and clarity and consideration of the final wording of amendments, the clause-by-clause scrutiny is concluded. Effectively, therefore, nothing new can be introduced; we can consider only those deferred matters.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Is the regulation of landlords among those deferred items?

The Chairperson: Yes, we will consider that to be a deferred item. We decided that we would not propose an amendment on it at this stage.

Are members content that that is the end of our clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, everyone. I am impressed by how quickly we were able to get through that. Deferred matters and outstanding evidence will be considered by the Committee at its next meeting on 5 November. I thank the departmental officials for their help.

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 9 October 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Strategic Investment Board: Other Costs

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7298/09, to give a detailed breakdown of the ‘other costs’ incurred by the Strategic Investment Board totalling £4.1m. (AQW 337/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): “Other costs” of £4.1m are made up of enabling expenditure (£3.4m) to assist departments to engage consultants to work on the implementation of the Investment Strategy and expenditure on internal consulting, office accommodation, equality support, telephone, IT costs, stationery, training & conferences, hospitality and depreciation.

A list of expenditure by project is attached as an annex.

ANNEX

2008 Enabling Expenditure by project	(£m)
ISNI	0.42
Workplace 2010	0.43
Central Asset Realisation Taskforce	0.09
Wider Markets	0.07
Waste Management	0.68
BELB	0.61
Belfast Metropolitan College	0.10
School Modernisation Programme	0.30
Titanic Quarter Signature Project	0.05
Emergency Services Inv Programme	0.15
General Hospitals Programme	0.24
Primary Care Programme	0.06
Maze/Long Kesh	0.12
Other	0.06
Total Enabling Expenditure	3.38

Childcare: Strategic Plan Development

Mr K Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if their Department has considered the development of a strategic plan for childcare, covering both pre-school and school-age children. (AQW 744/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People identified childcare as a priority and tasked members of its cross-departmental sub group on Child Poverty to undertake an exercise to consider the issues. A preliminary report was completed in June and the Sub-Committee agreed that an economic appraisal be carried out on a range of strategic options.

This will form the basis of a draft childcare strategy, covering both pre-school and school age children, which will be subject to public consultation. It is hoped the economic appraisal will be completed by the end of 2009 at which time further decisions will be taken on the way forward.

Review of Public Administration: OFMDFM Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much has been spent by their Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 780/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since April 2002, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has spent £5.1m on the Review of Public Administration. A breakdown is as follows:

2002/03	£0.8m
2003/04	£0.9m
2004/05	£0.9m
2005/06	£1.1m
2006/07	£0.5m
2007/08	£0.4m
2008/09	£0.4m
2009/10 (to 28 Sept. 09)	£0.1m

Child Poverty

Mr J Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the statement given to the OFMDFM Committee in November 2008, that “the Child Poverty Sub-group had identified several departmental initiatives that are in place to tackle child poverty”, to outline how many of these initiatives have been implemented or reviewed to deal with the increased number of children who are now living in poverty. (AQO 141/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Member’s question is based on a false premise. Since 1998 there has, in fact, been a downward trend in the numbers of children living in relative income poverty here. However, over the last couple of years the figures have remained fairly static at around 22%. The greatest reduction is in the absolute poverty measurement which now stands at approx 12%, less than half the 1998 figure.

The figures which will cover 2007/08 are not available until November and may not show the full impact of the recession.

There is no doubt however that the rise in unemployment to around 6.75% for the period May to July 2009 will have affected many families but it is too early yet to say precisely who and to what extent.

We would want to emphasise though, that through the child poverty sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on children and young people, we are working with all departments to ensure that current initiatives which contribute to tackling child poverty are properly targeted and effective and to identify further opportunities for cross-cutting actions.

The lack of good quality, accessible and affordable childcare is one issue which has been raised time and again both as a barrier to individuals entering the labour market and as a contributory factor to child poverty. The first phase of the work on childcare is now complete and being taken forward for economic appraisal which we hope can be completed by the end of this year. Further decisions will then be taken on how this important issue is progressed.

The provisions of the Child Poverty Bill will also be a significant step towards focusing efforts within government to meet our challenging PfG commitments of eradicating child poverty by 2020.

There is important work going on across all departments that contributes in some way to tackling child poverty and we outlined some of these initiatives to the OFMDFM Committee. We are happy to provide the Member with a written update on each of the policies discussed with the Committee in due course, and a copy will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Economic Taskforce

Mr S Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the economic taskforce. (AQO 143/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Cross Sector Advisory Forum, established to continue our dialogue with business, trade unions and voluntary and community stakeholders, is scheduled to meet on Wednesday 7 October. This will be the third plenary session since April.

Over the summer the Forum's sub-groups have been working on a substantive range of issues covering: infrastructure, planning and procurement; business and skills; hardship, poverty, debt and energy; agriculture; banking, finance and lending; and housing and property, to bring forwards ideas for remedial action to address problems arising from the Economic Crisis.

We continue to pay close attention to the impact of the recession on the local economy and issues surrounding the downturn which continues to be a standing item on the agenda of the Executive's meetings.

The work of the Forum is a key element in our response and provides us with an opportunity to gather further ideas on the Executive's approach to moving forward.

Regeneration of Sites Team

Mr B Armstrong asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Regeneration of Sites team in the last twelve months. (AQO 146/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The primary function of this team is to manage the development of a number of key security sites gifted to the Executive to symbolise the transfer from conflict to peace. As the Member will recall, we announced on 8 April 2009 that we will set up a Development Corporation to redevelop the Maze/Long Kesh site. The Regeneration Sites Team has since been preparing the necessary policy and legislation to establish and empower the Corporation to drive forward this important area of work. Building on the work previously undertaken by the All-Party Maze/Long Kesh Panel the team continues to take forward the development of the site. In March 2009 in partnership with the Programme Director they completed the management of the significant demolition work on the site which encompasses an area the size of the entire Belfast city centre, and continue to manage the site on our behalf taking forward the second stage of remediation which is necessary to prepare the land for any future potential usage.

In Derry~Londonderry, the Team supports the ILEX Urban Regeneration Company, overseeing the regeneration of the Ebrington site through a number of major capital projects including the construction of the new iconic foot and cycle bridge which will join the two sections of the City.

Other key tasks for the team have been the ongoing work to secure the sale of the former military site at Magherafelt to the North Eastern Education and Library Board enabling the Board to build two new schools on that site. The Team also provides ongoing support to OFMDFM Ministers on all matters relating to these sites and the redevelopment projects at Crumlin Road Gaol.

Efficiency Savings: OFMDFM

Mr J Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they have carried out a review of their departmental functions and responsibilities given the large numbers of staff employed within their Department and the urgent need for efficiency savings. (AQO 148/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are committed to the efficient and effective delivery of the wide range of functions and programmes delivered by OFMDFM.

The size of the Department has reduced from 408 staff in post in September 2007 to 394 in September 2009. The Department has taken active steps to deliver efficiency savings and has achieved the Departmental administration cost efficiencies as required by the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement.

In addition, a review of OFMDFM structures and staffing levels to support delivery of Departmental objectives and deliver further cost savings has been carried out. We are considering the findings and proposals emerging from the review.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Horse Racing Industry

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current economic situation as it applies to the horse racing industry, and to state what plans she has to address the decline in the industry. (AQW 725/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): The recession has hit the thoroughbred market hard and racehorse prices have dropped by anything from 25-50%. Many trainers have been left with unpaid bills, and in many cases people cannot afford to keep horses any longer. This has led to animals being abandoned or slaughtered for food. I recently announced my intention to bring forward a new Animal Welfare Bill, and in doing so I want to ensure that the maximum penalties are available to the Courts for animal cruelty offences.

I also intend to launch a public consultation on 5 October 2009 on a proposed increase to DARD's Horse Racing Fund (HRF), which has been negotiated between the north of Ireland's two racecourses and the NI Turf Guardians Association (NITGA), who represent off-course bookmakers here.

This agreement has been negotiated in the context of the current, difficult economic climate and dwindling public and private sector fund here and elsewhere. This will assist the north's two Racecourses to remain competitive, by achieving their true economic and sporting potential, thereby helping to sustain the horse racing industry generally.

Post Office Services

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what services her Department currently provides through post offices; and (ii) for her assessment of any additional services that could be provided through local post offices. (AQW 738/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development we have been unable to identify any services that could be delivered through Post Offices. We will continue to look at opportunities as they arise to consider whether any new public service could be delivered through the Post Office although these would be subject to the appropriate procurement policy.

Review of Public Administration: DARD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been spent by her Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 779/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The amount spent by my Department on the Review of Public

Administration was £6633.89

External Consultants: DARD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 7896/09 and AQW 73/10, (i) to provide a breakdown of all expenditure on external consultants; and (ii) to explain the discrepancy in the figures given in these answers for the year 2008/09. (AQW 1131/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: (i) A breakdown of expenditure incurred by DARD and its Agencies on external consultants (as defined in DAO (DFP) 03/05) in the last five years is as follows:-

Category	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Policy Appraisal and Review	£129,922	£16,424	£142,905		
Strategic Management	£152,210	£100,983	£10,480		
Organisational Development	£92,113	£2,850	£47,182		
Performance Measurement	£39,311	£7,732			
Financial Accountancy	£3,540	£31,500			
Audit	£9,922	£1,852			
Financial Systems	£200,076				
Economic Appraisal	£136,641	£46,261	£33,710		
Value for Money/Feasibility Study	£8,406	£11,731	£27,488		
Management Accountancy	£2,132				
Quality	£8,692	£10,055	£44,748		
Risk Analysis	£10,816				
Investment Appraisal	£130,210	£406			
Corporate Governance	£12,500	£560			
Health & Safety			£7,572		
Training Needs Analysis	£64,659	£59,860			
Projects	£230,496	£11,489	£452,840		
Surveys	£71,503	£38,525	£8,500		
Marketing	£5,680		£2,368		
Market Research	£505,749		£5,049		
*Management Consultancy				£370,237	£345,941
*Financial Services				£15,245	£12,276
*Information Services & E-Business				£94,639	£130,232
Yearly Total	£1,814,578	£340,228	£782,842	£480,121	£488,449

* Revised DFP definitions effective from 2007/08.

- (ii) The figure referred to in AQW 7896/09 for the 2008/09 year was estimated, as the accounts had not been audited at that stage. The figure of £488,450 referred to in AQW 73/10 was the actual amount confirmed for the year 2008/09.

I have discussed with my Permanent Secretary and senior management team the need to reduce the level of usage of external consultants.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Vandalism in Libraries

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent by his Department to clean up or repair acts of vandalism in libraries and on other property within his Department's responsibility in each of the last five years. (AQW 645/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The information requested is outlined in the attached table.

ALB	08/09 £	07/08 £	06/07 £	05/06 £	04/05 £
Libraries	9,256	23,535	15,957	17,581	19,085
Other Property	6,292	4,012	1,215	887	525

Digital Television

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has held any discussions with Digital UK in relation to the planned digital television switch-over in 2012; and in particular about ensuring that constituents in all parts of Northern Ireland are able to avail of digital television services. (AQW 703/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have not had any discussions with Digital UK regarding the switch over to digital television.

The Department of Finance and Personnel is the lead Department in the Northern Ireland Executive on the digital switch over.

Re-Imaging Communities Programme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to continue the Re-Imaging Communities programme funded by the Arts Council. (AQW 714/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Current funding for the Re-Imaging Communities programme will finish at the end of March 2010. The programme has received funding from a variety of sources, including OFMDFM, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the International Fund for Ireland.

I am aware that the Arts Council is working with various stakeholders to explore potential funding streams in order to extend the programme.

Given the success of the programme to date and the continued demand from communities, as evidenced the significant number of project proposals at various stages of development, I am supportive in principle of the continuation of the programme.

However, we are currently facing a much more challenging financial environment, which will put increasing pressure on all areas of expenditure.

Review of Public Administration: DCAL Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent by his Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 778/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The relevant costs for DCAL spend on RPA to date are set out in the table below.

Description	Costs £
Capital Spend – NI Library Authority (NILA) Computer system	398,437.79
Salary Costs from 06 to date	581,821.03
Travel, hospitality and other	8406.68
Management consultancy fees and expenses	64,905.46
NILA Implementation Team costs	1,201,749.07
NILA redundancy payments paid to Education and Library Boards	1,576,000.00
Government Actuarial costs Pension provision for staff transferring from FCB to DCAL	35,146.93
Total	3,866,466.96

Equality and Good Relation Policies: Bands

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department will look at its equality statements to investigate if bands, which are named after loyalist paramilitaries, should receive public funding. (AQW 1037/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Any organisation in receipt of public funding through my Department and its Arms Length Bodies must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the relevant funding organisations.

My officials continually monitor the Department's Equality Scheme to ensure full compliance with the equality duties of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Equality and Good Relations Policies: Banners

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department will look at its equality statements to investigate whether Orange Order lodges which carry banners dedicated to, or displaying a picture of, loyalist paramilitaries should receive public funding. (AQW 1038/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My officials continually monitor the Department's Equality Scheme to ensure full compliance with the equality duties of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Any organisation in receipt of public funding through Arms Length Bodies sponsored by my department must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the relevant funding organisations.

Bands Named After Loyalist Paramilitaries

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, which are named after loyalist paramilitaries, can avail of funding through the Arts Council or the Ulster Scots Agency. (AQW 1039/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Bands Named After Loyalist Paramilitaries

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, which are named after loyalist paramilitaries, can avail of funding through his Department. (AQW 1040/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Bands Participating in Parades Dedicated to Loyalist Paramilitaries

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, which participate in parades dedicated to loyalist paramilitaries, can avail of funding through his Department. (AQW 1041/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Bands: Paramilitary Displays

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, which participate in parades that involve loyalist paramilitary displays, can avail of funding through his Department. (AQW 1052/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Fishing Licences

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money is generated from fishing licenses on ponds or lakes that his Department leases, rents, or controls. (AQW 1109/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL has only taken over the responsibility of issuing fishing licences from the FCB on the 1st June 2009. The Department will not be in a position to provide figures for the current season until all licences records have been returned from licence distributors at the end of the season.

Fishing licences are required for both Private and Public Angling Estate waters and the Department would not retain records which would indicate what anglers purchased licences solely for angling on Public Angling Estate waters which are under its control.

The Department issues angling permits for use on ponds or lakes that the Department currently leases, rents or controls.

I have attached sales records for the previous 2008 angling season for both licences and permits (see attached annex A).

ANNEX A

DCAL PERMIT SALES FOR 2008

Permit Type	Permits Sold	Sales (Before VAT)
General	1680 @ £52.77	£88,653.60
Juvenile	3410 @ £1.70	£5,797.00
3 Day Game	2111 @ £4.26	£8,992.86
14 Day Game	60 @ £12.77	£766.20
Local	1244 @ £39.57	£49,225.08
Coarse	1199 @ £19.57	£23,464.43
Concessionary	2286 @ £12.77	£29,192.22
3 Day Coarse	150 @ £3.83	£574.50
14 Day Coarse	4 @ £7.66	£30.64
Disabled	1631 @ £12.77	£20,827.87
TOTAL	13775	£227,524.40

ANGLING LICENCE SALES 2008

Type of Licence	Number Sold	Amount
Game Season	8499 @ £16.50	£140,233.50
Game OAP	3968 @ £5.00	£19,840.00
Game Juvenile	2591 @ £2.00	£5,182.00
Game 14 Day	74 @ £8.50	£629.00
Game 3 Day	694 @ £3.50	£2,429.00
Joint Game 14 Day	282 @ £23.50 (including vat)	£6,627.00
Joint Game 3 Day	1879 @ £8.50 (including vat)	£15,971.50
Foyle	708 @ £1.00	£708.00
Coarse Season	2436 @ £16.50	£40,194.00
Coarse OAP	174 @ £5.00	£870.00
Coarse Juvenile	448 @ £2.00	£896.00
Coarse 14 Day	78 @ £8.50	£663.00
Coarse 3 Day	207 @ £3.50	£724.50
Joint Coarse 14 Day	1141 @ £17.50 (including vat)	£19,967.50
Joint Coarse 3 Day	714 @ £8.00 (including vat)	£5,712.00
Disabled Game Season	1674 @ £5.00	£8,370.00
Disabled Coarse Season	131 @ £5.00	£655.00
		£269,672.00
Less Permit Share to Department Culture Arts and Leisure		
Joint Game 14 Day	282 @ £15.00 (including vat)	£4,230.00

Type of Licence	Number Sold	Amount
Joint Game 3 Day	1879 @ £5.00 (including vat)	£9,395.00
Joint Coarse 14 Day	1141 @ £9.00 (including vat)	£10,269.00
Joint Coarse 3 Day	714 @ £4.50 (including vat)	£3,213.00
Total Amount		£27,107.00
TOTAL AMOUNT		£242,565.00

Private Consultancy: DCAL Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 72/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 1110/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The figures provided in AQW 72/10 for private consultancy expenditure from 2004-05 to 2008-09 include expenditure incurred on capital projects. The Department incurred no consultancy expenditure in respect of Private Finance Initiatives in these years.

Private consultancy expenditure incurred by the Department's agencies was not included in the figures provided in AQW 72/10. This expenditure is detailed in the following table.

Year	Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) *	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) **
2004-05	£113,805	£64,613
2005-06	£25,046	£85,134
2006-07	£21,422	
2007-08	£15,454	
2008-09		

* On 1 April 2008, the functions of OSNI transferred from the Department to Land & Property Services, DFP

** On 1 April 2006, PRONI was de-agentised and became a division within the Department. Expenditure on private consultancy by PRONI from 2006-07 onwards was included in the response to AQW 72/10

Language Bodies: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans his Department has to reduce the number of language bodies funded by Foras na Gaeilge. (AQW 1122/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Foras na Gaeilge has undertaken a review of the provision of core funding to Irish language voluntary organisations

I understand that my counterpart in the Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in the Irish Republic intends to present detailed proposals at our next North/South Ministerial Council meeting in Language Sectoral Format which is scheduled for 2 December 2009 in Belfast.

Northern Ireland Commonwealth Team for the Delhi Games

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department has contacted the local Indian community to organise cultural awareness training and language support for the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Team for the Delhi Games. (AQW 1153/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council (NICGC) is responsible for the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team including matters relating to cultural awareness training and language support. I understand that the NICGC is already planning to involve the local Indian

community in its preparations for Delhi 2010, primarily in relation to cultural awareness. The need for language support would be a matter for the NICGC to consider.

External Consultants: DCAL Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 7897/09 and AQW 72/10, (i) to provide a breakdown by contract value of all expenditure on external consultants; and (ii) to explain the discrepancy in the figures given in these answers for the years 2006/07; 2007/08; and 2008/09. (AQW 1174/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: A breakdown of all expenditure on external consultants by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure from 2004-05 to 2008-09 is enclosed as an attachment to this letter.

The discrepancy in the figures for consultancy expenditure reported in AQW 7897/09 and in AQW 72/10 from 2006-07 to 2008-09 is due to the following:

AQW 7897/09 requested information on all expenditure on external consultants in the years 2006-07 to 2008-09. The Department's response included expenditure with other Government Departments and public bodies in 2006-07 and 2007-08.

AQW 72/10 requested information on expenditure with private consultancy firms and, as a result, consultancy expenditure with Government Departments and other public bodies was excluded from the Department's response.

The remainder of the discrepancy in the answers for the years 2007-08 and 2008-09 can be explained by the correction of over-estimated consultancy expenditure for 2007-08 following the completion of the Department's Resource Accounts for 2008-09. The Department's response to AQW 72/10 took account of these adjustments.

A reconciliation of the figures given for consultancy expenditure in AQW 7897/09 and in AQW 72/10 for 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 is given below.

	2006-07 (£)	2007-08 (£)	2008-09 (£)
Figure per AQW 7897/09	1,273,691	3,534,432	87,572
Paid to other Departments/public bodies	-95,649	-75,779	
Correction of over estimate for 07-08		-85,260	85,260
Figure per AQW 72/10	1,178,042	3,373,393	172,832

DCAL EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE 2004-05 TO 2008-09

2004-05

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Techniquet	W5 Review	6,613
Roger Ulrich	Iro Consultancy	1,362
Countryside Access	Lagan Valley Park	2,500
Central Procurement Directorate	Cashel Trout Farm	4,884
DFP	EU Verification	4,150
FPM Accountants	Green Book Economic Appraisal	4,935
Paul Johnston	Salmon Habitat Restoration Project	19,935
Capita	Grant Applications	16,288
Donal O'Riagain	Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages/Ulster Scots Academy	4,588
Misc Exp	Charter Consultations	13,730
Sustainable Northern Ireland	Genealogy Future Search	450
TTC International	Review of Maiden City Festival	8,700

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Research & Evaluation Services	Research Consultant Costs	90,323
Ken Millar	Corporate Strategy	300
Independent Research	Barriers to Participation	8,750
Research & Evaluation Services	Millenium Cohort Study Group	27,600
Research & Evaluation Services	When Worlds Collide	6,889
Research & Evaluation Services	Cultural Forum Focus Group	2,850
Ulster Factors	Mini Disc Strategy	1,185
Ken Millar	Business Continuity Plan	2,473
Helm Consulting	Management Information System Audit	25,190
	Total	£253,695 *

* includes expenditure of £9,034 classed as external consultancy which was paid to other Departments.

2005-06

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Richard Buchanan Consulting	Executive Team Meeting	280
Charis Consulting Services	Child Protection Workshop	408
Deloitte	Electronic Document Records Management	12,788
Central Procurement Directorate	Project Advisor for Capital Projects	2,608
Sam Butler	Architecture Policy	350
Fire IMC	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	7,680
Genesis Consulting Ltd	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	36,964
University of Stirling	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	5,737
KM Walsh Ltd	Survey of Maid of Antrim EU Project	300
Derek Evans/QUB	Eel Research Project	43,618
Central Procurement Directorate	Article 4 & 10 Site Visit Checks	16,932
Helm Corporation	Asset Title Project	7,875
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Social & Economic Impact of Recreation Fisheries, Angling & Angling Resources in NI	29,600
Jane Preston/ATEC	Otter & Whopper Swan Survey	1,000
FPM Chartered Accountants	Green Book Economic Appraisal – South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association	2,000
Jane Preston/ATEC	Flora & Fauna Survey – Lough Macnean	850
Helm Corporation	Fisheries Conservancy Board Financial Projections	4,859
Research & Evaluation Services	Research Consultant	12,033
Helm Consulting	Risk Management Review	1,496
Helm Consulting	Internal Audit	29,540
	Total	£216,918 *

* includes expenditure of £19,540 classed as external consultancy which was paid to other Departments

2006-07

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Kentwood Associates	Review of Regional Role of Belfast Central Library	13,272
CAPITA	Recruitment of Chief Executive for Single Library Authority	10,156
Deloitte & Touche	Electronic Document Records Management	2,973
Evolve Business Consultants	Business Continuity Plan	24,505
Helm Corporation	Internal Audit	17,939
Central Procurement Directorate	Service Level Agreement between CPD and DCAL	69,000
Donal O'Riagain	Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages/Ulster Scots Academy	1,995
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Social & Economic Impact of Recreation Fisheries, Angling & Angling Resources in NI	19,751 #
Derek Evans/QUB	Eel Research Project	39,750
Central Procurement Directorate	Article 4 & 10 Site Visits	5,283
KM Walsh Ltd	Article 4 & 10 checks – Maid of Antrim/Ardmore Boatyard	520
Craigavon Borough Council	Lagan Canal Trust Business Plan	2,677
Castlereagh Borough Council	Restoration of Lock & Lock Keepers Cottage	3,568
Celine McKenna	Big Lottery Fund Independent Advisor	1,144
Adventure Activities Associates	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	7,500
Countryside Recreation NI	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	203
Judith A Annett	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulations	200
KPMG	IFA/Linfield Contract – financial advice	9,880
Denton Wilde Sapte	IFA/Linfield Contract – legal advice	5,626
BDO Stoy Hayward	Rally Ireland/NI Events Company arbitration	12,500
Fire IMC	Strategy for Sport	4,751
Departmental Solicitors Office	Title Deeds	25
Rally Ireland Management Ltd	2007 World Rally Championship Business Case	16,685
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Business Planning – Multi Sports Stadium	87,265
Miller Partnership	Audit of Windsor Park	25,025
Central Procurement Directorate	Procurement – Multi Sports Stadium	13,521
Mott MacDonald	Business Planning – Multi Sports Stadium	726,566
KPMG	Project Management – Multi Sports Stadium	27,016
Richard Buchanan Consulting	Independent assistance in review of complaint	3,640
Whitehall & Industry Group	Appointment of Independent Board Member	4,000
Imelda McAuley	Irish Language Legislation	28,350
University of Stirling	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	874
Fire IMC	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	3,321
Genesis Consulting Ltd	Consultation on Strategy for Sport	15,434
Donal O'Riagain	Ulster Scots Academy proposals	1,000

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Prof Gorter	Ulster Scots Academy proposals	1,229
European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages	Ulster Scots Academy Business Plan	817
Roger Dixon	Archiving in Resource Centre	150
Helm Corporation	Validation of Key Performance Targets	1,475
Deloitte & Touche	Accountancy Services	5,600
Helm Corporation	Audit Risk Meeting	257
GSL UK Ltd	Chartermark Assessment	1,410
Terrier Services	Security Review	1,139
Malone Lodge Trading	PRONI Planning Day	213
Deloitte MCS Ltd	Long Term Access to Electronic Records	17,352
Victor Gray	External Advisor Review costs	3,208
Dept of Employment & Learning	Investors in People Review	1,575
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	PRONI Review	26,154
Helm Corporation	Internal Audit	3,263
Deloitte & Touche	Preparation of 2006-07 Accounts	3,934
	Total	£1,273,691 *

* includes expenditure of £95,649 classed as external consultancy which was paid to other Departments/public bodies

2007-08

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Adventure Activities Associates	Safety at Outdoor Activity Centres regulation	12,701
Beeches Management Centre	Advice on Competence Based Training	990
Bernard McCloskey QC	Legal Advice to Minister iro Board Membership	850
Cadan Solutions	Electronic Catalogue for Northern Ireland Project	18,025
CAPITA Resourcing	Recruitment of Chief Executive Designate for NI Library Authority	2,470
CILIP	Interview Panel Member for Recruitment of Chief Executive Designate for NI Library Authority	530
CIPFA	Review of Governance in Arms Length Bodies	27,000
Central Procurement Directorate	Elite Facilities Programme – Advice	1,302
Central Procurement Directorate	Article 4 & 10 Site Visits	6,195
David Gibson	Corporate Governance of Ulster Scots Agency	4,139
Dept of Employment & Learning	Investors in People Review	1,050
Deloitte	Options for Corporate Services of NI Library Authority	53,525
Deloitte	Interim Performance Evaluation of Irish Language Broadcast Fund	12,716
Deloitte & Touche	Accountancy Services	4,013
Deloitte MCS Ltd	Review of Arts Council/Sport NI operating costs	14,464

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Denton Wilde Sapte	IFA/Linfield Contract – legal advice	32,062
Dept of Education	Internal Audit	67,227
Departmental Solicitors Office	Title Deeds	5
Derek Evans/QUB	Eel Research Project	53,000
Donal O’Riagain	Specialist Advice on European Charter	842
Evolve Business Consultants	Business Continuity Plan	29,826
Fire IMC	Naming Rights – Multi Sports Stadium	10,374
Goldblatt McGuigan	Facilities Management Business Case	22,345
GSL UK Ltd	Chartermark Assessment	740
Helm Corporation	Asset Title Project	47,657
Joan Ruddock	Sport NI Chair/Vice-Chair Appointments	2,927
Julia Bracewell	Sport NI Board Appointments	274
Kentwood Associates	Transitional HR Support and Advice	6,423
KPMG	IFA/Linfield Contract – financial advice	20,120
KPMG/Davis Langdon	Programme Management – Multi Sports Stadium	181,302
KPMG/John Caldwell	Consultancy Assignment – NI Events Company	89,509
Mazars	Financial Audit – Foras na Gaeilge	2,133
Miller Partnership	Facilities Audit – Windsor Park	24,659
Mott MacDonald	Design – Multi Sports Stadium	2,417,634
Orla Moore	NI Events Company Board Appointments	437
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Business Planning – Multi Sports Stadium	196,935
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	VALCAL – Value of Culture, Arts & Leisure	25,703
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	PRONI Review	6,359
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Job Description for Head of Division	950
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	W5 Strategic Plan	52,387
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Social & Economic Impact of Recreation Fisheries, Angling & Angling Resources in NI	-2,628 #
	Total	£3,449,172*

negative contract expenditure due to contribution from North South body in respect of expenditure incurred in 2006-07.

* includes expenditure of £75,779 classed as external consultancy which was paid to other Departments/public bodies and also adjusted for previously over estimated expenditure of £85,260

2008-09

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
APEM Ltd	Fishing Consultancy Services	9,975
Cadan Solutions	Electronic Catalogue for Northern Ireland Project	11,025
CIPFA	Review of Governance in Arms Length Bodies	24,150
Deloitte MCS Ltd	Refresh of Business Case/Economic Appraisal for Ulster Scots Academy	21,038
Dept of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs	Ulster Canal Outline Business Case	12,804

Name of Consultant/Firm	Subject of Consultancy	Contract Value (£)
Donal O'Riagain	Specialist Advice on European Charter	1,064
FGS McClure Watters	Review of Sport NI	11,200
Finegan Gibson	Review of NI Events Company financial transactions	6,055
Goldblatt McGuigan	Facilities Management Business Case	8,895
GSL UK Ltd	Chartermark	790
John Hunter	Advice – NI Events Company	600
KPMG	Establishment of Navigation Authority for Lough Neagh	45,802
KPMG/Davis Langdon	Multi Sports Stadium	17,943
PriceWaterhouseCoopers	Briefing with Minister – Multi Sports Stadium	1,491
	Total	£172,832*

* adjusted for over-estimated expenditure of £85,260 in 2007-08 which was then reversed in this year

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DCAL

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long he anticipates it will last. (AQW 1345/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has no plans to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion at this time.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Compulsory Redundancies

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have (i) lost their jobs in grammar schools due to compulsory redundancies and; (ii) lost their jobs in the non-grammar school sector due to compulsory redundancies, in the last academic year. (AQW 353/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Seo a leanas líon na múinteoirí a chaill a bpost de bharr iomarcaíochta éigeantaí in earnáil na hiar-bhunscolaíochta sa bhliain acadúil 2008-09: The number of teachers who lost their jobs due to compulsory redundancy in the post-primary sector in the 2008-09 academic year is as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (i) <i>Scoileanna Gramadaí</i> / Grammar Schools | 2 |
| (ii) <i>Scoileanna Neamhghramadaí</i> / Non-Grammar Schools | 5 |

Intake of Pupils

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps she intends to take to remove restrictions which cap the intake of pupils and result in schools being left in the danger zone and targeted for closure. (AQW 383/10)

Minister of Education: Socraíonn an Roinn líonta iontrála agus rollaithe a léiríonn méid na scoileanna. I gcás na scoileanna sin atá ag streachailt le maireachtáil, ní hiad na srianta seo an fhadhb a bhíonn acu ach is í an fhadhb a bhíonn acu ná go mbíonn suibscríobh easnamhach suntasach orthu maidir leis na líonta seo.

The Department sets admissions and enrolment numbers that reflect the size of schools. For schools struggling to survive, these limits are not an issue as the nature of the schools' difficulty is that they are significantly undersubscribed in respect of these numbers.

Undersubscription and unsustainability is developing in our system due to demographic decline. The difficulties of this are compounded in the post-primary sector by the fact that demographic decline is, in pure numbers terms, almost exclusively borne by secondary schools - as grammar schools continue to admit to capacity. The situation needs a strategic planning solution responding to demographic change and the wider reform agenda (the development of the Entitlement Framework for instance) and I established the area-based planning process for this purpose.

Schools: Per Capita Funding

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to address the difference in per capita funding between the primary and post primary sector. (AQW 431/10)

Minister of Education: I recognise the importance of providing appropriate support to ensure that our children get the best start to their school years and have previously committed to taking action to increase the relative funding levels distributed to primary schools compared to post-primary schools.

Within the total resources available for pupils at all levels, this is being undertaken progressively so as to avoid impacting unduly on the resources available for pupils in other phases. I have, however, been able to significantly increase the proportion of fully delegated funding made available to primary schools over the last two years. This has been increased from 65.8% to 70.4%.

In the current year, 2009/10, within the overall £56 million uplift to schools budgets, some £37.9 million was directed to primary schools, representing an average increase of £266 per pupil in primary schools.

I will continue to focus on maximising the levels of funding being allocated to support primary learning and to this end, I have commissioned a review of schools' funding to examine a range of issues, with particular focus on bringing greater fairness and equality to the arrangements for distributing funding across all schools and targeting social need.

Tá mé i gcónaí ag iarraidh tacaíochta ó na páirtithe uile sa Tionól; le leibhéal an chistithe atá ar fáil don oideachas a uasmhéadú, agus lena chinntiú go mbíonn an tús is fearr ag na páistí bunscoile lena saol scoile.

I will continue to seek the support of all parties in the Assembly; to maximise the level of funding available for education, and to ensure that our primary school children get the best start to their school years.

Life Skills

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education who delivers Life Skills education within post primary schools; and what qualifies them to do so. (AQW 432/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an curaclam athbhreithnithe i bhfeidhm thar gach bliainghrúpa i ngach scoil dheontaschúnta. Cuimsíonn sé fócas ar leith ar a chinntiú go mbíonn deis ag gach dalta scileanna a fhorbairt a bheidh de dhíth orthu le bheith rathúil ina saol agus ina saol oibre, chomh maith le fócas ar eolas agus scileanna a fhorbairt a bhaineann le cumarsáid, matamaitic agus Teicneolaíocht Eolais agus Chumarsáide agus le réimsí eile foghlama mar an eolaíocht, nuatheangacha nó na healaíona.

The revised curriculum is now in place across all year groups in all grant-aided schools. It includes a particular focus on ensuring that, as well as developing their knowledge and skills in communication, mathematics and ICT and in other areas of learning such as science, modern languages or the arts, all pupils have the opportunity to develop the skills needed to succeed in life and at work.

In all post-primary schools, Learning for Life and Work is an integral part of the revised curriculum and includes a particular focus on self-awareness and self-esteem; on the importance of recognising and managing factors that may influence emotional and mental health throughout life; and on forming and maintaining healthy relationships. As with all aspects of the curriculum, the Learning for Life and Work area of learning is designed to be delivered by teachers and training and support is provided, through CCEA and the Education and Library Board CASS services, to ensure teachers have the skills they need to deliver all aspects of the curriculum effectively.

My Department is very aware of the important contribution that the revised curriculum as a whole and the Learning for Life and Work area in particular make to developing young people who have the skills to make informed and sensible choices about issues relating to their health and wellbeing and their future career aspirations and it liaises regularly with DHSSPS to ensure that this contribution supports, and is supported by, wider programmes to promote health and wellbeing. It also maintains very close working relationships with DEL, including, for example, in the development and implementation of the new strategy for careers education, information, advice and guidance which focuses on ensuring that all our young people have the skills they need to become effective career decision-makers. The Education and Training Inspectorate is responsible for assessing the implementation and impact of the revised curriculum.

The revised curriculum does not apply in Colleges of Further Education.

I would also want to highlight the work underway to ensure effective transitions from school into adulthood. A Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People has established sub-groups to take forward six key priorities in a cross departmental approach. My department has agreed to lead one of the sub-groups, with membership including DHSSPS, DEL, DCAL, DSD, NIO and Juvenile Justice. Our key priority/outcome is the provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools, including transitions to adulthood and the provision of appropriate health and social care interventions.

Life Skills

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education what recognised regulatory standards are applied to the provision of Life Skills education within post primary schools. (AQW 433/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an curaclam athbhreithnithe i bhfeidhm thar gach bliainghrúpa i ngach scoil dheontaschúnta. Cuimsíonn sé fócas ar leith ar a chinntiú go mbíonn deis ag gach dalta scileanna a fhorbairt a bheidh de dhíth orthu le bheith rathúil ina saol agus ina saol oibre, chomh maith le fócas ar eolas agus scileanna a fhorbairt a bhaineann le cumarsáid, matamaitic agus Teicneolaíocht Eolais agus Chumarsáide agus le réimsí eile foghlama mar an eolaíocht, nuatheangacha nó na healaíona.

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Life Skills

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education what work has been carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Employment and Learning to develop the mental health component of Life Skills education delivered within post primary schools and the Further Education sector. (AQW 434/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an curaclam athbhreithnithe i bhfeidhm thar gach bliainghrúpa i ngach scoil dheontaschúnta. Cuimsíonn sé fócas ar leith ar a chinntiú go mbíonn deis ag gach dalta scileanna a fhorbairt a bheidh de dhíth orthu le bheith rathúil ina saol agus ina saol oibre, chomh maith le fócas ar eolas agus scileanna a fhorbairt a bhaineann le cumarsáid, matamaitic agus Teicneolaíocht Eolais agus Chumarsáide agus le réimsí eile foghlama mar an eolaíocht, nuatheangacha nó na healaíona.

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Education Project Funding

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what projects her Department has funded; and (ii) the amount of money provided by her Department, in the North Antrim constituency, since May 2007. (AQW 458/10)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn mo Roinn an t-eolas a iarradh miondealaithe de réir toghcheantair agus dá gcuirfí an t-eolas ar fáil san fhormáid seo, bheadh costas díréireach i gceist leis seo.

My Department does not hold the information requested on a constituency basis and to have the information provided on this basis would result in disproportionate cost.

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Travel Costs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the travel costs of the South Eastern Education and Library board, including (i) the mode of transport used; (ii) whether economy/first class/business class used; (iii) the destination; and (iv) the reason for the journey, in the last year. (AQW 488/10)

Minister of Education: The level of detail requested in respect of the travel costs for the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) in 2007/08 is not held electronically by SEELB and would require the accessing of all original claim documentation. Due to the number of mileage claims made during the 2007/08 year it would not be reasonable in terms of the disproportionate costs involved to source this documentation.

Tá taifead ar chóras ríomhairithe, áfach, de shonraí ar chostais taistil an SEELB don bhliain airgeadais 2007/08 san fhormáid seo a leanas agus seo a leanas miondéalú ar na costais sin:

However, the details of travel costs for the SEELB for 2007/08 are recorded on a computerised system in the following format and are broken down as follows:

	£,000s
Staff claims for mileage / subsistence	397
Essential car users lump sum	217
Travel expenses for pupils	614
Total	1,228

Lurgan College: Newbuild

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the Lurgan College new build economic appraisal, to detail (i) her reasons for the postponement and rejection of the appraisal; and (ii) all meetings and correspondence between the Southern Education and Library Board and her Department on this matter. (AQW 501/10)

Minister of Education: The main focus for my Department is the successful delivery of high-quality, sustainable curricular provision, particularly through the efficient and effective delivery of the Entitlement Framework on an area basis. It is therefore critical that the pattern of post primary provision in an area is consistent with the policy framework now in place, particularly Sustainable Schools policy and delivery of the Entitlement Framework. In reviewing the Economic Appraisal for Lurgan College my Department concluded that there was insufficient evidence to provide assurance that this development was part of a strategic plan for the Craigavon area and that the proposed capital scheme for Lurgan College is therefore unlikely to be fit for purpose in facing the challenges in the future, particularly in terms of delivering access to the range of courses required to fully implement the Entitlement Framework from 2013. As such the Department is unable to approve the proposal.

De dhroim sraith cruinnithe, scríobh mo Roinn chuig an bhord lena buarthaí a chur in iúl dó agus lena iarraidh air athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar riachtanais Lurgan College, i gcomhthéacs níos leithne sheachadadh an Chreata Teidlíochta i gceantar Craigavon, d'fhonn plean straitéiseach a fhorbairt don cheantar.

Following a series of meetings my Department has written to the board outlining its concerns and asking it to review the needs of Lurgan College, within the wider context of delivery of the Entitlement Framework in the Craigavon area, with the view to bring forward a strategic plan for the area.

School Uniform Grants

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, in relation to grants available to parents for school uniforms, to outline (i) the level of grant available; (ii) the criteria for receiving the grant; and (iii) how the grant aid figure was calculated. (AQW 511/10)

Minister of Education: The school uniform grant is available for those in our community with young families who struggle to meet the cost of basic everyday needs, such as the cost of school uniforms. The scheme applies

to post-primary schools, further education colleges and day pupils at special schools and from the 2009/10 school year I have introduced a new primary school uniform allowance.

The primary school allowance for 2009/10 is £35. The post-primary/special school rates are:

Under 15 years old	£50.00	15 years old and over	£55.00
PE	£21.50	PE	£21.50
Total	£71.50	Total	£76.50

A pupil is entitled to a clothing allowance where:

- he/she or the parent is in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Job Seeker's Allowance or Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance; or
- the parent receives the Child Tax Credit; and is not receiving Working Tax Credit because he/she works less than 16 hours per week and has an annual taxable income of £16,040 or less; or
- the parent receives the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit; or
- he/she is the child of an Asylum Seeker supported by the Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Is iad na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne a shocraíonn rátaí an chúinimh agus athbhreithnítear na rátaí gach bliain i gcomhréir le boilsciú.

The rates of assistance are determined by the Education and Library Boards and are reviewed annually in line with inflation.

Legislation: Department of Education

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education to outline any legislation her Department intends to bring before the Assembly before 31 December 2009. (AQW 515/10)

Minister of Education: Faoi réir chomhaontú an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, tá sé beartaithe agam an Education Reform (No. 2) Bill a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil san fhómhar.

Subject to the agreement of the Executive, I intend to introduce the Education Reform (No. 2) Bill in the Assembly in the autumn.

In addition, consultation is currently underway on policy proposals for a Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Bill which I hope to introduce in the Assembly at a later stage.

Irish-Language Primary School in Castlewella

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Education to detail the postal address used by the Irish language primary school in Castlewella, when it recently applied for planning permission to build new school premises. (AQW 541/10)

Minister of Education: Is é an seoladh poist a úsáideadh san iarratas pleanála a rinneadh ar na mallaibh ná:

*Páirc Paul Magorrian
Dún Droinne
Caisleán Uidhílin
BT31*

The postal address used for the recent planning application was:

*Paul Magorrian Park
Bunkers Hill
Castlewella
BT31*

Head Teachers' Bonuses

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education, in relation to Head Teachers' bonuses, to detail (i) the total number who received bonuses; (ii) the total of all bonuses paid; and (iii) how these bonuses are financed, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 571/10)

Minister of Education: Níl aon fhoráil do bhónais nó d'íocaíochtaí thar scála a thabhairt do phríomhoidí i scoileanna deontaschúnta anseo.

There is no provision for bonuses or above-scale payments to be made to principals in grant-aided schools here. The pay arrangements for school principals provide for Boards of Governors to award discretionary annual progression points on fixed salary scales. Based on performance of sustained high quality, one progression point may be awarded; and in the case of performance of a very high quality, one additional point may be awarded.

SELB: Mobile Classrooms

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that are currently using mobile classrooms with temporary planning permission, in the Southern Education and Library Board area. (AQW 619/10)

Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas seo ar fáil.

This information is not available. Planning permissions are not awarded on a temporary basis. Planning permissions can however be time limited to a maximum of 5 years within which the proposed development needs to be taken forward. Grant aid is not reimbursed by my department without evidence (including planning) of all statutory approvals.

SELB: Mobile Classrooms

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that have had mobile classrooms replaced with permanent structures, in the Southern Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years. (AQW 620/10)

Minister of Education: Tógadh cóiríocht bhuan in áit seomraí ranga soghluaiste sna scoileanna seo a leanas i limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt.

The following schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area have had mobile classrooms replaced with permanent accommodation.

School	Work Completed	No of Mobiles removed
Annaghmore PS	New school (Orchard PS) built to replace Annaghmore PS & Tullyroan PS	3
Total 04/05		3
Cortamlet PS	Extension and Alterations	1
Ballytrea PS	Extension and Alterations	1

School	Work Completed	No of Mobiles removed
Hamiltonsbawn PS	Extension and Alterations	2
Killyman PS	Extension and Alterations	1
Dromore Road PS	Extension and Alterations	1
Moyallon PS	Extension and Alterations	2
Richmount PS	Extension and Alterations	2
Brackenagh West PS	Extension and Alterations	2
Mullaglass PS	Extension and Alterations	3
Bush PS	Extension and Alterations	1

School	Work Completed	No of Mobiles removed
St Brigid's PS Drumilly	2 Classroom Extension and special needs	2
Ballyholland PS	3 Classroom Extension, special needs and resource	3
St John's PS Gilford	2 Classroom Extension and special needs	3
Total 05/06		24
Kilkeel NS	Refurbishment of Existing Building	1
Bronte PS	1 Classroom Extension	1
Lisnadill PS	3 Classroom Extension and Alterations	4
Edenderry PS, Banbridge	Extension and Alterations to Education Special Needs Unit and Multi Purpose Hall	2
Windmill Integrated PS	New School	8
St Patrick's PS Mayobridge	2 Classroom Extension	2

School	Work Completed	No of Mobiles removed
St Oliver Plunkett PS Armagh	3 Classroom Extension	2
St Patrick's PS Donaghmore	New School	8
St Paul's HS Bessbrook	New School	35
Total 06/07		63
Aughnacloy PS	2 Classroom Extension and Alterations	1
Fivemiletown College	Major Refurbishment and Extension	13
Clare PS	Extension and Alterations	2
Maralin Village PS	New Replacement Primary School	8
Bocombra PS	Extension and Alterations - Phase 1	2
Total 07/08		26
Waringstown PS	Major Work - Refurbishment and Extension	4
Clare PS	Provision of Multi-Purpose Hall and refurbishment	1
Bocombra PS	Extension and Alterations - Phase 2	1
Total 08/09		6
Overall Total		122

New School Builds: Foyle Constituency

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the estimated and actual costs of all (i) new school builds; (ii) school extensions and improvements and; (iii) the stage of each project, in the Foyle constituency, since 2007. (AQW 623/10)

Minister of Education: Tugtar sonraí sa tábla thíos de mhórhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna i dtoghcheantar an Fheabhail, (i) atá á bpleanáil faoi láthair; (ii) ar cuireadh tús le hobair tógála orthu; agus (iii) ar cuireadh i gcrích iad ón bhliain 2007 i leith.

The table below provides details of major school capital projects in the Foyle constituency, which are (i) currently being planned; (ii) construction work is underway; and (iii) have been completed since 2007.

School	Details of Project	Estimated Construction Cost £M	Approved Contract Cost £M	Current Position
Foyle & Londonderry College	New school on new site	15	n/k	EA approved. Awaiting outline sketch plans (RIBA Stage C)
Ebrington Primary School	New school on existing site	3.7	n/k	Awaiting final sketch plans (RIBA Stage D)
Eglinton Primary School	New school on existing site	2	n/k	Awaiting final sketch plans (RIBA Stage D)
New Buildings Primary School	New school on existing site	2	n/k	Awaiting final sketch plans (RIBA Stage D)
Lisnagelvin Primary School	New school on existing site	4.36	5.47	Construction underway. Estimated completion date Jan 2011
Lisneal College	New school on a new site	14.5	14.65	Completed August 2007

For those projects still in the planning stages it not possible to provide actual contract costs as they have not yet reached procurement stage.

Secondary- and Grammar-School Teachers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many secondary and grammar school teachers hold degrees in the subjects they teach at (i) key stage three; (ii) key stage four; and (iii) A and AS Level. (AQW 646/10)

Minister of Education: Bhí an Roinn i dteagmháil leis an Chomhairle Ghinearálta Teagaisc (GTCNI) leis an eolas a fháil.

The Department contacted the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) to obtain the information.

The GTCNI has advised that it does not currently hold data on the 'Subject Taught' for registered teachers. The GTCNI is currently undertaking a large scale review and development of its qualification data and would hope to be in a position to be able to supply this in the future.

One-to-One Tuition in English and Maths

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if her Department will bring forward proposals on one-to-one tuition in English and Maths within schools, similar to the pilot scheme 'Making Good Progress' operated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in England. (AQW 647/10)

Minister of Education: Beidh mo Roinn ag tabhairt isteach straitéise athbhreithnithe don litearthacht agus don uimhearthacht ar ball.

My Department will soon bring forward a revised literacy and numeracy strategy. This strategy will set how we propose to support pupils and schools in raising standards in literacy and numeracy, particularly those pupils who are underachieving. In this respect, the strategy will be closely aligned with the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion.

Vandalism on School Estates

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education how much money has been spent by her Department to clean up or repair acts of vandalism on school estates in each of the last five years. (AQW 648/10)

Minister of Education: Thug na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an t-eolas seo a leanas ar chaiteachas ar chothabháil mar gheall ar loitiméireacht a rinneadh ar scoileanna le cúig bliana anuas.

The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information on maintenance as a result of vandalism to schools in the last five years.

Limistéar an Bhoird / Board Area	2004/05 £000s	2005/06 £000s	2006/07 £000s	2007/08 £000s	2008/09 £000s
Béal Feirste / Belfast	111	189	87	166	49
An tIarthar / Western	38	60	49	52	40
An tOirthuaisceart / North Eastern	221	129	211	147	164
An tOirdheisceart / South Eastern	108	128	69	84	70
An Deisceart / Southern	145	215	287	126	119
Iomlán / Total	623	721	703	575	442

Youth Programmes in Crumlin

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education if she would support the opening of Crumlin Integrated College facilities during out of school hours, in order to address the need for youth programmes in Crumlin.

(AQW 680/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mé tiomanta d'úsáid níos leithne áitreabh scoileanna taobh amuigh de ghnáthuaireanta scoile a chur chun cinn le freastal ar riachtanais na ndaltaí, na dteaghlach agus an phobail i gcoitinne. Chuir an Roinn grúpa oibre ar bun ar na mallaibh le hiniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na bealaí trínar féidir rochtain an phobail ar áiseanna scoile a mhéadú agus le moltaí a dhéanamh a chuideoidh le ceapadh polasaí agus oibriúchán le húsáid phoiblí áitreabh scoileanna a fheabhsú.

I am committed to promoting the wider use of school premises outside of normal school hours to meet the needs of pupils, families and the wider community. The Department has recently established a working group to explore ways in which community access to school facilities can be increased and make recommendations to inform policy and operation for enhancing community use of school premises.

Under Article 140 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, schools are encouraged to make their premises available (when not required by or in connection with the school) for use by members of the community.

The Chief Executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that there is a range of out of hours provision currently available for children and young people from the Crumlin area including existing provision at Crumlin Integrated College which offers afterschool activities, sports, ICT, and Young Enterprise programmes.

The NEELB Youth Service is keen to engage with schools in the Crumlin area and currently supports St Joseph's Primary School in running a part-time youth club. Supporting youth provision in Crumlin Integrated College is a matter for the management of the College.

The Board have assured me that youth provision in Crumlin remains a priority and will be pursued along with local partners and agencies.

Child Protection Legislation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to introduce new child protection legislation or regulations.

(AQW 710/10)

Minister of Education: Níl aon phlean ann le reachtaíocht nó rialacháin nua ar chosaint páistí a thabhairt isteach.

There are no plans to introduce new child protection legislation or regulations.

The Education Bill, currently under consideration, does include at Clause 44 a duty on the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to ensure that its functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young persons. In carrying out that duty the ESA shall have regard to any guidance issued by the Department. ESA shall review the exercise of its child protection duty by a Board of Governors of

a grant aided school, providers of funded pre-school education and persons in receipt of certain grants. ESA may issue such guidance or directions as necessary to ensure compliance with child protection duties.

This duty and related powers will empower the ESA to be accountable in multi-agency settings for safeguarding within the education sector.

Child protection continues to be a priority for the North South Ministerial Council and the programme of co-operation continues to grow. Recently there have been valuable exchanges of information and ideas on issues such as internet safety and the development of a protocol for the movement of vulnerable children and families across borders. This collaborative working also extends to ensuring that legislation in relation to child protection in both jurisdictions is compatible.

Child Protection

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what discussions her Department has held with the Independent Safeguarding Authority on its proposals in relation to child protection. (AQW 711/10)

Minister of Education: The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) will operate the new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) across the North of Ireland, England and Wales. The Scheme, intended to prevent unsuitable persons working with children or vulnerable adults, will be established here under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is leading a cross-departmental team tasked with implementing the legislation here. My Department is represented on this team.

Tá oifigigh ar an Fhoireann seo ag obair go dlúth leis na comhpháirtithe feidhmithe VBS ar fad, lena n-áirítear an ISA, Biúró na dTaifead Coiriúil agus Access NI lena chinntiú go bhfuil an scéim oiriúnach don fheidhm.

Officials on this Team are working closely with all VBS implementation partners, including the ISA, the Criminal Records Bureau and Access NI to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Officials in the South of Ireland have also been engaged in the development process so that the long established cooperation in this area is sustained. Safeguarding children is a priority area and compatibility and consistency of our respective arrangements is high on the agenda of the North South Ministerial Council.

Carrowdore Early Years Centre

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education what assistance can her Department provide to assist Carrowdore Early Years Centre in achieving additional child allocation. (AQW 716/10)

Minister of Education: Leithdháileadh 20 áit chistithe ar Carrowdore Early Years Centre don scoilbhliain 2009/10 faoin Chlár um Leathnú Réamhscolaíochta.

Carrowdore Early Years Centre were allocated 20 funded places under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme for the 2009/10 school year.

I am aware that the group have written to the South Eastern Education and Library Board Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) requesting that this number be increased to 22 for the 2010/11 school year.

The PEAG are currently considering the allocation of places to all groups for 2010/11 and will take Carrowdore Early Years Centre's request, and those from any other providers, into account during this process.

First Aid Training on Epilepsy and Epipen Delivery

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if newly qualified teachers are offered first aid training on epilepsy and epipen delivery as part of their induction or early professional development. (AQW 721/10)

Minister of Education: There are many competing demands for the inclusion of training on specific topics and areas in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses, and the time available for training students is limited. There is, therefore, a limit to the range of issues that can be covered, and special educational needs in ITE courses primarily focuses on the recognition of pupils' special needs and the development of appropriate strategies to meet those needs.

With regard to teachers' continuing professional development, all Education and Library Boards (ELBs) undertake, on an annual basis, a needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year. School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their teachers and they can avail of the wide range of courses on all aspects of special educational needs, including epilepsy, offered by ELBs.

I ndiaidh eisiúint an doiciméid "Ag Tabhairt Tacaíochta do Dhaltaí a bhfuil Riachtanais Speisialta Cógais acu" ón Roinn Oideachais sa bhliain 2008, soláthraíodh clár oiliúna do phríomhoidí scoile lena chinntiú gur féidir le scoileanna freastal ar riachtanais gach dalta a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta cógais acu.

Following the issue of the Department of Education's document "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs" in 2008, a training programme for school principals was offered to all schools to ensure that all pupils with medication needs, including epilepsy, could have their needs met in schools.

Child Protection Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what training is provided for teachers in relation to child protection issues; and what is the protocol for reporting suspected abuse. (AQW 730/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an tSeirbhís Tacaíochta do Scoileanna um Chosaint Páistí réimse cúrsaí oiliúna i gcosaint páistí, atá ceaptha le freastal ar riachtanais Múinteoirí agus Leasmhúinteoirí Ainmnithe, Príomhoidí, Gobharnóirí agus gairmithe eile san earnáil oideachais.

The Child Protection Support Service for Schools offers a range of training courses in child protection designed to meet the needs of Designated and Deputy Designated Teachers, Principals, Governors and other professionals in the education sector.

All newly appointed Designated Teachers and Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection are offered a two day basic training course within their first year in post. All existing Designated Teachers and their Deputies are offered a refresher training course of 1 day every third year in post. Designated Teachers and their Deputies are also invited to participate in a programme of capacity building around child protection and continuous skills development/training, in line with a regionally agreed programme, through attendance at sector specific cluster groups held on two occasions each school year.

The Designated Teacher or Deputy Designated Teacher provides awareness raising training about child protection for all other school's staff. The Department of Education has produced and distributed to schools materials which can be used for this purpose and cover the key elements of signs and symptoms of abuse, who to talk to if there are concerns about a pupil and what to do in the event of a disclosure or allegation.

The training content is kept under review and updated to meet the needs of schools' staff and the wider operating context. The training is offered offsite and provides an opportunity for schools' staff to learn and exchange experiences with colleagues from other schools. While training is optional for the present, the participation of a school's staff is raised by the Education and Training Inspectorate in the context of any inspection of pastoral care.

The current advice to schools' staff on reporting suspected abuse is set out in the Department's Circular 1999/10, paragraph 28. In brief, referrals to social services or the police are normally made by the Principal or the Designated Teacher. Where either party is unsure about the need for a referral advice is available from the Child Protection Support Service for Schools or the relevant Health and Social Care Trust's Gateway Team.

Children who are Carers for Parents or Siblings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education if there is additional educational assistance available for children who are carers for parents or siblings. (AQW 731/10)

Minister of Education: Aithnítear cúramóirí óga mar ghrúpa san earnáil oideachais a d'fhéadfaí go mbeadh deacrachtaí acu a gcumas iomlán a bhaint amach mar gheall ar chúinsí pearsanta.

Young carers are recognised as a group within education who may experience difficulties in achieving their full potential by dint of personal circumstances.

In 2006 the Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety issued a DVD which raises awareness of the issues confronting pupils while coping with a caring role.

The DVD was issued to the Regional Training Unit and Boards' Curriculum Advisory Support Service for use in relevant training courses with schools' principals and staff.

Schools are encouraged to refer any pupil experiencing difficulties because of caring responsibilities to the Education Welfare Service so that access to additional supports can be secured.

Other, more recent developments within education which are seeking to address barriers to learning will benefit young carers. The Department has been working in partnership with all key statutory, voluntary and community sector stakeholders and interested parties to develop a 'Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Programme'.

The agreed Programme will focus initially on the post primary sector and address how a pupil's emotional health and wellbeing is promoted by the school, what supports are available for a pupil under stress and what support is available to a school in the event of a crisis. The Programme will contribute to the building of resilient emotional health and wellbeing.

It is intended to be a vehicle for providing the 'glue' or framework for integrating a range of current activities/policies/systems within schools such as curriculum work on personal development, counselling, anti-bullying work, suicide prevention, promoting good behaviour, healthy schools initiative and pastoral care into a coherent and consistent approach. This Programme will be extended into the primary and special schools' sectors in due course.

The Department is also currently updating its pastoral care guidance for schools, in which a number of stressors on children including those of young carers are identified along with signposting information for teachers.

Post-Primary Schools

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education to list the post primary schools which list children of teaching staff as part of their criteria for admission; and what steps she has taken to address this. (AQW 740/10)

Minister of Education: Ní heol go fóill cad iad na critéir iontrála a bheas in úsáid ag iarbhunscoileanna i mbliana. Foilseoidh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne na critéir iontrála i Leabhráin ar an Aistriú a bheas ar fáil i mí na Nollag/i mí Eanáir.

Admissions criteria to be used by post-primary schools this year are not yet known. They will be published by the Education and Library Boards in Transfer Booklets that will be available in December/January.

The Transfer 2010 Guidance published by my Department on 25 June 2009 specifically recommends that schools do not use children of employees/governors as part of their admissions criteria. It states the reason for this, which applies equally to siblings of staff, is that "notwithstanding the ability of this criterion to provide convenience for a small number of families, it makes admissions priority a benefit of service or employment. Employment or service either have their own benefit or are disinterested in one. Furthermore, employment or service can only be accessed by specific groups from, and a very small number of, the potential community to be served by the school."

Leave due to Stress: Primary-School Teachers

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of primary school teachers who have taken leave for stress in each of the last three years; and the total amount of leave taken in days and months. (AQW 756/10)

Minister of Education: Tá na sonraí a iarradh le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The details requested are provided in the table below.

School Type / Cineál na Scoile	2006/07 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2006/07 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)	2007/08 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2007/08 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)	2008/09 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2008/09 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)
Primary / Bunscoil	8556	224	72599	10064	234	69726	10416	227	63842
Secondary /Meánscoil	6816	190	66150	6713	191	59207	5873	159	53352
Total / Iomlán	15372	414	138749	16777	425	128933	16289	386	117194

Head Teachers

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) male; and (ii) female Head Teachers of primary schools, broken down by Education and Library Board area. (AQW 758/10)

Minister of Education: Sa tábla thíos, tá eolas ar líon na bPríomhoidí fireann agus baineann i mbunscoileanna, de réir limistéar na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

The numbers of male and female Principals in primary schools, by Education and Library Board, are given in the table below.

NUMBERS OF MALE AND FEMALE PRINCIPALS¹ IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, 2008/09

Education and Library Board/ Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne	Male/Fireann	Female/Baineann
Belfast/Béal Feirste	36	44
Western/an tIarthar	69	107
North Eastern/an tOirthuaisceart	99	102
South Eastern/an tOirdheisceart	84	55
Southern/an Deisceart	109	107

¹ Teachers working in primary schools on 30 November 2008 on a Principal pay grade.

Leave due to Stress: Secondary-School Teachers

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of secondary school teachers who have taken leave for stress in each of the last three years; and the total amount of leave taken in days and months.

(AQW 759/10)

Minister of Education: Tá na sonraí a iarradh le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The details requested are provided in the table below.

School Type / Cineál na Scoile	2006/07 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2006/07 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)	2007/08 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2007/08 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)	2008/09 Stress Days / Saoire mar gheall ar Strus	No of Teachers For Stress Days / Líon na Múinteoirí do Shaoire mar gheall ar Strus	2008/09 Total Sick Days (inc stress) / Líon iomlán na Laethanta do Shaoire Breoiteachta (strus san áireamh)
Primary / Bunscoil	8556	224	72599	10064	234	69726	10416	227	63842
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Total / Iomlán	15372	414	138749	16777	425	128933	16289	386	117194

Post Office Services

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Education (i) what services her Department currently provides through post offices; (ii) and for her assessment of any additional services that could be provided through local post offices. (AQW 760/10)

Minister of Education: Ní sheachadann mo Roinn seirbhís ar bith trí oifigí poist agus is é mo thuairim nach féidir ceann ar bith de na seirbhísí oideachais a sholáthraíonn mo Roinn a sheachadadh ar an bhealach seo.

My Department does not provide any services through post offices and it is my assessment that none of the education services delivered by my Department could be provided in this way.

Project Opposing the Construction of a North/South Electricity Interconnector

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education if any primary schools in County Armagh involved their pupils in a project opposing the construction of a North-South electricity interconnector and, if so, (i) which schools were involved; (ii) where they got the information for their project; (iii) who selected the project; (iv) why the project was selected; and (v) whether the project considered the arguments for and against the interconnector. (AQW 768/10)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn an Roinn ná ní choinníonn Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt eolas ar na tionscadail a rinneadh i scoileanna aonair.

Neither the Department nor the Southern Education and Library Board holds information about the projects carried out in individual schools.

Education Projects: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to list the projects her Department has funded and the amount of money provided by her Department in the North Down constituency, since 2007. (AQW 835/10)

Minister of Education: Ní choinníonn mo Roinn an t-eolas a iarradh miondealaithe de réir toghcheantair agus dá gcuirfí an t-eolas ar fáil san fhormáid seo, bheadh costas díréireach i gceist leis seo.

My Department does not hold the information requested on a constituency basis and to have the information provided on this basis would result in disproportionate cost.

Educational Psychologists

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Education, as budgetary restrictions in schools mean only four or five children a year are put forward by schools for assessment by Educational Psychologists, how her Department intends to help the children in need of, but unable to get, assessment and reduce their waiting times of up to three years. (AQW 847/10)

Minister of Education: There is no set limit throughout the north of Ireland to the number of referrals a school can make through an Education and Library Board (ELB) to an educational psychologist (EP) although the number of pupils who can be assessed by an EP may be limited within a given area due to the overall capacity of the service.

All Boards, with the exception of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), use a time allocation model of service delivery which gives schools access to a fair allocation of educational psychology service time. Using this system each school has its own waiting list of referrals to the Boards' educational psychology services. It is, therefore, the schools which prioritise the pupils whom they deem to be most in need of assessment, usually through discussion with the Boards' educational psychology services. This model allows schools to appraise the needs of pupils on their waiting lists on an ongoing basis.

In all Boards if information is presented to the EP during consultation that indicates that the pupil has exceptional circumstances such referrals will receive priority.

I am aware of the current difficulties experienced in some areas around the recruitment of educational psychologists and to this end I can confirm that my Department has been working closely with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to consider future staffing requirements and to help ensure that supply matches demand. I should explain, however, that it is a matter for the ELBs in the first instance to determine their staffing levels.

Since 1999 the number of educational psychologists in training at QUB has been increased from 5 to 12 per annum, through the provision of additional resources. This increase was agreed following discussion with the ELBs and QUB. The increase in trainees has been sustained following the move to a 3-year Doctorate course, which replaced the 1-year Master's course, in 2006.

In addition the vacancy control measures, in place because of the Review of Public Administration, have been lifted in relation to the recruitment of permanent educational psychology staff due to the unique situation of the Educational Psychology Service.

In recent years the Department has also provided ELBs with additional funds to train and employ additional psychologists in an effort to enable them to meet increased demand for assessments.

Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne dom freisin gur tugadh isteach cúntóirí síceolaíochta i gceantair áirithe agus go ndeachaidh sé seo go mór chun tairbhe na seirbhísí síceolaíochta.

I have also been advised by the Chief Executives of the ELBs that the introduction of psychology assistants in some areas has greatly benefited their psychology services.

Home Schooling

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education how many children were home schooled this year and in each of the last five years. (AQW 869/10)

Minister of Education: Is féidir le tuismitheoirí oideachas baile a roghnú dá bpáistí agus ní bhíonn aon cheanglas dlíthiúil orthu a gcinneadh a chur in iúl don Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ná don Roinn. Thug na Boird an t-eolas atá sa tábla seo a leanas agus tá sé bunaithe ar eolas a fuarthas go raibh an páiste ag fáil oideachais do pháiste sa bhaile. D'fhéadfaí go bhfuarthas an t-eolas seo ó tuismitheoirí, ó scoil dheireanach an pháiste, ó rannóg aistrithe an Bhoird nó ón tSeirbhís Leasa Oideachais.

Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision. The information in the following table has been provided by the Boards and is based on notifications received that a child is being home educated. These notifications may have been made by parents, a child's previous school, the Board's transfer department or it's Education Welfare Service.

Board Area	Number of home educated children				
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
BELB	12	5	4	13	13
NEELB	54	59	60	59	55
SEELB	5*	22*	32	33	41
SELB	56	65	30	30	32
WELB	43	44	45	54	63

* SEELB figures for 2004/05 and 2005/06 include only pupils in the primary sector. Post-primary figures are only available from the 2006/07 school year.

It should be noted that all figures are cumulative and therefore the same children may be included in Board figures for more than one school year.

Figures for the current school year, 2009/10, are not yet complete or available.

Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when her Department will have resources to implement policy changes which may flow from the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. (AQW 927/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar AQW 77/10, a chuir an Comhalta do thoghcheantar Aontroim Thoir, Roy Beggs, agus a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 18 Meán Fómhair 2009.

I would refer the Member to my reply to AQW 77/10, tabled by the Member for East Antrim, Roy Beggs, and published in the Official Report on 18 September 2009.

Primary Schools: Attendance

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the rate per thousand of primary school pupils that have less than eighty-five percent attendance, broken down by (i) local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area. (AQW 970/10)

Minister of Education: Tá socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Post-Primary Schools: Attendance

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1874/09, to detail the rate per thousand of fifteen to seventeen-year-old pupils who have less than eighty-five percent school attendance, broken down by (i) local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area. (AQW 971/10)

Minister of Education: Tá socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Post-Primary Schools: Attendance

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the rate per thousand of post primary school pupils who have less than eighty-five percent school attendance, broken down by (i) local council area; and (ii) electoral ward within each local council area. (AQW 972/10)

Minister of Education: Tá socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Ongoing Reviews: Department of Education

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to list any ongoing reviews in her Department and to provide a timescale for the completion of each review. (AQW 1042/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla faoi iamh.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table.

Name of Review	Timescale for Completion
Review of STEM	30 September 2009
Early Years (0-6) Strategy	Late 2009
Review of the Teacher Demand Model	End October 2009
Review of Prep School Funding	Autumn 2009
Review of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy	Early 2010
Alternative Education Provision	January 2010
Review of Community Relations Policy	March 2010
Evaluation of the Developmental Programme for 2 year olds	March 2010
Review of School Funding	Spring 2010
Review of Teacher Education	Summer 2010
Review of the emPowering Schools Strategy for ICT in Schools	June 2010
Review of Specialist Schools Model	End of 2010/2011 financial year
Every School a Good School: Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion	Spring 2011
Evaluation of Sure Start	June 2011

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Vandalism on Colleges and University Estates

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much money has been spent by his Department to clean or repair acts of vandalism on colleges and university estates in each of the last five years. (AQW 649/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department does not earmark any funding to Colleges and Universities specifically for this purpose. The cost of cleaning and repairing acts of vandalism are met within overall budgetary allocations. The Department does not hold information for expenditure on these areas for individual Further Education (FE) Colleges and Higher Education (HE) Institutions. I am further advised that such information is not readily available at the institutions themselves.

However, FE Colleges and HE Institutions have provided the following estimates of expenditure over the last two years:

Institution	2007-08	2008-09
University of Ulster	£26,000*	£17,000*
Queen's University	£17,433*	£16,908*
St Mary's University College	£3,265	£3,110
Stranmillis University College	Nil	Nil

Institution	2007-08	2008-09
Belfast Metropolitan College	N/A**	£10,500*
South East Regional College	£8,011*	£8,502*
Southern Regional College	£3,150	£25,000
South West College	£7,000*	£7,000*
Northern Regional College	£16,365	£8,502
North West Regional College	£4,000*	£6,000*

* estimated where College/ Universities do not record costs attributed specifically to cleaning and repairing acts of vandalism.

** BMC was unable to provide information for 2007/08.

Programme-led Apprenticeships

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the job target for those who complete the Programme-led Apprenticeships. (AQW 803/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Programme-Led Apprenticeships is an intervention initiative designed to address the needs of potential apprentices who cannot find employment. The programme targets 2009 school leavers as well as those who entered training in 2008 and wish to progress.

The programme aims to provide trainees with an accredited level 2 apprenticeship framework qualification in occupational skills as well as technical knowledge and, Essential Skills. The hope would be that these apprentices will progress into employment as the economy emerges from the economic downturn. It is difficult to predict the rate and scale of any subsequent recovery hence no target for employment has been set for this initiative.

I should stress that my Department's preferred progression route for trainees continues to be into employment. As such my Department's flagship programme remains ApprenticeshipsNI.

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people enrolled, but did not complete, the Learner Access Engagement Programme, broken down by (i) regional college; and (ii) gender. (AQW 985/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The information requested by the member is set out in the table below:

College	Total enrolled	Total not completed	Male not completed	Female not completed
Belfast Metropolitan College	449	97	24	73
Northern Regional College	61	19	6	13
North West Regional College	245	39	14	25
South Eastern Regional College	141	8	4	4
Southern Regional College	45	0	0	0
South West Regional College	112	10	4	6
Totals	1053	173	52	121

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the cost to (i) his Department; and (ii) students in year one of the Learner Access Engagement pilot. (AQW 989/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In its first year of operation, 2008/09, the Department incurred costs of £183,757 on the pilot Learner Access and Engagement (LAE) Programme.

Further Education (FE) Colleges are responsible for determining the level of fees for the courses they provide. As this programme targets the unemployed and economically inactive, most students will be eligible to receive an income based concessionary fee. Colleges have also been advised to encourage students to utilise their 'Support Funds' to offset any outstanding fee cost. All Essential Skills courses are free.

The Department does not hold any specific information relating to student costs.

FE Colleges have provided details of the cost per student for year one of the programme:

College	Fees Charged
Belfast Metropolitan	Nil
Northern Regional College	£5 per student
North West Regional College	Nil
South Eastern Regional College *	£23
Southern Regional College *	£7
South West College	£5 - £20 Depending on length of course

* SERC and SRC have provided an average cost per student.

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the level of underspend in year one of the Learner Access Engagement pilot. (AQW 991/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: During 2008/09, its first year of operation, the pilot Learner Access and Engagement Programme had an underspend of £33,388 from its overall final budget of £227,000.

University of Ulster: Property Acquisitions

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) what property acquisitions have been made by the University of Ulster, in Northern Ireland, in the last five years; (ii) the purchase price of the properties; and (iii) whether these properties remain in the ownership of the University. (AQW 1055/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This information is not held by my Department. However, the University of Ulster has advised that it has made the following property acquisitions in Northern Ireland, in the last five years, all of which remain in University ownership:

95-97 Donegall Street and 2-10 York Street, Belfast (Metropole House)

20-24 York Street, Belfast (Interpoint Building)

53-57 York Street, Belfast

59-65 York Street, Belfast

The University has not provided details of the purchase price of the properties as it believes disclosure of this information could potentially damage the commercial interests of the University and breach confidentiality.

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the cost for college administration in year one of the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme. (AQW 1073/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: During 2008/09, its first year of operation, the cost of college administration of the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme was £129,421.

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department intends to amend the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme, in light of the changing economic climate. (AQW 1074/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: An independent evaluation of this pilot programme is underway to assess its effectiveness; the findings of that evaluation will be used to inform the programme's development.

The programme's focus on helping those farthest removed from the labour market to prepare for employment remains a key objective in the current economic climate.

University of Ulster: Proposed New Campus in Belfast

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how much capital funding has been requested by the University of Ulster for the proposed new campus in Belfast; and (ii) what is the timeframe on which the capital funding is based. (AQW 1142/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The university has submitted an economic appraisal for the proposed campus in Belfast. The appraisal details a capital cost of £254.6m. This includes the cost of the work in both the Belfast campus and the Jordanstown campus. The University has assumed that capital funding from this Department will continue at present levels and has indicated that 50% of this funding, around £4m per annum, will be required for the development. This equates to a total of £100m across a twenty-five year funding timeframe. The construction timeframe is estimated at five years.

The economic appraisal is still being considered within my Department and, if approved, will be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel for its approval. It is only after these approvals are received that any capital contribution from this Department can be considered. Moreover, it must be noted that the Department can only commit funding out of the current Comprehensive Spending Review period that expires at the end of 2010/11.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Unemployment Rate by Council Area

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what has been the change in (i) rate and (ii) percentage of unemployment in each local council area, between July 2006 and July 2009. (AQW 557/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The table below provides the number and rate of claimants by District Council Area at July 2006 and July 2009 with the net and percentage change to the number of claimants and the percentage point change in the rate.

District Council Area	July 2006		July 2009		change		
	number	rate	number	rate	number	%age	rate
Antrim	544	1.7	1,154	3.5	610	112.1	1.8
Ards	1,023	2.2	1,560	3.3	537	52.5	1.1
Armagh	612	1.8	1,534	4.4	922	150.7	2.6
Ballymena	778	2.1	1,396	3.7	618	79.4	1.6

District Council Area	July 2006		July 2009		change		
	number	rate	number	rate	number	%age	rate
Ballymoney	394	2.2	848	4.6	454	115.2	2.4
Banbridge	374	1.3	932	3.2	558	149.2	1.9
Belfast	7,038	4.2	10,469	6.2	3,431	48.7	2.0
Carrickfergus	496	2.0	997	4.0	501	101.0	2.0
Castlereagh	539	1.4	1,083	2.7	544	100.9	1.3
Coleraine	933	2.7	1,628	4.7	695	74.5	2.0
Cookstown	405	1.9	1,082	4.9	677	167.2	3.0
Craigavon	1,139	2.1	2,581	4.7	1,442	126.6	2.6
Derry	3,414	5.0	4,811	7.0	1,397	40.9	2.0
Down	946	2.2	1,856	4.3	910	96.2	2.1
Dungannon	508	1.6	1,640	4.8	1,132	222.8	3.2
Fermanagh	995	2.7	1,574	4.1	579	58.2	1.4
Larne	413	2.1	813	4.2	400	96.9	2.1
Limavady	615	2.8	1,396	6.4	781	127.0	3.6
Lisburn	1,530	2.2	2,839	4.1	1,309	85.6	1.9
Magherafelt	401	1.5	1,145	4.2	744	185.5	2.7
Moyle	328	3.3	577	5.7	249	75.9	2.4
Newry and Mourne	1,326	2.3	3,077	5.2	1,751	132.1	2.9
Newtownabbey	1,094	2.2	1,880	3.7	786	71.8	1.5
North Down	867	1.8	1,497	3.1	630	72.7	1.3
Omagh	763	2.4	1,446	4.5	683	89.5	2.1
Strabane	1,174	4.9	1,615	6.7	441	37.6	1.8
Northern Ireland	28,649	2.7	51,430	4.7	22,781	79.5	2.0

Claimant Count Unemployment figures are derived from records of claimants held at Job Benefit Offices (JBO's). The term 'claimants' in the claimant count is used to include those who claim Jobseekers Allowance and national insurance credits. The figures include the severely disabled unemployed, but exclude students seeking vacation work and the temporarily stopped. The claimant count rate used in this table is a percentage of the working age population (females 16-59, males 16-64).

These figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Stenaline Ferries

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she is aware of a decision by Stenaline Ferries to replace the Belfast to Stranraer ferry with one from France, which will increase the journey time from one hour to three hours. (AQW 615/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Stena Line, along with other private sector ferry companies, provides important sea connections by way of both conventional and fast ferries, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, which benefit the people and economy of Northern Ireland.

The use, operation and optimisation of ferry vessels, whether conventional or fast, on the Belfast to Stranraer route are matters for the commercial judgement of Stena Line.

Geothermal Energy

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) if she is aware of the necessity for a clear regulatory structure to facilitate the development of geothermal energy, ensuring security of supply of this green, alternative, indigenous and low carbon form of energy which will alleviate fuel poverty in the context of volatile fossil fuel prices; (ii) if she will introduce a regulatory regime for the development and operation of geothermal energy; (iii) what progress is being made in relation to relevant legislation and when it will be presented to the Assembly; and (iv) whether targets for geothermal energy contributions have been considered as part of the National Renewable Energy Action Plan. (AQW 644/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment recognises the potential which both deep and shallow geothermal energy has to contribute to the development of the renewables sector.

Work to date on geothermal energy has been led by the Department's Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI). GSNI is a partner in an EU-funded project, Geothermal Regulations – Heat (GTR-H), which is examining regulatory barriers to the development of geothermal energy resources in Member States. This project recognises that a well-formulated regulatory structure is needed to stimulate investment in the development of geothermal energy resources.

The Department will consider the provision of an appropriate enabling legislative and licensing framework in the wider context of the Department's Strategic Energy Framework consultation which closed on 30 September 2009. A timeframe for the introduction of any relevant legislation will be established once this process has completed.

DETI is currently undertaking research into the potential for the development of a renewable heat market in Northern Ireland. The research will consider all types of renewable heat, including geothermal.

The National Renewable Energy Action Plan is a UK wide plan which must be developed in line with the Renewable Energy Directive. This will be at member state level and, as such, contributions from geothermal energy will be considered in line with the heat requirements of the Directive, but it is anticipated that any emerging targets will be set at UK level.

Plantation of Ulster: 400th Anniversary

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what strategy her Department has to use the 400th anniversary of the plantation of Ulster to increase and capitalise on tourism. (AQW 690/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In 2012 £60million of investment in Northern Ireland tourism is planned to come to fruition. To get the maximum advantage from this for our economy the local people of Northern Ireland need to be able to deliver a warm welcome to our visitors. New attractions should include the completion of the Titanic Signature Building and the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre alongside capital improvements to the St. Patrick's Trail, the Walled City and the Mournes.

Significant anniversary events will also occur in 2012 including the 400th anniversary of the Plantation of Ulster, the 50th Anniversary of the Belfast Festival at Queen's and the signing of the Covenant, to name but a few.

I am currently considering how best to showcase all of this under one campaign. Such a campaign would require support and endorsement from a wide range of my ministerial colleagues and I will be seeking to ensure that any proposals I bring forward will be inclusive and capable of gaining widespread consensus.

Rolls Royce Factory: Upper Newtownards Road

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to promote and encourage new build at the former Rolls Royce factory, on the Upper Newtownards Road. (AQW 728/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The former Rolls Royce factory was leased to the TK-European Components Corporation (TKECC) by the Industrial Development Board (IDB) in 1979. The company subsequently purchased the freehold of the site from IDB in 1995.

When the business closed in 2004 Invest NI actively promoted and advertised the available floor space in conjunction with the building's owner. While the total floorspace of the factory extends to circa 275,000 sq ft the owners permitted only 80,000 sq ft to be marketed as available.

Invest NI promoted this available floor space through various means, via the external property website, through inward investment visits and also directly to companies seeking property in this area. This continued until January 2009 when Invest NI was informed by the owners that the property was no longer on the market.

On 12th December 2007, at the enquiry into the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, Invest NI strongly endorsed the importance of retaining the factory site zoning as existing employment/Industry. Invest NI stated the land was an important resource for industrial use and should be maintained as such.

Overhead Electricity Power Line Network

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans are in place to carry out a risk assessment on the overhead electricity power line network. (AQW 805/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Northern Ireland Electricity, the network owner, undertakes regular inspections of the overhead electricity power network to ensure continuity of supply and safety of electric lines, based on experience and common industry practice. If an inspection reveals a particular hazard it is individually risk assessed and dealt with appropriately.

Review of Public Administration: DETI Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide a breakdown of how much has been spent to date by her Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 833/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has not incurred any external costs in relation to the Reform of Public Administration. Staff costs for the period April 2006 to date are estimated to be approximately £60,000.

Jobs in North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years. (AQW 836/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is not possible to provide information on the total number of jobs created in the North Down constituency. DETI collect information on the number of jobs at a particular point in time and therefore can only provide the net change between two points in time.

Table 1 provides information on the net change in all employee jobs (excludes the agriculture sector) in the North Down constituency as measured by the biennial Census of Employment conducted in (2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007).

TABLE 1: NET CHANGE IN ALL EMPLOYEE JOBS IN THE NORTH DOWN CONSTITUENCY

Area	2001-2003	2003-2005	2005-2007
North Down PCA	720	811	104

Table 2 presents assistance and investment information for those businesses assisted by Invest NI in the North Down constituency during the five financial years ended March 2009. Also included is the number of jobs promoted or safeguarded relating to projects assisted during this timeframe. Invest NI clients would be expected to create these jobs during the lifetime of assisted projects.

Table 2 – Invest NI Assistance & Investment Offered and Jobs Promoted/Safeguarded in North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (2004/05 to 2008/09)

Local/External	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
External	2004/05	4	2.18	11.04	140	147
	2005/06	1	0.02	0.02	-	-
	2006/07	1	0.93	4.00	233	0
	2007/08	6	1.51	9.39	63	12
	2008/09	7	6.85	47.40	163	152
External Total		19	11.51	71.86	599	311
Local	2004/05	113	1.22	3.85	n/a	n/a
	2005/06	37	0.82	3.65	n/a	n/a
	2006/07	41	0.47	2.55	26	0
	2007/08	71	1.04	6.04	64	0
	2008/09	95	1.65	9.91	91	18
Local Total		357	5.20	26.00	181	18
Grand Total		376	16.71	97.85	780	329

Notes to Table:

1. Some projects are not focused on job creation, therefore job numbers are not directly related to assistance and investment figures.
2. 'Local' refers to Northern Ireland owned businesses and 'External' to those which are owned by businesses outside Northern Ireland.
3. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created during the lifetime of projects offered assistance during the period under review.
4. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported during the period under review.
5. Local job figures are only available for the 3 year period 2006/07 - 2008/09
6. Planned Investment includes assistance offered.
7. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.
8. Table totals may not add due to rounding.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Start a Business Programme (SABp), which is provided by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland, expects to create just over 600 jobs in North Down through locally-owned business start up projects over the same period.

Scheme to Expand Sales of Beef and Lamb

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Following the announcement by Invest NI regarding a two year scheme to expand sales of beef and lamb to retailers and customers in parts of Europe by 2011, (i) to outline the budget made available for this scheme; (ii) if the marketing advisors involved will only seek to sell red meat; (iii) are the officials involved in running the scheme food marketing professionals; (iv) what consultation took place with the Northern Ireland Red Meat Industry regarding the markets chosen for the focus of the scheme; and (v) what steps Invest NI will take to minimise the competition between red meat companies bidding for potential sales. (AQW 851/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI have in place a funding provision of £100,000 to cover this two year (2009-2011) initiative which will primarily cover the red meat sector, however, pork and pork products will be added to the programme if international buyers with this additional buying responsibility for this meat category are also successfully encouraged to visit Northern Ireland.

The advisers appointed to deliver this programme, have the responsibility to deliver into Northern Ireland a series of buying missions comprising representatives of 6-10 organisations, who are currently not buying from Northern Ireland. Invest NI recruited the advisers via a Central Procurement Directorate tender competition with awards made to four Greenseeds Ltd international offices in France, Spain, Italy, and Scandinavia and a fifth provider Northern Ireland Trade Consultants (Holland). Greenseeds Ltd is a privatised trade/marketing development consultancy network operating across Europe, which until March 2009, was the international marketing part of the DEFRA sponsored "Food from Britain" organisation, which itself ceased to exist at that

date. All the providers have extensive long term experience of marketing British company products in their respective marketplaces, in all cases the providers have previously worked with Invest NI with regard to meat promotional missions.

The proposed inward missions/target marketplaces are identical to those which the red meat industry processors and stakeholder organisations enthusiastically endorsed in the 2006- 2008 pilot initiative. All the key processors and stakeholder groups including the Livestock and Meat Commission, Northern Ireland Meat Exporters Association (NIMEA) and National Beef Association actively participated in this pilot wave of missions, being represented at all the formal mission dinners and thereby meeting the visiting buyers. Discussions and consultations have continued with both NIMEA and the Ulster Pork & Bacon Forum to ensure mission activity meets their needs. Feedback received at the time from all participants was universally positive and encouraging in nature. Subsequently Invest NI was able via company returns to estimate that these 5 pilot missions yielded +£25million of new business over the period, to a majority of companies participating. This gave rise to the consideration that such success should be further pursued and exploited through a repeat initiative, which mainstreamed this activity and targeted new buying organisations within these very large marketplaces. To ensure continuity, of a sustained marketplace penetration strategy, the new series of missions are identical to the pilot series, and as before, they cover markets representing 85% of the west European marketplace for red meat.

Invest NI are aware that the main attraction for buyer organisations visiting Northern Ireland, is the ability over a short period of time, to meet with a relatively small group of companies, that represent virtually all the processing output of the province. Invest NI have stringently maintained “a level playing field” approach encouraging buyers to meet all companies in the sector. This collective approach ensures both the widest opportunity and overall probability for success for the red meat industry as a whole. Invest NI would not meet its equality obligations by being part of a selective process that positioned it, as the selector of buyers who at its discretion are then chosen to meet with selected companies (or vice versa). Nor could Invest NI seek to restrict inter company competition (price or quality) by facilitating solo access to specific Northern Ireland companies by buyers. The concentration of the Northern Ireland red meat sector allows for this collective approach, whereas in other food exporting regions overall size actually prevents respective economic development agencies from adopting such a proactive role. Individual meat processing companies in Northern Ireland are entirely free to decide whether they wish to participate in any inward buyer mission or to pursue individual development strategies in individual countries. The ultimate feature of the Invest NI strategy is “freedom of choice”. Buyers can decide with whom they want to meet (thus far Invest NI has successfully encouraged buyers to meet all companies) and likewise Northern Ireland companies retain the freedom to decide wither they wish to meet particular buyers or not.

In terms of competitive effect, feedback received by Invest NI from buyers, suggests that quality, availability of required meat cuts, domestic market considerations and exchange rates have been the predominant factors influencing their approach to Northern Ireland companies – inter Northern Ireland company pricing or price competition have not been factors drawn to our attention by either buyers or Northern Ireland companies.

Further discussions have been scheduled with NIMEA for early October in order to ensure that there is clarity and industry support for all mission activity.

Private Consultancy: DETI Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 152/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of her Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 886/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The figures provided in the answer to AQW 152/10 include expenditure on capital projects, Private Finance Initiatives and NDPBs. However, the following figures relate to private consultancy on capital projects that was recorded against capital budgets, and should be added to the previous answer:

2004-2005	£ 12,616
2005-2006	£ 5,875
2006-2007	£ 0

2004-2005	£ 12,616
2007-2008	£ 9,988
2008-2009	£ 26,154

Project Kelvin

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide an update on the implementation of Project Kelvin, detailing progress at each 'Point of Presence' site. (AQW 963/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Project Kelvin is progressing well and has met a number of important milestones, including the physical installation of the new cable between Portrush and the existing transatlantic cable. The submarine cable has also been connected to the Cable Landing Station in Coleraine and fully tested.

Progress at each of the Points of Presence (POP) in Northern Ireland is as follows:

The Coleraine POP is contained within the Cable Landing Station and, once the permanent electricity supply is in place, it will be complete;

The steel container based POPs are in place in Ballymena, Omagh and Strabane. These require both electrical and telecoms connections to be completed;

Work has started on preparation of the sites in Armagh and Portadown for the container based POPs;

The Belfast POP will be located in or near to the Titanic Quarter. This may involve either a container based solution or equipment housed in one of the new buildings in TQ.

In relation to the Telehouse facility, Hibernia Atlantic has reached agreement with ILEX/DSD to locate the facility on the Fort George site. Planning permission was received for the new building on 29 September and ILEX are committed to handing the new building over to Hibernia Atlantic no later than 16th November 2009.

Construction work has started on the terrestrial infrastructure to link the eight POPs plus the five existing Metropolitan Area Network co-location centres in Letterkenny, Monaghan, Castleblayney, Dundalk and Drogheda. This work should be completed by mid December 2009.

InterTrade Ireland

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much financial support her Department has given to InterTradeIreland in each of the last three years. (AQW 1062/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Under InterTradeIreland's Annual Business Plans, as approved by the North South Ministerial Council, DETI made the following financial support available to InterTradeIreland:

2006	£3.41M
2007	£3.47M
2008	£3.47M
Total	£10.35M

Businesses Operating in Northern Ireland

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses operating in Northern Ireland are (i) wholly; and (ii) partly owned by interests outside Northern Ireland. (AQW 1134/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is not possible to answer how many businesses there are operating in Northern Ireland who are i) wholly; or ii) partly owned by interests outside Northern Ireland.

However, the latest data from the Inter-departmental Business Register¹ indicates that at September 2009, there were a total of 70,790 businesses operating in Northern Ireland. Of these businesses, 3,325 (5%) had an owner from outside Northern Ireland, who held more than 50% of the shareholding².

1 It should be noted that the business register only contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered or which operate a PAYE scheme. Therefore those smaller businesses which do not exceed the VAT threshold or are VAT exempt will be excluded from the figures.

2. Please note that each business on the register is defined as being locally owned unless a single outside investor holds a greater than 50% total shareholding. As a result the estimates provided in this answer are likely to underestimate the total number of businesses in Northern Ireland which may be partly owned by interests outside of Northern Ireland.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Master Plan for Glenarm Village

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any correspondence that his Department has had with (i) Larne Borough Council; and (ii) Glenarm Community Association, in relation to the development of a master plan for Glenarm village. (AQW 697/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): There has been correspondence between the Department and Larne Borough Council in relation to the development of a master plan for Glenarm village. Following a number of meetings involving Departmental representatives and various interested parties, a request for funding has been received from Larne Borough Council to support the engagement of the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment in this matter.

I anticipate being in a position shortly to respond to this request from Larne Borough Council in respect of funding to support work on the development of the Glenarm Village Regeneration Masterplan.

Review of Public Administration: Cost to Date

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how much the Review of Public Administration reorganisation of councils has cost to date. (AQW 849/10)

Minister of the Environment: I refer the member to my response to AQW 633/10.

Review of Public Administration: Estimated Savings

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment what are the estimated savings from the Review of Public Administration reorganisation of councils, for each of the first three years. (AQW 852/10)

Minister of the Environment: The PricewaterhouseCoopers report on Local Government Service Delivery is currently under development; this includes the economic appraisal aspects of the options. However, once completed and considered by the Strategic Leadership Board I will make the report public.

Planning Service: Staff Vacancies

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff vacancies currently exist within the Planning Service; and, of these, how many relate to (i) planners; and (ii) administration staff. (AQW 878/10)

Minister of the Environment: Planning Service has currently (i) 51 vacancies for planners and (ii) 13 vacancies in the Administrative grades.

Super Councils

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment, if functions are to be devolved to the new super councils in 2011 and recruitment is under capacity, what impact this will have on the planning system, especially in its transition to local Government in terms of adequate staffing levels, training and expertise. (AQW 892/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am committed to transferring a reformed and fit for purpose planning system to local government, and this includes transferring the appropriate resources to enable delivery. Planning Service has a staff complement of 844 and there are currently 64 vacancies. At present, the impact of the vacancies is managed by ensuring that key or priority areas have the appropriate staff available and through increased flexibility within teams across the Planning Service.

In terms of the future, my planning officials are closely involved with the PricewaterhouseCoopers exercise which is looking at local government service delivery. The report, which is currently under development, includes the economic appraisal aspects of the local government reorganisation under the Review of Public Administration. Once completed and considered by the Strategic Leadership Board, I will make the report public.

Work to scope and identify ways to respond to the requirements in relation to training and capacity building for all key players involved in the transition (councillors, council officers and planning staff) is a key part of the work being taken forward through the RPA implementation structures, particularly Policy Development Panel C.

Removal of Waste Lorry: Rosslea

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the recent incident of a lorry containing waste being left in Rosslea, Co Fermanagh, to detail (i) when he was made aware of the incident; and (ii) when the lorry was removed by his Department. (AQW 899/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department was notified about the trailer on the evening of Friday 28 August 2009. The trailer was initially removed from Rosslea by Fermanagh District Council on 8 September 2009, to one of its licensed waste facilities. My Department arranged for the trailer to be moved to a secure facility on 10 September where it will be stored until the agreed repatriation of the waste to the Republic of Ireland takes place.

PPS21

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an update on the development of draft PPS21. (AQW 900/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am discussing the finalisation of PPS21 with the Executive Subcommittee. The final version will be put in place after it has been agreed by the Executive.

Planning Applications

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications submitted more than three months ago for tourist development in Fermanagh have not yet been considered. (AQW 901/10)

Minister of the Environment: There are no planning applications submitted more than three months ago for tourist development in Fermanagh that have not been considered. Given current levels of planning applications, there is no issue with prioritising applications which contribute to tourism and the economy as all planning applications are allocated to a case officer within one week of receipt, a site inspection is carried out within two weeks of allocation and the proposal fully considered.

Private Consultancy: DOE Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 69/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 917/10)

Minister of the Environment: My response of 23 September 2009 to you, under AQW 69/10 provided details of expenditure on private consultancy firms for each of the last 5 years and was inclusive of expenditure for capital projects and Private Finance Initiatives for my Department including agencies.

Planning Approval

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment if he will meet with representatives of the lending institutions in an effort to seek a resolution to the refusal of banks and building societies to provide mortgage facilities in instances where an occupancy clause is included in the conditions of the planning approval.

(AQW 922/10)

Minister of the Environment: The imposition of occupancy restrictions for a specified term on some planning permissions for new dwellings in the countryside is established operational planning practice, reflective of the special and often unique circumstances in such cases.

The lending policy of banks and building societies are matters for those institutions. On this basis I do not believe that a meeting [with representatives of lending institutions] would be beneficial.

Derelict Buildings

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the extent of his Department's powers to compel property owners to make safe and improve the appearance of derelict buildings under their control in towns and villages.

(AQW 951/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the Planning legislation my Department has no general powers to compel property owners to maintain their buildings. The only exception is in relation to a listed building where under Article 109 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 the Department may serve a repairs notice where it considers it is expedient to preserve the listed building. If the necessary repairs are not carried out, the Department has the power to compulsory acquire the building.

Ensuring that dangerous structures and open and vacant properties are not a threat to public safety is jointly the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and District Council Building Control Departments.

Review of Public Administration: Local Government Reorganisation

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment if the report from Pricewaterhouse Coopers, on the financial assessment of the local government reorganisation under the Review of Public Administration, is complete, and when it will be published.

(AQW 981/10)

Minister of the Environment: The PricewaterhouseCoopers report on Local Government Service Delivery is currently under development; this includes the economic appraisal aspects of the local government reorganisation under the Review of Public Administration. However, once completed and considered by the Strategic Leadership Board I of course, will make the report public.

External Consultants: DOE Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 7837/09 and AQW 69/10, (i) to provide a breakdown of all expenditure on external consultants; and (ii) to explain the discrepancy in the figures given in these answers for 2006/07; 2007/08; and 2008/09.

(AQW 1057/10)

Minister of the Environment: (i) Pursuant to AQW 7837/09 and AQW 69/10 the attached tables provide a breakdown of external consultancy expenditure by project for each of the last 5 years.

2004-05

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 04/05 (excl VAT) £
Facilitator Peatlands Workshops Seminars	11,049

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 04/05 (excl VAT) £
EHS Customer Survey 2004	13,500
IIP Advice	3,000
Facilitation Services for Organisational/Development seminars	12,600
EHS Structural Review	12,100
EHS Business Plan Review	4,900
Giants Causeway WHS Management Plans	38,570
Consultancy Support of Development of NIEL	8,363
Review of Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Management Structure	16,525
North Derry and Sperrin Boundary Review	19,798
Time Costing Information Review	9,796
Technical Advisor to CNCC/ENWG	1,500
Facilitator for Built Heritage Senior Staff Away Days	5,265
Facilitation Services for SCm Visioning Exercises	10,853
Independent Review and Evaluation of the Wake up to Waste Campaign	12,160
Consultant to Provide Expert Witness Report	1,485
Waste Management Strategy - Public Awareness and Information Campaign	44,035
Waste Management Consultancy	285,331
Pilot Baseline Waste Streams Audit	27,178
WEEE Pilot Scheme	35,260
Media Campaign Manager	63,141
Preparation of WEEE Guidance for NI	7,938
Preparation of WEEE BPEO Study for NI	18,000
Contract- Romaha	30,806
Provision of audit (TSI 9001)	8,338
Equality Impact Assessment	4,500
Draft of Plan Consultant	17,500
Dangerous Wild Animals - Standards and Guidance	7,520
Integrated Coastal Zone Management	8,100
Water Framework Directive Economic Analysis	30,523
Filing System review- FOI- Deloitte	8,953
Recommendations- NI inquiry into 'Home to school transport'	13,592
Advertising/PR contract	239,000
Total	£1,031,179

2005 - 06

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 05-06 (excl VAT) £
Assessment re renegotiate	4,200
Stress at work	830
Network Review	17,174
ISO Accreditation for centres	8,399

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 05-06 (excl VAT) £
EHS Structural Review	12,100
Waste Management Consultancy	109,533
Technical Advisor to CNCC/ENWG	21,947
Consultant to Provide Expert Witness Report	2,435
Time Costing Information Review	880
EU Consultancy Support	49,148
Review of EHS Corporate Communications Delivery	13,160
Review of Lagan Valley Reg Park Man Structure & Preparation of Business Plan	11,662
Interpretive Strategy for the Giants Causeway WHS	22,100
Commercial and Industrial Waste Survey	67,693
Economic Appraisal of Community Waste Innovation Fund Applications	33,295
Environmental Education Programme Research Study	13,640
NGO Waste Sector Review	20,400
Construction Demolition and Excavation Waste Arising Survey in NI 2004/05	15,007
Environmental Audit of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme (ALCS)	15,600
Environmental Framework Directive - Stakeholder Workshop Facilitation	1,900
Environmental Resources Management (ERM) - Waste Cost Model	30,387
Waste Infrastructure Task Force Workshop/Local Government Conference	3,142
Integrated Costal Zone Management - Northern Ireland	1,800
Technical Advisors to Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside - Research	24,195
One day workshop facilitation - Sustainable Development	3,597
I.De.A Peer Support to the Local Government Task Force	10,161
Declan Hall – LG Councillors’ Remuneration Working Group	12,407
Lady Anne McCollum – member of interview panel for NILGOSC chairman	1,528
Sid McDowell – member of interview panel for NILGOSC chairman	1,528
Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Retail Sector Study	37,500
DOE: Belfast Houses in Multiple Occupation Plan 2015 - Public Consultation	27,000
Business Planning Zones	2,000
Examination in Public - Belfast City Airport	19,717
Assistance with IIP Re-accreditation	3,300
Investigation into leak of information from Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Area Plan	3,644
Investigation into complaint by Mr McClelland	7,385
Review of Old Mineral Permissions	2,500
Craigavon Retail Study	46,275
West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 Public and Community Consultation - Stage 1	31,817
West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 Public and Community Consultation - Stage 2	28,105

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 05-06 (excl VAT) £
Assessment of Waterfront Leisure Development, Chain Memorial Road, Larne	3,135
Electronic Planning Information for Citizens Project (ePIC)	158,088
Armagh Area Plan 2018 Retail Study (and subsequent extension)	16,374
City & Town Centre Retail Study: Banbridge / Newry and Mourne Plan 2015	26,785
Areas of Historic Townscape Assessment (and subsequent extension)	3,500
Recommendations of Northern Ireland Inquiry into Home to School Bus Transport - School Bus Occupancy Surveys (April/May 2006)	40,776
Recommendations of Northern Ireland Inquiry into Home to School Bus Transport - School Bus Occupancy Surveys (Sept 2006)	35,677
Assessing the Nature of Public Concern about the Safety of School Bus Transport	9,997
Advertising Services	255,800
Measuring the Prevalence of Public Concern about the Road Safety of Home to School Transport	3,000
Total	£1,292,223

2006-07

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 06/07 (excl VAT) £
Environmental Audit of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme	108,000
Waste Infrastructure Task Force -Facilitation of Workshop/Conference to co-ordinate and drive discussion, provide and agree key outputs, ensure key objectives are met and provide written summary of utputs in a report for each day	5,000
Technical Advisors to Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) Research	35,000
To develop mediation and arbitration services for the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme	2,000
To design and develop a NI websire and key in Air Quality data.	45,000
The noise mapping project is delivering the NI responsibility for the implementation of Directive 2002/49/EC and is a statutory obligation under the Environmental Noise Regulations(NI) 2006. DoE are managing the contract on behalf of the competent authorities, which also include DRD, NI Transport Holding Company, Belfst International Airport and Belfast City Airport.	170,000
To research and carry out comparative analysis of waste management funding between NI and GB. Will be used to debate level of central funding necessary to support district councils to ensure affordability and parity.	18,500
Advertising & Publicity	322,903
Review of forecast and targets for Road Safety Strategy	4,763
Business Continuity	6,300
IIP review	1,400
Stress at work	999
Valuations on sale	193
Security review	3,234
Quality Accreditation	1,848
MIS update 06/07	2,100

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 06/07 (excl VAT) £
MIS update removal of diesel test	4,900
Business Planning Model updates	14,600
MIS update 07/08	2,000
Good Vehicle Survey	3,178
Coleraine Borough HMO subject plan 2016 issues paper public consultation	30,628
West Tyrone Retail study	10,750
Advice and guidance on SEA/Habitats Directive	1,894
Armagh Area Plan 2018 Retail study	4,862
Areas of historic townscape assessment	625
Assessment of waterfront leisure development, Larne	8,714
Bmap public inquiry	5,500
EIP Belfast City Airport	59,225
ePIC	153,278
Assistance with IIP accreditation	400
Update retail study for Craigavon	12,250
RPA HR consultancy	23,570
Preparation of flood mapping strategy	25,000
Fraud Investigation	2,832
Chairman of Councillors Remuneration working group	7,473
Implementation of Corporate Communication Review	26,000
Review of the Consultation Procedures for Planning Applications	8,029
EHSNI Engagement Scoping Study	10,000
Mourne National Park Boundary Consultation Facilitator	164,840
Research on the impact of a National Park in NI	27,720
Wind Energy Landscape Study	0
Waste Management Consultancy (waste strategy)	11,339
Pilot Baseline Waste streams audit	44,968
Waste Information Tool for Business	29,789
NGO Waste Sector Review	25,500
Commercial & Industrial Waste Survey	205,098
Construction, Demolition & Extraction Waste Survey	44,214
WSR Statistical Support	29,613
Technical Audit of Waste Management Plans	71,990
Preparation of a draft PPC permit for proposed landfill site at Mullaghglass Road Lisburn	12,367
Determination of Pollution Prevention & Control Applications	34,521
Economic Appraisal of Waste Management Plans	19,724
Determination of Pollution Prevention & Control Applications	58,971
Hazardous Waste Forum	5,853

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 06/07 (excl VAT) £
An analysis of business sectors producing marketing or using environmental chemicals in NI	50,568
Support to target regulatory effort in enforcement of marketing and restrictions (joint-fund with EA)	5,000
Decontamination Policy for NICS	5,000
Technical Support Garvary Lodge PPC Appeal	12,367
Preparation of Material for Curatorial Recruitment	870
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	1,405
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	2,332
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	3,297
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	6,430
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	2,046
Policy Development support to Local Govt taskforce	88,039
Review of Local Govt Taskforce	28,195
Total	£2,135,003

2007-08

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 07/08 (excl VAT) £
Advertising and Publicity	271,673
Evalutaion of Road Safety Council	22,500
Epic (new contract)	305,618
Londonderry conservation areas	51,406
West Tyrone retail study	24,050
Hollywood Conservation Area - design Guideline	21,800
RPA preparation	5,930
Armagh Area Plan	5,270
Review of Council Consultation procedures	24,450
Draft Bmap 2015 - Retail Study Inquiry Stage 1 (Ext)	17,750
Draft Bmap 2015 - Office Inquiry Stage 1 (Ext)	3,600
Draft Bmap 2015 - Built Heritage Study Inquiry Stage 2 (ext)	7,550
Draft Bmap 2015 - Urban Design Inquiry stage 2 (ext)	6,462
DARD Flood Mapping Strategy	1,500
Training and development for planners	19,513
Craigavon Town Centre Public Examination	17,856
Special Investigation	953
Special Investigation	675
IIP Re-accreditation Assessment	4,500
ePIC Facilitator	8,366
Independent Expert - Reform Programme	7,188
Technical Support	4,950

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 07/08 (excl VAT) £
Peer Support to LG Taskforce	76
A Shared Vision for Local Government	83,598
Strategic outline case for modernisation of local government	40,000
Economic and financial modelling	15,000
Review of NILGOSC constitution	2,000
CLAS Consultants review on Information Management Assurance	9,500
IT Strategy (Costs shared with DVA Testing)	14,981
Quality accreditation	4,989
Development of Tachonet IT System	nil
Annual Update to MIS re Operational Activity (CMR)	2,900
CMR Update	6,450
Business Plan 2008/09	3,950
BSP / MOT2 Integration	6,590
ISO for Larne	6,553
IT Strategy (Costs shared with DVA Licensing)	14,981
Environmental Audit of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme	101,238
The Provision of Noise Maps for NI	195,197
Programme Management for Waste Management Strategy 2006-2020	65,670
Management & Maintenance of the Belfast Ambient Noise Monitoring Station	12,585
Technical Advisor to the CNCC/ENWG	10,459
Legal input for waste matters	56,365
Draft Nitrate Action Programme amending Regulations to transpose EC decision granting derogation to NI	15,648
PPS14 Development in the countryside: Stakeholder Engagement 2008	13,177
Scoping Study DEFRA Model	16,800
Scoping Study on the transfer & transition of work from EHS to PEPG	36,482
IIP Facilitator	2,551
Preparation of PPC Permits for Specified Waste Management Activities	62,396
Hazardous Waste Forum	5,000
Technical Audit of Waste Management Plans	0
Preparation of Material for Curatorial Recruitment	4,650
Review of Site Closure Reports	77,202
Built Heritage Grant Aid Funding Review + NGO Funding Paper	17,671
Technical Support Garvary Lodge PPC Appeal	4,309
Decontamination Policy for NICS	5,000
Pilot Baseline Waste Streams Audit	4,292
Wind Energy Landscape Study	69,735
Centralisation of EHS Corporate Communications Delivery Project	3,000
Mourne National Park Boundary Consultation Facilitator	37,620

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 07/08 (excl VAT) £
Consultancy Support for the Preparation of a Draft Financial Provision Consultation Document.	9,937
Review of Site Closure Reports and Modification of Waste Management Licences.	51,450
Commercial & Industrial Waste Survey	24,936
Packaging Project - Potential Obligated Business	21,549
Review of Municipal Waste Component Analysis	23,670
Total	1,993,716

2008-09

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 08-09 (excl VAT) £
Technical Support	4,950
Local Government Pension Scheme - 85 year rule projections	15,000
Revised guidance on transfers into and out of local government pension scheme under new regulations coming into operation on 1 April 2009	2,923
Local Government Pension Scheme Transfer Values	12,839
Environmental Audit of Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme	122,305
Programme Management for Waste Management Strategy 2006-2020	2,755
Technical Advisor to the CNCC/ENWG	17,325
ELD Impact Assessment	15,282
Legal input for waste matters	27,385
Draft Nitrate Action Programme amending Regulations to transpose EC	370
Secretariat for NI Climate Change Impacts partnership	11,341
Arc 21 OBC Review	14,360
NWR OBC Review	14,360
Gateway review of NI residual waste management programme	8,715
Legal Advice on Landfill Sites	5,394
Environmental Audit of Landfill Sites	4,573
Biodiversity	38,000
	8,000
DOE School Bus Occupancy Survey	10,250
Advertising and Publicity	204,159
Processing Drafting and Determining PPC Permits and Site Closure Plans	58,119
Review of Site Closure Reports and Modification of Waste Management Licences	85,550
Review of Strangford Lough and Lecale AONB	43,973
Measuring the Effectiveness of EMS in Improving Environmental Performance in NI Businesses	48,750
UPM Technical Support	28,283
Odour Survey of Operating Landfill Sites	7,794
Consultancy services in relation to proposed restoration of a hydro electric power scheme at Roe Valley Country Park	29,392

Subject of Consultancy	Total Expenditure during 08-09 (excl VAT) £
Design of mini hydroelectric scheme at Roe Valley	48,676
Processing Determination & Drafting of Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) Permits	15,851
Londonderry Conservation Areas	23,906
Training and development for planners	20,113
DARD Flood Mapping Strategy	13,500
ePIC (ePlanning Information for Citizens)	373,320
Tall Buildings Guidance	10,769
Rooskey Quarry Discontinuance Case	5,000
Clay Pigeon Discontinuance Case	6,600
Review of LGSC	3,250
Policy Review of NILGOSC Governance Arrangements	2,000
Strategic Outline Case for Local Government Modernisation	28,031
Strategic Outline Case for Local Government Modernisation - extension	38,212
Service Delivery	128,315
A Practical Approach to implementing a successful change management programme in Local Government	14,000
Expert advisor on LG Restructuring	11,846
Expert advisor on LG Restructuring	18,629
Independent Expert - Reform Programme	6,274
Stakeholder Engagement - Reform Programme	5,000
Review of Householder Permitted Development Rights - Reform Programme	60,283
Review of Non-householder Permitted Development Rights - Reform Programme	70,698
Review of Non-domestic Microgeneration Permitted Development Rights - Reform Programme	65,338
Accessibility - Belfast Pilot Evaluation - Reform Programme	9,918
Total	1,821,675

- (ii) The table below shows the external consultancy expenditure figures provided for both AQW 7837/09 and AQW 69/10 and the discrepancies between them.

Expenditure on External Consultants	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
AQW 7837/09	2,135,003	1,993,716	1,821,675
AQW 69/10	2,097,051	2,131,030	1,346,791
Add - Reform consultancy expenditure previously excluded	37,952	45,061	474,884
Remove - Non – external Consultant Expenditure		182,375	
Correct Expenditure on External Consultants	2,135,003	1,993,716	1,821,675

The figures for external consultancy contained in AQW 7837/09, for the 3 years (2006-07 – 2008-09), are therefore the correct figures. Unfortunately the figures in the response to AQW 69/10 were taken from the reports presented to the Departmental Board which exclude consultancy expenditure on reform agenda contracts. These reports are reviewed quarterly by the Board to ensure that the Department lives within the ceiling for annual non-

reform consultancy spend set by the Board at the start of each financial year in attempt to reduce year on year the overall expenditure on external consultancy.

Furthermore, the expenditure figure for 2007-08 in AQW 69/10 also incorrectly included an amount for £182,375 which related to a website project. In line with a more stringent interpretation of DFP guidance this is not now deemed to be external consultancy expenditure.

Speeding

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware of the practice adopted by German police, that when a vehicle is stopped for speeding, the offender is cautioned and then shown a film about the dangers of speeding. (AQW 1106/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am not aware of the practice referred to. However, if further details can be provided, including details of any evaluation carried out by the German police, I will ensure that they are forwarded for consideration to the PSNI.

Co-option in District Councils

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his meeting with NIO Minister Paul Goggins regarding bringing forward legislation to allow co-options in District Councils. (AQW 1175/10)

Minister of the Environment: I had a constructive meeting with Minister Goggins and discussions are continuing about a possible amendment to section 11 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 which sets out the procedure for filling a casual vacancy in a District Council.

Illegal Dumping

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 534/10 and AQW 112/10, to detail the costs to each District Council of disposing of tyres collected as a result of illegal dumping in (i) 2006-2007; (ii) 2007-2008; and (iii) 2008-2009. (AQW 1203/10)

Minister of the Environment: As stated in my answer dated 23 September 2009 to AQW 534/10, my Department has no statutory authority over the collection, disposal or clean up of illegally dumped materials, and therefore does not hold these details.

Noise Insulation Grant Scheme: George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to support a noise insulation grant scheme for residents living close to the George Best Belfast City Airport; and whether he will meet with local residents to discuss the impact of the plans to extend the airport runway. (AQW 1271/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department for Regional Development is responsible for any noise insulation schemes for residents living close to the George Best Belfast City Airport. I understand that the DRD Minister Conor Murphy MP MLA will write to you separately about this.

In terms of the current planning application I would be happy to meet the residents.

Planning Powers

Mr A McFarland asked the Minister of the Environment if it is still his Department's policy to transfer planning powers to the new Councils in May 2011. (AQO 163/10)

Minister of the Environment: In accordance with the Review of Public Administration decisions, I remain committed to transferring the relevant planning functions to the new district councils. The transfer of these planning functions is a key element of my wider programme of reform of the planning system. As Members will be aware, there were delays in getting the planning reform proposals cleared by the Executive and published

for consultation. This delay now means that we are outside best practice in terms of the timetable for delivering the legislative programme for planning reform, including the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils by 2011.

The size of the programme and the challenges that it brings should not be underestimated. However, my officials remain committed to driving this work forward as quickly as possible to ensure we stay on course to deliver by the 2011 deadline.

Review of Public Administration: Update

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Local Government aspects of the Review of Public Administration. (AQO 164/10)

Minister of the Environment: The legislation giving effect to the local government reform is being taken forward by three Assembly Bills. The first of these Bills, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, is already before the Assembly and is being considered in detail by the Environment Committee. This Bill will, inter alia, provide for the making of severance arrangements for long-serving councillors and for the establishment of Statutory Transition Committees. This Bill should complete its passage by the end of the year, thus enabling the establishment of the Statutory Transition Committees early in the new year.

The second, the Local Government (Finance) Bill is out for public consultation until the end of October.

The third, the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, which will actually bring the new councils into being, is before the Executive for consideration, and if the Executive agrees the proposals, my aim is to issue a consultation paper before the end of October.

The policy development work for the local government reform programme, which has been done by the Strategic Leadership Board and Policy Development Panels, largely composed of political representatives from the five main parties, and in close co-operation with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is now coming to an end, and the programme is moving into its implementation phase. The Transition Committees have a crucial role to play in delivering much of the preparatory work to facilitate the convergence of the amalgamating councils.

A full economic appraisal of the Reform Programme is due to be completed within the next few months. This includes a detailed assessment of the options for delivery of the key services by the 11 new councils, a full economic appraisal of each option and an outline implementation plan.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to state his progress and intentions in relation to the implementation of the recommendations in the report by Sir George Bain on the Location of Public Sector Jobs. (AQW 275/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs indicated that the recommendations to disperse jobs to a number of locations across Northern Ireland could cost in the region of £40m. This is a cost to the public purse which is becoming increasingly difficult to justify given the current economic climate and significant pressures on public spending. The review also suggested that normal value for money considerations in Her Majesty's Treasury Green Book should be set aside.

The issues of value for money and affordability were raised in the Assembly debate on 21 October 2008 shortly after the Report was published. At the time a motion was passed which specifically called on the Finance Minister to consider the consequences of the Report including value for money.

Since then we have continued to face a tightening financial situation and so I am coming to the conclusion that, at a cost of up to £40million, it is simply not affordable to proceed to implement the recommendations of

the Report, nor is this the time to set aside normal value for money principles. However, I am keen to have a discussion with Executive colleagues so that decisions can be taken on the matter as soon as possible.

Civil Servants

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of Civil Servants in senior salary bands who were promoted less than (i) one year; (ii) two years; and (iii) three years before retirement; and the financial implications of this for pension funds. (AQW 770/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Four civil servants in senior salary bands who retired in the last 5 years were promoted within three years of their leaving date. Of those permanently promoted, none was promoted less than one year; one was promoted within two years; and one within three years before retirement. Two of the four were temporarily promoted within two years of their retirement.

The financial implications for the pension funds regarding the total additional lump sum payable was £34,940 and the total additional pension payable is £11,735 annually.

Review of Public Administration: DFP Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been spent by his Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 829/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel has spent £1.5m on the Review of Public Administration.

Domestic Rates

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for his assessment of the present domestic rating system being based on capital values of properties which were assessed before the present economic downturn; and (ii) whether he plans to review domestic rates taking into account the present market value of properties. (AQW 850/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At present the domestic rating system is based on individual capital values that were assessed using a fixed antecedent date of 1 January 2005. This fixed date ensures that all properties are valued on a consistent basis, with subsequent fluctuations in market prices (both up and down) disregarded until the next revaluation. Any properties built post 1 January 2005 continue to be valued at 1 January 2005 levels.

While I appreciate the concerns that have been expressed by some, given the recent decline in the property market, revaluation involves a redistribution of the rating burden, it does not in itself change the total amount of money that needs to be raised and it is always accompanied by a corresponding change in the tax rates (the rate in the pound). So, if a revaluation were to occur at this time only those properties that have reduced in value by more than the average would experience a reduction in rates liability, while properties experiencing lower than average falls in value would have an increased rates liability. There would be both winners and losers.

I have no plans to revalue all domestic property in Northern Ireland at the moment. I will of course keep the timing of the next domestic revaluation under review. However, I believe that now would not be an appropriate time to begin such an exercise given the unsettled state of the housing market and the fact that the current valuation list is just over two years old. There is also an overriding need, at this time, to maintain a period of stability for district councils, Land and Property Services and ratepayers. Furthermore, revaluation has a cost and I think there are currently higher priorities for public spending.

Private Consultancy: DFP Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 162/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 891/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The figure for private consultancy provided in AQW 162/10 did not include £0.14m capital expenditure detailed in the table below, but did include expenditure on Private Finance Initiatives and Agencies.

CAPITAL PROJECTS £'M

2004/05	Nil
2005/06	0.07
2006/07	0.03
2007/08	0.04
2008/09	Nil
Total	0.14

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) when the review of the Special EU Programmes Body will be concluded and whether it should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act; and (ii) to explain the delay in reaching a conclusion. (AQW 982/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The review of the applicability of the Freedom of Information Code of Practice for North South Bodies to the work of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is approaching its final stages. Following its conclusion, decisions on outstanding Freedom of Information requests will be communicated to applicants by the SEUPB.

The time taken reflects the complex nature of the review in a context where International Relations (including with the EU) is, for Northern Ireland, an excepted matter. The review has included an examination of the nature of the work of the SEUPB and the information it holds, and consideration of the relevant legislation in both the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Government Contracts: 10-Day Payment

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to include a 'flow down' requirement as part of the ten day payment rule in Government contracts, to ensure that money flows from large contractors to smaller sub-contractors and small and medium sized enterprises within a set and efficient timeframe. (AQW 984/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although it is not a contractually binding requirement, Departments, as best practice clients, are committed to paying suppliers within 10 days of the receipt of a valid invoice.

For construction works contracts, main contractors are required to comply with the 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains'. The Code sets out the core principles that should govern the behaviour of clients, contractors and subcontractors, including the need for fair dealing within the supply chain.

Principle 3 of the Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland Procurement Task Group (PTG) Report recognises that enterprises have the opportunity to benefit from participation in Government contracts either as a main contractor or as a subcontractor. A PTG Working Group will consider expanding the 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains' to include a 'Fair Payment Charter' and a requirement that first tier subcontractors provide feedback directly to the Government Construction Client on monthly payment progress from the main contractor to the supply chain. The proposals, to be developed by December 2009, will seek to ensure that main contractors pass on the benefits of prompt payment to subcontractors.

Supplies and services contracts also require main contractors to enter into subcontracts on the same terms and conditions as the main contract. I have asked Central Procurement Directorate to review if the approach taken in construction contracts would be practicable in supplies and services contracts.

Government Invoice Scheme

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to introduce a Government scheme to enable firms to immediately draw down cash flow from the banks when they submit invoices to the Government, thereby freeing up cash flow for a minimal fee while allowing Government to pay within the normal timeframe. (AQW 990/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have no plans to introduce such a scheme and would have concerns that the processes needed to operate it would outweigh any potential benefits.

Rates Collection

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to detail the performance of the Land and Property Services in relation to rates collection; and (ii) to advise how it compares with the collection of rates in (a) England; (b) Scotland; and (c) Wales. (AQW 993/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 30 September 2009, Land & Property Services had issued 671,279 rate bills for 2009-10 and collected £621 million of rates. The Agency had issued some 83,596 final demands and initiated 28,590 court processes for non-payment of rates. The overall collection performance has improved from 56% at 30 September 2008 to 61.3% at 30 September 2009.

Land & Property Services' overall rate collection performance for

2008-09, the last complete rating year, is shown in the table below, along with figures for Council Tax and business rates collection in England, Scotland and Wales. However, direct comparisons should be treated with caution. In a recent benchmarking report for Land & Property Services the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation indicated four key differences which affect Northern Ireland performance. These are -

- The narrower range of enforcement options available in Northern Ireland.
- The more complex and varied relief schemes in Northern Ireland.
- The quality of records, which in Northern Ireland have been affected by the recent replacement of the rating IT system.
- Differences in payment culture between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

The report also indicated that costs of collection in Northern Ireland compare favourably with those in Great Britain.

There are no formally published half-year figures for Great Britain for 2009-10, but information provided informally by collection authorities in Great Britain suggest that collection levels are under pressure due to the general economic downturn.

Year	Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales
2008-09	Rates 92.4%	Council Tax 97.0%	Council Tax 94.4%	Council Tax 96.4%
		Business rates 97.8%	Business rates 96.4% ¹	Business rates 96.4% ²

¹ This is for 2005-06, the last year for which data for the Scottish local authorities was collated centrally

² Provisional figure provided by Welsh Assembly Government

Bain Report: Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given that a year has passed since the publication of the Bain Report on the location of public sector jobs (i) what are his Department's plans to adopt the recommendations of this report; and (ii) which Departments are actively pursuing a decentralisation agenda. (AQW 1118/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Professor Bain's independent review of policy on the location of public sector jobs made various recommendations to disperse jobs to six locations across Northern Ireland. The Report indicated that the cost to the public purse to implement the recommendations could be around £40m. It also suggested that normal value for money considerations in Her Majesty's Treasury Green Book should

be set aside. As far as my Department is concerned I am of the opinion that in the current economic climate, and with the significant pressures on public spending, it is simply not affordable to proceed to implement the recommendations of the Report, nor is this the time to set aside normal value for money principles.

Decentralisation is an issue that will have to be considered by the Executive. I am keen, therefore, to have a discussion at the Executive as soon as possible.

National Asset Management Agency

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his Department's formal position regarding a Northern Ireland representative on any advisory board for the forthcoming National Asset Management Agency in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 1138/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I had a very constructive meeting on 8th September 2009 with Finance Minister Lenihan on the NAMA issue. At this meeting Minister Lenihan confirmed that DFP could communicate directly to NAMA through an advisory committee, which would report directly to the Board. This advisory committee would be established under Section 32 1(A) of the revised draft legislation.

I intend to meet with Minister Lenihan again once the NAMA legislation has been enacted. A key objective of this meeting will be to finalise the details with respect to DFP representation on the NAMA advisory committee.

Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he plans to amend the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 Part R Access and Facilities for Disabled People to introduce a requirement to have changing facilities for people with severe learning and physical disabilities. (AQW 1165/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are no plans at present to amend Part R (Access to and use of buildings) of the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

My officials have been working closely with MENCAP, which launched the "Changing Places" campaign some time ago, to determine whether or not building regulations are an appropriate vehicle to achieve the campaign's goals of an increase in the number of changing places facilities in Northern Ireland.

Building Regulations

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how current building regulations comply with equality duties regarding the provision of changing facilities for people with severe learning and physical disabilities. (AQW 1166/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Part R (Access to and use of building) of the Building Regulations (NI) 2000 was last amended in November 2006. This amendment broadened the scope of this part to improve the access to and use of buildings for all people, including people with young children and the elderly as well as those with disabilities. The amendment complements the provisions of Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended). The legislation was screened out for equality impact assessment as building regulations apply to everyone, regardless of whether or not a person sits within one or more of the groups listed in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

It should be noted that building regulations set the minimum standards acceptable for construction and there is nothing in the current regulations

that would prevent a builder from incorporating changing places facilities into a building should he wish to do so.

Changing Facilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to increase the number and availability of changing facilities for people with severe learning and physical disabilities. (AQW 1167/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: An increase in the number of changing places facilities in Northern Ireland is the main goal of MENCAP's current "Changing Places" campaign. My officials have met with MENCAP to determine if it is appropriate to include such a requirement in building regulations. Officials will continue to work with MENCAP in this regard.

Changing Facilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to adopt design standards for changing facilities. (AQW 1168/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are some differences between the two standards that define a Changing Places facility, namely the recently revised British Standard BS8300:2009 and that devised by the Changing Places Consortium, led locally by MENCAP. Officials have met with MENCAP on a number of occasions, and will continue to meet with them to determine if it is appropriate to include such a requirement, and to what standard, in building regulations.

Local Banks

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) any meetings he or his predecessor has had with local banks, in the last twelve months; (ii) the agenda items discussed; and (iii) any outcomes. (AQW 1171/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The primary forum for engagement with the local banks is the Cross Sector Advisory Forum (CSAF) and particularly the Banking, Finance and Lending Sub-Group, which I chair.

The Plenary CSAF, which has representation from the local banks, met on the 6th April, 30th June and 7th October 2009. The Banking, Finance and Lending Sub-Group met on 6th August 2009. The key issues discussed were the National Asset Management Agency, business lending (including uptake of Government schemes) and the local housing market. This forum offers a constructive channel for discussing lending conditions with the local banks. I, and my officials, will continue to monitor and engage with the local banks over the coming months.

External Consultants: DFP Guidance

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what procedures exist to ensure that consultants provide value for money; and (ii) what advice his Department gives to other Departments in this regard. (AQW 1220/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP has produced comprehensive guidance for departments on all aspects of value for money in the use of external consultants. The guidance covers the process from the requirement of an approved business case, the procurement through a Centre of Procurement Expertise and the management and evaluation of the assignment.

This guidance was issued to departments as Finance Director Letter FD(DFP) 04/09 and is available from the publications section of the Accountability and Accountancy Services Division (AASD) website www.aasdni.gov.uk.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DFP

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long he anticipates it will last. (AQW 1272/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are no plans at present to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Equal Opportunities Unit

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the 9th report of the Equal Opportunities Unit will be published. (AQO 171/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A 9th Equal Opportunities Unit report will not now be published as new legislative duties have been placed on NISRA to publish official statistics in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and the associated Code of Practice for Official Statistics. There is no statutory requirement to produce such reports.

NISRA will produce an interim report in November and from 2010 they will publish annual equality statistics. These reports will provide broadly similar statistical information to that which previously appeared in the Equal Opportunities Reports. A separate equality and diversity report will be produced annually by my Department which will provide background information, progress reports and identify future work to progress equality and diversity in the NICS.

Civil Service: Redundancies

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people his Department made redundant between 1 March 2009 and 31 August 2009. (AQO 172/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: No staff from my Department have been made redundant between 1 March 2009 and 31 August 2009.

Rates

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the impact of the current economic downturn on businesses, if he will increase the percentage reduction of rates payable on vacant non-domestic properties, as permitted under Article 23 of the Rates (Amendment) (NI) Order 2006. (AQO 173/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A routine evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the policy of rating vacant non-domestic properties is nearing completion and will take into account the impact of the current economic downturn.

I want to see the outcome of this work in the next few weeks before deciding what changes, if any, are needed to the policy.

One issue, which it is important to remember, is that any easements granted would affect revenues and therefore budgets, at both regional and local council level. This will need to be considered carefully, particularly as there is currently no legal basis for compensating councils for any loss.

DHSSPS: Funding

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how funding of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety compares to funding for equivalent Departments in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQO 174/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Comparisons between regions within the United Kingdom can be found within the document "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses" the most recent update of which was published by Treasury in June 2009.

The latest outturn figures relating to comparable health services indicate that Northern Ireland spends £1,835 per head of population which is considerably more than England which spends £1,774 per head. The Northern Ireland figure is broadly analogous to Wales which spends £1,834 per head while Scotland spends £1,986.

Budget Process

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will now establish a new budget process which is fully inclusive of all parties in the Assembly. (AQO 175/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Budget process is inclusive not just of all parties represented on the Executive, but also of all parties represented in the Assembly.

The draft Budget 2008-11 was agreed by the four party Executive and once published all MLAs were invited to comment, as were all Committees. The revised Budget, where possible, was changed to account for the consultation process and was again agreed by the four party Executive before being put to the Assembly as a whole.

Should there be a new Budget process that process will again be fully inclusive.

In light of the public expenditure pressures facing the Executive in respect of 2010-11 the most appropriate approach at this time is to focus on addressing these issues rather than conducting a costly and bureaucratic full-scale Budget process.

Budget Pressures

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his plans to address pressures on the budget. (AQO 176/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive has decided not to conduct a full formal budget process in respect of 2010-11 but to focus instead on the financial pressures that have crystallised over the summer period, particularly in respect of domestic water and sewerage charges.

Once the Executive has agreed a formal set of proposals these will be submitted to the Assembly for consultation so that the process will be fully inclusive.

It is intended that the process will be completed by the end 2009 to allow departments the time to adjust their business plans in response to the revised expenditure plans.

Alternatives to Lottery Funding

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the need to establish alternate funding streams, other than National Lottery based funding, to take account of those sections of the community who are opposed to lottery funding on ethical grounds. (AQO 177/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I fully recognise that there are sections of the community who are opposed to lottery based funding on ethical grounds. I was therefore pleased to announce in August public consultation on the Dormant Accounts Scheme which is a non-lottery stream of funding. Within the consultation, I have specifically asked "how best we could accommodate organisations that on moral or ethical grounds did not secure funding from the national lottery".

Even though monies available under the Scheme will be distributed by the Big Lottery Fund, they are entirely separate from lottery funding and firm assurances have already been given that they will be branded and managed entirely separately from lottery funding. This is a key principle of the scheme

In this way, I would hope that the opportunity to avail of the Dormant Accounts Scheme will go some way to providing an additional potential source of assistance to organisations such as these, within of course the priorities that will be set for the Scheme as it is to operate on Northern Ireland.

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how successful the enforcement of Energy Performance Certificates has been. (AQO 178/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Overall EPC enforcement has been very successful, with over 44,500 EPCs lodged on the Register so far. While the majority of the certificates relate to dwellings it should be noted that most relevant public sector buildings now have the required certificate on display.

The Department continues to encourage compliance with the requirements and is developing further publicity in the near future to highlight the requirements relating to air-conditioning systems which will come into operation from January 2010.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY**Diabetes Service Framework**

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce a Diabetes Service Framework. (AQW 593/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): My Department is developing a series of Service Frameworks which set out explicit standards for health and social care. A Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing was launched on 17 June 2009. The Cardiovascular Service Framework includes 3 standards relating to diabetes which will have a positive impact on the diagnosis of the condition and on the treatment and management of people with diabetes to prevent the onset of complications. It is anticipated that further areas for service framework development will be taken forward next year. These will be selected from the remaining priority areas identified and evaluated by the Department. Diabetes is one of the priority areas for consideration.

Age Related Macular Degeneration Patients

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the treatment of Age Related Macular Degeneration patients at the new Mater Hospital Macular Clinic. (AQW 605/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The macular service provided by Belfast HSC Trust has, since May 2007, been providing treatment with Lucentis to patients whose second eye is affected by wet age related macular degeneration. The Trust is in the process of expanding its macular service to provide treatment with Lucentis in line with National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance and the service relocated from the Royal Victoria Hospital to the Mater Hospital in April 2009 to provide the additional physical accommodation required to treat current and future patients.

The Trust has experienced some difficulty creating the staff capacity required to deliver the full level of service to all patients. Patients with second eye involvement continue to have priority; in addition, the Trust has assessed almost 100 'first eye' patients from the waiting list and those patients who require treatment with Lucentis have started their treatment.

The Trust is working with the Health and Social Care Board to increase the capacity of the HSC to provide Lucentis to all who require it in as short a time as possible.

Emergency Ambulance Cover

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the likely impact of the proposed 50% cut in emergency ambulance cover for South Belfast. (AQW 606/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There will be no 50% cut in emergency ambulance cover for South Belfast and any such suggestion is entirely bogus.

The Ambulance Service's current proposals will see an increase in paramedic response capacity for South Belfast of 4,171 hours annually.

In order to be assured of the suitability of the proposals for Belfast, I have asked the ambulance service to review its proposals for the configuration of ambulance resources for the entire city. That review will seek to ensure that the current excellent response times across the city are sustained into the future.

Swine Flu Vaccination

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much GPs will be paid for the administration of each swine flu vaccination. (AQW 617/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the Statement I made to the Assembly on Tuesday 15 September 2009.

Vandalism on Property

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent by his Department to clean up or repair acts of vandalism on property within his responsibility in each of the last five years. (AQW 643/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally.

Generic Prescribing

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with GPs in relation to generic prescribing; and if his Department has informed them that cheaper medication should be given preference. (AQW 670/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since 2006 Generic Prescribing has been one of the key policies of my Department. As a result generic dispensing rates have increased significantly from 43% (April 2005) to a current rate of 57% and this has contributed significantly to cash-releasing efficiencies. The Health and Social Care service has been set a generic dispensing rate target of 64% to be achieved by March 2011.

The use of generic medicines in favour of branded equivalents is a central strand in the Department's overall strategy aimed at promoting improved quality in medicines management for all patients through cost effective prescribing.

All healthcare professionals, including GPs, are updated regularly on generic prescribing policy. However, it is for the clinician, in consultation with their patient, to decide on an appropriate course of treatment for the patient and to prescribe the medication to support that treatment.

Migraine Sufferers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has had discussions with any relevant bodies in relation to migraine sufferers and how treatment of the condition can reduce absenteeism at work. (AQW 671/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data on causes of absenteeism from work are not collected centrally. I have not had discussions with any bodies in relation to migraine or the impact of migraine on absenteeism from work.

Child Protection: Care Homes

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the child healthcare issues relating to allegations of serious physical assault against children in (a) Termonbacca, Londonderry; (b) Nazareth House, Londonderry; (c) Nazareth Lodge, Belfast; (d) Nazareth House, Belfast; (v) St Patrick's home, Belfast; and (ii) how they intend to investigate those child protection issues. (AQW 674/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within Northern Ireland, the statutory framework requires that where allegations of child abuse come to light these must be reported immediately to PSNI and Social Services for investigation. I would encourage strongly anyone who has any information regarding any allegations of child abuse to report these immediately to the statutory authorities for investigation so that perpetrators can be brought before the courts where this is appropriate.

Regulation, inspection and provision here have been strengthened significantly over many years. Since the 1985 public inquiry into abuse at the Kincora Boys' Home we have continuously strengthened arrangements for vulnerable children. The independent Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has statutory responsibility and powers to inspect services. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council, the independent public regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland, is dedicated to improving and regulating standards of training and practice for social care workers.

Child Protection: Care Homes

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the need for a public investigation of allegations of serious physical assault against children in (a) Termonbacca, Londonderry; (b) Nazareth House, Londonderry; (c) Nazareth Lodge, Belfast; (d) Nazareth House, Belfast; (v) St Patrick's home, Belfast; and (ii) how he intends to investigate those child protection issues. (AQW 675/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within Northern Ireland, the statutory framework requires that where allegations of child abuse come to light these must be reported immediately to PSNI and Social Services for investigation. I would encourage strongly anyone who has any information regarding any allegations of child abuse to report these immediately to the statutory authorities for investigation so that perpetrators can be brought before the courts where this is appropriate.

Regulation, inspection and provision here have been strengthened significantly over many years. Since the 1985 public inquiry into abuse at the Kincora Boys' Home we have continuously strengthened arrangements for vulnerable children. The independent Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority has statutory responsibility and powers to inspect services. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council, the independent public regulatory body for the social care workforce in Northern Ireland, is dedicated to improving and regulating standards of training and practice for social care workers.

St Joseph's Baby Home

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many infants were sent (i) from Northern Ireland to St Joseph's baby home in Donegal; and (ii) to St Joseph's baby home Ravenhill Road, Belfast in each year since the formation of Northern Ireland and; what record is kept of each infant. (AQW 678/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Smoking Bans

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of recent media reports that smoking bans in Europe and North America cut the number of heart attacks by up to a third, (i) if he has any statistical data that would indicate that this trend will be repeated in Northern Ireland; (ii) if so, will he make it a central theme of future anti-smoking advertising; and (iii) if he will publish this statistical data. (AQW 686/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department collates data on the estimated number of hospital admissions and number of deaths attributable to smoking, including data on ischaemic heart disease. Statistics on ischaemic heart disease for the year preceding - and for the eleven month period following - the introduction of the smoking ban, have been published in a Departmental document "Smoke-free Legislation in Northern Ireland – A One Year Review".

These statistics indicate that there was a 3 per cent decrease in the estimated number of hospital admissions with a diagnosis of ischaemic heart disease, attributable to smoking, in Northern Ireland. However, it is much too early to say if a trend is emerging; therefore this information could not be used as a central theme of anti-smoking campaigns in the near future. It is also important to note that hospital admissions data is not equivalent to an independent, dedicated research study.

Social Services Joint Protocol

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the purpose and objectives of the Social Services Joint Protocol. (AQW 706/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The purpose of the Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged or Suspected Cases of Child Abuse is to ensure that clear procedures are in place to facilitate proper investigation of allegations of abuse by relevant statutory authorities whilst ensuring that children are not further abused by the investigative process.

The Protocol provides detailed guidance on the coordination between the investigating services in the following broad areas:

- Investigation of allegations of abuse;
- Investigative interviewing evidence gathering;
- Special investigative interviewing techniques to gather video evidence which meet court requirements;
- Investigation of complex abuse allegations;
- Support for the Young Witness programme; and
- Joint training of Social Workers and PSNI officers who operate the Protocol.

A review of the Joint Protocol is being undertaken by social services and the police in conjunction with other stakeholders such as the NSPCC and is expected to be completed later this year.

Specialist Medical Treatment for ME

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are being taken to provide specialist medical treatment for M.E. (AQW 707/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patient care for ME is, for the most part, provided by general practitioners. However, patients can be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their assessed individual needs. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, can be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

In addition patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in secondary, primary and community care settings, including neurology services and mental health services.

Child Protection Legislation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to introduce new child protection legislation or regulations. (AQW 708/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On behalf of other departments within the Executive and working closely with the Northern Ireland Office, my department is bringing forward secondary legislation to implement a new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) in Northern Ireland. The VBS is being established here under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. It will be implemented in stages, starting in October 2009 and ending in late 2015 by which time all those working with children or vulnerable adults will be registered with a new Independent Safeguarding Authority. My department is also considering the need for further legislation to strengthen the protection of children who are being considered for either fostering or adoption, by introducing statutory checks not only on prospective foster carers or adopters but also others living in fostering or adoption households. This is currently the subject of an ongoing public consultation. Finally, subject to approval by the Executive, it is intended to introduce legislation to the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish a new Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, which will replace the four non-statutory Area Child Protection Committees.

Child Protection

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions his Department has had with the Independent Safeguarding Authority on its proposals for child protection. (AQW 709/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) is central to a new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS), which is being put in place in Northern Ireland, England and Wales. The VBS is being established here under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007. The aim of the VBS is to improve protections for children and vulnerable adults. On behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, and working closely with the Northern Ireland Office, my department is leading on implementation of the VBS here. My officials are working closely with all VBS implementation partners, including the ISA, the Criminal Records Bureau and AccessNI to ensure that it is fit for purpose in Northern Ireland. I met with the Chair of the ISA, the Chief Executive and its Northern Ireland Board member on 4 June 2009 to discuss

implementation of the VBS in Northern Ireland and arrangements for Northern Ireland stakeholder engagement post implementation.

Childcare: Strategic Plan Development

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has considered the development of a strategic plan for childcare, covering both pre-school and school-age children. (AQW 722/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not have policy responsibility for pre-school and school-age childcare.

Childcare is an issue which cuts across the remit of a number of departments. In recognition of this, the Ministerial Sub Committee on Poverty, led by OFMDFM, has been asked to examine childcare provision, for pre-school and school-age children; along with getting an agreed cross-departmental policy in relation to childcare and identifying appropriate Departmental lead on childcare. My Department is a member of this cross-departmental sub group and I am fully supportive of this process and believe it provides the appropriate platform to consider the issues fully.

Childcare Organisations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has a lead agency for liaising with and supporting school-age childcare organisations; and if so, does the agency utilise cross-departmental links in its work in this sector. (AQW 723/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not have policy responsibility for school-age childcare.

OFMDFM currently provides funding to the school-age sector via Playboard, a voluntary organisation acting as an intermediary funding body. My Department acts solely as a funding conduit, on behalf of OFMDFM, for these monies.

Post Office Services

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what services his Department currently provides through post offices; (ii) and for his assessment of any additional services that could be provided through local post offices. (AQW 739/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Post Office plays an important role in the provision of health and social care information and advice to the public. This is demonstrated through the availability, in all local post offices, of the application pack for the European Health Insurance Card. The Post Office also offer a “check and send” service, whereby Post Office staff will assist in the completion and sending of the form on behalf of the applicant. The utilisation of the Post office network for the provision of additional services is kept under review by my Department.

Additional Funding: DHSSPS

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how often he has met with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to discuss additional funding for his Department. (AQW 745/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Meetings with the Minister of the Department of Finance and Personnel regarding budgetary issues have taken place on three occasions this year.

Efficiency Savings: DHSSPS

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any recent meetings he has had with the Health and Social Care Trusts to discuss efficiency savings. (AQW 746/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have had a number of meetings with each HSC Trust to discuss their efficiency savings on a regular basis since the start of 2009.

Efficiency Savings: DHSSPS

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any recent meetings he has had with Trade Unions to discuss efficiency savings in the Health Service. (AQW 747/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I met with the Regional Trade Union Representatives to discuss efficiency savings when I was first made aware of the impact that the Comprehensive Spending Review would have on health budgets. I have subsequently met with Regional Trade Union Representatives in my Department's Partnership Forum at which this topic was also discussed. More recently HSC employers have been keeping local Trade Union representatives informed of their proposals for efficiency savings and the impact that this will have on Health and Social Care.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Proposed Efficiency Cuts

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any recent meetings he or his officials have had with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to discuss its proposed efficiency cuts. (AQW 748/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Contingency plans containing proposals by Trusts to recover deficits have been submitted to my Department and these are still being considered. My officials have recently met with the Belfast HSC Trust to discuss their contingency plan. I have commissioned the new Health and Social Care Board to provide an assessment of the implications for patients from the proposed closure of hospital beds in Belfast. No decisions have been made and the proposals are still just proposals.

I have also met several times with the Trust during 2009 to discuss their CSR efficiency proposals.

Ambulance Service

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to reduce the number of ambulances that currently serve the Mid-Ulster area under the restructuring of the Ambulance Service. (AQW 749/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Emergency response in Mid-Ulster is generally provided from Magherafelt and Cookstown Ambulance Stations. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) plans to increase paramedic rapid response cover at Magherafelt by 3,910 hours over the current CSR period. The additional cover will be available 7 days a week for 10 hours distributed between 8:00 am and midnight.

In addition, to ensure that additional hospital services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust are available and responsive to local community needs, I am investing an annual £0.5m to strengthen ambulance services which will result in a further 8,760 A&E ambulance hours of cover. There will be no change to ambulance emergency response cover at Cookstown.

Ambulance Service

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of ambulances serving the Mid-Ulster area met their target times in (i) the year to date; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2007. (AQW 750/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not measure response time performance for individual ambulances or on the basis of parliamentary

constituencies. During 2007/08 and 2008/09, NIAS performance data was collected for Health and Social Services Board areas with Mid-Ulster spanning the Northern and Southern Boards. From April 2009, performance data has been collected for local commissioning group (LCG) areas with Mid-Ulster spanning the Northern and Southern LCGs.

The table below sets out the requested information.

Year	Northern Board/ Northern LCG	Southern Board/ Southern LCG
2007/08*	49.4%	52.4%
2008/09**	56.8%	59.1%
2009/10 (TO August 2009)***	65.1%	67%

* In 2007/08, NIAS's target was that, from April 2007, an average of 65% of Category A (life-threatening) calls should be responded to within eight minutes, with performance improving to 70% for the month of March 2008.

** In 2008/09, NIAS's target was that, from April 2008, an average of 70% of Category A (life-threatening) calls should be responded to within eight minutes with performance in individual Board areas being improved to at least 62.5% by March 2009.

*** In 2009/10, NIAS's performance target is that, from April 2009, an average of 70% of Category A (life-threatening) calls should be responded to within eight minutes increasing to an average of 72.5% by March 2010 (and not less than 65% in any local commissioning group area).

ME Clinic at Belfast City Hospital

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that M.E. has been classified by the World Health Organisation as a neurological illness, to explain why the M.E. clinic at Belfast City Hospital was situated in a psychiatric ward and was psychiatry led. (AQW 773/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Trust has advised me that the ME clinic at the Belfast City Hospital was located in the psychiatric ward because it was provided, on a voluntary basis, by a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in ME.

Due to competing priorities it was no longer possible to continue the service and no new cases have been referred since 2 July 2009. However, people suffering from this very debilitating condition can be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their individual needs. Care may be provided in secondary, primary and community care settings, including specialist regional neurology services and mental health services. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, may also be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

On 28 September I met with representatives of those suffering from ME/CFS. Following that meeting I have asked officials of my department, in association with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers might be improved.

ME

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision will be made for people diagnosed with M.E. after the closure of Northern Ireland's only treatment centre. (AQW 774/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Trust has advised me that the ME clinic at the Belfast City Hospital was located in the psychiatric ward because it was provided, on a voluntary basis, by a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in ME.

Due to competing priorities it was no longer possible to continue the service and no new cases have been referred since 2 July 2009. However, people suffering from this very debilitating condition can be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their individual needs. Care may be provided in secondary, primary and community care settings, including specialist regional neurology services and mental health services. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, may also be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

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patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers might be improved.

ME Patients

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in the absence of specialist and trained staff with experience of working with M.E. patients, to explain how his Department will ensure appropriate care and treatment for people diagnosed with M.E. (AQW 775/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Trust has advised me that the ME clinic at the Belfast City Hospital was located in the psychiatric ward because it was provided, on a voluntary basis, by a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in ME.

Due to competing priorities it was no longer possible to continue the service and no new cases have been referred since 2 July 2009. However, people suffering from this very debilitating condition can be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their individual needs. Care may be provided in secondary, primary and community care settings, including specialist regional neurology services and mental health services. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, may also be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

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Health and Social Care Trusts: Company Cars

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many of the five Health and Social Care Trusts provide company cars for staff. (AQW 781/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The five Health and Social Care Trusts do not provide company cars for staff.

ME: Provision for Patients

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision is in place within the Health Service for people suffering from M.E. (AQW 782/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patient care for ME is, for the most part, provided by general practitioners. However, patients may be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their assessed individual needs. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, can be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

In addition patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in secondary, primary and community care settings, including neurology services and mental health services.

On 28 September I met with representatives of those suffering from ME/CFS. Following that meeting I have asked officials of my department, in association with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers across Northern Ireland might be improved.

Vaccination Against Swine Flu

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider prioritising people who are self-employed for vaccination against swine flu over people who are entitled to sick pay, given the impact on their financial situation of contracting the flu. (AQW 786/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 13 August, I announced the priority groups who will be first to receive the swine flu vaccine. These include:

- Individuals aged between six months and 65 years in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at risk groups.
- All pregnant women, subject to licensing considerations.
- Household contacts of immunocompromised individuals.
- People aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at risk groups.

These priority groups have been selected because they are at higher risk of severe illness from swine flu. Frontline health and social care workers will also be among the first to be vaccinated. The close contact they have with patients on a daily basis makes them much more susceptible to becoming infected and then passing the virus onto patients. There are currently no plans to consider prioritising people who are self-employed for vaccination against swine flu.

Drug Awareness Programmes: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what drug awareness programmes his Department has funded in the North Down constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 799/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Through funding made available via the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, the former Eastern Board commissioned and funded a number of specialist Board wide and locality based substance misuse services in support of Eastern Alcohol Co-ordination Team's Action Plan in the three year period 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10.

These services and programmes address both alcohol and drug awareness, with the exception of the Lisburn and North Down YMCA Projects which covered only alcohol, reflecting the strategic approach to tackling substance misuse and best practice in regard to alcohol, illicit drugs, prescribed drugs and other substances. Those eastern area wide projects highlighted in this answer are available in the North Down constituency.

The services available to those in the North Down constituency over the past three years are set out in the tables below:

2007/2008

EASTERN AREA PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES IN NORTH DOWN

Project Title	Funding
Lisburn YMCA-SHAHRP Project	£156,599
ASCERT-Life Matters Programme	£232,754
FASA-Targeted Education for Young People	£166,519
ASCERT-Learning Disabilities Drug Awareness Training	£15,445
ASCERT-Taking the Lid Off/Living with Addiction Training	£14,539
ASCERT-Community Drug Awareness Training	£104,179

2008/2009

EASTERN AREA PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES IN NORTH DOWN

Project Title	Funding
Lisburn YMCA-SHAHRP Project	£109,652
ASCERT-Life Matters Programme	£162,030
FASA-Targeted Education for Young People	£136,576
ASCERT-Learning Disabilities Drug Awareness Training	£9,910
ASCERT-Taking the Lid Off/Living with Addiction Training	£4,957
ASCERT-Community Drug Awareness Training	£65,541

FUNDING SPECIFICALLY FOR NORTH DOWN ONLY PROJECTS

North Down YMCA	£4,261
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2009/2010**EASTERN AREA PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES IN NORTH DOWN**

Project Title	Funding
Lisburn YMCA-SHAHRP Project	£89,967
ASCERT- Targeted Education for Young People	£155,629
ASCERT-Community Drug Awareness Training	£84,998

FUNDING SPECIFICALLY FOR NORTH DOWN ONLY PROJECTS

FASA - One Stop Shop	£61,500
FASA	£5,000
NORDAG	£2,900

Alcohol Awareness Programmes: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what alcohol awareness programmes his Department has funded in the North Down constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 800/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Through funding made available via the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, the former Eastern Board commissioned and funded a number of specialist Board wide and locality based substance misuse services in support of Eastern Alcohol Co-ordination Team's Action Plan in the three year period 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10.

These services and programmes address both alcohol and drug awareness, with the exception of the Lisburn and North Down YMCA Projects which covered only alcohol, reflecting the strategic approach to tackling substance misuse and best practice in regard to alcohol, illicit drugs, prescribed drugs and other substances. Those eastern area wide projects highlighted in this answer are available in the North Down constituency.

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2008/2009**EASTERN AREA PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES IN NORTH DOWN**

Project Title	Funding
Lisburn YMCA-SHAHRP Project	£109,652
ASCERT-Life Matters Programme	£162,030
FASA-Targeted Education for Young People	£136,576
ASCERT-Learning Disabilities Drug Awareness Training	£9,910
ASCERT-Taking the Lid Off/Living with Addiction Training	£4,957
ASCERT-Community Drug Awareness Training	£65,541

FUNDING SPECIFICALLY FOR NORTH DOWN ONLY PROJECTS

North Down YMCA	£4,261
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2009/2010**EASTERN AREA PROJECTS WHICH PROVIDE SERVICES IN NORTH DOWN**

Project Title	Funding
Lisburn YMCA-SHAHRP Project	£89,967
ASCERT- Targeted Education for Young People	£155,629
ASCERT-Community Drug Awareness Training	£84,998

FUNDING SPECIFICALLY FOR NORTH DOWN ONLY PROJECTS

FASA - One Stop Shop	£61,500
FASA	£5,000
NORDAG	£2,900

Residential Homes for Older People

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if the proposed staff reductions in Residential Homes for Older People in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust meet RQIA standards on care and safety; (ii) what consultations have taken place with local stakeholders on the matter; and (iii) when will a final decision be made on any proposals. (AQW 806/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Taking account of public opinion, and following a full public consultation which included local stakeholders, the Southern Trust decided to keep all five of the statutory residential homes open but reduce the number of places available in line with the level of demand, a decision which I endorsed in April of this year. The Trust have confirmed that staffing levels in all five statutory residential homes exceed those specified as the minimum required by the RQIA, taking account of the numbers and dependency levels of residents.

Trust officials have met with potentially affected staff and consulted fully with residents, carers and Trade Union colleagues with regard to reducing staffing levels in line with the reduced number of beds. A paper, which outlined the new staffing arrangements, was issued for a three week consultation period on 17th July. During this period senior managers in the Trust met with staff in all five of the homes. A final decision on the outcome of the staffing consultation was issued to trade union and staff on 15th September 2009.

Swine Flu

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people his Department estimates will contract swine flu. (AQW 813/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer you to my Assembly statement on 15/09/2009, in which this information was provided.

Swine Flu Vaccines

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has bought swine flu vaccines for the entire population. (AQW 814/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Advance Purchase Agreements have been activated to procure A(H1N1) vaccine for the entire population.

Tamiflu

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has bought Tamiflu for the entire population. (AQW 815/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Procurement of antivirals for the entire population is not considered necessary. Tamiflu, is one of the two Antiviral drugs, along with Relenza, that is currently prescribed to treat the symptoms of the H1N1 virus. Northern Ireland has stockpiles of these antivirals for a worst case scenario which will cover 50% of the population. Stockpiles to cover up to 80% are being procured.

Closure of Hospital Beds: Belfast

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the province wide impact on patient treatment from the closure of hospital beds in Belfast. (AQW 821/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The contingency plan has been received from Belfast HSC Trust containing proposals to bring the Trust back into financial balance and these are currently being considered. I have commissioned the new Health and Social Care Board to provide an assessment of the implications for patients from proposed closure of hospital beds in Belfast. No decisions have been made and the proposals are still just proposals.

Closure of Hospital Beds: Belfast

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how he will reduce the impact on patient treatment in the Western Health and Social Care Trust if the proposed closure of hospital beds is implemented. (AQW 822/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have commissioned the new Health and Social Care Board to provide an assessment of the implications for patients from proposed closure of hospital beds in Belfast.

No decisions have been made and the proposals are still just proposals.

Review of Public Administration: DHSSPS Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent by his Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 830/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total cost to date of implementing the Review of Public Administration is £73.8m. The majority of this has been spent on early retirements and voluntary redundancies that will facilitate the achievement of £53m recurring savings from administration.

Home Start in Ards, the Ards Peninsula, and Comber

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will ring-fence the equivalent of this year's funding to Home Start in Ards, the Peninsula, and Comber for the next three years. (AQW 841/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Board has been given freedom to control most of the resources within its financial allocation without ring-fencing. This is to ensure that the use of resources is maximised, and that objectives and targets are achieved.

My Department, therefore, will not ring-fence these funds.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Waiting Times

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the vacancy freeze which has been introduced by Belfast and other Health and Social Care Trusts, and other proposed efficiency savings, whether he has any plans to revise waiting time targets. (AQW 844/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: "Priorities for Action 2009/10" sets out the specific standards and targets to be achieved by Health and Social Care Trusts in relation to waiting times. I have no plans to change the requirement for Trusts to meet those targets.

I have received contingency proposals from each of the Trusts and these are currently being considered. No final decisions have however been made.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Autistic Spectrum Disorders teams will be allocated budgets for those families who do not meet the criteria for direct payments and for respite care. (AQW 894/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care services are provided on the basis of individually assessed need and the commissioning and provision of services have to be prioritised within the amount of money available. Additional investment of £2.02m for autism services has been allocated to the Health and Social Care Board who allocate it to the Health and Social Care Trusts taking into account the relative needs of the population and the differential need for care between the populations. In addition, as a result of investment in Learning Disability services, an additional 200 new or enhanced respite packages will be put in place in 2010 which will provide respite to an additional 800 people. This will include respite provision for children and adults affected by ASD.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent by the Fire and Rescue Service on equipment to be used in emergency situations at rivers and other water based locations, in each of the last five years. (AQW 896/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in the table.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Expenditure on Water-based Rescue Equipment 2004 - 2009

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
£11,213	£4,688	£801,087*	£48,255	£37,061

* Includes expenditure of £768,803 on 3 High Volume Pumping Units

Attacks on Health Service Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many days sick leave were taken as a result of attacks on Health Service staff in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) this year to date . (AQW 924/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My department monitors the number of violent attacks on a six monthly basis, however the number of sick days taken as a result of these attacks is not collected.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people attended the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital in the last twelve months. (AQW 926/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised by the Belfast Trust that 16 patients attended the clinic at the Belfast City Hospital during the 12 month period up to 2 July 2009.

People suffering from this very debilitating condition continue to have access to appropriate care and treatment, ranging from primary and community care to specialist regional neurology services, depending on their assessed individual needs. Severe cases, from any part of Northern Ireland, may be referred to specialist clinics in the rest of the UK.

On 28 September I met with representatives of the Northern Ireland ME Association. Following that meeting I have asked officials of my department, in association with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers might be improved.

Learning Disability: Respite Care

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the reduction in the limited respite care offered to adults and children with a severe learning disability, if he remains committed to maintaining funding for learning disabilities. (AQW 973/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Learning Disability Services remains an area of priority. I fought hard to secure £33m (£17m recurrent) for the learning disability programme of care, a percentage of which will underpin the provision of an additional 200 new or enhanced respite care packages over the next 3 years for people with learning disabilities and their families/carers. Trusts estimate that 4 people should be supported by each package which will mean that around 800 people will benefit.

With a target of £700m efficiencies, or £344m recurrent or about 9% of the baseline, to release over three years, it was not possible to exempt any programme of care without putting undue pressure on the others. In the Learning Disability programme, efficiencies are being found through many initiatives which are in line with our strategic direction for change. Trusts are redesigning services in such a way as to ensure they will meet the level and type of demand anticipated, throughout the transition and beyond.

ME

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the closure of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital, (i) how many doctors in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have training in M.E.; and (ii) if NICE guidelines on M.E. apply across the Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 974/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no specific training in ME/CFS for doctors in the Belfast Trust, or any other Trust, as it is not a specialty. Training is included in the Royal College of General Practitioners curriculum for GP training and is also covered in the undergraduate medical education curriculum. The NICE clinical guideline CFS/ME was endorsed for use by the HSC in January 2008.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who made the decision to close the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic at Belfast City Hospital. (AQW 980/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Trust has advised that the clinic at Belfast City Hospital was being provided on a voluntary basis by a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in ME. Due to pressure of competing priorities that consultant was no longer available to provide this service and, therefore, no new cases have been referred since 2 July 2009.

However, people suffering from this very debilitating condition continue to have access to appropriate care and treatment, ranging from primary and community care to specialist regional neurology services, depending on their assessed individual needs.

I can also advise that on 28 September I met with representatives of the NI ME Association. Following that meeting I have asked officials of my department, in association with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers across Northern Ireland might be improved.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent closure of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital, what general clinics are available for people diagnosed with M.E. (AQW 1063/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: ME/CFS patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in secondary, primary and community care settings, including neurology services and mental health services. In addition patients may be referred for assessment and treatment to a variety of specialists depending on their assessed individual needs.

I can also advise that on 28 September I met with representatives of those suffering from ME/CFS. Following that meeting I have asked officials of my department, in association with the Health and Social Care Board, the Belfast Trust and patient representatives, to examine how access to specialist clinical services and to the other services required by ME sufferers can be improved.

Review of Public Administration: Impact on Social Services

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what impact RPA will have on the provision of front line services by Social Services. (AQW 1190/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The RPA reforms in health and social care are designed primarily to ensure that administrative structures and procedures are fit for purpose and that resources are maximised for frontline services. Developments in social care services are dependent upon the reinvestment of RPA savings. The new structures will also ensure that the benefits of our integrated health and social care structure are fully realised by strengthening links with local communities and improving consistency in the assessment of need and delivery of social care services across Northern Ireland.

Regional consistency is balanced by a strong local presence in the form of Local Commissioning Groups, which have representation from local government and the voluntary and community sectors.

Carers in the Upper Bann Constituency

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW342/10, for any statistical information held by the Department, in whichever format is available, regarding carers in the Upper Bann constituency. (AQW 1196/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Statistical information on carers is not available for the Upper Bann constituency.

Tyrone County Hospital: Urgent Care and Treatment Centre

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital will remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (AQW 1265/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm that the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre will continue to function as a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Public Hire Taxis

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister for Regional Development what flexibility his officials have to allow public hire taxis to establish ad hoc taxi ranks during peak times or at major events. (AQW 639/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not have any flexibility to allow public hire taxi drivers to establish taxi ranks at peak periods or major events.

Public Hire Taxis

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister for Regional Development what arrangements were made to allow access for public hire taxis to the Tall Ships event in Belfast; and whether these vehicles were permitted to set up temporary unofficial taxi ranks. (AQW 640/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the traffic management arrangements for the Tall Ships event were organised by the Belfast City Council, in conjunction with the PSNI, DRD Roads Service, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Belfast Harbour Police and Translink.

During the event, in Belfast, two areas were made available for the use of public hire taxis. One of these areas was within the Belfast Harbour Estate and the other area was on a section of road adjacent to the Odyssey, that had been closed by the PSNI to facilitate the event.

Vandalism Repairs: Roads Service Expenditure

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent by Roads Service in carrying out repairs to vandalised property, in each constituency, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 655/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the cost of carrying out repairs to vandalised property, for example to replace road signs vandalised or stolen, is not recorded separately from other maintenance activities.

Park and Ride Scheme, Drumahoe

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development the cost to the public purse of the park and ride scheme currently being provided at Drumahoe, Londonderry for the use of Translink services. (AQW 656/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the park and ride scheme at Drumahoe is not yet complete and at present cannot provide a final cost of the project. However, it is estimated to be in the region of £260,000.

Traffic Control

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has considered traffic control similar to the 'naked street initiative' in Kensington, London, where all street markings have been removed and accidents have fallen by 50%. (AQW 668/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is aware of the scheme installed on Kensington High Street and its success in reducing the number of collisions on that route.

The design of the project involved the removal of most of the pedestrian guard railing and a more minimal approach to the provision of street furniture. Road markings were mostly retained but the central reserve was widened to improve the streetscape and improve pedestrian safety.

I am advised that the Department for Transport has recently conducted research on the road safety effectiveness of pedestrian guard railing installed in urban areas. Its findings concluded that pedestrian crossing points without guard rails had a slightly lower collision rate than those with protection. Consequently, it has recommended that pedestrian guard rails should no longer be erected at junctions and crossing points, unless absolutely necessary, in places like schools and transport interchanges.

Roads Service identified this issue during the development of the new Road Safety Strategy for the North and will consider possible future intervention to remove guard rails in appropriate locations. However, you will be aware that the Kensington High Street scheme was a very expensive scheme to install, as it contained a lot of high quality street furniture. Given the pressure on resources, it is important that the Department gets value for money from its road safety engineering measures.

Whilst I will not rule out the possibility of implementing a similar scheme here, I should advise that there is also a very wide range of low cost engineering measures that can be provided to improve road safety.

Half Fare SmartPass

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can confirm that the 2004 Equality Impact Assessment on his Department's Half Fare Smart Pass did not include the expansion of the scheme to return fares. (AQW 687/10)

Minister for Regional Development: When the Equality Impact Assessment of the Concessionary Fares Scheme was carried out in 2004, it was the requirement that SmartPass holders obtain tickets for single journeys. No consultee raised objections to this policy at that time. The policy of allowing the purchase of two single tickets, which was introduced in 2009, was screened for equality purposes earlier this year and it was established that the policy did not impact negatively on any of the section 75 groups and that a full equality assessment was not required.

Road Works on the West Link and York Street

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development who was responsible for the lack of diversion signs and the lack of co-ordination of road works on the West Link and York Street in Belfast on Sunday 20 September which caused major traffic delays. (AQW 691/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that normal notice arrangements for major road closures were put in place using various media, prior to the closure, for resurfacing work, of the M2-bound carriageway of the Westlink and York Street junction, from 9 pm on Saturday 19 September until 12:25 pm on Sunday 20 September. These included issuing a press release to all media outlets, publicising it in the Roadworks Report and the TrafficWatch NI website. The road closure was also broadcast by Radio Ulster in its traffic bulletins.

A signed diversion route along Divis Street, Millfield, Carrick Hill, North Queen Street, Brougham Street and York Street was in operation. Roads Service has good CCTV coverage of this diversion route and this allowed it to actively monitor traffic conditions. On the Sunday morning Roads Service altered the traffic signal settings at the Divis Street junction with the Westlink, to remove a minor build up of traffic on the approach to this junction.

The Member will appreciate that it is not possible to undertake road works at such a key junction on the strategic road network, without causing some disruption. However, an overall assessment concluded that the diversion route coped reasonably well, with only minor traffic delays.

Utility Works: Lisburn North Feeder Road

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development who is responsible for the co-ordination of the various utility companies digging up the new Lisburn north feeder, as the road has been dug up twice in the same place in the last couple of months. (AQW 692/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I should explain that the legislative framework that supports the co-ordination of street works in the North is The Street Works (NI) Order 1995, which empowers my Department to co-ordinate utility works. The powers within the Order permit my Department to require utilities to give adequate notice of their works, and may also subject certain streets to special controls, as well as co-ordinating or restricting the timing of the works. In this respect, my Department has the power to delay utility works by up to 12 months, following completion of substantial road works.

However, utilities do have a statutory right under their enabling legislation, to install equipment in a public road. Under The Street Works (NI) Order 1995, they also have a duty to co-operate with the Department in the interests of safety, to minimise inconvenience and to protect the structure of a street.

In this particular case, Phoenix Natural Gas has been installing their equipment to cater for the energy demand required by the new Coca-Cola factory on the Lissue Road and the new housing developments within the area. However, I understand that Phoenix Natural Gas has not been working within the new carriageway construction.

Bonfires: Rathfriland

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether the land located at the junction of John Street and Drumlough Road, Rathfriland is owned by his Department and, if so, the annual cost of cleaning the site and repairing the grassed area, following bonfires; and (ii) for his assessment of the effect bonfires have on community relations in the area. (AQW 693/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that the land at the junction of John Street and Drumlough Road is part of the public road.

Cleaning of the bonfire site is carried out by Banbridge District Council and, as such, my Department does not incur any cleaning costs.

The area is inspected regularly and any repairs to the surface are carried out under Roads Service's normal inspection and repair procedures. However, I am advised that no actionable defects were recorded after this year's bonfire.

While bonfires are very popular, with some members of the local community, it is accepted that other local residents do not support them. Bonfire management is an inter-agency issue and Roads Service works with the PSNI, District Councils and the organisers of bonfires, to reduce environmental concerns, improve the safety of those involved in such events and to reduce any adverse impact on community relations in the area.

Roads Service Depot, Cookstown

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 443/10, if the Roads Service operational depot in Cookstown is one of the three depots being considered for closure. (AQW 724/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that Cookstown is one of my Department's three Road Service depots being considered for closure, as part of the first stage of the Depot Review.

Roads Service: Section Engineer Posts

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 437/10, to outline (i) the timescale for filling the two section engineer posts; and (ii) the method he intends to use to fill the posts. (AQW 726/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no current plans to fill the two Section Engineer posts.

In common with other parts of the Civil Service, Roads Service is considering efficiency measures that will allow it to live within a reducing staff budget. Until these measures have been implemented, a number of posts in the current structure will have to be held vacant.

Post Office Services

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what services his Department currently provides through post offices; (ii) and for his assessment of any additional services that could be provided through local post offices. (AQW 761/10)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) My Department does not provide any services through Post Offices. NIW currently facilitate the payment of bills by non-domestic customers at all Post Offices in the North.
- (ii) My Department has not identified any additional services that could be provided through local Post Offices. Currently Translink use approved agents for Smartlink card issues. There is an ongoing tendering process to allow public transport customers to top-up the value on their Smartlink cards at locations across the North. It is possible the Post Office could be successful in that tendering process.

NI Water: Stress-Related Absence

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many NI Water staff are currently off work due to stress related absence. (AQW 762/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that 17 staff are currently absent from work due to stress related illnesses.

Mobile Work Management System

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to identify the efficiency savings made by NI Water since the introduction of the Mobile Work Management System. (AQW 764/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that as a consequence of the introduction of the Mobile Work Management System and a number of other initiatives, efficiency savings in the region of £6 million per annum have been achieved. These savings resulted from a reduction in staff numbers and associated costs such as accommodation and vehicles and excludes the cost of implementation.

Private Hire Coaches

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how many service buses were used for private hire by the Orange Order on 12 July 2009; and if these vehicles were fitted with seatbelts and met the conditions under which Translink operates private hire coaches. (AQW 772/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised me that 313 buses were used for private hire on 12 July 2009. Of these buses 140 were fitted with seatbelts. There is no requirement to provide buses with seatbelts for private hire use.

Translink: George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if the detailed study carried out by Translink on a new train halt at George Best Belfast City Airport and Ikea has been completed and presented to his Department. (AQW 790/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have not undertaken any detailed study regarding a new train halt at George Best Belfast City Airport. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan did originally propose a halt or interchange in the vicinity to connect with proposed Rapid Transit options.

The Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for Rapid Transit examined the possibility of extending the network to service Belfast City Airport. The report concluded that this scheme should not be progressed because of engineering and planning constraints and cost implications. The report did recommend considering alternative options which could use the existing infrastructure, once the plans for Phase 3 and 4 of Titanic Quarter were confirmed.

Damage Caused to Public Roads in Lurgan and Upper Bann

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the damage caused to public roads in the environs of Lurgan and in the Upper Bann constituency by public order disturbances and the costs incurred in the past 12 months. (AQW 794/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there have been a number of public disorder incidents, in the Lurgan and Craigavon areas of the Upper Bann Constituency, during the past 12 months. Damage to public roads has largely been of a superficial nature and inspections of the sites have not identified substantial defects that require immediate repairs. However, it is estimated that, once completed, the cost of repairs is likely to be in the order of £10,000-£15,000.

It should be noted that repairs to roads, which form part of railway crossings in Lurgan, damaged during public disorder may be considerably more expensive. However, these costs are funded by NI Railways/Translink.

Road Signs: Expenditure

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs of all road signs erected in the past 12 months. (AQW 795/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the majority of its road signs are purchased and erected by its internal contractor, Roads Service Direct (RSD). The total cost of signs and related equipment, purchased through RSD during the financial year 2008/09, was approximately £640,000.

The Member should note that this figure does not include the cost of erecting the signs and other overheads, or signs that are included in the overall costs of road schemes.

Multi-lingual Road Signs: Expenditure

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs of all multi-lingual road signs in the past 12 months. (AQW 796/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are currently no multi-lingual road signs in place in the North. However, I have been working to advance the issue of bilingual traffic signing, and my Department's Roads Service has developed a draft policy which I am considering, to permit the erection of a limited range of such signs.

Urban Clearways

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has considered any extension to the hours of operation of urban clearways in the Greater Belfast area, including bringing forward the start times on a Friday afternoon to facilitate the earlier rush-hour. (AQW 808/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it intends to carry out a review of all Urban Clearways in the Greater Belfast area during the 2009/10 financial year. As the arterial routes into Belfast need to serve a variety of functions, it is important that major routes such as the Newtownards Road, Lisburn Road and Ormeau Road, provide good quality transport corridors, during the peak hours.

However, these roads must also sustain vibrant commercial activity during the day, as well as facilitating residents who live on these roads. In these circumstances, it is considered that the current operating times strike the best balance between the competing needs. The review of Urban Clearways will, therefore, concentrate on the need for Clearways on certain roads, rather than their hours of operation.

Where a route has a clear need for more throughput of capacity, outside the normal clearway hours, then Roads Service will consider the introduction of additional bus priority measures. This is in line with general government transportation policy and the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP), which also includes proposals for high quality bus priority measures, as well as bus lanes on arterial routes in Belfast.

Review of Public Administration: DRD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a breakdown of how much has been spent to date by his Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 834/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has incurred costs of £2,500 in relation to consultant's fees for the Review of Public Administration. Roads Service has also incurred the following additional staff costs as a result of the Review:

05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10 (at Sept)
£59,000	£59,000	£72,000	£72,000	£29,000

Road Safety Barriers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the various types of safety barriers in use on roads, and to advise on cost comparisons and effectiveness in the event of a vehicle colliding with each type of barrier. (AQW 837/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the type and layout of safety barriers used on the road network have undergone many changes during the past 30 years, including terminology. Road Restraint Systems (RRS) is a recent term for both parapets and safety barriers. The requirements for the provision of RRS on UK roads can be found in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges TD19/06.

Roads Service requires RRS to be specified using only performance criteria, and the systems have to be successfully tested to meet the requirements of the European Standard EN 1317. The costs shown below are based on typical installation costs, and do not take account of ground conditions, site specific or engineering issues.

On roads with a speed limit of 50 mph or more, the following containment levels are used:

- **Normal Containment Level N2**
(approximate cost range, £20 - £80/m for wire rope or steel systems);
- **Higher Containment Level H1 or H2**
(approximate cost range, £140 - £280/m for wire rope, steel or concrete systems);
- **Very High Containment Level H4a**
(approximate cost range, £500 - £800/m for steel or concrete systems).

On roads with a speed limit of less than 50 mph, the following containment levels are used:

• **Normal Containment Level = N1**

(approximate cost range, £20 - £80/m for wire rope or steel systems, however, N2, H1 or H2 and H4a are used where necessary)

The Containment Levels, set out in EN 1317, are calculated from data which involves crash testing, and the tables, recreated below, advise of the type of test carried out for each Level.

Containment Levels		Acceptance test
Normal	N1	TB 31 and TB 11
	N2	TB 32 and TB 11
Higher	H1	TB 42 and TB 11
	H2	TB 51 and TB 11
Very high	H4a	TB 71 and TB 11

Acceptance Test	Impact speed km/h	Impact angle degrees	Total vehicle mass kg	Type of vehicle
TB 11	100	20	900	Car
TB 21	80	8	1,300	Car
TB 22	80	15	1,300	Car
TB 31	80	20	1,500	Car
TB 32	110	20	1,500	Car
TB 41	70	8	10,000	Rigid HGV
TB 42	70	15	10,000	Rigid HGV
TB 51	70	20	13,000	Bus
TB61	80	20	16,000	Rigid HGV
TB 71	65	20	30,000	Rigid HGV
TB 81	65	20	38,000	Articulated HGV

Road Safety Barriers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to road safety barriers used on A roads and motorways in each of the last three years, to detail (i) location; (ii) type of barrier; (iii) distance covered; and (iv) date of installation. (AQW 838/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain a central database of the information requested by the Member.

External Consultants: A5 Route

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the process of appointment for the consultants who will progress the A5 route. (AQW 846/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In October 2007, my Department's Roads Service appointed Mouchel as their lead consultants to the A5 Project, through a framework contract established in August 2005: - "Consultancy Services for the Assistance in the delivery of the Roads Service Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) Programme, Major Works Planning, Assessment and Delivery Contract".

The A5 project will be delivered through an Early Contractor Involvement procurement route whereby contractors, assisted by their own consultant designers, will combine with Mouchel to deliver the project. The scheme has been split into three distinct sections and the tendering process is currently underway to appoint three

contractor/consultant consortiums to form an Integrated Delivery Team, with Mouchel as lead consultant, to deliver the whole project.

External Consultants' Contract Costs: A5 Route

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the agreed contract costs for Mouchel to carry out the work on the A5. (AQW 848/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service has advised that the contract costs for Mouchel, under the framework contract, are hourly rates which are commercially sensitive and cannot be disclosed.

Distinct stages of work are briefed to the consultant and Roads Service project manages the consultant's delivery of the work, to meet the required deliverables.

Pay and Display Machines, Newtownabbey

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of pay and display machines in Newtownabbey, and to detail how many were out of order at some point over the past year and for how long on average they were out of order. (AQW 864/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, within the Newtownabbey Borough Council area, there are three pay and display machines at the Harrier Way car park and two at Market Square car park.

I am also advised that during the period from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2009, each one of the five machines experienced at least one fault which rendered it out of order. Over that period a total of 49 machine faults were reported. This equates to an average of 3.6 days for each machine and to approximately 1.2% of the machines total available working time.

Two-Tier Rail Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take to reverse the creation of a two-tier rail service, as evidenced by the new timetable for the Londonderry line. (AQW 867/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The track renewal/track life extension project between Ballymena and Coleraine has permitted a return to full line speed of 70mph over that section of track. As a result new timetables introduced on 27 September 2009 have seen the majority of services in both directions operating with reduced running times of between 3 and 15 minutes.

However, in order to facilitate a 9.00 am arrival in Derry the journey time of the first week day train from Belfast to Derry has increased. Based on information provided by Translink this appears to be unavoidable in the short term and is caused by train stops which are necessary to allow trains travelling in the opposite direction to pass.

I would not describe this difficulty, which impacts on one train service, as representing a two tier rail service, but, I agree that it is a situation which should be addressed as soon as possible.

In the medium-term the Department has earmarked £75m to fund a project to completely re-lay and re-signal the track between Coleraine and Derry including the construction of a new passing loop. This work is scheduled to commence in 2011 and complete in 2013/14. Completion will coincide with the arrival of a second fleet of new trains which will enable 2 additional trains to be brought into service on the Derry line. Both measures will permit more regular train services, reduce existing journey times between Coleraine and Derry and most importantly will allow trains to operate into Derry before 08:00 and 09:00am.

Translink have also informed me that in respect of the current Belfast to Derry 6.20am train, NIR will continue to review timetables on the Derry line in the context of the whole network and will seek to deliver further improvements in running times, where feasible, in the near future.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to ensure the journey time for passengers using the Belfast to Londonderry line are the same for every service. (AQW 868/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The track renewal/track life extension project between Ballymena and Coleraine has permitted a return to full line speed of 70mph over that section of track. As a result new timetables introduced on 27 September 2009 have seen the majority of services in both directions operating with reduced running times of between 3 and 15 minutes.

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In the medium-term the Department has earmarked £75m to fund a project to completely re-lay and re-signal the track between Coleraine and Derry including the construction of a new passing loop. This work is scheduled to commence in 2011 and complete in 2013/14. Completion will coincide with the arrival of a second fleet of new trains which will enable 2 additional trains to be brought into service on the Derry line. Both measures will permit more regular train services, reduce existing journey times between Coleraine and Derry and most importantly will allow trains to operate into Derry before 08:00 and 09:00am.

In the more immediate future, Translink have informed me that they will continue to review timetables on the Derry line in the context of the whole network and will seek to deliver further improvements in running times, where feasible, in the near future.

It is unlikely it will be possible to ensure the journey time for passengers using a particular train service can be exactly the same in all circumstances.

Pay and Display Machines in Larne and Carrick

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of repairing pay and display machines in Larne and Carrick in each of the last five years. (AQW 870/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is unable to provide details of the repair costs of pay and display machines in each of the last five years, but can provide details of the cost of maintaining pay and display machines, since the commencement of the parking enforcement contract with NSL on 30 October 2006. Details of maintenance costs for the machines in Larne and Carrick are detailed below.

	30 October 2006 to 29 October 2007	30 October 2007 to 29 October 2008	30 October 2008 to 31 August 2009
Larne	£4,509.29	£5,100.95	£4,370.26
Carrickfergus	£5,511.36	£6,234.49	£5,341.43

Footpaths, Carrowdore

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the developments between Manse Court and Main Street, Carrowdore are completed, if and when he will ensure that all related footpaths will be completed. (AQW 887/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they remain committed to assessing the need for additional pedestrian facilities following completion of the proposed developments at Manse Road, Carrowdore.

I can further advise that work is scheduled to commence on a section of footway at the junction of Manse Road and Ballyblack Road East before the end of this calendar year.

Footpath and Road Resurfacing Projects: Strangford

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what footpath and road resurfacing projects are planned for the Strangford constituency in the current financial year. (AQW 902/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not hold information on schemes on a constituency basis. However, information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address: www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

NI Railways

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if he intervened to ensure that a train would be timetabled to arrive in Londonderry at 9.00 am on weekdays; and (ii) if as a consequence of rearranging the timetable, NI Railways axed the four morning trains and two evening trains which stopped at Whiteabbey; and if he will approach NI Railways to have the Whiteabbey stops re-instated. (AQW 942/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I did intervene to ensure that a train would be timetabled to arrive in Derry at 9.00 am on week days. Translink have confirmed that in fact adjustments to Whiteabbey stopping patterns were proposed prior to this intervention.

Timetable issues are an operational matter and are the responsibility of Translink. My position is that I will only intervene in exceptional circumstances. Translink have informed me that as a result of a revised timetable introduced in December 2008 Translink introduced additional Whiteabbey stops on some Derry to Belfast line trains to gauge potential uptake of passengers transferring from inward Derry to outward Larne line services. This also provided train connections between Ballymena to Whiteabbey. Usage of the Whiteabbey stop by Derry line passengers has been low and as a result Translink has retained only one morning train stopping at Whiteabbey. However all Derry trains now stop at Yorkgate and users of the Derry line can take a Larne line connection to Whiteabbey from Yorkgate. Translink have stated that this much better services overall passenger requirements on the Derry line.

NI Railways

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development when the four trains on the Londonderry to Belfast line which formerly stopped at Whiteabbey, will be re-instated; and when the evening train services which were cut between Belfast and Londonderry will be re-instated. (AQW 975/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer to AQW 942 which addresses this issue.

NI Railways

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development why NI Railways have cut the number of trains that stop at Whiteabbey. (AQW 1015/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer to AQW 942 which addresses this issue.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if trains are able to meet and pass at Antrim; Ballymena; Ballymoney; Coleraine; and Castlerock stations. (AQW 1018/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have confirmed they are. In addition to those passing locations mentioned, passing loops also exist at Templepatrick, Magherabeg (between Antrim and Ballymena) and Killagan (north of Cullybackey).

NI Railways

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he will take to ensure that passengers using the Londonderry and Larne lines will be able to change at Whiteabbey in order to access Whiteabbey Hospital, the Northern Regional College and the Jordanstown campus of the University of Ulster, as was the case prior to the timetable change on 28 September 2009. (AQW 1060/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that there continues to be one morning train which stops at Whiteabbey on the Derry line and, via Yorkgate, passengers will continue to be able to get a number of trains to and from Whiteabbey.

I understand that in addition to trains operating the Derry line, Whiteabbey and Yorkgate are serviced by 33 to 36 trains in each direction on the Larne line.

‘Winter Services Around Rural Schools’

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what rural primary schools are included in option two as outlined in his statement ‘Winter Services Around Rural Schools’, to the House on 28 September 2009. (AQW 1114/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that my Department’s Roads Service is currently in the process of organising for the list of schools, which are included in option two of my statement on winter services around rural schools, to be sent to all MLAs.

Car Parking in Housing Estates

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 797/10, to provide a time-scale for the completion of the review of policy on car parking in housing estates. (AQW 1295/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service has advised that they anticipate the review of the policy for providing parking in housing estates will be completed by early 2010.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Community and Voluntary Groups

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the East Antrim constituency over the next year. (AQW 440/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): Details of funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the East Antrim constituency over the next year is provided in the table below

	2009/2010
Areas at Risk	53,988.96
Community Investment Fund	118,000.00
Community Support Programme	285,356.00
Local Community Fund	108,196.00
Volunteer Bureau Initiative	192,755.00
Neighbourhood Renewal	83,293.00
Total	£841,588.96

Social Housing: Central Heating Systems

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of Social Housing dwellings, in each Council area, are not equipped with oil or gas central heating systems. (AQW 521/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of social housing dwellings which are not equipped with oil or gas central heating are set out in the following tables. Note that the information for Housing Executive dwellings is not available by District Council area and is only available by Housing Executive District Office area.

Table 1 - Housing Executive Dwellings Not Equipped with Oil or Gas Central Heating.

Housing Executive District Office Area	%
West Belfast	21%
East Belfast	18%
West Belfast	10%
South Belfast	16%
North Belfast	31%
Shankill	21%
North Belfast	8%
Ballymena	40%
Antrim	32%
Newtownabbey 1	25%
Newtownabbey 2	19%
Carrickfergus	15%
Larne	32%
Ballycastle	29%
Ballymoney	25%
Coleraine	30%
Banbridge	28%
Newry	35%
Armagh	37%
Lurgan Brownlow	29%
Portadown	41%
Dungannon	28%
Fermanagh	25%
Bangor	35%
Newtownards	28%
Castlereagh	37%
Lisburn Antrim Street	29%
Lisburn Dairyfarm	13%
Downpatrick	40%
Waterloo Place	35%
Waterside	30%
Collon Terrace	28%
Limavady	37%

Housing Executive District Office Area	%
Magherafelt	30%
Strabane	14%
Omagh	28%
Cookstown	31%

Table 2 - Housing Association Dwellings Not Equipped with Oil or Gas Central Heating. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations are only able to provide information up to 2005/06. More up-to-date information will be available at the end of October and I will write to the Member.

District Council Area	%
Antrim	51%
Armagh	58%
Ballymena	42%
Ballymoney	69%
Banbridge	40%
Belfast	47%
Carrickfergus	54%
Castlereagh	57%
Coleraine	46%
Cookstown	46%
Craigavon	51%
Derry	28%
Dungannon	71%
Down	38%
Fermanagh	42%
Larne	68%
Limavady	34%
Lisburn	40%
Magherafelt	44%
Moyle	80%
Newtownabbey	61%
Newtownards	64%
Newry & Mourne	49%
North Down	48%
Omagh	11%
Strabane	25%

Housing Executive Schemes: Holywood

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what Housing Executive schemes are planned for the Loughview area of Holywood over the next five years. (AQW 524/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Housing Executive Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline what Housing Executive schemes are planned for the Breezemount Estate area of Bangor over the next five years. (AQW 592/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Motability

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to clarify her Department's policy on people using a Motability car to provide volunteer transport. (AQW 610/10)

Minister for Social Development: Motability is an independent voluntary organisation and is responsible for the administration of the Motability contract hire scheme. Whilst my Department facilitates the operation of the Motability scheme by diverting payments of disability living allowance to meet contract hire payments, it is not directly involved in setting the policy for the scheme. Further information about the scheme can be obtained directly from Motability. The rules relating to the use of vehicles licensed under the disabled exempt taxation class, including Motability vehicles, are a matter for the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

Housing Executive Schemes: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing schemes planned by the Housing Executive for North Down in the next financial year. (AQW 613/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Traveller Family or Group

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, if a travelling family or group is allocated a Northern Ireland Housing Executive dwelling, are they obliged to formally relinquish any previous traveller site. (AQW 704/10)

Minister for Social Development: Generally Traveller families, like the settled community, can only have one Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenancy/lease at any given time. If a Traveller family has been occupying permanent Traveller accommodation such as a serviced site or group housing then they will be required to relinquish this when allocated another Housing Executive dwelling.

However, there may be circumstances, as happens also in the settled community, where for example, due to overcrowding or family breakdown, members of an extended Traveller family living on a permanent site have been allocated a Housing Executive dwelling.

Housing Associations: Strangford and Ards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been allocated by Housing Associations in (i) Strangford; and (ii) Ards, in each of the last three years. (AQW 718/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. Housing Associations allocate houses using the Housing Executive Common Waiting List. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations records Housing Associations' allocations by postcode. All the postcodes in the table below include the Strangford constituency and Newtownards, but the postcodes do not correlate exactly to Parliamentary Constituencies or District Council areas, and these figures include data for other areas.

Postcode	06/07	07/08	08/09 (Provisional)
BT 8	3	24	0
BT 16	2	1	11
BT 22	3	16	5
BT 23	11	13	16
BT 24	12	10	2
BT 30	4	4	14

Rural Cottages

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8759/09, to outline the general location of each of the 19 rural cottages referred to in her answer. (AQW 742/10)

Minister for Social Development: The location of the 19 properties which I referred to in my answer to Assembly Question AQW 8759/09 is as follows:-

Location	Dwellings
Ballycairn Road, Aghalee	1
Ballynamoney Lane, Lurgan	1
Bowens Lane, Knocknashane	1
Brankinstown Road, Aghagallon	1
Colane, Tiscallon	1
Cranny Road, Bleary	1
Dromore Road, Donacloney	3
Drumnagoon Road, Portadown Craigavon	2

Location	Dwellings
Hill Road, Kilmore	1
Inn Road, Dollingstown	1
Mill Hill, Waringstown	1
The Slopes, Ballydugan	2
Whitehall Road, Tiscallon	1
Windmill Lane, Waringstown	2

Housing Executive Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive schemes are planned for the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 783/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Housing Executive Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive schemes are planned for the Whitehill Estate in Bangor over the next three years. (AQW 784/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the North Down constituency over the next year. (AQW 804/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the North Down constituency over the next year are provided in the table below.

	2009/2010
Community Investment Fund	118,000
Community Support Programme	233,318
Local Community Fund	20,000
NIHE Community Funding	30,366

	2009/2010
Small Pockets of Deprivation	116,985
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding	128,644
Volunteer Bureau Initiative	84,958
Total	732,271

Housing Executive Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive Schemes are planned over the next three years for the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor. (AQW 816/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Housing Executive Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive Schemes are planned over the next three years for the Churchill Estate, Bangor. (AQW 817/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go onsite in subsequent years.

The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The North Down District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Disability Living Allowance: Complaints Against Examining Medical Practitioner Staff

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints have been made against Examining Medical Practitioner staff, regarding home visits as part of the Disability Living Allowance application or renewal process, in (i) Strangford; and (ii) Ards, in each of the last three years. (AQW 824/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of complaints received following a domiciliary visit by an Examining Medical Practitioner for Disability Living Allowance are provided in the table below.

Year	Strangford Area	Ards Area	Total
April 2006 - March 2007	0	1	1
April 2007 – March 2008	3	3	6
April 2008 – March 2009	2	0	2
Total	5	4	9

Disability Living Allowance: Examining Medical Practitioner

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Examining Medical Practitioner visits resulted in a change of Disability Living Allowance award in (a) Strangford; and (b) Ards, in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many awards were (a) increased; and (b) decreased. (AQW 825/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available. The DWP IT system used to administer Disability Living Allowance (DLA) does not record this specific level of detail as in most instances a number of pieces of evidence are considered when determining entitlement to DLA, including the customer's claim form and all appropriate reports from Health Care professionals.

Review of Public Administration: DSD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been spent by her Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 831/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has spent £1.1m on the Review of Public Administration to September 2009.

Funding for Community and Voluntary Groups: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding given to community and voluntary groups by her Department in the North Down constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 839/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of funding given to community and voluntary groups in the North Down constituency, in each of the last three years, are as follows:

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Community Investment Fund		115,921	123,921
Community Support Programme	193,166	217,927	222,999
Local Community Fund	44,066	47,206	26,371
NIHE Community Funding		35,384	36,385
Small Pockets of Deprivation	52,861	69,317	85,141
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding	61,249	60,296	107,823
Volunteer Bureau Initiative	78,259	80,600	82,984
Total	492,601	626,651	685,624

Mortgage Rescue Scheme

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed Mortgage Rescue Scheme. (AQW 843/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the New Housing Agenda, which I launched in February last year, I stated that I would develop proposals for a mortgage rescue scheme; this work was duly completed. I have made, and will continue to make, bids at every monitoring round to enable a scheme to be introduced. However, none of those bids have been met. Unfortunately, therefore, I do not have the funding to allow me to launch the financial-rescue element of the scheme. I will not raise the expectations of people who are struggling to stay on the housing ladder when I simply do not have the budget to provide the kind of financial assistance that is required.

Earlier in the year I was able to provide funding to launch a Mortgage Debt and Advice Service to increase the level of advice for people experiencing difficulty making mortgage payments. This specialised service is preventing people here from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing-related debt.

Housing Executive Housing List

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the Housing Executive housing list. (AQW 854/10)

Minister for Social Development: At 30 June 2009 there were 38,329 applicants on the waiting list.

Housing Executive: Vacant Properties

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive houses are currently vacant. (AQW 855/10)

Minister for Social Development: At 28 September 2009 there were 2,400 vacant Housing Executive dwellings. The total number of vacant properties include those which are awaiting imminent allocation (115), difficult to let properties (490), undergoing major repairs/improvement or decanting (1,035) and the remainder are pending sale or demolition (760).

Vacant Privately Owned Homes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many privately owned houses are estimated to be vacant. (AQW 856/10)

Minister for Social Development: Data on the number of empty homes in the private sector is held by Land and Property Services, Department of Finance and Personnel. I am advised that the most recent estimate is that there are 15,000 privately owned empty homes across Northern Ireland.

Vacant Privately Owned Homes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what scope there is for using vacant privately owned homes to ease the social housing waiting list. (AQW 857/10)

Minister for Social Development: I remain determined to ensure that any scope to meet housing need through effective use of empty homes should be maximised. The Empty Homes Strategy, currently being implemented by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, aims to bring back into use empty homes. This involves identifying the location of empty homes and making contact with the owners and encouraging them to bring the properties back into use. By taking into account the housing stress in the area, the possibility exists to match those properties which are available or can be brought into use with minimal cost, with people in need of accommodation.

My Department, along with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, will continue to look at other innovative ways of making full use of empty homes.

Housing Executive Schemes: Crawfordsburn

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what Housing Executive schemes are planned for Crawfordsburn Village over the next three years. (AQW 858/10)

Minister for Social Development: One scheme is planned for Crawfordsburn within the next 3 years, to replace the heating system in 4 dwellings.

Housing Executive Properties: Heating Systems

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Monkstown Estate are currently heated through (i) open fires; and (ii) Economy 7 heating systems. (AQW 859/10)

Minister for Social Development: I can confirm that in the Monkstown Estate there are no Housing Executive properties with open fires and 45 have Economy 7 heating.

Royal Exchange Scheme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development, if she is successful in the September monitoring round bid or any subsequent bid, how her Department intends to fund any development of the Royal Exchange Scheme in 2010/11. (AQW 871/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is currently finalising the Development Agreement for the scheme which provides the legal contract for the statutory planning, commercial and funding requirements for the scheme. The Development Agreement will set out the timetable and funding requirements for the scheme and I will make an announcement about this as soon as the Agreement has been finalised with the developer.

Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the religious background of applicants on the NI Housing Executive waiting list, at the year end, for each of the last five years. (AQW 873/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the breakdown of the total number of applicants by religion on the Waiting List for Social Housing in Northern Ireland for the last five years.

	31st March 2005		31st March 2006		31st March 2007		31st March 2008		31st March 2009	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Catholic	12,182	41.2	13,322	41.8	14,844	41.0	15,762	39.7	14,973	38.5
Other	1,659	5.6	1,882	5.9	2,139	5.9	2,709	6.8	3,334	8.6
Protestant	13,222	44.7	14,564	45.7	16,540	45.7	17,354	43.8	15,591	40.1
Undisclosed	2,529	8.5	2,133	6.7	2,653	7.3	3,839	9.7	5,014	12.9

Notes:

- The religious composition of households is based on 'self reported' answers to the question on applicant religion. The religion of the person appearing first (i.e. position 1 applicant) on the application form is assumed as a proxy for the religion of all individuals in the household.
- The Housing Executive is currently unable to identify 'mixed' religion households although we are aware that a number of households currently described as 'catholic' or 'protestant' would clearly fall into a mixed category.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Disability Living Allowance Branch (DLAB); (ii) whether DLAB is fit for purpose; and (iii) how often it has attained its Key Performance Indicator targets. (AQW 879/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out below:

(i) and (ii) Challenging public service agreement targets for DLA in respect of financial accuracy and claim clearance time have been set and are consistently achieved. Just over 65,000 transactions are processed annually and almost a quarter of a million phone calls are handled each year with a response rate of 99%. This consistent level of performance demonstrates the branch's effectiveness and supports the view that it is fit for purpose in delivering this complex benefit.

(iii) The tables below show the achievements in financial accuracy and claims clearance time for the last three years; current performance is on track for 2009/10:

Financial Accuracy Target	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10*
Target %	98	98	98	99
Accuracy Level Achieved %	98	98.8	99.7	99.6

* Year to date to June 2009

Claims Clearance Time	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10**
Target (working days)	52	50	47	41
Clearance Time (working days)	50.7	45.1	41	39

** Year to date to August 2009

Areas at Risk Programme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why responsibility for the Areas at Risk Programme is not being transferred to local Councils. (AQW 888/10)

Minister for Social Development: Areas at Risk is a pilot programme which has allowed my Department to respond to emerging difficulties outwith established programmes. It will be formally evaluated later this year. Given this, it would not be appropriate to include the programme in the list of functions transferring from my Department to the new local Councils.

Co-ownership Housing

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to list all successful Co-ownership housing applications in each of the last five years, in each postcode area. (AQW 895/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the information requested:

POSTCODE	2008/9	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5
BT1	2	2	0	0	0
BT2	1	1	0	1	0
BT3	0	0	0	0	0
BT4	5	13	7	12	11
BT5	8	27	9	13	16
BT6	12	13	3	3	10
BT7	0	5	0	1	2
BT8	4	12	0	3	1
BT9	0	2	0	0	0
BT10	1	6	0	4	2
BT11	5	16	7	3	8
BT12	9	13	8	8	9
BT13	9	14	6	8	10
BT14	8	33	8	13	7
BT15	5	16	6	11	6
BT16	5	12	5	10	2
BT17	10	24	8	10	19
BT18	1	7	1	4	5
BT19	12	64	32	50	38
BT20	7	34	14	25	19
BT21	0	14	5	7	3
BT22	9	17	10	12	19

POSTCODE	2008/9	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5
BT23	14	44	27	35	38
BT24	3	5	0	5	4
BT25	3	14	3	6	12
BT26	0	0	0	0	0
BT27	8	11	5	7	4
BT28	19	24	10	18	21
BT29	0	7	2	2	3
BT30	2	14	2	5	9
BT31	1	4	0	0	1
BT32	4	10	2	8	7
BT33	1	0	0	4	2
BT34	3	8	0	2	4
BT35	2	2	0	1	0
BT36	15	56	19	34	30
BT37	9	19	16	4	14
BT38	9	46	22	27	35
BT39	9	16	3	12	11
BT40	9	31	6	8	11
BT41	9	24	6	10	7
BT42	4	17	7	5	6
BT43	3	13	3	5	5
BT44	3	4	2	1	1
BT45	3	12	0	3	1
BT46	0	1	0	2	1
BT47	6	39	21	16	8
BT48	1	30	11	5	5
BT49	1	7	1	1	3
BT50	0	0	0	0	0
BT51	4	7	2	5	5
BT52	0	11	7	10	8
BT53	4	5	3	9	4
BT54	0	0	0	1	0
BT55	0	1	0	1	0
BT56	0	0	1	0	5
BT57	0	0	0	0	1
BT58	0	0	0	0	0
BT59	0	0	0	0	0
BT60	0	2	0	2	0
BT61	0	0	0	4	1

POSTCODE	2008/9	2007/8	2006/7	2005/6	2004/5
BT62	9	14	0	7	8
BT63	14	8	0	2	5
BT64	2	8	1	1	1
BT65	1	14	1	5	3
BT66	6	13	2	13	9
BT67	18	14	4	5	5
BT68	0	0	0	0	0
BT69	0	0	0	0	0
BT70	0	0	0	0	0
BT71	1	5	0	3	1
BT72	0	0	0	4	0
BT73	0	0	0	0	0
BT74	0	5	0	0	5
BT75	1	1	1	0	2
BT76	0	1	0	1	0
BT77	0	0	0	0	0
BT78	0	3	2	0	0
BT79	1	3	0	0	0
BT80	0	3	2	2	2
BT81	2	2	0	0	0
BT82	3	9	0	3	5
BT83	0	0	0	0	0
BT84	0	0	0	0	0
BT85	0	0	0	0	0
BT86	0	0	0	0	0
BT87	0	0	0	0	0
BT88	0	0	0	0	0
BT89	0	0	0	0	0
BT90	0	0	0	0	0
BT91	0	0	0	0	0
BT92	3	2	1	0	1
BT93	2	1	0	1	0
BT94	0	0	1	1	1
	325	935	325	504	502

Disability Living Allowance

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency have correctly received Disability Living Allowance in each month, in each of the last three years. (AQW 906/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The most recently published information contained in the Department's Resource Account for 2008/09 reports that the overall level of error including official error, customer error and fraud is estimated to be only 0.3% of DLA expenditure.

Private Consultancy: DSD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 229/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of her Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 907/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information on consultancy costs provided in AQW 229/10 does include expenditure in these three areas as listed in central DFP guidance DPS 2/95 and its successor DAO 03/05.

Attendance Allowance Branch

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development what is the target time for Attendance Allowance Branch to process reported changes in recipient's circumstances. (AQW 929/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is no specific target time for dealing with reported changes of circumstances in respect of Attendance Allowance. Priority is given to changes which impact on the customer's entitlement to the benefit. Outstanding work for this specific area is well within acceptable levels and this is kept under continuous review.

Attendance Allowance Branch

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the length of time Attendance Allowance Branch has to process reported changes of circumstances and to verify if this affects Carers Allowance; and (ii) the length of time it has to notify Carers Allowance Branch. (AQW 930/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is no specific set time for dealing with reported changes of circumstances in respect of Attendance Allowance and the length of time it has to notify Carers Allowance Branch as the rules governing all benefits require customers and their appointees to report changes of circumstances about each benefit separately to the specific branch that administers the benefit. In both Attendance Allowance and Carers Allowance priority is given to processing changes of circumstances reported by customers that are likely to impact on the payment of the benefit.

Carers Allowance

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development who is responsible for overpayments in Carers Allowance in cases where changes in circumstances have been reported and payment should have been stopped. (AQW 932/10)

Minister for Social Development: Carers Allowance Decision Makers are responsible for reviewing entitlement decisions when changes of circumstances have been reported. Any overpayment arising from a revision is decided upon by Decision Makers in the Agency's Debt Centre who must examine all the evidence in each case to determine the amount and decide if the overpayment is recoverable from the customer.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the annual budget for the Disability Living Allowance Branch. (AQW 933/10)

Minister for Social Development: The allocated salaries budget for Disability Living Allowance Branch for 2009/10 is £5,232,000. Information is not available with regard to General Administrative Expenditure (GAE) for DLA as that budget is set annually taking account of all other benefits which the Social Security Agency administers centrally from Castle Court, Belfast and costs are not disaggregated by benefit.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints have been received by the Disability Living Allowance Branch from (i) individual claimants; (ii) Citizens Advice Bureau staff; (iii) solicitors; and (iv) elected representatives such as councillors, MLAs or MPs, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 934/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Origin of complaint	Number of complaints 2006/07*	Number of complaints 2007/08	Number of complaints 2008/09	Number of complaints 2009/10
Individual claimants	38	141	86	53
Citizens Advice Bureau staff	0	5	2	1
Solicitors	0	3	7	2
Elected Representatives	9	16	16	21

* Information is not available prior to September 2006 in line with the document retention policy for complaints.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if there is a dedicated call handling section in the Disability Living Allowance Branch. (AQW 935/10)

Minister for Social Development: Disability Living Allowance (DLA) has a dedicated Contact Centre. Customers who phone can either select an option which deals with requests for claim forms and provides assistance with claim form completion or an alternative option dealing with all other enquiries in relation to DLA. There is also a dedicated Customer Response Team who handle telephone calls from elected representatives.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if staff with responsibility for processing in the Disability Living Allowance Branch are also manning telephones whilst engaged in day to day duties. (AQW 936/10)

Minister for Social Development: Telephone duties are carried out by processing staff as they regularly have to contact customers and other operational business areas to progress claims.

Disability Living Allowance Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff within the Disability Living Allowance Branch are tasked on a daily basis with tackling benefit fraud. (AQW 937/10)

Minister for Social Development: Disability Living Allowance Branch has four trained Fraud Liaison Officers. Fraud awareness training has been delivered to operational staff in the branch. A continuous awareness programme is in place throughout the year. All staff are aware of their responsibility to report any suspected cases of fraud to the Fraud Liaison Officers.

Environmental Improvement Schemes: Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on Phases 3 and 4 of the Environmental Improvement Schemes for the Market area, south Belfast. (AQW 939/10)

Minister for Social Development: Following recent on site meetings between community representatives and Housing Executive technical staff, alternative proposals are being drawn up for Phase 3.

With regard to Phase 4, full consultation with the community has been carried out and the scheme re-surveyed to include any tenant-led requests for changes as the original proposals were drawn up more than 2 years ago.

The start date of each phase, like all other Environmental Improvement schemes will be determined by the availability of funding once the detail of the proposals has been finalised.

NI Housing Executive: Contractors

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the number of contractors and sub-contractors who are awaiting payment from the NI Housing Executive for completed home improvement work in (a) the Omagh Office area; and (b) Derry Office area; (ii) how much money is outstanding; and (iii) when she expects these payments to be made. (AQW 947/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's Grants Office in Omagh has payments for processing, for work undertaken by 12 contractors, valued at £206,310.11. Their Derry Grants Office has payments for processing for work undertaken by 8 contractors, valued at £49,805.43. The Housing Executive's published Standards of Service states they aim to make payment within 6 weeks from inspection of the completed grant aided work, provided all the relevant invoices, guarantees and certificates have been received. The latest Quarterly Performance Monitor shows that the Omagh Grants Office was performing at an average payment timescale of 5.6 weeks, and Derry Grants Office was performing at an average of 5.3 weeks for payments. There is no reason to expect payment times to fall outside these norms.

Housing Stress in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the work carried out by her Department to alleviate housing stress and need in South Belfast since May 2009. (AQW 976/10)

Minister for Social Development: Two hundred and thirty five new homes across 14 different schemes are included for South Belfast in the 2009/10 Social Housing Development Programme and at this stage 119 of these homes have already been started across 6 different sites.

Between April and June this year 115 applicants in housing stress have been taken off the waiting list across South Belfast.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the sections in the Incapacity Benefit Branch; and (ii) the number of staff in each section. (AQW 1008/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Staff employed in Incapacity Benefit Branch by Section

Section	Number of Staff
Operational Support	30
Training/SAU Liaison	5
Decision Making & Appeals	53
Linking Claims	24
Medical	57
Maintenance	121
Total	290

* These numbers have been rounded to whole time equivalents and will include a number of part time staff.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff are employed in the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1009/10)

Minister for Social Development: As at 30 September 2009 Incapacity Benefit Branch employed 290 staff. This number is rounded to whole time equivalent and will include a number of part time staff.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) desktop computers; (ii) laptop computers; (iii) fax machines; and (iv) telephones are utilised within each section of the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1010/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is provided in the table below:

Section	Desktop Computers	Laptop Computers	Fax Machines	Telephones
Decision-Making & Appeals	57	0	1	37
Operational Support	33	0	2	31
Training/SAU Liaison	5	0	1	5
Linking Claims Team	26	0	1	16
Medical	60	0	1	25
Maintenance	126	0	3	51
Total	307	0	9	165

Use of External Consultants: DSD

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps her Department is taking to phase out the use of, and cut the cost of, external consultants. (AQW 1035/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department currently makes use of external consultants in areas where expertise is not available in-house but is critical to the successful delivery of projects. Procurement of consultancy for time limited assignments is carried out in accordance with strict guidelines that apply to all Northern Ireland Civil Service departments, agencies, non-departmental public bodies and other sponsored bodies in order to ensure greatest value for money. All business cases are reviewed on an individual basis to consider the need for external consultancy.

Housing Executive Schemes

Mrs N Long asked the Minister for Social Development when NI Housing Executive kitchen, heating and window replacement schemes will be reinstated. (AQW 1049/10)

Minister for Social Development: The replacement of kitchens, heating and windows in Housing Executive homes has not been suspended. However due to funding restrictions the number of planned schemes has had to be scaled back. It is estimated that work will be carried out in around 6,950 homes this year, but it may become possible to start other schemes later in the year, depending upon priorities and available funding.

Holyland Stakeholders' Forum

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what contact her Department has had with the Holyland Stakeholder's Forum and the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to the ongoing problems in the Holyland area of South Belfast. (AQW 1068/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Holyland Stakeholder's Forum first met on 7 May 2009 and was attended by officials from my Department. Following this meeting the Department for Employment and Learning produced an action plan which identified a number of issues for my Department. I have also been in communication with the Minister for Employment and Learning on these issues.

Benefit Fraud

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been (i) investigated; and (ii) prosecuted for benefit fraud in each constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1085/10)

Minister for Social Development: Tables 1 and 2 respectively show the total number of people investigated and prosecuted for benefit fraud in each parliamentary constituency. Information is only held in respect of the last 3 years plus the current year.

TABLE 1 INVESTIGATIONS IN EACH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Constituency	Financial Year				Total
	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	
Belfast East	197	195	196	92	680
Belfast North	470	474	502	266	1,712
Belfast South	198	258	294	135	885
Belfast West	549	523	570	269	1,911
East Antrim	191	155	178	102	626
East Londonderry	235	165	181	73	654
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	276	205	165	66	712
Foyle	416	345	386	168	1,315
Lagan Valley	198	203	186	89	676
Mid Ulster	257	166	183	91	697
Newry and Armagh	329	302	298	130	1,059
North Antrim	273	176	231	120	800
North Down	135	104	104	35	378
South Antrim	169	150	177	77	573
South Down	283	235	211	104	833
Strangford	174	142	149	54	519
Upper Bann	306	250	295	136	987
West Tyrone	406	226	239	87	958
Unallocated Postcode*	74	54	65	22	215
Total	5,136	4,328	4,610	2,116	16,190

TABLE 2 PROSECUTIONS IN EACH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Parliamentary Constituency	Financial Year				Total
	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	
Belfast East	20	18	25	12	75
Belfast North	27	37	66	22	152
Belfast South	14	18	42	15	89
Belfast West	39	51	95	29	214

Parliamentary Constituency	Financial Year				Total
	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	
East Antrim	9	6	11	8	34
East Londonderry	4	15	9	2	30
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	12	24	25	4	65
Foyle	34	33	53	11	131
Lagan Valley	12	14	17	3	46
Mid Ulster	7	13	9	7	36
Newry and Armagh	17	20	25	3	65
North Antrim	13	17	14	2	46
North Down	6	6	6	1	19
South Antrim	6	12	12	3	33
South Down	10	19	9	2	40
Strangford	8	16	16	2	42
Upper Bann	19	28	23	2	72
West Tyrone	13	30	17	10	70
Unallocated Postcode*	40	40	44	14	138
Total	310	417	518	152	1,397

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Electoral Wards and Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated to a ward using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all. Past investigation has demonstrated that mis-allocations and non-allocations do not necessarily occur randomly between areas, and at ward level the proportion of records mis-allocated or unallocated can be substantial. At present, it seems likely that a higher than average proportion of the records that cannot be attributed to a ward are in the following areas: Fermanagh District Council, Derry District Council and parts of Belfast City Council.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has any plans to expand the role and remit of the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1126/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are no plans to expand the role and remit of Incapacity Benefits Branch.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints have been received by the Incapacity Benefit Branch from (i) individual claimants; (ii) Citizens Advice Bureau staff; (iii) solicitors; and (iv) elected representatives such as councillors, MLAs or MPs, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1128/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below:

Origin of complaint	Number of complaints 2006/07*	Number of complaints 2007/08	Number of complaints 2008/09	Number of complaints 2009/10
Individual claimants	137	206	124	70
Citizens Advice Bureau	3	2	6	1
Solicitors	3	4	0	0
Elected Representatives	25	47	41	27
Total	168	259	171	98

* Information is not available prior to September 2006 in line with the Agency's Document Retention Policy.

Curzon Development in South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current status of the Curzon development in south Belfast; and when these units will be allocated. (AQW 1135/10)

Minister for Social Development: Clanmil Housing Association has now completed the acquisition of these apartments and has begun discussions with the Housing Executive regarding allocations to them.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if staff with responsibility for processing in the Incapacity Benefit Branch are also manning telephones whilst engaged in day to day duties. (AQW 1156/10)

Minister for Social Development: Telephone duties are carried out by processing staff as they are regularly required to contact customers and other operational business areas in order to progress claims.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff are employed in the Appeals Service. (AQW 1159/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 83 staff employed in The Appeals Service.

This number is based on whole time equivalents and will include a number of part time staff.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to list (i) the sections within the Appeals Service; and (ii) the number of staff in each section. (AQW 1162/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Section	Number of Staff
Prehearing	22
Hearing	25
Post Hearing	16
Administration and Support	20
Total	83

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to give details of any backlog within the Appeals Service, including the reasons for this backlog. (AQW 1231/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are no backlogs of work within The Appeals Service; the work in hand is well within acceptable levels.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if staff with responsibility for processing in the Appeals Service are also manning telephones whilst engaged in day to day duties. (AQW 1270/10)

Minister for Social Development: Providing information and answering customer's telephone enquiries is an essential part of the service provided by The Appeals Service and is included in the daily duties of all staff.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 16 October 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the First Minister's comments at the Ulster Hall on 8 September, if the Department will make a statement on the drafting and circulation of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy. (AQW 122/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The comments made by the First Minister at the Ulster Hall on 8 September were not the agreed view of this office. The draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration was originally meant to have been brought forward before the end of last year. That and subsequent commitments on timing were made in good faith, and it was our expectation that those would be met. However, it was not possible to meet that date. Reaching agreement on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy (CSI) remains one of the top policy priorities of OFMDFM. Currently, officials within OFMDFM are working on a revised draft of the Programme to identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

Complaints Against OFMDFM

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 16/10, how many complaints are outstanding against their Department; and how many of these were discussed at the meeting of the Central Freedom of Information Team and the NI Regional Office of the Information Commissioner on 26 February. (AQW 928/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: There are currently five complaints registered with the Information Commissioner's Office against the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. At the time of the meeting between the Central Freedom of Information team and the Northern Ireland Regional Office of the Information Commissioner, on 26 February 2009, three of them had been registered. There was discussion around the handling protocols for one of the complaints, as it had also been received by three other Departments.

North/South Ministerial Council: Expenditure

Mr G Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the format of the reported expenditure for the North South Ministerial Council, as set out in the Annual Report pertaining to the breakdown of costs by main expenditure areas for the Joint Secretariat, has changed in the last two years. (AQW 1007/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In 2007, the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Joint Secretariat reviewed the format of its annual report with a view to reducing production costs. Arising from this review, annual reports in 2007 and 2008 were shorter and more focused than in previous years and have been produced in electronic format only.

In line with this approach, information on NSMC Joint Secretariat expenditure in the 2007 and 2008 annual reports has been published on the basis of total expenditure only.

The total expenditure for the NSMC Joint Secretariat in 2007 and 2008 was £1,626,707 and £1,724, 872 respectively. Staff costs are met by OFMDFM and the Department of Foreign Affairs. All other costs associated with the Joint Secretariat are shared between the two administrations.

Private Consultancy: OFMDFM Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 74/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of their Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 1112/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The figures provided in AQW 74/10 for private consultancy (see Table 1 below) include expenditure on capital projects.

The Department is not taking forward any projects under the Private Finance Initiative, and the Department does not have any Executive Agencies.

TABLE 1

Description	2004/05 (£'000s)	2005/06 (£'000s)	2006/07 (£'000s)	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)
Private Consultancy	404	830	1,193	2,758	1,017

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Flooding Programme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of areas defined under her Department's flooding programme as "Areas at Risk" in each constituency. (AQW 890/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Currently an Inter-Agency Flood Liaison Group, chaired by DARD Rivers Agency, and including DRD Roads Service, NI Water and NI Fire and Rescue Service, has identified 79 "flooding hotspots" across the eighteen MLA constituencies to date. A number of additions have been proposed by DRD Roads Service and these will be considered at the next meeting of the Group. These "hotspots" are subject to ongoing consideration for flood alleviation work by the relevant Group member(s). Furthermore NI Water has advised that it is also developing a register of properties at risk of flooding, based on previous incidents and by use of computer models which simulate the hydraulic performance of the sewerage networks. It is envisaged that a draft version of the register will be discussed with the NI Authority for Utility Regulation by April 2010. Looking to the future Rivers Agency is undertaking a "Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment" for the north of Ireland as required under the EU Floods Directive. Although the Directive does not require this assessment to be completed until December 2011, it is anticipated that it will be completed in the current financial year.

Renewable Energy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether stand-alone renewable energy projects are admissible for funding under Axis 3, Measure 1 of the Rural Development Programme and to outline the criteria. (AQW 977/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 AXIS 3 Measures explain that 'Renewable Energy sources may be funded only where it is part of a capital expenditure project for a new or expanding business'.

DARD is currently engaged in a review of the eligibility criteria for 'stand alone renewable projects', however until the outcome of this review all applications must be assessed on the basis of the current criteria.

Derelict Buildings

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the extent and range of her Department's power and authority to compel property owners in towns and villages to make safe, and improve, the appearance of derelict buildings. (AQW 1043/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not have the power or authority to compel property owners in towns and villages to make safe, and improve, the appearance of derelict buildings.

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applicants for the Single Farm Payment have been refused hardship payments in each constituency, in each of the last three years, because forms were submitted late. (AQW 1105/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: European Council Regulations provide that applications submitted under the Single Farm Payment Scheme after 15 May of the scheme year may be accepted without penalty on the grounds of force majeure/ exceptional circumstances and where the application is made in writing within 10 working days of the applicant being able to do so.

My Department rejected a total of 89 late applications to the Single Farm Payment Scheme under the force majeure/ exceptional circumstance provisions in respect of the 2006 scheme year. For the 2007 scheme year, the total was 69 applications rejected and for the 2008 scheme the total was 49 rejected.

Single Farm Payment Branch does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county/postcode.

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applicants for the Single Farm Payment have been refused hardship payments in each constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1107/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: European Council Regulations provide that claims submitted under the Single Farm Payment Scheme which do not satisfy certain scheme eligibility criteria may be accepted without penalty on the grounds of force majeure/exceptional circumstances and where the application is made in writing within 10 working days of the applicant being able to do so.

My Department rejected a total of 6 applications to the Single Farm Payment Scheme under the force majeure/ exceptional circumstance provisions in respect of the 2006 scheme year. For the 2007 scheme year, the total was one application rejected and for the 2008 scheme the total was one rejected. In each case the figures shown do not include late applications considered under the force majeure provisions.

Single Farm Payment Branch does not hold Single Farm Payment details on a constituency basis. The data is currently held by county/postcode.

Hardship Payments for Fishermen

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications from fishermen for hardship payments have been refused in each constituency, in each of the last three years, because forms were submitted late. (AQW 1108/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I would advise that, over the past three years, no fishing vessel has been refused hardship payment. To date £658,800, has been paid to all 171 vessels who submitted their application and claim on time and the Department is now processing the final 31 claims from fishermen who made late application and/or claim to the scheme, with the aim of having the scheme completed by the end of October.

Private Consultancy: DARD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 73/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of her Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 1111/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I can confirm that the figures referred to AQW 73/10 include external consultancy expenditure (as defined in DAO (DFP) 03/05) on DARD capital projects and in respect of its agencies.

DARD has not had any Private Finance Initiatives to date.

Bovine TB Regulations

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of cattle slaughtered under Bovine TB Regulations, that showed no lesions or signs of disease, over the last two years. (AQW 1116/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The number of animals removed during 2007 and 2008 following skin test reaction that showed no lesions or signs of disease at post mortem is 9187.

It is important to realise that lack of confirmation at these post mortem tests does not mean the animal is not diseased as the post mortem examination is primarily for the purposes of public health.

Single Farm Payment

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to explain why her Department has insisted on Single Farm Payment herd inspections being carried out only days after the same herd has been rounded up for routine TB and Brucellosis tests; (ii) to explain the necessity to close the herd if the owner is not prepared to subject his herd to another inspection within a short timeframe; (iii) for her assessment of the level of stress caused to the animals during the inspection routine; and (iv) if she will ensure that the well-being of the animals is considered during the inspection routine; and (vi) if she will undertake to reduce the costs associated with additional testing. (AQW 1120/10)

- (i) Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department uses APHIS to monitor TB and BR testing in the herds selected for SFP herd inspections. Where possible SFP inspections involving livestock will be synchronised with disease testing although this is not always possible due to resource constraints, or where disease testing is arranged at short notice. SFP inspections should be carried out without any prior notice where possible, but there is discretion to allow up to 48 hrs notice in duly justified circumstances and if the purpose of the control is not jeopardised.
- (ii) DARD CII procedures require that herds selected for announced inspections are placed under movement restrictions from the date on which the inspection was appointed. Where inspections are unannounced, the herd is placed under movement restrictions from the date on which the herd keeper was made aware that an inspection was to be completed. In both cases the movement restrictions remain in place until the inspection has been completed.
- (iii)(iv) DARD Inspectors at all times endeavour to keep animal stress to a minimum and ensure that animal welfare is not compromised by the inspection process.
- (v) As part of Better regulation the costs to the farmer are being considered.

Cost of Translating and Publishing Material in Irish and Ulster Scots

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of translating and publishing all material in both Ulster-Scots and Irish, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1173/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department only holds records on this information for the last seven years. Expenditure incurred by the Department on the translating and publishing of Irish and Ulster-Scots material in the last seven years is as follows:-

	Irish £	Ulster-Scots £
2002 / 03	310.89	Nil
2003 / 04	76.59	Nil
2004 / 05	311.90	Nil
2005 / 06	3,192.16*	95.89
2006 / 07	2,087.49*	489.77
2007 / 08	4,303.75	88.54
2008 / 09	1,805.20	278.95

* Includes NDPB expenditure

Bumblebee Population

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to (i) prevent the decline in the bumblebee population; and (ii) recreate its habitat and set aside dedicated areas for it to thrive. (AQW 1183/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) There are a number of options in DARD's agri-environment schemes that encourage participants to manage habitats which benefit the bumblebee population.
- (ii) These areas of managed existing habitat and created optional habitat include:
 - Pollen and nectar mixture - which contains a mix of legumes flowering at different times to provide a habitat with a continuous supply of pollen and nectar for bumblebees, butterflies and other insects.
 - Rough grass margins where minimal disturbance benefits ground nesting bees;
 - Conservation cereals with reduced pesticide and herbicide input;
 - Tree planting and planting of traditional orchards where apple trees, rowan, whitebeam, hazel and holly are pollinated by bees;
 - Wild bird cover which contains kale and weeds of arable land which may be pollinated by bees;
 - Hedgerow restoration where hawthorn, gorse and blackthorn are all pollinated by bees; and
 - Responsible management of field boundaries, in particular, cutting on a rotational basis to encourage flower and berry production.

Rural Development Programme

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the establishment of the new delivery structures and the allocation of funding under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme. (AQO 211/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am pleased to announce that considerable progress has now been made with all seven contracts for funding having been signed by the Joint Council Committees and returned to my Department. As I have stated previously over sixteen hundred applications have been recorded as received on the database from across the north for the measures under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme (In the SWARD area 616 applications; Lagan Rural Partnership 108; GROW 95; North East Region 109; DRAP 198; ARC 330; and SOAR 183 applications). I think this number of applications shows the level of interest out there in rural communities of businesses wishing and willing to develop and grow. I would point out that not all areas have opened all their measures yet.

I can report that following eligibility checks and site visits nearly eight hundred of these applications have now been considered as eligible for assessment by the Local Action Groups. To date over one hundred and thirty projects have achieved or exceeded the pass mark for assessment making them eligible. The GROW and SWARD group's have so far issued letter's of offer worth just under one million pounds, three hundred and fifty thousand pounds of this to farm diversification projects. At least three more areas will be in a position to issue letters of offer by the end of the month. Indications are that the first claims for expenditure will be submitted for payment in November with the first project launch in December. I think you will agree this will inject much needed investment into our rural areas.

National Trails Day

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the activities planned for National Trails Day. (AQO 212/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: National Trails Day was held on Sunday 4 October. In all, 11 events were hosted by Forest Service, as part of an all-Ireland National Trails Day. Some of these events were organised jointly with partner organisations. For example, Fermanagh District Council, RSPB and the Tollymore Red Squirrel Group. Events included a lakeside and woodland trail walk at Hillsborough Forest; a forest trail walk and red squirrel fun event at Tollymore Forest Park; a waterfall walk and forest trail horse trek at Glenarrif Forest Park; a family cycling event on forest trails at Gosford Forest Park; a red squirrel awareness event at Gortin Glen Forest Park and a Geopark guided nature walk at Lough Navar Forest. Around 800 people took part in the organised events and there was a noticeable increase in the number of visitors to forests. All normal entry charges were waived for the day. National Trails Day has grown in success from last year and it is totally consistent with my desire to see more use made of our forests and the social use potential of our forests realised.

Loughs Agency Funding

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department contributed to the Loughs Agency in the last financial year. (AQO 213/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Loughs Agency financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December, however in the DARD financial year 2008/09, DARD contributed £2,503,750 to the Loughs Agency.

EU Milk Quotas

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the EU Agriculture Commissioner's proposal to end to milk quotas by 2015; and what representations she has made to DEFRA and the EU Commissioner concerning this matter. (AQO 214/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The CAP Health Check agreement provides for the phasing out of milk quotas which will end in 2015 under EU legislation. The EU Commissioner has stated very firmly that the Commission will not propose an extension to the milk quota regime so I think we have to accept that they will expire in 2015 and consider how best the industry can prepare for a quota free environment.

A number of research projects on phasing out milk quotas have found that there will be a negative impact on producer prices as production increases at EU level. They have also indicated that the negative impact on prices is greater if quotas are suddenly removed and production expands rapidly without any transition period. Therefore, given the Commission's determination to end quotas, I argued during the CAP Health Check negotiations that quotas should be phased out in an orderly way. I believe that the CAP Health Check agreement does that by keeping the increase to 1% per year and will achieve a situation whereby quotas will gradually become irrelevant in all Member States paving the way for their abolition. Since the CAP Health Check agreement, I have not made any further representations to the EU Commissioner or Defra on the specific issue of milk quotas.

I am aware that it has been suggested that the current market situation has been caused by the EU increasing milk quotas and there have been calls for the increases to be stopped and quotas reduced. I do not believe that the evidence supports these suggestions. The increase in milk quota has not been taken up and at EU level production in 2008/09 actually fell and is estimated at 4.2% below quota. It is also the case that a significant factor in the collapse in world dairy markets was increased production in the USA and New Zealand which are not

constrained by quotas. This fact means that we should be careful in taking action, however well intentioned, that would constrain supply by EU producers but would mean that any resulting shortfall on the world market would be met by countries outside the EU.

North/South Hotline

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the North-South hotline linking the two Agriculture Departments is now in operation. (AQO 215/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Links between my Department and the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food have always been strong, but at the March meeting of the North South Ministerial Council we agreed to strengthen co-operation in dealing with major incidents in light of the animal feed contamination incident.

We agreed that our officials would review and if necessary, revise the existing arrangements. I am therefore pleased that an interim system has been put in place, which will be maintained until our reviews on the dioxin incident have been completed and the findings made known. This interim system builds on the rapid notifications systems that are already in place to deal with serious disease outbreaks. The existing arrangements have now been extended to cover any issues that have a potential impact on animal health and welfare or on animal products or the food chain.

A good example of how this interim system works was in the recent detection of novel H1N1 in a pig herd here. Although novel H1N1 in pigs does not represent an animal, public health or food safety risk, in the interests of maintaining close working relationships my officials used the procedures in the rapid notification system to contact their counterparts to inform them of the situation. Officials in the South took the same action when they detected novel H1N1 in a pig herd.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Efficiency Savings: DCAL

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1306/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The efficiency programme is designed to release funds to front line services, not to diminish them in any way.

All NICS departments have produced Efficiency Delivery Plans to provide assurance that they are able to deliver the required level of efficiency savings in a strategic and planned manner rather than through arbitrary cuts to front line services.

Girl Guides

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider a reception to mark one hundred years of the Girl Guides, and their contribution to society in Northern Ireland. (AQW 1525/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I recognise the positive contribution made by the Girl Guides to Northern Ireland society; however it falls outside the remit of my Department to sponsor a reception to mark this one hundred year anniversary.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Schools in the Upper Bann Constituency

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the estimated and actual costs of all (i) new school builds; (ii) school extensions and improvements and; (iii) the stage of each project, in the Upper Bann constituency, since 2007. (AQW 622/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. At the heart of this are Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans. As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are now investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for the taxpayer. I have commissioned therefore a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

Tugtar sonraí sa tábla thíos de mhórhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna i dtoghcheantar na Banna Uachtaraí, (i) atá á bpleanáil faoi láthair; (ii) ar cuireadh tús le hobair tógála orthu; agus (iii) ar cuireadh i gcrích iad ón bhliain 2007 i leith.

The table below provides details of major school capital projects in the Upper Bann constituency, which are (i) currently being planned; (ii) construction work is underway; and (iii) have been completed since 2007.

School	Details of Project	Estimated Construction Cost £m	Approved Contract Cost £m	Current Position
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	New school on existing site	10.5	n/k	Final sketch plans under consideration (RIBA Stage D)
Tannaghmore Primary School	New school on existing site	5	n/k	Revised final sketch plans awaited (RIBA Stage D)
St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan	New school on extended site	2.5	n/k	Revised final sketch plans awaited (RIBA Stage D)
Portadown College	New school on existing site	19.3	n/k	Economic Appraisal under review
Banbridge Academy	Extension & Refurbishment	15.6	16.9	Construction underway. Estimated completion date Oct 2011
Waringstown Primary School	Extension & Refurbishment	1.48	1.38	Completed October 2008

For those projects still in the planning stages it not possible to provide actual contract costs as they have not yet reached procurement stage.

Capital Schemes: DE

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when the capital schemes will start at (i) St Oliver Plunkett primary school, Forkhill; (ii) St Mary's Burren primary school, Dromintee; (iii) St Joseph's primary school, Madden; and (iv) St Clare's Convent Abbey primary school, Newry. (AQW 861/10)

Minister of Education: It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. At the heart of this are Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans. As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are now investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for the taxpayer. I have commissioned therefore a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

It is anticipated that this review will be completed in the near future and subject to the outcome of the review it is estimated: -

- (i) that the new build for St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill will commence in early Spring 2010 and complete around Spring 2011.
- (ii) that the new build for Carrick PS, Burren, Warrenpoint will commence in early 2010 and complete around summer 2011.
- (iii) that the new build for St Joseph's PS Madden will commence in early 2010 and complete around Spring 2011.
- (iv) a revised Economic Appraisal for St Clare's Convent PS, Newry is currently being prepared. It is not therefore, possible to give an indication at this time, as to when construction work will commence. However given the age and condition of the building this is a priority.

Bíonn na hamscálaí thuas faoi réir na bpróiseas riachtanach pleanála agus tógála bheith curtha i gcrích go sásúil agus faoi réir acmhainní bheith ar fáil in aon bhliain ar leith. Beidh siad faoi réir beartas na Roinne fosta agus cuirfidh siad san áireamh iad, mar shampla pleanáil bunaithe sa cheantar.

The timescales set out above are of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year.

Schools Converting to Natural Gas

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 131/10, what steps she is taking to encourage the 95 schools capable of converting to natural gas to do so. (AQW 877/10)

Minister of Education: Bíonn na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne freagrach as córais téimh san earnáil rialaithe agus san earnáil faoi chothabháil. Bíonn scoileanna deonacha gramadaí agus scoileanna imeasctha faoi chothabháil stáit freagrach as a gcórais téimh féin.

Heating systems in the controlled and maintained sectors are the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards. Voluntary grammar schools and Grant maintained integrated schools are responsible for their own heating systems.

Funding is available through the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Energy Efficiency Fund (CEEF) for conversion to more energy efficient fuels.

Review of Public Administration: DE Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of how much has been spent to date by her Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 883/10)

Minister of Education: Is é bunú an Údaráis um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) an t-athrú is mó don earnáil Oideachais mar gheall ar chur i bhfeidhm an Athbheithnithe ar Riarachán Poiblí (RPA).

The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is the key change for Education resulting from the implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Details of expenditure incurred to date by my Department on the RPA, as set out in the table below, relate to the Policy and Legislative team within DE and the ESA Implementation Team. In addition staff throughout the Department will have contributed to varying extents to the work relating to the establishment of ESA, however, it would not be possible to disaggregate this expenditure.

	05/06 £'000	06/07 £'000	07/08 £'000	08/09 £'000	09/10* £'000	Total £'000
Total	107	1,214	1,864	2,719	684	6,588

* expenditure up to 31st. August 2009

Education and Skills Authority

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education how much the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority has cost to date. (AQW 897/10)

Minister of Education: Is é bunú an Údaráis um Oideachas agus Scileanna (ESA) an t-athrú is mó don earnáil Oideachais mar gheall ar chur i bhfeidhm an Athbheithnithe ar Riarachán Poiblí (RPA).

The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is the key change for Education resulting from the implementation of the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Details of expenditure incurred to date by my Department on the establishment of ESA, as set out in the table below, relate to the Policy and Legislative team within DE and the ESA Implementation Team. In addition staff throughout the Department will have contributed to varying extents to the work relating to the establishment of ESA, however, it would not be possible to disaggregate this expenditure.

	05/06 £'000	06/07 £'000	07/08 £'000	08/09 £'000	09/10* £'000	Total £'000
Total	107	1,214	1,864	2,719	684	6,588

* expenditure up to 31st. August 2009

First Aid Training for Teachers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education what first aid training is offered to new teachers. (AQW 913/10)

Minister of Education: All Education and Library Boards undertake, on an annual basis, a needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year. School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of all their teachers, including those newly qualified, and it is considered that schools are best placed to ascertain which teachers and how many require first-aid training. Such training is delivered by a Health and Safety Executive accredited provider.

In addition, guidance for schools on first-aid training is available within the Inter-Board and CCMS Health and Safety Manual for Principals and Governors. This guidance provides an overview of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (NI) 1982 and details the steps schools need to take to ensure compliance with these regulations.

I ndiaidh eisiúint an doiciméid “Ag Tabhairt Tacaíochta do Dhaltaí a bhfuil Riachtanais Speisialta Cógais acu” ón Roinn Oideachais sa bhliain 2008, soláthraíodh clár oiliúna do phríomhoidí scoile lena chinntiú gur féidir le scoileanna freastal ar riachtanais gach dalta a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta cógais acu.

Following the issue of the Department of Education’s document, “Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs” in 2008, a training programme for school principals was offered to all schools to ensure that all pupils with medication needs could have their needs met in schools.

Private Consultancy: DE Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 70/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of her Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 915/10)

Minister of Education: Cuimsíonn an figiúr do chaiteachas ar chomhairliúchán príobháideach a thug mé mar fhreagra ar AQW 70/10 caiteachas ar thionscadail caipitil agus ar Thionscnaimh Phríobháideacha Airgeadais. Níl mo Roinn freagrach as aon ghníomhaireachtaí.

The figure for private consultancy expenditure which I provided in response to AQW 70/10 does include expenditure on capital projects and Private Finance Initiatives. My Department is not responsible for any agencies.

Report into Preschool Education

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action her Department is taking to implement the Comptroller and Auditor General's report into pre-school education. (AQW 938/10)

Minister of Education: Liostaíodh roinnt réimsí arbh fhéidir a fheabhsú i dTuarascáil an NIAO ar an Chlár um Fhorleathnú Oideachais Réamhscoile a foilsíodh ar 19ú Meitheamh 2009 agus ba chóir don Roinn iad sin a chur san áireamh agus beartas do pháistí á fhorbairt as seo amach.

The NIAO Report on the Pre-school Education Expansion Programme published on 19th June 2009 listed a number of areas for potential improvement which the Department should consider when developing future policy for children.

The Department is committed to addressing the observations and recommendations in the NIAO Report and will be taking those forward in developing the Early Years 0-6 Strategy.

Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education what role she envisages for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum in the future. (AQW 954/10)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh an Fóram don Óige le spreagadh a thabhairt do níos mó daoine óga le páirt a ghlacadh sa tseirbhís óige. Is eagraíocht í an Fóram atá treoraithe ag an óige agus leagann siad béim ar an phointe go bhfaigheann siad treoir agus fócas ó dhaoine óga. Tá sé tábhachtach go gcuirtear i gcónaí le cumas páistí agus daoine óga sa tseirbhís óige agus is mar gheall air sin go gcuireann an Fóram isteach ar chistiú mar Eagraíocht Dheonach Réigiúnach don Óige ón Chomhairle Ógra, agus tá cistiú acu faoi láthair le feidhm ionadaíoch do dhaoine óga a chomhlíonadh ag leibhéal straitéiseach in obair don óige.

The Youth Forum was established to encourage greater involvement of young people in the youth service. The Forum, as a youth-led organisation, emphasise that they get their direction and focus from young people. It is important to continue to build the capacity of children and young people in the youth service and therefore the Forum apply for funding as a Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation to the Youth Council, and are currently funded to perform a representative function for young people at a strategic level in youth work. In its annual report of 2009 the Youth Forum highlight that "the organisation has cultivated an active membership of young people, and participative structures, to set the strategic direction of the Forum".

In 2008, the Department of Education approved the appointment of a Transitional Director to the Forum to lead the organisation through changing times; this is managed by the Youth Council. The duties of that post include working with key stakeholders to position the organisation in the new structures, and to advise on the future development of the Youth Forum taking cognisance of RPA, DE Policy, Youth Service Liaison Forum initiatives, Section 75, inclusion and the principles of equality, diversity and interdependence. Therefore it is a matter for the Forum and its membership to agree how the Forum can work with young people to encourage and support active participation, including working with the Transitional Director to explore the relationship and interconnection between the Forum and Network for Youth. I would therefore very much encourage the Forum and its members to clearly define and agree the role of the Forum in light of the emerging participative structures.

The Network for Youth, as an emerging structure for children's participation, is a response to young people consistently reporting that they do not have adequate opportunities to have their voices heard, or their concerns listened to when decisions that affect them are being taken. The new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will have responsibility for developing the Network for Youth, which provides a unique opportunity to encourage active citizenship by providing increased opportunities for all young people to express their views equally. The Network for Youth will not compete with existing youth or children's groups; instead it will seek to build on what has already been achieved.

The Network is not intended to be the only way for children and young people to influence government. There are already a number of groups which do this effectively or on a smaller scale. It will be important that these existing structures are able to connect to the Network to ensure that a wide range of groups of young people or from local areas can be relayed to decision makers. It will strengthen the voice of young people, by providing for children's participation developed at local levels, but collated and considered on a regional basis.

Following the announcement that a Network would be established, the Youth Forum developed ideas on the Network with groups of young people and presented these to the Department. A Working Group was then

established in August 2007, made up of a cross section of stakeholders from both the youth and children's sector including the Youth Forum, and chaired by the Youth Council. The Working Group proposed a facilitated Network. It is important that the design of the Network takes account of existing participation structures and is part of an overarching and coherent system for children and young people's participation. The Youth Council is currently working on options for this design based on the recommendations of the Working Group with input from key stakeholders. A report is due in December 2009.

Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education whether she envisages the Northern Ireland Youth Forum continuing to provide a link between young people and Government. (AQW 955/10)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh an Fóram don Óige le spreagadh a thabhairt do níos mó daoine óga le páirt a ghlacadh sa tseirbhís óige. Is eagraíocht í an Fóram atá treoraithe ag an óige agus leagann siad béim ar an phointe go bhfaigheann siad treoir agus fócas ó dhaoine óga. Tá sé tábhachtach go gcuirtear i gcónaí le cumas páistí agus daoine óga sa tseirbhís óige agus is mar gheall air sin go gcuireann an Fóram isteach ar chistiú mar Eagraíocht Dheonach Réigiúnach don Óige ón Chomhairle Ógra, agus tá cistiú acu faoi láthair le feidhm ionadaíoch do dhaoine óga a chomhlíonadh ag leibhéal straitéiseach in obair don óige.

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In 2008, the Department of Education approved the appointment of a Transitional Director to the Forum to lead the organisation through changing times; this is managed by the Youth Council. The duties of that post include working with key stakeholders to position the organisation in the new structures, and to advise on the future development of the Youth Forum taking cognisance of RPA, DE Policy, Youth Service Liaison Forum initiatives, Section 75, inclusion and the principles of equality, diversity and interdependence. Therefore it is a matter for the Forum and its membership to agree how the Forum can work with young people to encourage and support active participation, including working with the Transitional Director to explore the relationship and interconnection between the Forum and Network for Youth. I would therefore very much encourage the Forum and its members to clearly define and agree the role of the Forum in light of the emerging participative structures.

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Northern Ireland Youth Forum

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education what relationship and interconnection she anticipates between the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Network 4 Youth, whether she envisages any overlap in their roles; and what plans are in place to avoid any overlap. (AQW 956/10)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh an Fóram don Óige le spreagadh a thabhairt do níos mó daoine óga le páirt a ghlacadh sa tseirbhís óige. Is eagraíocht í an Fóram atá treoraithe ag an óige agus leagann siad béim ar an phointe go bhfaigheann siad treoir agus fócas ó dhaoine óga. Tá sé tábhachtach go gcuirtear i gcónaí le cumas páistí agus daoine óga sa tseirbhís óige agus is mar gheall air sin go gcuireann an Fóram isteach ar chistiú mar Eagraíocht Dheonach Réigiúnach don Óige ón Chomhairle Ógra, agus tá cistiú acu faoi láthair le feidhm ionadaíoch do dhaoine óga a chomhlíonadh ag leibhéal straitéiseach in obair don óige.

The Youth Forum was established to encourage greater involvement of young people in the youth service. The Forum, as a youth-led organisation, emphasise that they get their direction and focus from young people. It is important to continue to build the capacity of children and young people in the youth service and therefore the Forum apply for funding as a Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation to the Youth Council, and are currently funded to perform a representative function for young people at a strategic level in youth work. In its annual report of 2009 the Youth Forum highlight that “the organisation has cultivated an active membership of young people, and participative structures, to set the strategic direction of the Forum”.

In 2008, the Department of Education approved the appointment of a Transitional Director to the Forum to lead the organisation through changing times; this is managed by the Youth Council. The duties of that post include working with key stakeholders to position the organisation in the new structures, and to advise on the future development of the Youth Forum taking cognisance of RPA, DE Policy, Youth Service Liaison Forum initiatives, Section 75, inclusion and the principles of equality, diversity and interdependence. Therefore it is a matter for the Forum and its membership to agree how the Forum can work with young people to encourage and support active participation, including working with the Transitional Director to explore the relationship and interconnection between the Forum and Network for Youth. I would therefore very much encourage the Forum and its members to clearly define and agree the role of the Forum in light of the emerging participative structures.

The Network for Youth, as an emerging structure for children’s participation, is a response to young people consistently reporting that they do not have adequate opportunities to have their voices heard, or their concerns listened to when decisions that affect them are being taken. The new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will have responsibility for developing the Network for Youth, which provides a unique opportunity to encourage active citizenship by providing increased opportunities for all young people to express their views equally. The Network for Youth will not compete with existing youth or children’s groups; instead it will seek to build on what has already been achieved.

The Network is not intended to be the only way for children and young people to influence government. There are already a number of groups which do this effectively or on a smaller scale. It will be important that these existing structures are able to connect to the Network to ensure that a wide range of groups of young people or from local areas can be relayed to decision makers. It will strengthen the voice of young people, by providing for children’s participation developed at local levels, but collated and considered on a regional basis.

Following the announcement that a Network would be established, the Youth Forum developed ideas on the Network with groups of young people and presented these to the Department. A Working Group was then established in August 2007, made up of a cross section of stakeholders from both the youth and children’s sector including the Youth Forum, and chaired by the Youth Council. The Working Group proposed a facilitated Network. It is important that the design of the Network takes account of existing participation structures and is part of an overarching and coherent system for children and young people’s participation. The Youth Council is currently working on options for this design based on the recommendations of the Working Group with input from key stakeholders. A report is due in December 2009.

Network 4 Youth

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the development of Network 4 Youth. (AQW 959/10)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh an Fóram don Óige le spreagadh a thabhairt do níos mó daoine óga le páirt a ghlacadh sa tseirbhís óige. Is eagraíocht í an Fóram atá treoraithe ag an óige agus leagann siad béim

ar an phointe go bhfaigheann siad treoir agus fócas ó dhaoine óga. Tá sé tábhachtach go gcuirtear i gcónaí le cumas páistí agus daoine óga sa tseirbhís óige agus is mar gheall air sin go gcuireann an Fóram isteach ar chistiú mar Eagraíocht Dheonach Réigiúnach don Óige ón Chomhairle Ógra, agus tá cistiú acu faoi láthair le feidhm ionadaíoch do dhaoine óga a chomhlíonadh ag leibhéal straitéiseach in obair don óige.

The Youth Forum was established to encourage greater involvement of young people in the youth service. The Forum, as a youth-led organisation, emphasise that they get their direction and focus from young people. It is important to continue to build the capacity of children and young people in the youth service and therefore the Forum apply for funding as a Regional Voluntary Youth Organisation to the Youth Council, and are currently funded to perform a representative function for young people at a strategic level in youth work. In its annual report of 2009 the Youth Forum highlight that “the organisation has cultivated an active membership of young people, and participative structures, to set the strategic direction of the Forum”.

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Statementing of Children

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 423/10, to outline the reasons for the diverging trends in relation to the number of children being statemented in each of the Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 969/10)

Minister of Education: The Chief Executives (CEs) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that over the past few years ELBs have been extending the range of special educational needs (SEN) provision for children across all five stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP). This has resulted in more support being provided to pupils at an earlier stage without the need for statutory assessment, leading generally to a decline in the number of children who have received statements of special educational need at Stage 5 of the COP.

Mar sin de, ní gá go léiríonn líon na bpáistí a bhfuil ráitis ar Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais (SEN) faighte acu líon na bpáistí a bhfuil soláthar breise SEN faighte nó á fháil acu ag gach leibhéal den Chód Cleachtais.

The number of children who have received statements of SEN is therefore not necessarily a direct reflection of the number of children who have either received or are receiving additional SEN provision at all stages of the COP.

As part of the process of converging practices and protocols within the ELBs ahead of the transfer of responsibilities to the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA) on 1 January 2010, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) has taken action in relation to the number of children who would have been receiving Board support for SEN without holding a statement of SEN. Many of these children have now been assessed and will have received a statement of SEN. It is for this reason that the statistics for the BELB show a slight increase in children holding statements of SEN.

The increase in the number of children with statements in the Southern Education and Library Board area in the 2007/2008 academic year includes a higher than average number of statements ratified by the Children and Young Persons Committee of the Board and issued in September 2007. The figures for 2007/2008 also include numbers of statements formalised and issued during July and August 2008 thus falling into the same academic year whereas in the 2006/2007 year there were no statements issued during the summer months.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education how many staff have been appointed to the Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 979/10)

Minister of Education: Ceapadh Príomhfheidhmeannach ainmnithe agus 6 Stiúrthóir ainmnithe chuig an Udarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna.

The Chief Executive designate and 6 Directors designate have been appointed to the Education and Skills Authority

Special Programmes for Underachieving Schools

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the total amount of funding provided through special programmes for underachieving schools in (a) 2005/06; (b) 2006/07; (c) 2007/08; and (d) 2008/09; (ii) the total funding forecast for special programmes for underachieving schools in (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; (c) 2011/12; and (d) 2012/13; (iii) the schools that are in receipt of this funding; and (iv) the criteria currently used to allocate funding; and to outline any planned changes to this criteria in the future. (AQW 983/10)

Minister of Education: Tá tacaíocht airgeadais tugtha ag an Roinn tríd an chiste thiomnaithe d'fheabhsú scoile do chlár a bhfuil sé mar aidhm ghinearálta acu caighdeáin sa litearthacht agus san uimhearthacht a ardú, agus trí thacaíocht do scoileanna tearcghnóthaithe. Léiríonn an tábla thíos an cistiú a tugadh faoin chiste d'fheabhsú scoile sna blianta ó 2005-06 go dtí 2008-09.

The Department has provided support through its dedicated school improvement fund for programmes aimed at raising standards in literacy and numeracy generally, as well as support for underachieving schools. The table below shows the funding disbursed from the school improvement fund in the years from 2005-06 to 2008-09.

2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
£10.4m	£9.4m	£7.2m	£9.0m

In previous years, the school improvement fund provided support for underachieving schools through the School Support Programme (SSP) and Group 1 funding. Schools were selected for these programmes following discussions between the Department, the Education and Library Boards, and, where appropriate, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). These discussions were informed by end of key stage assessment results, Free School Meal Entitlement and other data. Following a review of the effectiveness of those programmes, funding for the School Support Programme and Group 1 schools ceased in August 2008.

The fund has also provided support for joint action plans from the Education and Library Boards for raising standards in literacy and numeracy, including through the Raising Achievement Programme (RAP) and the Raising Achievement in Numeracy Programme (RAIN). Schools in these programmes have been selected by

the relevant Board on the basis of performance in end of key stage assessment results or, at post-primary, GCSE performance.

A list of the schools that benefited from funding under these programmes in the years 2005-06 to 2008-09 has been placed in the Library.

From 2008-09, the school improvement fund has also been used to support my targeted intervention programmes in Belfast and Derry – Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry – Bright Futures. These programmes, whilst different in their scope and coverage, share the same objective of raising standards and closing the gap in achievement that has persisted for too long between our most affluent children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who face other barriers to learning. The Achieving Belfast programme concentrates efforts on some of the lowest performing schools in the city. The Achieving Derry programme includes all schools, pre-schools and youth provision in the Derry City Council area. A list of the schools participating in both programmes has also been placed in the Library.

The funding available in 2009-10 is £8.3m. This funding is in addition to other funding programmes and schools' own delegated budgets and is being used to support a range of interventions, including the regional literacy and numeracy action plans and the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry programmes.

Turning to future years, given the current uncertainty in terms of future budget provision, it is simply not possible at this stage to determine the amounts that will be available for school improvement. Indeed, my focus, following the publication of my school improvement strategy, is first and foremost on ensuring that schools use their existing delegated budgets – which will, in future, be more reflective of the objective needs of schools – to improve outcomes for their pupils. Through the Education and Skills Authority, I will also expect underperforming schools to be identified early and to receive the support they need to effect improvement.

Teachers' Pension and Retirement Scheme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when she will enter into negotiations with the Teachers' Unions regarding the future of the Teachers' Pension and Retirement scheme. (AQW 1044/10)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh an Coiste Comhairleach ar Aoisliúntas Múinteoirí (TSCC) sa bhliain 1993 le fóram a chruthú do chomhairliú rialta a dhéanamh le ceardchumainn na múinteoirí ar cheist an aoisliúntais agus ar nithe eile gaolmhara, lena n-áirítear cúiteamh i leith luathscóir.

The Teachers' Superannuation Consultative Committee (TSCC) was established in 1993 to provide a forum for regular consultation with the teacher unions on superannuation and related matters, including premature retirement compensation. Membership of the TSCC currently comprises representatives of the Department of Education; the Department for Employment and Learning; the five recognised teacher unions; two unions representing lecturers in colleges of further education; and employer representatives from both the school and further education sectors. The TSCC meets biannually, normally in May and November. In February 2008 a sub-group of the TSCC was established to consider options for managing the costs of premature retirement compensation and has met on six occasions to date. The most recent meetings of both the Committee and the sub-group were held on 27 May 2009.

Northern Ireland Languages Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress of the Northern Ireland Languages Strategy. (AQW 1046/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mo Roinn ag obair i gcomhar leis an dá ollscoil lena chinntiú go gcuirfear a moltaí deiridh ar straitéis do nuatheangacha ar fáil go luath. Nuair a bheas na moltaí seo faighte agam, déanfaidh mé breithniú ar an bhealach chun tosaigh agus ar an bhealach is fearr le tacaíocht a thabhairt do scoileanna agus do mhúinteoirí le teangacha a theagasc i scoileanna anseo.

My Department is working with the two universities to secure delivery, in the very near future, of their final recommendations on a modern languages strategy. Once I have received those recommendations I will consider the way forward on how best to support schools and teachers in the delivery of languages in schools here.

Integration of Newcomer Children in Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what current and future action her Department and the Inclusion and Diversity Service Adviser will be taking to fulfil the commitment to continued co-operation in education on approaches to the integration of newcomer children in schools, as discussed at the NSMC meeting on 6 July 2009. (AQW 1047/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir an Roinn an tSeirbhís um Chuimsiú agus Éagsúlacht (IDS) ar bun sa bhliain 2006 leis an tacaíocht a thugtar do dhaltai núíosacha a neartú agus a fheabhsú, trína chinntiú go gcuirtear leibhéal seasta tacaíochta agus sainchomhairle ar fáil do na scoileanna deontaschúnta uile agus do na scoileanna speisialta uile.

The Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) was established by the Department in 2006 to strengthen and improve support to newcomer pupils, by ensuring that a consistent level of support and specialist advice is provided to all grant-aided and special schools.

The work of the Inclusion and Diversity service is guided by the Departmental policy ‘Supporting Newcomer pupils’ which was launched in April 2009. While the acquisition of English language skills is absolutely fundamental to the policy, schools and the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) now take a more whole child/whole school approach which recognises and celebrates the diversity which has enriched our indigenous cultures.

One of the key responsibilities of the Inclusion and Diversity Service is to promote north/south collaboration. As part of this, IDS, together with colleagues in the south, have created a toolkit to help primary schools and teachers support their newcomer pupils. The ‘Together towards inclusion - toolkit for diversity in the primary school’ was launched on 10 December 2007 and every aspect of it is designed to benefit all pupils equally. It offers examples, templates and models as well as a large number of classroom activities, all designed with clear learning/teaching aims.

Currently work is ongoing to develop similar toolkits for post-primary, nursery and special schools. These toolkits should be completed and available to schools by the end of March 2010, thereby providing valuable resources on the integration of newcomer children to all nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools across the island.

Officials from both north and south have met regularly to learn from each other’s experiences in supporting newcomer pupils, and will continue to meet and co-operate on joint projects as the need arises.

Connecting Young People to the Democratic Process and Structures

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education to outline the current and planned range of organisations sponsored by her Department to connect young people to the democratic process and structures; and their primary roles and objectives. (AQW 1051/10)

Minister of Education: As part of the revised curriculum in schools and through a range of opportunities offered in the youth service, young people learn about the democratic institutions, how they can participate in the democratic process, their role in promoting inclusion, justice and democracy; and how they can exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local, national and global issues.

Tá Saoránacht ina mír den churaclam reachtúil athbhreithnithe ó Bhliain 1 go dtí Bliain 12. Cuimsítear é ag leibhéal na bunscoile trí Fhorbairt Phearsanta agus Comhthuiscint, agus cuimsítear é ag leibhéal na hiarbhunscoile trí Fhoghlaim don Saol agus don Obair. Ag Eochairchéimeanna 3 agus 4, tugann Ag Iniúchadh an Daonlathais agus Rannpháirtíocht Ghníomhach deis do dhaoine óga tuiscint a fháil ar an dóigh arbh fhéidir bheith páirteach i bpróisis dhaonlathacha agus tionchar a imirt orthu agus tuiscint a fháil ar chuid de na príomhinstiúidí daonlathacha agus an ról atá acu maidir le cur chun cinn an chuimsithe, an cheartais agus an daonlathais.

Citizenship is part of the statutory revised curriculum from Year 1 to Year 12. At primary level this is covered through Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, and at post-primary level through Learning for Life and Work. At Key stages 3 and 4, Exploring Democracy and Active Participation provides opportunities for young people to understand how to participate in and to influence democratic processes and to be aware of some key democratic institutions and their role in promoting inclusion, justice and democracy.

The Department of Education has invested in a substantial programme of piloting and teacher training for post-primary schools, recognising the important role citizenship education can play in developing our young people as contributors to society, and the need for teacher support to deliver citizenship in the classroom. The Department does not endorse specific organisations in relation to the delivery of the revised curriculum. However, the Department has provided resources to the Education and Library Boards for citizenship officers, and further training and support materials have been provided for both primary and post-primary teachers as the revised curriculum is implemented. In addition, my Department provides all Year 11 pupils with a Young Citizens Passport booklet, providing information on a range of relevant areas as a reference point for them.

Fostering young people's active participation is a main theme of youth work. The Department funds the Education and Library Boards and the Youth Council to support youth service provision across the north of Ireland, including a range of programmes and organisations to encourage and support young people to become active citizens.

The Youth Council through its International Committee is responsible for the co-ordination of a number of North/South, British/Irish, and European funded programmes. Through the 'Youth in Action' programme €150,000 has been secured for youth democracy projects. Young people can apply for funding for Youth Democracy Projects which aim to increase the active participation of young people in the life of their local, regional or national community or at international level by supporting their participation in the mechanisms of representative democracy. Local youth councils which have been operating in the north of Ireland for many years, primarily supported through the Education and Library Boards and some through District Council structures are another mechanism for young people to learn about and experience democracy.

The Department of Education is keen to support all schools in the north of Ireland to establish a School Council using the Democra-School programme designed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). The programme is designed to support and encourage the development of meaningful school councils and the practice of democracy in the school environment.

My officials will be considering how this work can link with emerging participative structures such as the Network for Youth, and I have also met with Junior Ministers and William Hay to discuss how my Department can work with OFMDFM and the Assembly Commission in the development of their respective initiatives to encourage participation, including the Assembly Commission Education Programme, and how we can work together on increasing opportunities for young people to engage positively with Government.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Review of Public Administration: DEL Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide a breakdown of how much has been spent to date by his Department on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 884/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): DEL has incurred a total of £63,915 to date on the Review of Public Administration. This is made up of £53,692 of staffing costs and £10,223 of other costs, which includes consultancy.

Private Consultancy: DEL Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 151/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 916/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The figure provided for private consultancy under AQW 151/10 did not include expenditure on external consultants with regard to either Capital projects or Private Finance Initiatives, as such expenditure was not incurred by the Department. The Department does not have any Agencies.

Learner Access Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people gained a qualification through the Learner Access Engagement Programme, broken down by (i) regional college; and (ii) gender. (AQW 987/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The information requested by the member is set out in the table below:

College	Total enrolled	Total achieved qualification	Male achieved qualification	Female achieved qualification
Belfast Metropolitan College	449	14	12	2
Northern Regional College	61	32	6	26
North West Regional College	245	89	19	70
South Eastern Regional College	141	100	22	78
Southern Regional College	45	4	1	3
South West Regional College	112	47	2	45
Totals	1053	286	62	224

The total 'achieved qualification' does not include those students who have sat examinations but have not yet received their results.

Additionally, as course enrolments continue throughout the academic year, many students have not yet completed their chosen course of study or their examinations.

GCSE and A-Levels Resits

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what fees are applicable for students re-sitting GCSEs or A-Levels in Further Education Colleges. (AQW 1017/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: There are two types of fees that can be charged to learners. First, there are tuition fees, and Further Education colleges, as incorporated bodies, are responsible for setting the level of tuition fees for the courses they provide. The Department does not intervene in this process. In addition to the course tuition fee, if a student is taking an examination, for example a GCSE or A Level, an examination fee is payable to the Awarding Body of that qualification. In some cases, colleges also charge a nominal administration fee.

There are a number of factors that will determine the extent to which these charges are applied to learners who re-sit GCSEs or A Levels. These include: the age of students (with some distinction being made those under and those over 19 years of age); the mode of attendance (whether full-time or part-time); whether the course is being studied alongside other courses; and whether the student wants to attend classes or just to be entered for the re-sit examination. In addition, there are differences between individual colleges in terms of how these factors are applied to the fees they charge students, and differences in the level of fees charged.

However, Further Education colleges do offer fees concessions to students based on their ability to pay. Concessionary fees are available to those in receipt of, for example, Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (income based), Guaranteed Pension Credit, and income based National Health Service Exemption Certificates.

Full details on the charges levied by individual colleges are available in their courses prospectuses.

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the entry qualifications required by each Further Education College for the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme. (AQW 1075/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Learner Access and Engagement Programme is open to adults who are not in work and who do not hold a qualification at least at Level 2, who may have barriers to

learning. These barriers may include caring responsibilities, disability, poor levels of literacy and numeracy, poor behaviour in, or attitude to training and other personal, emotional, or domestic circumstances.

Learners already enrolled in statutory Further Education provision are excluded from these arrangements.

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail what groups or individuals were consulted during the review of the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme by Pricewaterhouse Coopers. (AQW 1076/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has commissioned Pricewaterhouse Coopers to carry out a comprehensive longitudinal evaluation of the Learner Access and Engagement initiative, which will continue for the three year duration of the pilot programme.

During the first quarter of the evaluation, I understand that Pricewaterhouse Coopers consulted with all six Further Education Colleges and with my Department.

My Department has been advised by Pricewaterhouse Coopers that other stakeholders including contract holders, their staff, and programme participants will be consulted in due course.

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if any of the groups involved in the review of the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme by Pricewaterhouse Coopers were contract holders in the programme. (AQW 1078/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has commissioned Pricewaterhouse Coopers to carry out a comprehensive longitudinal evaluation of the Learner Access and Engagement initiative, which will continue for the three year duration of the pilot programme.

The evaluation will include interviews with 12 contract holders. I understand that these interviews will take place before the end of this year.

My Department has also been advised by Pricewaterhouse Coopers that other stakeholders including programme participants, contract holders and their staff will be consulted in due course.

Courses for Prisoners

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the courses his Department provides for prisoners in (i) Hydebank; (ii) Maghaberry; and (iii) Magilligan prisons. (AQW 1177/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In helping to address the literacy and numeracy needs of prisoners in Hydebank, Maghaberry and Magilligan prisons, the Department funds the further education colleges to deliver Essential Skills courses. Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) delivers Essential Skills courses in Literacy and Numeracy at both Maghaberry and Hydebank prisons. The North West Regional College (NWRC) provides Essential Skills courses in Literacy and Numeracy at Magilligan Prison.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service Vocational and Educational Service engage with the further education colleges to deliver other recreational and vocational courses.

New Sports Facility at University of Ulster, Coleraine

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the extent of his Department's involvement in the new sports facility to be built at the University of Ulster's Coleraine campus; and (ii) if the facility will be available for use by local schools, sports organisations and the general public. (AQW 1244/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) Earlier this year my Department issued a call for proposals for funding under the University Strategic Capital Investment Fund. Both universities submitted proposals. The proposal from the University of Ulster was for the construction of a new indoor sports facility at its Coleraine campus. The University has since submitted an economic appraisal which is currently being considered by officials. No decision as regards funding has yet been taken by this Department.
- (ii) The University's Widening Access programme allows access to university facilities for the local community and this is linked closely to the opening up of educational opportunities. In the economic appraisal, the University has stated that it will actively promote the availability of indoor and outdoor facilities to its students, staff and the local community.

1997 Dearing Report

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, what measures have been put in place to address the findings of the 1997 Dearing Report which stated that 40 per cent of students who studied outside Northern Ireland would have preferred to remain here. (AQW 1259/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Recent research commissioned by my Department identified the factors associated with the decision making processes of school pupils in relation to seeking entry to Higher Education. This was completed by Osborne et al and published in June 2008 which concluded that 'the evidence points towards the bulk of those who leave Northern Ireland are those who want to leave - they are, for a range of reasons, determined leavers'. Data collected from the Higher Education Statistics Agency would show that in 2007/08, around one quarter of NI domiciled students were enrolled at a Higher Education Institution in Great Britain.

In the period from 1994/95 to 2009/10, my Department has provided an overall increase of 5,118 full-time higher education places to institutions in Northern Ireland. Of these, 4,678 additional places were allocated to the two Northern Ireland universities, 2,834 to Queen's University and 1,844 to University of Ulster, and 440 full-time higher education places were allocated to the further education sector.

University of Ulster: Business Plan

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has received copies of the University of Ulster's business plans for the development of the new campus in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast and the new campus at Magee. (AQW 1280/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I can confirm that I have received a copy of the University of Ulster's business case for the development of the University's campus in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast. The business case is currently being considered by officials within my Department and, if approved, will be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel for its consideration.

I have not received a business case for any development of the University's campus at Magee.

Teacher Enrolments

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what role his Department has in determining the number of teacher enrolments each year; and what discussions he has held with the Minister of Education on this subject. (AQW 1285/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of Initial Teacher Education enrolments at the universities and university colleges in Northern Ireland, in each academic year, is set by the Department of Education. When the annual allocations are notified to the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department then calculates the amount of recurrent grant funding the new intakes and existing students will generate for each institution.

I have discussed with Minister Ruane, the rationale for the allocation of places between providers. I have also discussed the possible financial implications for my Department if the Department of Education proposed allocating intake figures beyond the current Comprehensive Spending Review period.

Queen's University

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with Queen's University concerning the proposed abolition of its German Studies Department. (AQW 1286/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I discussed this issue when I met with the Vice-Chancellor, Peter Gregson, in August and passed on the concerns raised by a number of parties at the possible implications of this decision.

Since that discussion, the Vice-Chancellor has written to me outlining the reasons why the University came to this decision. These reasons include the current and projected low demand from students from Northern Ireland wishing to study for a degree in German. This, coupled with the ongoing decline in the number of pupils studying German at 'A' Level, means that, in the view of the University, the continuation of a degree course would be unsustainable.

The University has also cited the German Department's recent poor performance in the Research Assessment Exercise as a further reason for this decision.

German Studies Department at Queen's University

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the potential impact of the proposed closure of the German Studies Department at Queen's University on jobs and investment from companies based in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. (AQW 1287/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As you may be aware, Invest NI has responsibility for encouraging and cultivating inward investment in Northern Ireland from overseas investors, such as those located within Germany, Austria and Switzerland. I am advised by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that, during the course of Invest NI's inward investment and trade activities with these nations, Invest NI is not aware of any impact caused by the availability of German language skills within the local workforce. In those instances where any of Invest NI's German clients have chosen to invest in Northern Ireland, a local knowledge of the German language has not been a factor in the location decision.

However, I am advised by Queen's University that it will continue to offer German as an extra-curricular activity and as part of other degree programmes, such as International Business. These requirements are met through the University's Language Centre where German can be studied to post 'A' level standard.

Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, German will continue to be offered at degree level by the University of Ulster.

Expansion of the Magee Campus: University of Ulster

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has received an outline business plan or other proposals from the University of Ulster relating to the expansion of the Magee campus, and if so, to outline the proposals and his response. (AQW 1328/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I have not received an outline business plan from the University relating to the expansion of the Magee campus. However, in February this year, the Vice-Chancellor wrote to the Permanent Secretary and enclosed a copy of the Magee Campus Strategic Development Plan.

The Development Plan outlines the case for the increase in undergraduate student numbers at Magee by 1,000 over a five year period (2010 to 2015). The proposed areas for growth at Magee are in the areas of Business and Professional Services (90 places); Computing, Electronics and Software (90 places); Creative Technologies and Animation (140 places); the Institute of Health and Wellbeing (280 places); and, the Institute of Sustainable Technologies (400 places).

In terms of the University's physical estate, the Development Plan envisaged two new buildings being constructed on the Foyle and Londonderry College site should it become available. The new buildings would house the Institute of Health and Wellbeing and the Institute of Sustainable Technologies.

The Development Plan requested my Department's support for a bid, principally through the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The Permanent Secretary confirmed that the Department would work closely with the University at that time.

I have further indicated to the Vice-Chancellor that if resources were to be made available by the Executive in the future to support developments in the North West, I would consider submitting a bid for Higher Education development.

Intake of Students: University of Ulster and Queens University

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the intake of students, both full and part-time, in the University of Ulster and Queen's University in each of the academic years between 2004/05 and 2009/10. (AQW 1330/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of first year students enrolled on both full and part-time courses at the University of Ulster and Queen's University in each of the academic years between 2004/05 and 2007/8 is detailed in the table below:

	University of Ulster			Queen's University		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Full-time	Part-time	Total
2004/05	6,805	3,885	10,690	5,650	5,695	11,345
2005/06	7,045	3,840	10,885	5,645	5,495	11,140
2006/07	5,945	3,785	9,730	5,550	5,090	10,640
2007/08	6,280	3,930	10,210	5,645	4,380	10,025

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

Undergraduate Places

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many undergraduate places were available in the University of Ulster and Queen's University in the academic years between 2004/05 and 2009/10; and how many will be available in the year 2010/11. (AQW 1333/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The undergraduate Maximum Student Number (MaSN) allocation for each university in academic years 2004/05 to 2009/10 is shown below:

Academic Year	Queen's University	University of Ulster	Total
2004/05	10,676	12,608	23,284
2005/06	10,902	12,628	23,530
2006/07	11,052	12,702	23,754
2007/08	11,134	12,688	23,822
2008/09	11,236	12,668	23,904
2009/10	11,296	12,658	23,954

The base MaSN allocation at both universities has reduced in the last three years due to a decline in the Initial Teacher Education places assigned by the Department of Education. In the case of Queen's University, this

has been offset by increased medical and dental places funded by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and additional agricultural places funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Allocations for 2010/11 have still to be determined by officials in my Department and will take account of available financial resources and competing demands.

Nortel Workers Rights

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if she will consider raising, with the British and European Parliaments the apparent disregard by Nortel (UK) Limited for accepted workers rights and entitlements under EU law and directives; and what measures she intends to take to ensure that Nortel workers' rights and entitlements are protected and that EU directives are implemented. (AQW 1365/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In responding, I am making the assumption that you are referring to workers' rights to meaningful consultation in a redundancy situation. Under EU and domestic law, employers proposing to make collective redundancies must complete a consultation period with employee representatives before issuing redundancy notices. If Nortel employees consider that this requirement has been breached, then they may make a complaint to an Industrial Tribunal, which could result in protective awards to employees of up to 90 days. The Department, however, has no legal sanction against employers who do not comply with their statutory obligations to consult workers.

Following similar allegations of failure to consult properly with workers, the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment and I recently wrote to all insolvency practitioners in Northern Ireland to remind them of their obligations under the law on collective redundancies.

As employees already have redress under the law, I have no plans to raise this issue with the British or European Parliaments.

Under both GB and NI legislation, employees also have rights and protections, including the right to receive statutory redundancy pay as a minimum. The level of protection in domestic law already provides for at least the level of protection required under the relevant EU Directives.

Apprenticeship Training in West Tyrone

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students enrolled in apprenticeship training in West Tyrone; and how many of them gained employment, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1403/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has supported 1251 apprentices in the West Tyrone area between 1 September 2006 and 31 August 2009. The data in Annex A lists numbers of apprentices in each of the last three years whose given address is within the West Tyrone area. Although these apprentices reside within the West Tyrone area, they may or may not have enrolled with Training Providers in the West Tyrone area and may or may not be employed by companies in the West Tyrone area.

Annex A

NUMBER OF ENROLMENTS FOR APPRENTICESHIPS PROGRAMMES IN THE WEST TYRONE AREA 1 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 31 AUGUST 2009

1 September 2006 – 31 August 2007	225
1 September 2007 – 31 August 2008	327
1 September 2008 – 31 August 2009	699
Total	1251

Efficiency Savings: DEL

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year.

(AQW 1444/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A number of service improvements have been made as a result of the application of the monies generated from the efficiency savings made by the department. These have resulted in an enlargement in the skills base in NI and contributed to the strengthening of the local economy. The improvements include: increased investment via the Further Education colleges in the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT; an increase in the provision of PhD places by 100 per annum and an increase in research funding in the two universities. It has also enabled the Department to provide effective support to both people and businesses, in light of the significantly increased demand as a result of the economic downturn.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Projects in the North Antrim Constituency: DETI

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) what projects her Department has funded; and (ii) the amount of money provided by her Department, in the North Antrim constituency, since May 2007.

(AQW 455/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Please see table attached which provides details of projects funded and actual expenditure incurred by my Department in the North Antrim constituency area since May 2007.

NORTH ANTRIM CONSTITUENCY AREA

DETAILS OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY DETI AND ITS NDPBS SINCE MAY 2007 WITH ACTUAL EXPENDITURE

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
Energy Projects		
1 DETI Energy Branch funds a range of projects and programmes which benefit all of Northern Ireland. It is not possible to meaningfully allocate expenditure to the North Antrim Constituency area for these projects. An approximate estimate of total expenditure would be £9 million.		
1 May 2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Reconnect Household Scheme providing grants to householders towards the cost of renewable energy installations.	£502,000
	Renewable Energy Networks for Environmental Welfare (RENEW) Initiative – willow biomass project in Ballymoney area	£10,000
	Construction of hydro electric installation Ballycastle area	£49,000
EU PROGRAMMES PROJECTS		
1 May 2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Peace II Programme - Ballee & Harryville Community Enterprises – The Department provided Peace II funding towards a capital build workspace development project with the aim of improving economic infrastructure in the area and creating jobs.	£400,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymena Borough Council – Enterprise Development Programme – Focused on the areas central to the maintenance and development of Ballymena BC	£29,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymena Borough Council – Building the Future Programme – built on Ballymena's existing strong physical and digital infrastructure.	£140,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymena Borough Council – Expanding Horizons Programme – focused on development activities for established business in the Borough.	£15,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymena Borough Council – Programme Management	£7,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymoney Borough Council – Strengthening the Enterprise Base – promoted a suite of projects to improve the competitiveness of existing enterprises and accelerate the formation of sustainable new business and jobs.	£17,000

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymoney Borough Council – Creating the Supporting Infrastructure – a small number of strategically important projects to create entirely new tourist products and attractions to strengthen the town.	£11,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymoney Borough Council – Programme Management	£13,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Ballymoney Borough Council – Strengthening Town Competitiveness programme – To strengthen the town as a shopping and hospitality base both for those living locally and for the tourist population	£22,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Moyle District Council – Business Growth & Development programme – is aimed at stimulating enterprise and entrepreneurship within the District	£35,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Moyle District Council – ICT Development – aimed at stimulating enterprise and entrepreneurship with the ICT sector in the District	£1,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Moyle District Council – Trade Development – to promote trade, international relations and co-operation across the service sector within the District's towns and villages.	£27,000
1 May 2007 – 31 Mar 2008	BSP Programme - Moyle District Council - Programme Management.	£14,000
HSENI FUNDED PROJECTS		
2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Health and Safety Works NI, the small business advisory unit of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, held the 3rd Engineering health and safety awareness workshop in Northern Regional College, Ballymena on 10th September 2008. 350 engineering businesses were invited to the workshop.	£5,000.00
	Asbestos Awareness Seminar aimed at the construction sector workforce, tradesmen, engineers and IT cablers. Held at Northern Regional College, Ballymena on 11 December 2007.	£300.00
NITB FUNDED PROJECTS		
2 For these projects listed that were paid financial assistance against eligible project costs, the economic and tourism benefits that they bring have a much wider effect. In addition financial assistance has been paid by the NITB to other projects that were implemented over several constituency areas including North Antrim, however these amounts cannot be attributed to any single constituency.		
1 May 2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Ballymoney TIC – fit-out of new TIC (grant to Ballymoney Borough Council)	£31,000 ²
	Cottage Wood – Cushendall – development and up-grade of access, facilities, parking and paths and trails (grant to Moyle District Council)	£50,000 ²
	Aquaholics – Ballycastle – provision of new dive boat for private sector dive company (grant to Aquaholics Ltd)	£33,000 ²
	Rathlin Westlight bird watching facilities – provision of facilities and improved access to observation point at Rathlin Island West Lighthouse (Grant to RSPB)	£114,000 ²
	Riverside Park Footbridge – Bushmills – provision of new footbridge over river Bush in Bushmills (grant to Moyle District Council)	£14,000 ²
	Design and Implementation of the Causeway Coastal Route strategic driving route covering 9 local authority areas stretching from Newtownabbey to Limavady (500 brown and white orientation signs) [grant to Causeway Coast & Glens Regional Tourism Partnership]	£630,000 ²
	Ballymena Borough Council – technical support towards a feasibility study as to the potential of water-based tourism by extending the marina at Portglenone.	£3,000 ²
	Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities Ltd – architect, design and professional fees associated with the proposed new Visitor Centre at the Causeway.	£304,000 ²

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
STRATEGIC POLICY PROJECTS		
<p>³ The Remote Broadband Services Contract covers Northern Ireland in its entirety but through analysis of addresses for customers connected to a satellite service under the contract to date, it has been established that 24 priority customer fees and 1 cell fee have been attracted by the supplier under the contract to date for customers located in the North Antrim constituency.</p> <p>⁴ The Local Broadband Access Contract, when in operation, covered Northern Ireland in its entirety. The contract was valued at £9.23m (over the five years) with the benefits derived from its delivery being enjoyed across all areas of the region. Due to the nature of its delivery, it is not possible to identify the level of spend that would be specific to the North Antrim constituency.</p> <p>⁵ The 3.9m Logon-ni project covers Northern Ireland in its entirety. As part of the project, a mobile advice unit is visiting all areas of the region providing free advice on the benefits of broadband services to business development. The mobile unit has already visited the Moyle District Council area of North Antrim (August 2009) and will be visiting other areas within the constituency as part of the future work programme. In addition the team of Logon-ni broadband advisers have been working with 30 companies in the North Antrim Constituency on the development of broadband action plans.</p>		
1 May 2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Provision of satellite broadband services under the 'Remote Broadband Services Contract'. Contract was awarded in January 2009 for a period of 3 years.	£11,000 ³
	Provision of Wi-Fi hotspots in Ballycastle town centre.	£12,000
	2ND Generation/3rd Generation Mobile broadband trial using satellite infrastructure in Ballintoy	£25,000
	Provision of DSL and satellite broadband services under the 'Local Broadband Access Contract'. Awarded in March 2004, the contract completed on 31 March 2009.	Not available ⁴
	Logon-ni – a programme providing expert, "supplier neutral" ICT advice to SMEs, focusing on the needs of the individual businesses and how the application and integration of broadband services into key business processes can assist with their development.	Not available ⁵
INVEST NI FUNDED PROJECTS		
<p>In addition to the projects listed below there is a range of entrepreneurship programmes funded by Invest NI that are delivered throughout Northern Ireland, and are not targeted at any particular Parliamentary Constituency or Council areas. Examples of these programmes include the Start a Business Programme, Advantage, and Princes Trust. The expenditure on these initiatives has not been included in the table as they are not specific to any parliamentary constituency or council area. However for further information, Invest NI paid £218,000 to the Enterprise Agencies of Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle that are located in the North Antrim constituency for the period from May 2007 to March 2009 to deliver the Start a Business Programme.</p>		
1 May 2007 – 15 Sept 2009	Ashgrove Contract Furniture Ltd - Gap (Growth Accelerator Programme)	18,000
	B.E.A.T. (NI) Limited - Social Enterprise Programme	5,000
	Ballymena Bus Development CTR Ltd TSO - Innovation Vouchers	4,000
	Billy Warke - Credit Crunch Diagnostic (BIS Consultancy)	2,000
	Bradys Hunter Limited – EMIS	1,000
	Bushmills Hotels Ltd - SFA 250k or more	337,000
	Catering Equipment Engineers Ltd - Business Improvement Training Programme	7,000
	Christies Direct Ltd - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	5,000
	Ciga Healthcare Limited - Innovation Vouchers	4,000
	CIGA Healthcare Limited - Management Information Systems	3,000
	Compass Advocacy Network Limited TSO - Social Enterprise Programme	10,000
	Cullybackey Improvement Association - Social Enterprise Programme	5,000
	Doherty & Gray Ltd - SFA less than 250k	21,000
	Dontaur Engineering Ltd - External Business Health Check	1,000
	Ecomesh Limited - Export Start	16,000
	Eddie Ferguson - Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP)	4,000
	Fearghas Quinn - Product Process Development	17,000

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
	Francis Dinsmore Ltd - Accelerated Support Fund (ASF)	26,000
	Francis Dinsmore Ltd - Balanced Scorecard	5,000
	Francis Dinsmore Ltd - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	5,000
	Francis Dinsmore Ltd - GAP (GROWTH ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME)	7,000
	Francis Dinsmore Ltd - Lean Manufacturing	4,000
	Frank & Gloria Alexander - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	6,000
	Frank & Gloria Alexander - Management Information Systems	1,000
	Frank & Gloria Alexander - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	2,000
	Frank Mc Caughan James Mc Caughan & Francis Farrell - Interim Manager	19,000
	Galgorm Manor Hotel Limited - External Business Health Check	5,000
	Garage Door Systems Ltd - Business Improvement Training Programme	39,000
	Garage Door Systems Ltd - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	5,000
	Gary Hood - SFA less than 250k	8,000
	Gary Mc Connell - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	2,000
	George Fleck SNR, George Fleck JNR, Agnes Fleck, Brenda Fleck - Interim Manager	6,000
	Glenovation Limited - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	3,000
	Glens Of Antrim Potatoes Ltd - Business Improvement Training Programme	22,000
	Glens Of Antrim Potatoes Ltd - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	22,000
	Glover Site Investigations Ltd - Management Information Systems	15,000
	Guy Thompson & Brad Huston - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	1,000
	Guy Thompson & Brad Huston - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	H K Dickey - Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP)	11,000
	Hayburn Wood Products Ltd - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	29,000
	J M F LTD - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	5,000
	James Harkness - External Business Health Check	5,000
	John Borland - Growth Incentive	1,000
	John Morton - NorthStar Mentor scheme	1,000
	John Sharkey - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Joseph Hughes & Susan Hughes - Business Improvement Training Programme	51,000
	Joseph Hughes & Susan Hughes - Growth Incentive	3,000
	Joseph Hughes Painting Contractors Limited - SFA less than 250k	3,000
	Lawsript (NI) Limited - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Liam Mc Garry, Patrick Mc Garry & Patricia Mc Garry - Northstar Mentor Scheme	2,000
	Madden Brothers Limited - Management Information Systems	2,000
	Maine Surface Finishing Limited - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	1,000
	Maine Surface Finishing Limited - Management Information Systems	3,000
	Maine Tankers Limited - Management Information Systems	3,000
	Mark Rea - Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP)	2,000
	Mcauley Kitchens Limited - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	3,000

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
	Michael Cunningham - GAP START	19,000
	Michelin Tyre PLC - Business Improvement Training Programme	442,000
	Michelin Tyre PLC - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	1,000
	Michelin Tyre PLC - Inward Existing	164,000
	Moore Concrete Products Limited - Business Improvement Training Programme	29,000
	Moore Concrete Products Limited – COMPETE	11,000
	Moore Concrete Products Limited - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	5,000
	Moore Concrete Products Limited - Management Information Systems	4,000
	Moore Concrete Products Limited - Process Solutions	1,000
	Moyle Enterprise Company Ltd - Social Enterprise Programme	5,000
	New World Developments Ltd - SME Energy Grant	3,000
	O’Kane Poultry Ltd – COMPETE	13,000
	ONUS (NI) Ltd - Social Enterprise Programme	5,000
	Pat O Boyle - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Peter McFetridge - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Peter O Kane - SFA less than 250k	25,000
	Red Bay Boats Ltd - Business Improvement Training Programme	5,000
	Resource (NI) Ltd - External Business Health Check	7,000
	Robert John & William Adrian Cherry - Pre-Start	7,000
	Roy Moore - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	S J Mcauley Engineering Ltd - Management Information Systems	1,000
	Salmar Construction Ltd - Growth incentive	5,000
	Salmar Construction Ltd - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Sean Blaney - Credit Crunch Diagnostic	5,000
	Sean Blaney - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Smiths Engineering Works (NI) Ltd - Management Information Systems	2,000
	Stephen McCully & Arnold Robinson - GAP (Growth Accelerator Programme)	1,000
	Stephens Catering Equipment Co Ltd - External Business Health Check	5,000
	Steven Houston T/A Red Heifer Cheese - Pre-Start	1,000
	System Controls Limited - Growth (Minor) Contracts	15,000
	System Controls Limited - Northstar Mentor Scheme	2,000
	Take The Biscuit Limited - Credit Crunch Diagnostic (BIS Consultancy)	5,000
	Travan Precision Engineering Ltd - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	6,000
	Warwick Engineering (NI) Ltd - Interim Managers	12,000
	William Mccaughern - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	1,000
	Woodland Furniture Ltd - Management Information Systems	54,000
	Woodland Furniture Ltd - NorthStar Mentor Scheme	4,000
	Wright Composites Ltd - SFA 250k or more	150,000
	Wrightbus Limited - Management Information Systems	5,000

Period Covered	(I) List of Projects	(II) The Amount of Money Provided
	Funding from Invest NI for export development projects to help companies become more competitive in export markets.	255,000
	Funding from Invest NI for participation in international trade missions and events.	15,000
	Woodside Road West, Ballymena – Feasibility Study Fees / Design Fees / Planning Application Fees in respect of Improvements to Flood Defences	114,000
	Garryduff Road, Ballymoney – the excavation and construction of a road formation along with associated land drainage	7,000
Total amount of money provided by DETI and its NDPBs since May 2007 to the North Antrim Constituency area		£4,735,300

InterTradeIreland

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of projects funded by InterTradeIreland; and (ii) the amount of funding provided for each project, in each of the last three years. (AQW 912/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The following projects and funding were provided through InterTradeIreland. A breakdown of these projects and funding can be found at Annex A (2005), Annex B (2006) Annex C (2007).

InterTradeIreland is funded on a basis of two thirds from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (ROI) and one third from DETI.

	Number of Projects	Funding
2005	45	£5,500,926 million
2006	45	£7,008,933 million
2007	55	£7,501,734 million
Total	145	£20,011,593 million

PROGRAMME COSTS - ITI (2005)

Sector Specific Networks -SSN	
BioMedIreland	121,705.46
Homethrown	11,513.69
ICT	96.55
Bord Bia/NIFDA Network	61,231.48
Polymers & Plastics	
	194,547.18
Areas of Excellence Networks - AEN	
EquityNetwork Advisory Service	182,070.75
EquityNetwork Business Angels Network	70,595.47
EquityNetwork Education & Awareness	95,319.76
EquityNetwork Private Equity Conference	97,622.49
EquityNetwork Seedcorn Competition	290,903.96
Supply Chain Ireland	72,455.71
Pilot Supply Chain Champion Programme	61,383.83

All Island Benchmarking Forum	12,625.14
All Island Public Procurement (SEP)	74,130.01
	957,107.12
Community of Interest Networks - CIN	
MicroTrade	252,852.95
PLATO	96,701.35
US/Ireland Research Partnership	
Universities Ireland	56,768.22
	406,322.52
Network Enabling Tools - Trade	
Acumen	379,300.02
Focus Pilot & Rollout	365,821.91
Network & Getwork	153,745.35
Awards & Events	9,908.95
EX (Awards & Events)	5,524.03
Knowledge Centre	28,177.25
	942,477.51
Network Enabling Tools - Business Development	
Fusion Pilot	523,046.71
Fusion Roll-out	1,297,476.74
Innova	163,416.34
Auril CPD	46,801.62
ExpertiseIreland	287,014.65
	2,317,756.06
Business & Economic Research - B&ER	
Business Competitive Model	35,209.05
Competitiveness & Trade Research	226,858.25
Competitiveness Forum	-3,536.75
Network Support & Facilitation	97,635.88
ITI Awareness & Promotional Activities	15,849.68
	372,016.11
Financial Assistance Scheme / ITI Sponsorship Projects	
North-South Roundtable Group	31,031.42
Done Deal' Sunday Business Post	12,004.71
Ernst & Young - Entrepreneur of the Year	40,307.68
All Island Marketing Event - AIM	33,624.97
World Nano-Economic Conference	8,920.14
USCC - ITI Secondment	45,934.67
Construction Development Project	7,117.27

CB Business Competitiveness Event	675.59
PA - ITI Performance Review	30,310.66
Lionra - All Island Trading Network	33,589.74
Deloitte, Fast 50 Awards	25,000.00
Development Funding - ICLRD	41,246.66
Bus Brokerage Economic Appraisal	935.64
	310,699.15
Total Programme Expenditure 2005	5,500,926

PROGRAMME COSTS - ITI (2006)

Sector Specific Networks -SSN	
BioMedIreland	154,494.20
Lionra - All Island Trading Network	9,936.07
All Island Software Network	53,305.38
Bord Bia/NIFDA Network	98.77
Polymers & Plastics	12,382.39
Homethrown	-2,696.44
NW Science & Technology Network	25,685.49
Network Support & Facilitation	41,443.12
	294,648.98
Areas of Excellence Networks - AEN	
EquityNetwork Advisory Service	77,418.74
EquityNetwork Business Angels Network	99,444.97
EquityNetwork Education & Awareness	50,285.23
EquityNetwork Private Equity Conference	134,812.52
EquityNetwork Seedcorn Competition	316,415.02
Logistics XP / Supply Chain Ireland	21,504.10
Pilot Supply Chain Champion Programme	
All Island Best Practice Network	17,675.40
All Island Public Procurement (Conference)	12,966.45
	730,522.43
Community of Interest Networks - CIN	
MicroTrade	307,085.96
PLATO	41,268.45
US/Ireland Research Partnership	51,030.66
Universities Ireland	12,551.24
ICLRD	49,942.04
North-South Roundtable Group	35,529.40
US Relationships	220.22
	497,627.97

Network Enabling Tools - Trade	
Acumen	439,464.11
Focus Rollout	346,773.27
Network & Getwork	228,132.17
Awards & Events	14,869.49
ITI Awareness & Promotional Activities	3,803.94
Go Tender	90,437.86
	1,123,480.84
Network Enabling Tools - Business Development	
Fusion Pilot	201,409.54
Fusion Roll-out	2,815,906.63
Innova	803,262.30
Auril CPD	
ExpertiseIreland	199,376.72
	4,019,955.19
Business & Economic Research - B&ER	
Business Competitive Model	37,939.49
Competitiveness & Trade Research	125,440.13
Knowledge Centre	14,842.33
	178,221.95
Financial Assistance Scheme Projects	
Mobile software Business Network	34,242.99
IBEC-CBI JBC Freight Transport report	
Dare to be Digital (Digital Hub Agency)	
	34,242.99
ITI Sponsorship Projects (Programme Budget)	
Ernst & Young - Entrepreneur of the Year	51,529.79
Leadership Summit	18,932.05
All Island Infrastructure Investment Conference	7,329.96
All Island Corporate Responsibility Conference	11,750.00
NI Economic Conference	3,180.41
BioIreland Conference	16,582.95
All Island Business Supplement	
Entrepreneurship Conference (Derry Chamber)	10,000.00
ITI (Non-Project Allocated) Appraisals & Evaluations	
Business Brokerage Service Economic Appraisal	10,927.46
	130,232.62
Total Programme Expenditure 2006	7,008,933

PROGRAMME COSTS - ITI (2007)

Business Networks	
BioMedIreland	111,240.82
All Island Software Network	107,821.85
Polymer & Plastics Network	30,235.39
North-West Science & Technology Network	73,648.44
All Island Learning Networks (Skillnets)	45,266.31
Mobile Software Business Network	207,878.40
Network Support & Facilitation	58,697.63
Build Up Construction Network	46,876.25
Digital Asset Management Network	2,450.00
Reminac Network (BioMedIreland)	34,634.60
Mobile Advertising Platform Initiative	51,007.72
All Island Digital Media Forum	
	769,757.41
Areas of Excellence Networks	
EquityNetwork Advisory Service	96,913.73
EquityNetwork Business Angels Network	150,758.97
EquityNetwork Education & Awareness	27,880.91
EquityNetwork Research & Publications	39,483.97
EquityNetwork Private Equity Conference	110,462.99
EquityNetwork Seedcorn Competition	460,632.47
Logistics XP	5,580.53
All Island Best Practice Network	28,569.01
All Island Public Procurement Conference	2,201.10
Entrepreneurship Master Class Programme	6,731.90
	929,215.58
Community of Interest Networks	
MicroTrade	-24,731.10
PLATO	20,011.00
US/Ireland Research Partnership	32,933.77
Universities Ireland	14,380.00
North-South Roundtable Group	34,197.73
MicroTrade Phase 2	140,567.10
	217,358.50
Network Enabling Tools - Trade	
Acumen	536,389.07
Focus Rollout	263,483.56
Network & Getwork	61,609.27
Go Tender	6,787.43

All Island Supplier Model (Construction)	39,566.66
	907,835.99
Network Enabling Tools - Business Development	
Fusion Pilot	-20,052.01
Fusion Roll-out	3,013,780.66
Fusion Phase 3	187,089.43
Innova	908,341.65
Auril CPD	500
Pilot EU Framework Programme (FP7) Support Programme	2,975.12
ExpertiseIreland	144,238.51
Science Technology & Innovation Research	69,089.42
3rd International Conference on Services Innovation	22,051.00
All Island Design Strategy	9,643.73
	4,337,657.51
Business & Economic Research	
Competitiveness & Trade Research	163,792.43
Baseline Survey	335
Knowledge Centre	15,594.56
	179,721.99
Third Party Projects	
ITI Financial Assistance Scheme Projects.	
Dare to be Digital (Digital Hub Agency)	5,143.63
WITS - Wiser Workforces	13,473.00
BT InterTradeIreland Business Monitor	11,848.80
	30,465.43
ITI Sponsorship Projects (Programme Budget).	
Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2007	56,319.31
BioEngineering in Ireland Conference 2007	2,000.00
ISBE Conference 2008	15,000.00
QUB Event: Royal and Irish Academies of Engineering	1,000.00
Irish Times Innovation Magazine	31,049.37
Sunday Tribune P&P Supplement	12,125.70
All Island Software Industry Awards	12,226.75
	129,721.13
Total Programme Expenditure 2007	7,501,734

InterTradeIreland

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the running costs of InterTradeIreland for each of the last three years. (AQW 1025/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The table below details the running costs of InterTradeIreland for each of the last three years.

InterTradeIreland	2005 Stg£m	2006 Stg£m	2007 Stg£m
InterTradeIreland Budgets as per Business Plans (as provided by OFMdFM)	9.27	10.219	10.27
Agreed Budgets per Business Plans provided by InterTradeIreland	9.27	10.218	11.63* 10.41
Operating Costs	1,060,318	1,149,717	1,084,167
Staff Costs and Board Remuneration	1,321,160	1,401,286	1,579,274
Total Northern Ireland Contribution	3.09	3.41	3.47

* In respect of the 2007 Business Plan, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was unable to commit to more than £3.47m and although the Business Plan was approved it was on the understanding that expenditure would be limited to £10.41m;

This information is held in calendar years;

Operating Costs includes rent and rates, promotional activities and computer costs.

InterTradeIreland

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created by InterTradeIreland in each of the last three years. (AQW 1061/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: InterTradeIreland have created the following number of jobs:

2006	90
2007	140
2008	127

This information is held in calendar years.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the estimated amount of foreign direct investment in (i) Lagan Valley; (ii) Lisburn City Council; and (iii) Banbridge District Council areas, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1071/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Tables (i), (ii) and (iii) provide information on the amount of foreign direct investment offered support by Invest NI within the Lagan Valley Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA), Lisburn City and Banbridge District Council Areas (DCA) respectively during the five-year period 2004/05 to 2008/09. This represents the estimated total cost of these projects to Invest NI's externally-owned clients. The number of projects and the associated assistance offered by Invest NI is also included. Projects have been split into those where the main focus is on employment creation and those that are innovation based, including activities such as training, research and development, trade development and technology and process development.

(I) - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN LAGAN VALLEY PCA (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m
Employment Related	2004/05	1	0.14	1.05
	2005/06	1	6.95	66.29
	2006/07			
	2007/08			
	2008/09	2	0.55	2.17
	Total	4	7.64	69.51

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m
Innovation	2004/05	11	0.10	0.24
	2005/06	3	0.02	0.10
	2006/07	2	0.89	3.21
	2007/08	5	0.26	0.93
	2008/09	6	0.56	1.42
	Total	27	1.83	5.90
Total	2004/05	12	0.25	1.30
	2005/06	4	6.97	66.39
	2006/07	2	0.89	3.21
	2007/08	5	0.26	0.93
	2008/09	8	1.11	3.59
	Total	31	9.47	75.41

(II) - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN LISBURN DCA (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m
Employment Related	2004/05	1	0.14	1.05
	2005/06	1	6.95	66.29
	2006/07			
	2007/08	1	0.40	2.51
	2008/09	2	0.55	2.17
	Total	5	8.04	72.03
Innovation	2004/05	11	0.10	0.24
	2005/06	3	0.02	0.10
	2006/07	6	1.15	3.99
	2007/08	6	0.51	1.69
	2008/09	6	0.56	1.42
	Total	32	2.34	7.44
Total	2004/05	12	0.25	1.30
	2005/06	4	6.97	66.39
	2006/07	6	1.15	3.99
	2007/08	7	0.91	4.21
	2008/09	8	1.11	3.59
	Total	37	10.38	79.47

(III) - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN BANBRIDGE DCA (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m
Employment Related	2004/05	1	0.49	2.89
	2005/06			
	2006/07			
	2007/08			
	2008/09			
	Total	1	0.49	2.89
Innovation	2004/05			
	2005/06			
	2006/07	1	0.00	0.00
	2007/08	6	0.16	0.43
	2008/09	3	0.29	0.78
	Total	10	0.45	1.21
Total	2004/05	1	0.49	2.89
	2005/06	0	0.00	0.00
	2006/07	1	0.00	0.00
	2007/08	6	0.16	0.43
	2008/09	3	0.29	0.78
	Total	11	0.94	4.10

Notes:

1. Table totals may not add due to rounding
2. Planned investment includes assistance offered.
3. Total offer locations in geographic tables exceed total number of offers, as some projects are located in more than one area.
4. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.

Job Creation

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs were created in (i) Lagan Valley; (ii) Lisburn City Council; and (iii) Banbridge District Council areas, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1072/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is not possible to provide information on the total number of jobs created in each of the areas requested. DETI collects information on the number of jobs at a particular point in time and therefore can only provide the net change between two points in time.

Table 1 provides information on the net change in all employee jobs in each of the areas requested as measured by the biennial Census of Employment (conducted in 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007). The net change takes into account both job gains and losses during the period.

TABLE 1 – NET CHANGE IN ALL EMPLOYEE JOBS BY AREA

Area	Net Change		
	2001-2003	2003-2005	2005-2007
Lagan Valley PCA	809	2,536	1,967
Lisburn DCA	899	2,413	1,636

Area	Net Change		
	2001-2003	2003-2005	2005-2007
Banbridge DCA	342	937	834

Table 2 presents information for those businesses assisted by Invest NI during the five financial years ended March 2009. This is based on the number of jobs promoted or safeguarded relating to projects assisted during this timeframe. Invest NI clients would be expected to create these jobs during the lifetime of assisted projects.

TABLE 2 – INVEST NI JOBS PROMOTED AND SAFEGUARDED IN LAGAN VALLEY (PCA) AND LISBURN AND BANBRIDGE DCAS (2004/05 TO 2008/09)

Local/ External	YEAR	Lagan Valley PCA		Lisburn DCA		Banbridge DCA	
		New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs	New jobs	Safe Jobs
External	2004/05	16	17	16	17	13	66
	2005/06	71	278	71	278		
	2006/07						
	2007/08			12	26		
	2008/09	29		29		0	0
External Total		116	295	128	321	13	66
Local	2006/07	158	62	210	62	21	0
	2007/08	111	8	111	18	19	7
	2008/09	86	36	89	36	11	0
Local Total		355	106	410	116	51	7
Grand Total		471	401	538	437	64	73

Notes:

1. Local refers to those companies in indigenous ownership. External refers to those companies in foreign ownership.
2. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created during the lifetime of projects offered assistance during the period under review.
3. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported during the period under review.
4. Local job figures are only available for the 3 year period 2006/07 - 2008/09

In addition, the Northern Ireland Start a Business Programme (SABp), which is provided by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland, expected to create the following jobs through locally-owned business start up projects over the same period – see Table 3.

TABLE 3 – SABP JOBS PROMOTED (2004/05 TO 2008/09)

Year	Lagan Valley	Lisburn	Banbridge
2004/05	180	167	105
2005/06	172	164	113
2006/07	159	148	102
2007/08	144	152	104
2008/09	104	109	67
Total	758	740	491

Craigavon Industrial Hub

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to refocus her Department's and Invest NI's strategies on the Craigavon industrial hub, now that it has emerged that Craigavon has 225 manufacturing businesses compared to Belfast's 340. (AQW 1136/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department and Invest NI's strategies do not include investment targets for specific sub-regional areas such as Craigavon.

Invest NI provides assistance in support of both new clients seeking to establish a business in Northern Ireland and existing clients intending to expand their operations. In doing so, Invest NI has limited scope for 'directing' investment to specific geographic areas and although it is able to influence some location decisions, assistance patterns are largely demand-led by businesses wishing to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets. Additionally, the benefits associated with business development are not constrained by local boundaries such as District Council Areas and Parliamentary Constituency Areas, which are not self-contained labour markets.

Invest NI has 161 client operations within the Craigavon District Council Area and the total amount of assistance offered to businesses in the area during the past seven years was almost £68 million, in support of projects which planned to invest £289 million. This represents £982 per head of adult population, which is some 59% higher than the NI average, and represents the 3rd highest rate of the 26 District Council Areas.

Larger investments in the area include those by the Almac Group, Nacco Materials Handling Ltd, Moy Park and Glanbia Cheese Ltd.

Please be assured that my Department and Invest NI will continue to work with other Departments, local partners and stakeholders, such as the District Councils to deliver business development support across all areas of Northern Ireland.

Tourism

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the structures within her Department which support tourism in Northern Ireland. (AQW 1137/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department works with three main bodies providing support to the tourism industry:

Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB)

NITB advises DETI on tourism policy matters and is primarily responsible for the development of the tourism sector in Northern Ireland through the Tourism Development Scheme. NITB also works with District Councils and a number of local delivery bodies to develop the tourism product throughout Northern Ireland.

Invest Northern Ireland

Invest Northern Ireland is responsible for tourism accommodation grants and business support to the tourism sector for client companies.

Tourism Ireland Ltd

Tourism Ireland Ltd, a North – South Body established under the framework of the Belfast Agreement and jointly funded by DETI and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in the Republic of Ireland, is responsible for the overseas promotion of Northern Ireland as a tourism destination. The company also collaborates with NITB and local Councils in the development of marketing strategies and specific overseas campaigns.

Locally Managed Enterprises

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her plans to develop locally managed enterprises based on patents held in the University of Ulster and Queen's University. (AQW 1141/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI provides funding to both Universities to support the staffing and activities of their knowledge exploitation offices through the Higher Education and Innovation Fund. These offices aim to maximise economic return from commercialising R&D.

Invest NI's Proof of Concept Programme provides pre-commercialisation funding to academics to move research from the lab towards the marketplace. The demand in the universities for this programme remains at a very high level and the current budget of £6.1m is almost fully committed. Applications to the programme must provide evidence of originality and true commercial potential for which a specific market opportunity has been

identified and validated. The 2008 funding round attracted 48 applications from QUB and UU of which 34 are being supported. The 2009 round received 45 applications of which 23 have been approved.

New spinout companies, resulting either from successful PoC projects or based on patents already held by the Universities, can access financial support through Invest NI's Grant for R&D.

DETI has supported the creation of NI's first dedicated Science Park at Queen's Island in Belfast. The science park is actively supporting a number of high-technology start-up and university spinout companies. Notably it is home to the CONNECT technology brokering and networking service and the Halo business angel network.

Building on the recommendation in its first report, MATRIX - The Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel - has begun work on a study into more efficient exploitation of intellectual assets in Northern Ireland, across both the business and academic communities.

Renewable Energy

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the targets for renewable energy that Northern Ireland is currently working towards; and the level of progress against those targets. (AQW 1144/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Our current renewable energy target relates solely to electricity generation: it is that, by 2012, 12% of electricity consumption in Northern Ireland should come from indigenous renewable energy sources and that 15% of the renewable element should be from non-wind sources.

Currently, generation from indigenous renewable sources accounts for 8.5% of electricity consumption with around 97% of that generation being from wind. DETI is confident that the 12% overall target will be achieved by 2012 with the 15% sub-target depending on the realisation of a number of projects that are currently at various stages of development.

DETI's draft Strategic Energy Framework which closed for consultation on 30 September proposed new renewable targets for achievement by 2020: 40% for electricity and 10% for heat.

External Consultants: DETI Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment pursuant to AQW 7839/09 and AQW 152/10, (i) to provide a breakdown of all expenditure on external consultants; and (ii) to explain the discrepancy in the figures given in these answers for 2008/09. (AQW 1172/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) A breakdown of all expenditure on external consultants for each year during the period 2004-05 to 2008-09 is attached.
- (ii) The Department's answer to AQW 7839/09 stated that the figures provided for 2008/09 financial year were based on accounting information that had not been subject to audit.

The figures provided in the Department's answer to AQW 152/10 reflect the fully audited position for 2008/09.

BREAKDOWN OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE IN 2004-2005

Management	
1. Policy appraisal and review	£686,943
2. Strategic management	£167,160
3. Organisational development	£518,945
4. Performance measurement	£88,220
5. Management Accountancy	£99,474
Financial	£0
6. Audit	£37,900
7. Economic appraisal	£235,301

8. Internal audit	£66,046
9. Feasibility study	£0
Assurance	£0
10. Quality accreditation	£2,759
11. Investment appraisal	£40,340
12. Corporate governance	£32,330
Research	£0
13. Projects	£487,045
14. Surveys	£267,309
Marketing	£0
15. Marketing	£324,482
16. Market research	£151,978
Totals	£3,206,232

BREAKDOWN OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE IN 2005-2006

Management	
1. Policy appraisal and review	£784,728
2. Strategic management	£321,711
3. Organisational development	£157,615
4. Performance measurement	£167,827
5. Management Accountancy	£1,022
Financial	£0
6. Audit	£3,960
7. Economic appraisal	£158,804
8. Internal audit	£249,569
9. Feasibility study	£17,675
Assurance	£0
10. Quality accreditation	£79,401
11. Investment appraisal	£764
12. Corporate governance	£46,659
Research	£0
13. Projects	£492,228
14. Surveys	£226,869
Marketing	£0
15. Marketing	£291,484
16. Market research	£13,877
Totals	£3,014,193

BREAKDOWN OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE IN 2006-2007

Management	
1. Policy appraisal and review	£1,257,880
2. Strategic management	£317,365
3. Organisational development	£161,788
4. Performance measurement	£98,431
5. Management Accountancy	£0
Financial	£0
6. Audit	£104,150
7. Economic appraisal	£233,923
8. Internal audit	£29,640
9. Feasibility study	£98,514
Assurance	£0
10. Quality accreditation	£19,174
11. Investment appraisal	£950
12. Corporate governance	£41,113
Research	£0
13. Projects	£243,602
14. Surveys	£285,933
Marketing	£0
15. Marketing	£222,004
16. Market research	£117,701
Totals	£3,232,169

BREAKDOWN OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE IN 2007-2008

Management	
1. Policy Appraisal and review	£693,192
2. Strategic management	£589,197
3. Organisational development	£155,097
4. Performance measurement	£138,920
5. Corporate Governance	£24,806
Financial	£0
6. Audit	£32,621
7. Economic appraisal	£367,502
8. Internal audit	£11,732
9. Business Case	£0
10. Financial Appraisal	£196,470
11. Accountancy	£697
12. Forensic Accounting	£14,080
Information Services (IS) & eBusiness	£0

13. General IS & IT Advice	£71,003
14. Programme & Project Management Support	£566,110
15. Application Development	£4,144
16. Web Services	£0
17. IT Security Services	£0
18. E-Business Services	£1,875
19. Telecoms Services	£0
20. Network Infrastructure Services	£0
21. Microsoft Product-centric Services	£0
Totals	£2,867,446

BREAKDOWN OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY EXPENDITURE IN 2008-2009

Management	
1. Policy Appraisal and review	£913,211
2. Strategic management	£427,270
3. Organisational development	£78,622
4. Performance measurement	£180,085
5. Corporate Governance	£52,780
Financial	£0
6. Audit	£90,439
7. Economic appraisal	£295,257
8. Internal audit	£16,335
9. Business Case	£0
10. Financial Appraisal	£581,875
11. Accountancy	£23,399
12. Forensic Accounting	£74,050
Information Services (IS) & eBusiness	£0
13. General IS & IT Advice	£7,700
14. Programme & Project Management Support	£309,934
15. Application Development	£184,422
16. Web Services	£0
17. IT Security Services	£5,520
18. E-Business Services	£10,350
19. Telecoms Services	£40,000
20. Network Infrastructure Services	£0
21. Microsoft Product-centric Services	£0
Totals	£3,291,247

NI Electricity

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how much NI Electricity are paying for the electricity generated at the Dargan Road Landfill site; (ii) who this money is paid to; and (iii) how much of this money is paid into the public purse. (AQW 1184/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The questions raised relate to a commercial arrangement between Belfast City Council and NIE Energy Limited and, as such, are a matter for the parties concerned. Nonetheless, in relation to the third question, the Council has already indicated publicly that it will benefit to the extent of an annual income of around £1.5 million from the site.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the estimated total amount of foreign direct investment in each of the Belfast parliamentary constituencies, and in the Belfast City Council area, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 1194/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Tables 1 to 5 provide information on the amount of foreign direct investment offered support by Invest NI within each of the Belfast Parliamentary Constituency Areas (PCA) and in the Belfast City Council area during the five-year period 2004/05 to 2008/09. The number of jobs promoted or safeguarded as a result is also included. The information in the tables represents the estimated total cost of these projects to Invest NI's externally-owned clients and the number of jobs that the projects expect to create or safeguard. The number of projects and the associated assistance offered by Invest NI is also included.

Projects have been split into those where the main focus is on employment creation and those that are innovation based, including activities such as training, research and development, trade development and technology and process development. Although not directly related to job creation, these capability development activities will underpin business competitiveness leading eventually to growth and employment opportunities, although they cannot be accurately forecasted at this stage.

TABLE 1 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN BELFAST EAST PCA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	4	8.29	10.61	410	79
	2005/06	4	1.69	11.59	232	-
	2006/07	6	11.10	41.28	624	60
	2007/08	8	12.22	86.72	226	1,069
	2008/09	5	22.83	529.85	943	-
	Total	27	56.11	680.05	2,435	1,208
Innovation	2004/05	40	5.83	18.25	-	-
	2005/06	15	0.28	0.90	-	-
	2006/07	24	3.22	19.67	-	-
	2007/08	26	6.00	23.17	-	-
	2008/09	9	0.63	2.41	-	-
	Total	114	15.95	64.41	0	0

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Total	2004/05	44	14.12	28.87	410	79
	2005/06	19	1.96	12.49	232	-
	2006/07	30	14.32	60.95	624	60
	2007/08	34	18.21	109.89	226	1,069
	2008/09	14	23.45	532.25	943	-
	Total	141	72.06	744.46	2,435	1,208

TABLE 2 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN BELFAST NORTH PCA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	2	0.17	0.45	27	-
	2005/06	1	2.60	25.08	46	-
	2006/07	1	0.16	2.52	44	-
	2007/08	-	-	-	-	-
	2008/09	3	1.65	53.04	108	2
	Total	7	4.57	81.09	225	2
Innovation	2004/05	9	1.24	6.06	-	-
	2005/06	4	0.31	1.50	-	-
	2006/07	2	0.06	0.18	-	-
	2007/08	2	0.01	0.01	-	-
	2008/09	8	1.83	9.33	-	-
	Total	25	3.45	17.09	0	0
Total	2004/05	11	1.41	6.51	27	-
	2005/06	5	2.91	26.58	46	-
	2006/07	3	0.22	2.70	44	-
	2007/08	2	0.01	0.01	-	-
	2008/09	11	3.48	62.37	108	2
	Total	32	8.02	98.18	225	2

TABLE 3 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN BELFAST SOUTH PCA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	13	9.19	34.80	1,379	-
	2005/06	4	8.17	56.01	795	47
	2006/07	9	9.46	54.10	987	123
	2007/08	6	3.22	24.27	283	7
	2008/09	10	8.72	74.40	1,279	-
	Total	42	38.74	243.58	4,723	177

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Innovation	2004/05	22	1.56	4.98	-	-
	2005/06	15	1.01	8.56	-	-
	2006/07	17	4.00	23.21	-	-
	2007/08	17	0.47	8.26	-	-
	2008/09	11	1.71	4.83	-	-
	Total	82	8.77	49.84	0	0
Total	2004/05	35	10.75	39.78	1,379	-
	2005/06	19	9.18	64.57	795	47
	2006/07	26	13.46	77.31	987	123
	2007/08	23	3.69	32.53	283	7
	2008/09	21	10.43	79.23	1,279	-
	Total	124	47.51	293.42	4,723	177

TABLE 4 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN BELFAST WEST PCA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	1	6.45	21.35	750	0
	2005/06	-	-	-	-	-
	2006/07	-	-	-	-	-
	2007/08	3	1.10	6.60	142	26
	2008/09	1	0.04	0.31	1	3
	Total	5	7.59	28.26	893	29
Innovation	2004/05	5	0.03	0.10	-	-
	2005/06	3	0.87	4.62	-	-
	2006/07	7	0.55	1.47	-	-
	2007/08	7	0.30	0.93	-	-
	2008/09	2	0.43	1.50	-	-
	Total	24	2.18	8.62	0	0
Total	2004/05	6	6.48	21.45	750	-
	2005/06	3	0.87	4.62	-	-
	2006/07	7	0.55	1.47	-	-
	2007/08	10	1.40	7.53	142	26
	2008/09	3	0.47	1.81	1	3
	Total	29	9.77	36.88	893	29

TABLE 5 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN THE BELFAST CITY COUNCIL AREA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	19	23.74	66.16	2,561	12
	2005/06	9	12.45	92.67	1,073	47
	2006/07	16	20.71	97.90	1,655	183
	2007/08	15	15.23	110.84	587	1,054
	2008/09	19	33.23	657.60	2,331	5
	Total	78	105.36	1,025.17	8,207	1,301
Innovation	2004/05	51	4.98	18.51	-	-
	2005/06	26	2.45	15.57	-	-
	2006/07	38	7.57	43.74	-	-
	2007/08	40	6.18	30.45	-	-
	2008/09	30	4.60	18.07	-	-
	Total	185	25.78	126.34	0	0
Total	2004/05	70	28.72	84.67	2,561	12
	2005/06	35	14.90	108.25	1,073	47
	2006/07	54	28.28	141.63	1,655	183
	2007/08	55	21.40	141.30	587	1,054
	2008/09	49	37.83	675.66	2,331	5
	Total	263	131.14	1,151.51	8,207	1,301

Notes:

5. Table totals may not add due to rounding.
6. Planned investment includes assistance offered.
7. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.
8. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
9. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the estimated total amount of foreign direct investment in the Foyle parliamentary constituency, and in the Derry City Council area, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 1195/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It should be noted that the boundaries for Foyle Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and Derry District Council Area (DCA) constitute the same geographical area. Therefore, Table 1 provides information on the amount of foreign direct investment offered support by Invest NI within both the Foyle PCA and the Derry DCA during the five-year period 2004/05 to 2008/09. The number of jobs promoted or safeguarded as a result is also included.

The information in both tables represents the estimated total cost of these projects to Invest NI's externally-owned clients and the number of jobs that the projects expect to create or safeguard. The number of projects and the associated assistance offered by Invest NI is also included.

Projects have been split into those where the main focus is on employment creation and those that are innovation based, including activities such as training, research and development, trade development and technology and process development. Although not directly related to job creation, these capability development

activities will underpin business competitiveness leading eventually to growth and employment opportunities, although they cannot be accurately forecasted at this stage.

TABLE 1 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN FOYLE PCA & DERRY DCA (INCLUDES JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED) - 2004/05 TO 2008/09

Type of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2004/05	1	2.50	37.10	40	117
	2005/06	3	19.12	72.62	361	1,258
	2006/07	3	6.28	25.85	754	-
	2007/08	4	8.78	36.26	865	67
	2008/09	1	0.25	1.68	30	-
	Total	12	36.93	173.51	2,050	1,442
Innovation	2004/05	8	0.55	2.27	-	-
	2005/06	9	3.26	22.06	-	-
	2006/07	6	0.33	1.06	-	-
	2007/08	3	0.07	0.36	-	-
	2008/09	2	0.19	0.55	-	-
	Total	28	4.40	26.30	0	0
Total	2004/05	9	3.05	39.37	40	117
	2005/06	12	22.38	94.68	361	1,258
	2006/07	9	6.61	26.91	754	-
	2007/08	7	8.85	36.62	865	67
	2008/09	3	0.44	2.23	30	-
	Total	40	41.33	199.81	2,050	1,442

Notes:

10. Table totals may not add due to rounding.

11. Planned investment includes assistance offered.

12. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.

13. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

14. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the total foreign direct investment in the East Antrim constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1206/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Table 1 provides information on the amount of foreign direct investment offered support by Invest NI within the East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and the number of jobs promoted or safeguarded as a result during the three-year period 2006/07 to 2008/09. The information in Table 1 represents the estimated total cost of these projects to Invest NI's externally-owned clients and the number of jobs that the projects expect to create or safeguard. The number of projects and the associated assistance offered by Invest NI is also included.

Projects have been split into those where the main focus is on employment creation and those that are innovation based, including activities such as training, research and development, trade development and technology and process development. Although not directly related to job creation, these capability development activities will underpin business competitiveness leading eventually to growth and employment opportunities, although they cannot be accurately forecasted at this stage.

TABLE 1 - INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO EXTERNALLY-OWNED CLIENTS IN EAST ANTRIM PCA & JOBS PROMOTED OR SAFEGUARDED (2006/07 - 2008/09)

Type Of Assistance	Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance £m	Total Planned Investment £m	New jobs	Safe Jobs
Employment Related	2006/07					
	2007/08	1	1.53	15.92	235	-
	2008/09	1	0.03	0.08	2	-
	Total	2	1.56	15.99	237	0
Innovation	2006/07	10	0.06	0.21	-	-
	2007/08	28	1.81	5.15	-	-
	2008/09	6	0.31	0.98	-	-
	Total	44	2.18	6.34	0	0
Total	2006/07	10	0.06	0.21	-	-
	2007/08	29	3.34	21.07	235	-
	2008/09	7	0.34	1.05	2	-
	Total	46	3.74	22.33	237	0

Notes:

15. Table totals may not add due to rounding.
 16. Planned investment includes assistance offered.
 17. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.
 18. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.
 19. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.

Advice4debtNI

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 319/10, to detail (i) which key stakeholders were met by Advice4debtNI in relation to the telephone debt advice service; (ii) when each of those meetings took place; and (iii) what cross-working opportunities and referral protocols have been put in place as a result. (AQW 1226/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: (i) & (ii) Since June 2009, Advice4debtNI has met with the following key stakeholders:

June 2009	Citizens Advice
August 2009	Advice NI
September 2009	Consumer Council, Financial Capabilities Partnership, Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Enforcement of Judgements Office
October 2009	National Debtline, Money Advice Trust

In addition, Advice4debtNI management participated in the Debt Remedies Rainbow event in June 2009 which was attended by a wide cross section of representatives from business, government and the voluntary and community sectors. Advice4debtNI officials also extended their network of contacts at the Northern Ireland Debt Discussion Forum Annual Conference held in September 2009.

- (iii) Informal referral arrangements are already in place with National Debtline, Consumerline and Jobs and Benefits offices. All such arrangements will be formalised in due course in light of the level of calls being dealt with.

Hotel Occupancy

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail hotel occupancy rates for each month of the last five years. (AQW 1256/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Northern Ireland hotel room occupancy rates by month, from 2004 to 2009, are detailed in the table below. The number of hotel rooms in Northern Ireland increased by 10% between August 2008 and August 2009.

	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %	2009 %
Jan	46	45	49	51	46	43
Feb	56	58	60	60	59	55
Mar	56	58	64	67	60	55
Apr	65	62	67	69	67	58
May	65	64	67	72	70	61
Jun	69	72	72	76	73	65
Jul	64	64	62	69	67	64
Aug	68	71	73	76	76	70
Sep	72	71	74	79	71	
Oct	66	68	66	74	64	
Nov	58	64	62	65	55	
Dec	46	51	49	51	46	

Credit Unions

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if Credit Unions in Northern Ireland will be requested to pay a fee similar to those in Scotland which have been asked to pay a minimum of £1500 each as a contribution towards the maintenance of UK banks. (AQW 1277/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have no plans to request Northern Ireland credit unions to make such payments.

One of the recommendations included in the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment's report of its inquiry in the role and potential of credit unions was that regulation of all credit unions in Northern Ireland move from DETI to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) in order to expand their range of services to include, at the very least, those which credit unions in Great Britain can offer currently. In my response to the Committee's report, I endorsed this recommendation.

The proposed transfer to FSA regulation is currently being jointly taken forward by officials from my Department, HM Treasury, and the FSA. All proposals, including payments in respect of the operation of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, will be subject to detailed consideration before any decisions are made. I am hopeful that a joint DETI / HM Treasury consultation paper will be issued by the end of the year.

Invest NI

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline (i) the total spend of Invest Northern Ireland during the financial years 2007/08 and 2008/09 and (ii) what proportion of this spend was allocated to administration. (AQW 1284/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In 2007/8 the total expenditure by Invest NI was £160.5 million, of which 15.9% related to Administration.

In 2008/9 the total expenditure by Invest NI was £167.6 million, of which 15.7% related to Administration.

Hotel Occupancy

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the average hotel occupancy rate for each day of the week, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1322/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Hotel occupancy rates are not available for each day of the week. However, hotel room occupancy rates are available by weekday and weekend for each of the last five years (see table below).

HOTEL ROOM OCCUPANCY RATES BY WEEKDAY/WEEKEND*

	2004 %	2005 %	2006 %	2007 %	2008 %
Weekday	60	62	64	68	64
Weekend	59	61	62	65	63

* Weekdays are defined as Monday to Thursday and Weekends are defined as Friday, Saturday and Sunday,

Invest NI Staff Salaries

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many staff are currently employed by Invest NI; (ii) to detail the total wages paid to these staff per annum; and (iii) to provide a breakdown of the number of staff who earn (a) less than £10,000; (b) £10,000 – £19,999; (c) £20,000 - £29,999; (d) £30,000 - £39,999; (e) £40,000 to £49,999; (f) £50,000 to £59,999; and (g) more than £60,000 per year. (AQW 1354/10)

- (i) Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In Northern Ireland, as at 30 September 2009, Invest NI employed 602 staff;
- (ii) The total wages paid to these staff per annum is £18,365,101.06.
- (iii) The above staff fall into the following salary bands:
 - (a) 5 staff earn less than £10,000;
 - (b) 190 staff earn £10,000 – £19,999;
 - (c) 130 staff earn £20,000 - £29,999;
 - (d) 179 staff earn £30,000 - £39,999;
 - (e) 58 staff earn £40,000 to £49,999;
 - (f) 23 staff earn £50,000 to £59,999; and
 - (g) 17 staff earn more than £60,000 per year.

Invest NI has actively managed its headcount figure from a peak of 748 (Full Time Equivalent) on its inception in 2002 to the current FTE of 583 (Headcount 610) in September 2009.

Invest NI Offices

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total number of Invest NI offices in Northern Ireland; (ii) the locations of these offices; (iii) the total number of staff employed in each of these offices; and (iv) the total wages paid to staff in each office per year. (AQW 1356/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) Invest NI has a total of 5 offices in Northern Ireland. In addition there are 3 sub-offices.
- (ii) The location of the offices and sub-offices is as follows:

North Eastern Office:	Ballymena		
North Western Office:	Londonderry	Sub Office:	Coleraine

Southern Office: Newry Sub Office: Craigavon
 Western Office: Omagh Sub Office: Enniskillen
 Belfast Headquarters

- (iii) The staff numbers currently employed in each of the above offices are as follows: North West office – 17; Southern Office – 14, Western office – 13; North East office – 8; Belfast Headquarters – 550.
- (iv) The total wages paid to staff in each office are as follows: North West office – £512,363; Southern Office – £401,200; Western office – £391,807; North East office – £214,496; Belfast Headquarters – £16,845,235.

Invest NI Offices

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the total number of Invest NI offices worldwide, excluding Northern Ireland; (ii) the locations of these offices; (iii) the total number of staff employed in each of these offices; and (iv) the total wages paid to staff in each office per year. (AQW 1358/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

- (i) Invest NI currently has a network of 11 offices located outside Northern Ireland. In addition, Invest NI has representatives based in Tokyo and Seoul.
- (ii) Invest NI has a network of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) offices located in North America (Boston, New York, San Jose), Europe (London, Brussels, Dublin) and South Asia (Mumbai). These offices focus on promoting Northern Ireland as a location capable of providing solutions to the business needs of new investors.

Invest NI also operates Trade Development Centres in Boston, Dubai, Mumbai, Dusseldorf, Taipei and Shanghai which provide practical assistance to Northern Ireland companies seeking to develop and secure new business and strategic business partnerships in those markets. In addition, Invest NI has a representative in Seoul who focuses on promoting technology development and university links.

Invest NI also has a part time FDI and Technology representative in Tokyo and Seoul.

The Boston and Mumbai offices have dual roles in FDI and Trade development and are each counted as one office in the response to point (i).

(iii) and (iv) The following table shows the number of staff based in each office and the current annual salaries costs:

Location	Office Type	Number of staff employed (note 1)	Total current annual salary costs (£)
Boston, USA	FDI, Trade	12	500,030
New York, USA	FDI	5	196,880
San Jose, USA	FDI	4	176,907
Dublin, ROI	FDI	4	114,775
London, UK	FDI	1	24,960
Dusseldorf, Germany	Trade	3	122,935
Mumbai, India	FDI, Trade	3	67,088

Notes:

- Figures include staff employed directly by Invest NI and locally engaged staff.
- Currently Invest NI has contractors and service providers in the following offices (which Invest NI does not pay a direct salary):

Location	Office Type	Number of service providers or contractors
Brussels, Belgium	FDI	2
London, UK	FDI	4
Dubai, UAE	Trade	3

Location	Office Type	Number of service providers or contractors
Shanghai, China	Trade	2
Taipei, Taiwan	Trade, Technology	1
Seoul	Technology	1 (part time representative)
Tokyo	FDI	1 (part time representative)

3. The Seoul and Tokyo offices are provided by the service provider and are not official Invest NI offices.

Invest NI: Jobs Created

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the number of jobs created by Northern Ireland companies with the assistance of Invest NI in each of the last three years. (AQW 1360/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the three financial years 2006/07 to 2008/09 Invest NI promoted 6,697 jobs and safeguarded 1,738 existing jobs through support to locally-owned projects. This represents the number of jobs that indigenous Invest NI clients expect to create or safeguard during the lifetime of projects offered assistance during the period under review.

Table 1 provides information on the number of jobs promoted or safeguarded and the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI to these employment-related projects. This represents the value of support which is expected to be paid during the life-time of these projects. The amount of investment that they plan to stimulate is also included.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED TO LOCALLY-OWNED EMPLOYMENT-RELATED PROJECTS AND ASSOCIATED PLANNED INVESTMENT (2006/07 TO 2008/09)

Financial Year	No. of Offers	Jobs Promoted	Jobs Safeguarded	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
2006/07	351	2,242	315	16.25	150.02
2007/08	324	2,018	732	24.91	280.48
2008/09	356	2,437	691	33.41	245.74
Total	1,031	6,697	1,738	74.58	676.24

Notes

20. Table totals may not add due to rounding.

21. Planned investment includes assistance offered.

22. Some of the assistance offered may not be paid if projects are not fully delivered by the client.

23. New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

24. Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.

In addition to the assistance offered directly by Invest NI, offers totalling almost £3million were made indirectly through the Start A Business programme to individuals intending to set up a business. These projects were expected to create almost 9,000 new jobs. This programme is delivered in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland and provides guidance to new businesses, reliant on the local Northern Ireland market.

Invest NI Start-ups

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many entrepreneurial start-ups to which Invest NI has provided financial assistance and training, in each local council area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1361/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the period 2006/07 to 2008/09 Invest NI directly offered assistance to 267 new locally-owned businesses that have the potential for significant growth, primarily through the development of markets outside Northern Ireland.

In addition, 8,726 offers were made to individuals intending to set up a business with a focus on the local market. Most of these were assisted indirectly through the Start A Business programme, which is delivered in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland.

Table 1 below shows the number of offers approved in each District Council Area in each of the 3 years under review.

TABLE 1: INVEST NI OFFERS APPROVED TO INDIGENOUS BUSINESS STARTS BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA (2006/07 – 2008/09)

District Council Area	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	Total
Antrim	82	71	48	201
Ards	101	91	72	264
Armagh	103	106	77	286
Ballymena	82	106	61	249
Ballymoney	76	70	47	193
Banbridge	98	102	67	267
Belfast	325	412	335	1,072
Carrickfergus	49	37	36	122
Castlereagh	94	100	89	283
Coleraine	103	127	97	327
Cookstown	94	108	78	280
Craigavon	94	119	121	334
Derry	232	282	170	684
Down	124	152	90	366
Dungannon	123	136	125	384
Fermanagh	217	245	157	619
Larne	88	95	52	235
Limavady	80	114	70	264
Lisburn	146	151	111	408
Magherafelt	103	136	73	312
Moyle	54	74	32	160
Newry & Mourne	159	212	126	497
Newtownabbey	98	101	81	280
North Down	99	93	72	264
Omagh	125	156	124	405
Strabane	79	95	63	237
Total	3,028	3,491	2,474	8,993

Invest NI: Overseas Trade Missions

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the cost of Invest NI overseas trade missions; and the amount of investment these missions have provided for the economy, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1362/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The table below gives details of the cost of Invest NI overseas trade missions in each of the past three years and the value of orders generated by those missions.

TRADE MISSIONS 1 APRIL 2006 - 31 MARCH 2009

Year	Cost £Million	Orders £Million
2006/2007	1.25	289.3
2007/2008	1.1	367.4
2008/2009	1.85	117.2
Totals	4.2	773.9

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DETI

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) if she intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across her Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long it will last. (AQW 1397/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There are currently no plans to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Department continues to manage vacancies and achieve efficiencies through workforce planning and close monitoring of staffing levels.

Efficiency Savings: DETI

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what services in her Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1599/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has a target to deliver 3% cash releasing efficiencies of £7.7 million, £15.2 million and £22.5 million respectively over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11, which will provide additional spending power to the Department during this time.

Savings in the last financial year and in the first six months of this financial year have been achieved primarily through the decision not to pursue the Electricity Contract Buy Out initiative on the basis that was no longer the most efficient way to proceed. Administration savings of 5% within the overall 3% target have also been achieved without adversely affecting service delivery.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**Scrabo Country Park**

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment if the Northern Ireland Environment Agency is considering, or has previously considered the possibility of developing a visitors centre at Scrabo Country Park. (AQW 992/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The Northern Ireland Environment Agency already has well-advanced plans for the construction of a visitor centre for Scrabo Country Park at the car park below the golf course clubhouse. Construction will be dependent on securing planning approval and the availability of funds.

Scrabo Country Park

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment if he will encourage the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to improve the marking and mapping of walking routes at Scrabo Country Park. (AQW 994/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency already has plans to replace the vandalised directional signage of walking routes at Scrabo Country Park with more durable signage and to renew interpretative panels and leaflets showing maps of the walking routes. These works will be carried out when funds become available.

Marine Bill

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what is the timescale for the Marine Bill. (AQW 1081/10)

Minister of the Environment: The position on the Northern Ireland Marine Bill remains unchanged from that given to the Assembly on 2 March 2009. I remain committed to introducing legislation to the Assembly in 2011, subject to Executive approval, with a view to its being on the Statute Book in 2012.

The UK Marine and Coastal Access Bill, which contains provisions relevant to Northern Ireland, is expected to receive Royal Assent this autumn.

Health and Safety Violations

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many health and safety violations were committed by staff in each of the District Councils, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1100/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Bridleways

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how many miles of bridleway exist; and if he has any plans to extend the provision of bridleways. (AQW 1130/10)

Minister of the Environment: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 810/10.

Carbon Budgets

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration has been given to introducing carbon budgets. (AQW 1140/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Climate Change Act 2008 set legally binding targets for the UK to cut emissions by 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. The Act also provides for a carbon budget to be set for each succeeding period of five years beginning with the period 2008-2012.

The first three carbon budgets were set in law following the Budget 2009, committing to cut the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1990 levels, by 22% in the current period, 28% in the period centred on 2015 and 34% in the period centred on 2020.

Local Government Boundary Commissioner

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the basis, including any legal reasons, for conducting a consultation on the final recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commissioner. (AQW 1143/10)

Minister of the Environment: Schedule 4 to the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (as amended) requires the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner to consult on his provisional and revised recommendations. There is no legislative requirement to consult on the final recommendations.

Squirrels

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what steps she is taking to curb the threat to red squirrels from diseases carried by grey squirrels. (AQW 1181/10)

Minister of the Environment: Squirrel pox is widely documented as a contributing factor in Red squirrel decline in the UK. To date there have been no confirmed cases of the disease in the Red squirrel population in Northern Ireland, although evidence exists to suggest that it is present in our Grey squirrel population.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is aware of the potential risk of disease transmission between the two species, and is presently assessing the potential risk to the Red squirrel population in Northern Ireland. The issue is to be discussed at the next meeting of the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum. The purpose of the Forum is to progress the Red squirrel Action Plan and to discuss and coordinate research, as well as advising on best practice for Red squirrel conservation activities in Northern Ireland.

Through the Forum, the Agency will be disseminating advice such as the need to clean and disinfect squirrel feeding stations and survey equipment. Further information will be given on what materials and disinfectants should be used to reduce the possibility of cross infection.

Poly-Tunnels: Planning Permission

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the need for planning permission for poly-tunnels used for domestic growing. (AQW 1210/10)

Minister of the Environment: There is no specific reference to poly-tunnels in planning legislation however the thrust of planning appeals cases and case law on this issue indicate that where tunnels have been erected, operational development is held to have occurred. The extent to which poly-tunnels comprise operational development will depend on the site of the proposal, the method of fixing to the ground and the degree of permanency.

However, where the erection of a poly-tunnel is proposed or has been carried out within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse that development may benefit from permitted development rights by virtue of Class D Part 1 of Schedule 1 of the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993. In this instance the development must comply with the limitations on the size and placing of the building or structure set out in the legislation. In other instances where the development does not comply with the limitations in the legislation, a planning application will be required.

Planning Applications

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment if the Planning Service accepts anonymous objections or complaints regarding planning applications or use of premises. (AQW 1239/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department accepts and considers all representations including anonymous objections or complaints as part of the development management decision making process or the use of premises. However, it is important that an objector identifies themselves when making a representation as it may seriously affect the weight attached to comments if they do not, particularly if they concern their own circumstances on their property. Also, if an objector does not identify themselves my Department cannot write to them regarding potential significant amendments made during the processing of an application nor can they be informed about a decision or provided with reasons for that decision when it is made.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of complaints received by each local Council relating to anti-social behaviour in (i) private developments; (ii) NI Housing Executive estates; and (iii) Housing Association developments, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1254/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of council-led Anti-Social Behaviour Orders issued over the last three years, in each local Council area. (AQW 1257/10)

Minister of the Environment: There were six council-led Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) between 2006 and 2008. Details are contained in the table below.

Year	District Council	Council-led ASBOs issued
2006	Belfast	1
2007	Antrim	1
2008	Down	1
	Larne	2
	Lisburn	1
Total		6

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of requests to issue Anti-Social Behaviour Orders received by each local Council in (i) private developments; (ii) NI Housing Executive estates; and (iii) Housing Association developments, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1258/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

PPS21

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, when the recommendations of the Independent Working Group on non-farming rural dwellers on PPS21 will be available for public scrutiny. (AQW 1300/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Independent Working Group report on non-farming rural dwellers will be available on the Planning Service website from 12 October 2009.

PPS21

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, when the recommendations of the Independent Working Group on non-farming rural dwellers on PPS21 will be available for public scrutiny. (AQW 1300/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Independent Working Group report on non-farming rural dwellers will be available on the Planning Service website from 12 October 2009.

Nutts Corner Race Tracks

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to ensure that residents close to the Nutt's Corner race tracks are not subjected to excessive noise and breaches of planning regulations. (AQW 1301/10)

Minister of the Environment: District councils are the statutory regulatory authority for carrying out noise monitoring at any sports facilities. Under the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 the councils have powers to investigate, monitor and take enforcement action for noise nuisance from motor sport activity. The powers also extend to neighbouring councils to take action against a noise nuisance that arises outside their jurisdiction.

Planning Service is currently investigating four alleged unauthorised motorsport tracks in the Moira Road area of Nutts Corner to establish if breaches of planning control have occurred.

Nutts Corner Motor Sports Tracks

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment if approval has been given for the construction of earth banks on either the approved motor sports tracks at Nutts Corner, or the unauthorised tracks at the Moira Road. (AQW 1366/10)

Minister of the Environment: To the Department's knowledge, no approval has been given for earth banks at any of the tracks either approved or unauthorised.

Unauthorised Motor Sports Tracks: Moira Road

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an update on the Planning Service investigation into the unauthorised motor sports tracks on the Moira Road and to detail if licences have been issued under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations. (AQW 1367/10)

Minister of the Environment: Enforcement investigations are ongoing into the two unauthorised tracks on Moira Road which involve operational development and we anticipate retrospective applications for both of them in the near future as agents have been appointed.

There are two further tracks operating at Moira Road which are being monitored by Planning Service to ensure that they do not exceed their permitted development rights. Currently these tracks are not illegal in planning terms. The Department cannot discuss the details of any ongoing investigations as disclosure could prejudice the outcome of any enforcement proceedings, should they be necessary.

The site is not licensed under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

Nutts Corner Race Track

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment what departmental support is available for Antrim and Lisburn Councils to permanently install mini disc or digital audio tape recorders at residents' properties, near the Nutts Corner Race tracks, that are currently experiencing noise pollution. (AQW 1369/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978 District councils are responsible for investigating, and taking appropriate enforcement action in respect of, noise nuisance. My Department does not provide separate financial support to councils for the purposes of purchasing noise monitoring equipment.

Social Housing Development Objections

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many times the Minister of Social Development has formally registered an objection to a social housing development since assuming Ministerial Office in May 2007 and in her capacity as MLA or Councillor. (AQW 1398/10)

Minister of the Environment: An interrogation of Planning Service's electronic records and data retrieval system 20/20 has returned no objections made by the DSD Minister to a social housing development since she assumed Ministerial office in May 2007, either in her capacity as MLA or Councillor.

Service Level Agreements

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment if he anticipates delays in developing agreed working relationships and Service Level Agreements between local Councils and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, due to the long-term absence of the assigned officer; and what measures he is taking to ensure that targets are met. (AQW 1410/10)

Minister of the Environment: In its current three year Corporate and Business Plan (2009/10 – 2011/12), the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has set an objective to develop agreed working relationships with key partners including new District Councils.

The purpose of the objective is to ensure that Service Level Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding exist with key partners and stakeholders, including the new District Councils in place after the Reform of Public Administration has been implemented.

I am satisfied that the resources required to achieve this objective will be in place and that all associated targets will be achieved.

PPS21

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications in the Omagh office, deferred under PPS14 were (i) approved under PPS21; (ii) further deferred; and (iii) issued with a refusal. (AQW 1469/10)

Minister of the Environment: At 30 June 2009, 91 applications had been approved under PPS21, 619 remain deferred and 9 had been refused.

Visit Scotland Tourism Agency

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to address the claim by the tourism agency 'Visit Scotland', that almost 50% of people in Northern Ireland have never seen a wild animal. (AQW 1533/10)

Minister of the Environment: I understand that the survey conducted by Visit Scotland relates only to Scotland.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Allegations of Sexual Harassment

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the legal costs incurred by his Department as a result of allegations of sexual harassment made by a member of staff against another member of staff, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1034/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The Department of Finance and Personnel has one such case which has not yet concluded. Accordingly, it is not possible to say what the legal costs of the case will be.

Rates

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the regional domestic rates; and (ii) the regional commercial rates paid in all postcode districts, in the greater Lurgan area, over the last five years. (AQW 1193/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total rates paid for properties in the wards of Church, Court, Drumanoë, Knocknashane, Mourneview, Parklake, Taghnevan, Woodville and Derrytrasna for the last three years are shown in the attached table. The figures for previous years are not readily available due to the replacement of rating IT system.

Domestic		2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	Notes
	Receipts (£)				1
	BT63 5	32,286	39,136	45,232	
	BT65 5	269,915	261,865	273,551	
	BT66 1	234	871	1,398	
	BT66 6	1,761,683	1,961,159	2,085,643	

Domestic		2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	Notes
	BT66 7	1,183,516	1,096,634	1,137,211	
	BT66 8	1,410,120	1,243,090	1,346,115	
	BT67 9	1,235,265	1,284,265	1,397,235	
	UNKNOWN	24,082	24,590	28,586	
	Total	5,917,101	5,911,610	6,314,971	2
Non-Domestic					
	Receipts (£)				1
	BT63 5	252,547	339,729	265,607	
	BT65 5	51,214	52,525	56,227	
	BT66 6	2,305,583	2,354,450	2,540,803	
	BT66 7	159,025	170,669	177,026	
	BT66 8	1,750,014	1,593,628	2,503,028	
	BT67 9	682,023	755,775	704,242	
	UNKNOWN	190,818	169,147	170,131	
	Total	5,391,224	5,435,923	6,417,064	2

Notes:

1. The rates shown above are those paid relating to properties in the wards listed above, split into post codes as requested. The figures are not the total rates paid by properties in the postcode sectors listed.
2. The split of receipts between domestic and non-domestic properties has been derived from the current valuation list, as the sector is not recorded on each individual receipt transaction. Properties that have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation have been included in 'non-domestic' receipts.

Individual receipts are not allocated between the district and regional components of each rates bill and as a result it is not possible to break receipts down into regional and district elements. In addition, receipts are received at a point in time and may not relate to the rating year in which they are received. An approximate estimate of the regional receipts could be obtained by applying the relevant proportion of the total poundage in each year. The poundages for Craigavon District Council are provided in the two tables below.

Domestic	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
District Rate	163.65	0.3395	0.3474
Regional Rate	198.17	0.3608	0.3608
Total Rate	361.82	0.7003	0.7082

Non-Domestic	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
District Rate	21.51	21.86	22.38
Regional Rate	28.17	29.10	29.89
Total Rate	49.68	50.96	52.27

Note: Domestic rates were based on Net Annual Values until 31 March 2007 and on 1 April 2007 changed to being based on capital values as part of the rating reforms. This is the reason for the significant change of domestic rate poundages between 2006- 07 and 2007- 08.

Civil Service Pay Rises

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline (i) the pay rise awarded to civil servants in (a) 2007/08 and; (b) 2008/09; and (ii) how this compares with the average pay rises in the private sector.

(AQW 1222/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The pay awards for Northern Ireland Civil Servants compared to the NI Private Sector in 2007/08 and 2008/09 are attached. The NICS figures are based on the average base pay increase for staff in post. The figure provided for the NI Private Sector is based on information taken from the results of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). The ASHE survey information related to the pay-week which included 16th April 2008. The estimated pay increase figure was calculated by comparing the 2008 ASHE figure with that available for 2007. The results are therefore not necessarily representative of pay over a longer period and are not directly comparable with the NICS pay award figures. An estimate for the average increase for the year to April 2009 is not yet available as ASHE 2009 results are due to be published in November 2009.

Year	Nics Pay Awards			Private Sector
	Non-Industrial	Industrial	Senior Civil Service	Ashe
2007	4%	3.44%	2.52%	3.7%
2008	4%	3.5%	2.48%	N/A

Executive's Access to End of Year Flexibility

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current arrangements his Department has with HM Treasury concerning the Executive's access to End Year Flexibility. (AQW 1384/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The current arrangements in respect of the drawdown of funding from the End Year Flexibility (EYF) stock of the Northern Ireland Executive are detailed in the Statement of Funding Policy for the devolved administrations and the 2009-10 Consolidated Budgeting Guidance for UK departments. Both documents are available on the HM Treasury website.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Fatal Listeria Outbreak: Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a definitive date for the publication of the report into the fatal Listeria outbreak at the Royal Victoria Hospital in May and June of 2008. (AQW 860/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): This report is now complete and will be presented to the Public Health Agency Board at their next meeting. Once approved by the PHA Board the report will be published as soon as is practicable.

Ambulance Service

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to reduce the number of ambulances that currently serve the mid-Ulster area under the restructuring of the Ambulance Service. (AQW 862/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 749/10 on 8 October 2009.

Review of Public Administration: Estimated Savings

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money each Health and Social Care Trust will save under the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 881/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trusts have been set targets totalling £38.2m recurrently (or £93.8m in total across the current CSR period) out of Trust budgets as their contribution to the

overall RPA target of £53m recurrent savings. The remaining £14.8m savings will be found from the HSCB, PHA and BSO and the implementation of shared services.

This is split as follows

Trust	2010/11 £m Target
SE	6.4
Northern	7.2
Belfast	13.4
Southern	5.5
Western	5.7
Total	38.2

Tamiflu

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research has been carried out on the effects of Tamiflu on children. (AQW 882/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Tamiflu is licensed for the treatment of influenza use in children from six months of age during a pandemic influenza outbreak. Research, in the form of clinical trials, has been conducted to determine the safety, quality and efficacy of Tamiflu in children as part of the licensing process.

The use of Tamiflu in children is supported by the European medicines regulator which has granted a marketing authorisation for Tamiflu for this age group.

Ambulances

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances serving the East Antrim area (i) met; and (ii) failed to meet their target times, for each of the last five years. (AQW 904/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not measure response time performance for individual ambulances or on the basis of parliamentary constituencies. However, performance information for the legacy Northern Board area, which includes East Antrim, is available and is shown in the table below. From 1 April 2009 NIAS performance is measured by local commissioning group (LCG) with East Antrim falling within the Northern LCG. Figures for 2009/10 year to 31 August 2009 are also included.

Year	NHSSB Performance
2004/05	42%
2005/06	43%
2006/07	44%
2007/08	49%
2008/091	57%
2009/102	65%

Notes

- 1 In 2008/09, NIAS's target was that, from April 2008, an average of 70% of Category A (life-threatening) calls across Northern Ireland should be responded to within eight minutes. Within individual Board areas performance should be improved to at least 62.5% by March 2009.
- 2 In 2009/10, NIAS's target is that, from April 2009, an average of 70% of Category A (life-threatening) calls across Northern Ireland should be responded to within eight minutes. Increasing to an average of 72.5% by March 2010 (and not less than 65% in any LCG area)

Swine Flu

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how people seeking the swine flu vaccination will be prioritised. (AQW 905/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer you to my Assembly statement on 15/09/2009, in which this information was provided.

Diabetic Framework

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will set up a Diabetic Framework similar to that in other parts of the UK. (AQW 908/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In June 2003 the Department published a framework for diabetes services in Northern Ireland developed by a joint CREST/Diabetes UK Taskforce, which echoed similar initiatives in England, Wales and Scotland.

All of these frameworks set similar standards across the UK in prevention and early detection, care, monitoring and treatment, specific groups, planning and managing services and implementation.

The CREST/Diabetes UK Taskforce envisaged that a 5-10 year programme would be needed to implement the recommendations of the framework and my Department continues to monitor progress on its implementation.

My Department is also developing a series of Service Frameworks which set out explicit standards for health and social care. A Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing was launched in June 2009. The Cardiovascular Service Framework includes 3 standards relating to diabetes which will have a positive impact on the diagnosis of the condition and on the treatment and management of people with diabetes to prevent the onset of complications.

It is anticipated that further areas for service framework development will be taken forward next year. These will be selected from the remaining priority areas identified and evaluated by the Department. Diabetes is one of the priority areas for consideration.

Crest Report

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Crest report, carried out in conjunction with Diabetes UK, has not had its strategy formulated. (AQW 909/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The CREST/Diabetes UK Taskforce report, which was published in 2003, contained recommendations covering a wide range of areas including prevention, early detection, treatment and the need to target vulnerable groups. The Taskforce envisaged that a 5-10 year programme would be needed to implement the framework and groups were established at local and regional level to take forward the implementation of the framework.

A wide range of measures have been put in place regionally and locally to address the recommendations in the report. Various Departmental strategies have reinforced the health promotion message in preventing diabetes and in slowing down the onset of the complications that may arise from diabetes and on foot of the Taskforce report an additional £3m has been invested in community-based specialist diabetic nurses, podiatrists and dieticians to improve services for people with diabetes.

Diabetes UK

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will meet with Diabetes UK to agree targets, a strategy and procedures to improve care for people diagnosed with diabetes. (AQW 910/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A service framework for cardiovascular health and well being was launched in June 2009. Diabetes UK (NI) was fully involved in the development of the framework which contains 3 standards specifically aimed at people with diabetes – the need for accurate diagnosis, annual review of the patient's condition and access to structured patient education programmes.

Officials from Diabetes UK (NI) have also held discussions with officials from my Department to discuss how the diabetes policy agenda should be taken forward.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients from Muckamore Abbey Hospital have been resettled into the community in the last twelve months. (AQW 919/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During the twelve month period 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2009 twenty long stay patients were resettled, or commenced resettlement, into the community, from Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has a discharge management plan in place for patients who are due to be discharged from Muckamore Abbey Hospital. (AQW 920/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The provision of services, including preparation and planning for discharge from learning disability hospitals, is the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts (Trusts) in Northern Ireland.

Trusts advise that the needs of individuals are assessed by hospital and community staff working together with patients and families/carers, as appropriate. Every person due to be discharged from Muckamore Abbey Hospital will participate in the development of a person-centred discharge plan which details the wishes and needs of the individual and how their plan will be managed in their new home.

Asperger's and Autism: Support Services

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support services are available through the Northern Health and Social Care Trust for people diagnosed with Aspergers or Autism in the South Antrim constituency. (AQW 921/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Due to the complexity of needs of people diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and/or Asperger Syndrome, a range of services may be required by children and adults and, numerous teams and professionals in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust provide such services. A range of core and support services are available to children and adults in the South Antrim areas based on assessed need. These services can include: Child Development Clinic and Autism Diagnostic Service; involvement of Allied Health Professionals which includes Occupational therapy and Social Work services. In addition to being supported by the Multi Disciplinary Learning Disability Teams and the Community Mental Health Teams, adults with Asperger Syndrome or autism can access a range of day care services and respite provision.

An ASD Co-ordinator has also been appointed in the last year, tasked with assessing and improving services available to both children and adults in all parts of the Trust. This Co-ordinator is a member of the Regional ASD Network which will be progressing the implementation of the ASD Strategic Action Plan.

Child Protection

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the issue of anti-social activity by young people falls within the remit of Social Services given the associated child protection issues. (AQW 941/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Dealing directly with young people who engage in anti-social behaviour is a public order issue which is primarily the responsibility of PSNI, Public Prosecution Service and the Courts. Those people who are the victims of such behaviour should therefore be encouraged by everyone to pursue the appropriate legal redress.

Anti-social behaviour by young people is an issue of general concern which affects a growing number of communities across NI. It has been shown to have many different causal factors from poverty and poor housing to alcohol/ drug abuse, boredom and inadequate parenting. Responsibility for the amelioration of these factors would therefore fall across a range of Government Departments and agencies. Many of these factors are clearly outside the remit of this Department – detection and prosecution, education, training and employment, youth and community services, housing, sport and leisure, diversionary activities.

DHSSPS has a specific role to play in supporting children in need and their families. By investing in family support services, better parenting initiatives, treatment for alcohol and drug abuse, CAMHS, the Department seeks to improve the wellbeing of young people who may be at risk of involvement in such behaviour. In certain circumstances DHSSPS and its Agencies have specific and specialist child protection responsibilities for example where anti-social activity places a child at risk of serious harm. In such an instance it is anticipated that we will discharge these statutory functions to the full.

However, all Government Departments with responsibility for services delivered to families and/or children also have a duty to ensure children's protection for areas which fall within their policy remit.

ME

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many doctors currently specialize in M.E. (AQW 944/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: According to the Health & Social Care Trusts, there are currently no doctors that specialise in M.E. People suffering from this very debilitating condition continue to have access to appropriate care and treatment, ranging from primary and community care to specialist regional neurology services, depending on their assessed individual needs.

Supplementary Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what accountability measures are in place to track funding for the training of student doctors under Supplementary Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education. (AQW 945/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The funding allocation model for Supplement for Undergraduate Medical and Dental Education (SUMDE) is currently under review. Audit processes are being developed and piloted to produce improved accountability and transparency.

Epilepsy: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the support services available for people diagnosed with epilepsy in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) the relevant officers who have responsibility for delivering these services. (AQW 957/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In common with epilepsy sufferers elsewhere in Northern Ireland, much of the care and support required by this patient group will be provided by General Practitioners in primary care.

In the Western Trust area, patients with epilepsy requiring consultant care are seen by either the resident neurologist in Altnagelvin hospital or at general neurology clinics across the Trust area.

A Belfast based neurologist, with a subspecialist interest in epilepsy, provides a weekly general neurology clinic at Altnagelvin. Another Belfast based neurologist provides 2 general neurology clinics per month in the Tyrone County Hospital and the Erne Hospital and provides a weekly telelink to both hospitals specifically for epilepsy patients.

In addition an epilepsy nurse specialist provides a monthly review clinic at both the Tyrone County Hospital and the Erne hospital and also carries out domiciliary visits.

The Trust also provides a range of services such as domiciliary care and day care services as made be required following an assessment of an individual's specific health and social care needs.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for the future provision of Paediatric Trauma Support in Daisy Hill Hospital. (AQW 958/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In answering this question it has been assumed that the question relates to paediatric trauma support delivered in the Emergency Department. There are no plans to change the current processes for managing paediatric trauma on the Daisy Hill site.

The Southern Trust is currently working to enhance senior medical cover in Daisy Hill Hospital Emergency Department through the appointment of a substantive consultant in emergency medicine and development of a Business Case for a second consultant post. Plans are also in place to re-design the hospital's Emergency Department from April 2010. A Paediatric Trauma Service will continue to be provided for patients who present to Daisy Hill Emergency Department which will link with other acute teams on the Daisy Hill site.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Trauma Services in Daisy Hill Hospital will be diverted to Craigavon Area Hospital or any of the Belfast hospitals. (AQW 960/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to change the existing processes for managing trauma at Daisy Hill Hospital. Trauma cases will continue to be brought to Daisy Hill Emergency Department from the usual catchment area. If clinically appropriate, cases may be transferred to Craigavon Area Hospital or a Belfast Hospital for ongoing management.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for the future provision of ambulance services in Daisy Hill Hospital. (AQW 961/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) plans for its services operating out of Newry Ambulance Station, which is located at Daisy Hill Hospital, will result in a net increase of 2,060 hours of paramedic cover annually. This will mean that there will be more rapid response paramedics on the ground delivering life-saving emergency care to those who need it.

Daisy Hill Hospital

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has any plans to make Daisy Hill Hospital a day-care hospital. (AQW 962/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to make Daisy Hill a day-care hospital. Daisy Hill Hospital is key to the delivery of acute services in the Southern Trust area. The hospital will continue to provide a wide range of inpatient, daycase and outpatient services to the local community.

Paramedics, Ambulance Service and Fire Service Personnel

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of (i) paramedics and ambulance service personnel; and (ii) fire service personnel injured in the line of duty, in each of the last five years. (AQW 964/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in the table below for the last five calendar years:

Year	Injuries to ambulance service personnel (including paramedics)		Injuries to fire service personnel	
	Work-related Injuries	Assaults	Work-related Injuries	Assaults
2004	0*	57	69	6
2005	24	41	42	4
2006	96	71	75	4
2007	94	86	52	1
2008	122	86	27	6

* **Note:** Data was not recorded prior to 2005 when a new system (DATIX) was introduced to record untoward incidents.

Independent Safeguarding Authority

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how his Department will communicate the new Independent Safeguarding Authority system of background checks on people wishing to work with children and vulnerable groups to private sector organisations providing services or working with these groups. (AQW 978/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, and working closely with the Northern Ireland Office, my department is leading on implementation of a new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) for Northern Ireland, of which the Independent Safeguarding Authority is an integral part. We have established an extensive stakeholder network to oversee implementation of the VBS. The statutory, voluntary, community, faith and private sectors are all represented on one of a number of stakeholder groups. Outside of the formal stakeholder network, my officials have also engaged directly with a wide range of organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses.

In addition, my department commissioned the Volunteer Development Agency to run a series of awareness-raising seminars, which were attended by around 1300 participants, representing all sectors across Northern Ireland. In conjunction with the Home Office, the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Education, we will soon be embarking on a VBS direct marketing campaign, which will be targeted at approximately 5000 Northern Ireland employers, including private organisations.

A second VBS conference will be hosted in November 2009 and guidance, which will explain what will be happening from the next key date in the VBS calendar, October 2009, will be published within the coming weeks.

MP3 Players: Risks to Hearing

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the short-term and long-term risks to hearing associated with the use of mp3 players. (AQW 995/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No such assessment has been made.

Current EU standards for Personal Music Players (PMP) prescribe no maximum sound limit nor require any specific labelling in respect of volume levels, requiring only that a statement be included in the PMP instruction manual to warn of the adverse effects of exposure to excessive sound level.

However, new EU standards for PMP are under development and the European Commission issued a mandate on 28 September 2009 to CENELEC, the EU Committee for electro technical standardisation, requiring new technical safety standards to be drawn up. In addition to warnings about PMP use and possible hearing loss, the new plans require that PMPs have a default volume setting of around 80 decibels. The new standards will still permit users to exercise personal choice to override the default settings if they so wish.

Ambulance Service

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to reduce the number of ambulances that currently serve the East Antrim area under the restructuring of the Ambulance Service. (AQW 996/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) provides emergency response cover in East Antrim from its stations in Larne, Carrickfergus and Whiteabbey. NIAS plans for its services operating from these stations will result in a net increase of 12,305 hours of paramedic cover annually. This will mean that there will be more rapid response paramedics on the ground delivering life-saving emergency care to those who need it.

This increase in paramedic cover is to be achieved by the replacement of 5,215 hours of emergency ambulance cover with 17,520 hours of rapid response paramedic cover.

Drug and Alcohol Awareness Programmes

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail funding allocated to voluntary and community groups for drug and alcohol awareness programmes in the East Antrim constituency in each of the last three years; and (ii) to list the groups. (AQW 997/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Through funding made available via the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, the former Northern Board commissioned and funded a number of specialist Board wide and locality based substance misuse services in support of the Northern Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Team's Action Plan in the three year period 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09.

These services and programmes address both alcohol and drug awareness, reflecting the strategic approach to tackling substance misuse and best practice in regard to alcohol, illicit drugs, prescribed drugs and other substances. Northern Board wide services/programmes were available to residents of East Antrim.

Therefore the funding for the range of voluntary and community sector services available to those in the East Antrim area is set out in the table below:

Service	Provider	Locality/Area	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Tier 2/3 counselling, support and mentoring service for 17 years and under	Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre	Former Northern Board (NB) wide	£53,089	£52,624	£71,547
Community and family support services	Ballymena Family & Addicts Support Group	Former NB wide	£58,232	£79,365	£58,067
Cross-sectoral training and awareness programme	Coleraine Rural & Urban Network	Former NB wide	£65,297	£87,004	£65,123
Supported and direct access accommodation	Living Rivers Trust	Former NB wide	£73,670	£73,670	£98,869
How to drug proof your kids	Carrickfergus Community Drug & Alcohol Advisory Group (CCDAAG)	East Antrim	£2,500	N/A	N/A
Health education and training – drugs and alcohol	ACET (NI) Ltd	Former NB wide	£2,500	N/A	N/A
Targeted education and prevention programmes with young people	ACET (NI) Ltd	East Antrim	N/A	£23,680	£24,319
Targeted education and prevention programmes with adults	Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre	East Antrim	N/A	£34,629	£50,887
Drug awareness (Monkstown)	Monkstown Community Association	East Antrim	N/A	£4,321	N/A
Drugs and alcohol awareness 4 Mossley	Monday Night Madness	East Antrim	N/A	£2,706	N/A
Counting the cost of alcohol	Community Direct	Former NB wide	N/A	£4,128	N/A
Drugs and alcohol awareness 4 Mossley	Monday Night Madness	East Antrim	N/A	N/A	£4,302

Service	Provider	Locality/Area	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Motiv8	CCDAAG	East Antrim	N/A	N/A	£5,000
Diversionary activities	Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre	Former NB wide	N/A	N/A	£3,585
Pilot Project	CCDAAG	East Antrim	N/A	£49,145	N/A
Project Co-ordinator	CCDAAG	East Antrim	N/A	N/A	£22,951

Junior Doctor Posts: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many junior doctor posts there are in the Paediatric Department in the Erne Hospital; and (ii) how many of these posts are currently filled. (AQW 999/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Erne Hospital Department	Number of junior doctor posts		Number of junior doctor posts currently filled	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Paediatric	7	7.0	6	6.0
Obstetric & Gynaecology	6	6.0	6	6.0
Medical	18	18.0	18	18.0
Surgery ¹	12	12.0	11	11.0
Accident & Emergency ¹	1	1.0	0	0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note:

- ¹ One of the full-time junior doctor posts is counted twice, once in Surgery and once in Accident & Emergency as it is a split post on a 3 month rotation. The junior doctor in this post will rotate to Accident & Emergency in November.

Junior Doctor Posts: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many junior doctor posts there are in the Obstetric and Gynaecology Department in the Erne Hospital; and (ii) how many of these posts are currently filled. (AQW 1000/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Erne Hospital Department	Number of junior doctor posts		Number of junior doctor posts currently filled	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Paediatric	7	7.0	6	6.0
Obstetric & Gynaecology	6	6.0	6	6.0
Medical	18	18.0	18	18.0
Surgery ¹	12	12.0	11	11.0
Accident & Emergency ¹	1	1.0	0	0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note:

- ¹ One of the full-time junior doctor posts is counted twice, once in Surgery and once in Accident & Emergency as it is a split post on a 3 month rotation. The junior doctor in this post will rotate to Accident & Emergency in November.

Junior Doctor Posts: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many junior doctor posts there are in the Medical Department in the Erne Hospital; and (ii) how many of these posts are currently filled. (AQW 1001/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Erne Hospital Department	Number of junior doctor posts		Number of junior doctor posts currently filled	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Paediatric	7	7.0	6	6.0
Obstetric & Gynaecology	6	6.0	6	6.0
Medical	18	18.0	18	18.0
Surgery ¹	12	12.0	11	11.0
Accident & Emergency ¹	1	1.0	0	0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note:

- ¹ One of the full-time junior doctor posts is counted twice, once in Surgery and once in Accident & Emergency as it is a split post on a 3 month rotation. The junior doctor in this post will rotate to Accident & Emergency in November.

Junior Doctor Posts: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many junior doctor posts there are in the Surgery Department in the Erne Hospital; and (ii) how many of these posts are currently filled. (AQW 1002/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Erne Hospital Department	Number of junior doctor posts		Number of junior doctor posts currently filled	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Paediatric	7	7.0	6	6.0
Obstetric & Gynaecology	6	6.0	6	6.0
Medical	18	18.0	18	18.0
Surgery ¹	12	12.0	11	11.0
Accident & Emergency ¹	1	1.0	0	0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note:

- ¹ One of the full-time junior doctor posts is counted twice, once in Surgery and once in Accident & Emergency as it is a split post on a 3 month rotation. The junior doctor in this post will rotate to Accident & Emergency in November.

Junior Doctor Posts: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many junior doctor posts there are in the Accident and Emergency Department in the Erne Hospital; and (ii) how many of these posts are currently filled. (AQW 1003/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Erne Hospital Department	Number of junior doctor posts		Number of junior doctor posts currently filled	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Paediatric	7	7.0	6	6.0
Obstetric & Gynaecology	6	6.0	6	6.0
Medical	18	18.0	18	18.0
Surgery ¹	12	12.0	11	11.0
Accident & Emergency ¹	1	1.0	0	0

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

Note:

- 1 One of the full-time junior doctor posts is counted twice, once in Surgery and once in Accident & Emergency as it is a split post on a 3 month rotation. The junior doctor in this post will rotate to Accident & Emergency in November.

Car Parking Charges at Hospitals

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will consider extending the list of people exempt from paying car parking charges at hospitals. (AQW 1004/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At present, many patients suffering from cancer and other serious conditions are entitled to free parking at hospitals. Trusts also have arrangements in place to offer assistance to people who meet low income criteria.

Car Parking Charges at Hospitals

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he intends to prevent the introduction of car parking charges at hospitals in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 1005/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision to apply car park charging and the level of charging to be applied is an operational matter for each Trust.

Security at the Ulster Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to increase security at the Ulster Hospital. (AQW 1021/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All Hospital Trusts operate a Zero Tolerance policy regarding attacks on health and social care staff. New legislation to allow the removal of those who create a nuisance or disturbance from hospital premises will become effective shortly. The policy also includes training for staff and personal alarms, and a dedicated senior director in each health and social care organisation who has responsibility for staff safety.

Therapy for Gambling

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8727/09, how many patients with a co-existent mental illness or alcohol problem currently receive therapy for gambling as part of their treatment. (AQW 1024/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No information is available centrally on the numbers patients with a co-existent mental illness or alcohol problem who currently receive therapy for gambling as part of their treatment. This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Treating with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is known to have good results. An additional £7m has been allocated for the development of psychological therapies, including CBT, over the CSR period. My Department

is finalising a strategy for the development of psychological therapy services and this will be published in the Autumn 2009.

Staff Employed in Day-Care Settings

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed in day care settings in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 1036/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below in respect of all HSC staff employed in statutory facilities.

CURRENT STAFF EMPLOYED IN DAY CARE SETTINGS¹ IN HSC TRUSTS

HSC Trust	Headcount	WTE ²
Belfast	1,045	843.1
Northern	703	313.3
South Eastern	398	293.8
Southern	342	240.4
Western	395	326.3

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 1 Day care settings include day centres, adult centres, special schools and resource centres that do not provide 24 hour care.
- 2 WTE= whole-time equivalent

Staff Employed in Day-Care Settings

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff employed in day-care settings were absent on sick leave during each quarter of the last financial year, in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1054/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information relating to sickness absence levels in HSC Trusts is published bi-annually on the Departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm. The information is presented across terms and conditions groups rather than specific to particular settings.

Staff Absence in Day-Care Settings

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people with a learning disability in each Health and Social Care Trust area were unable to attend day-care because of staff being absent on sick leave during the past twelve months; and (ii) how many of these people were offered alternative services. (AQW 1056/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within the Belfast, Northern and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts no clients were unable to attend day care due to staff being on sick leave.

Within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust 128 clients were unable to attend Day Care because of staff sick leave over the past 12 months, however 108 of these received an alternative service. In most instances clients missed only one or two days.

In the Western Health and Social Care Trust one client's access to day care has been affected by staff sickness, and an alternative service was not available for a 6 day period.

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available for patients diagnosed with M.E. in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1059/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that in each Trust area care for the vast majority of patients with ME or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is provided and coordinated by GPs. There is a range of treatment and support options available in Northern Ireland including community care and support, specialist regional neurology services and mental health services. Patients may also be referred to specialists outside Northern Ireland where this is considered clinically appropriate.

Ban on Overtime: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how the ban on overtime for nurses and the use of nursing agency staff from 1 October 2009 will effect the delivery of patient services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1077/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast HSC Trust is implementing a range of initiatives to ensure the delivery of the trust's required efficiency savings under CSR07 and to ensure the Trust breaks even. The Trust has submitted a financial contingency plan. This plan does not contain proposals to ban overtime and the use of agency staff.

Ban on Overtime and the Use of Nursing Agency Staff

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are being put in place to protect isolated units, such as those caring for patients with a severe neurological condition, and to ensure that existing services are not curtailed by the ban on overtime and the use of nursing agency staff. (AQW 1080/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast HSC Trust is implementing a range of initiatives to ensure the delivery of the trust's required efficiency savings under CSR07 and to ensure the Trust breaks even. The Trust has submitted a financial contingency plan. This plan does not contain proposals to ban overtime and the use of agency staff.

Neurology Unit at Forster Green Hospital

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the neurology unit at Forster Green Hospital will be moving to the Musgrave Park site. (AQW 1082/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Subject to confirmation of additional funding, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust intends to build a permanent home for neurology services on the Musgrave Park Hospital site. Enabling works for the new building are planned to start by December 2009, provided the necessary funding is in place.

Locum Consultants: Erne Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many locum consultants have been employed in the Erne Hospital since the beginning of this financial year. (AQW 1088/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been 4 (4.0 WTE) locum consultants employed by the Erne hospital since the beginning of the financial year.

Locum Medical Consultants: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has the Western Health and Social Care Trust spent on the employment of locum medical consultants since the beginning of the financial year. (AQW 1089/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As at the end of August the Western Health and Social Care Trust had spent £705K on the employment of locum medical consultants since the beginning of the financial year.

Hospital Bed Spaces

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of bed spaces available in each hospital, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1090/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data relating to available beds is published annually and can be found online at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/hospital_statistics.htm.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Projected Overspend

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to assist Health and Social Care Trusts with their projected overspend. (AQW 1091/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While all trusts are currently facing financial pressures, every trust has a statutory duty to break even. Trusts are working closely with commissioners, primarily the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency, to identify measures to achieve financial balance. My Department continually monitors the forecast financial position of the trusts. Contingency plans have been developed by Trusts and these are currently being considered.

Mixed-Sex Residential Homes

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on mixed sex residential homes for people with learning difficulties and mental health conditions. (AQW 1093/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Departments policy on mixed sex residential homes for all people is to comply with the relevant Northern Ireland Residential Care Home and Nursing Home Regulations. These Regulations contain provisions as to how homes are conducted, in particular with regard to residents' privacy, dignity, sex and disability.

All residential and nursing homes must be registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in accordance with statutory requirements and must comply with the relevant regulations and standards.

Health and Social Care Trust: Staff Sick Days

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many sick days were taken by staff in each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last financial year. (AQW 1095/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information has been supplied by the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Health and Social Care Trust	Number of sick days 01/04/08/ to 31/03/09
Northern	147,275
Southern	102,411

Health and Social Care Trust	Number of sick days 01/04/08/ to 31/03/09
South Eastern	113,507
Belfast	260,049
Western	127,937
NI Ambulance Service*	n/a

* s NI Ambulance operates a 24 hour service, sickness absence data is captured as 'hours lost' rather than 'days'. The total hours lost for the same period above was 139,581.74

My department monitors sickness absence rates in HSC Trusts on a bi-annual basis and I have set a target in my Priorities for Action for reduction in sickness absence to a regional average of 5.2% by March 2011.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Salaries

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the cost was to his Department for salaries in each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last financial year. (AQW 1099/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information on salaries you have requested is contained in note 2.1 of each of the six Trust's 2008-09 annual accounts.

Private Consultancy: DHSSPS Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 163/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (iii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 1113/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department reports expenditure on private consultancy in line with guidance from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Up to 31 March 2009 there has been no requirement under the guidance to include expenditure on capital projects or Private Finance Initiatives. From April 2009 new guidance requires that expenditure on capitalised consultancy is included. As a result, from that date, expenditure on those areas will be reported.

As confirmed in my previous response, the expenditure by the Health Estates Agency of my Department is included in the figures.

Private Nursing and Care Homes: Costs

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what regulations are in place to monitor (i) the difference in costs between private nursing and care homes and those under the control of his Department; and (ii) the difference in costs between individual private nursing and care homes. (AQW 1123/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Private care homes are independent businesses and the Department can not impose regulations to monitor their fees. Care Homes are, however, required by legislation (Residential Care Home Regulations (NI) 2005 and Nursing Homes Regulations (NI) 2005) to be transparent regarding the level of their fees. Health and Social Care Trusts are required to procure care from private providers on the basis of quality and value for money.

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently have M.E. in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 1133/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of people who currently have M.E.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicle

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what situations an ambulance could respond to that a rapid response vehicle could not. (AQW 1148/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Rapid response vehicles can respond to all categories of emergency calls.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicle

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any medical equipment that can be carried by an ambulance but cannot be carried by a rapid response vehicle. (AQW 1149/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A rapid response vehicle is not equipped with a long board, scoop stretcher, vacuum mattress and carry chair as these are used for loading or preparing to load a patient into an A&E vehicle.

Rapid Response Vehicles carry all vital life-saving equipment that are carried by A&E ambulances.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes there will be to the number of rapid response vehicles under the proposals to reconfigure the provision of ambulance services. (AQW 1150/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service plans to increase the number of rapid response vehicles by 11 to 33 and decrease the number of A&E ambulances by 16 to 116 during the current comprehensive spending Review period. This reprofiling of emergency response cover will result in more paramedics on the ground delivering life-saving emergency care to those who need it.

Ambulance Services

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes there will be to the number of ambulances under the proposals to reconfigure the provision of ambulance services. (AQW 1151/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service plans to increase the number of rapid response vehicles by 11 to 33 and decrease the number of A&E ambulances by 16 to 116 during the current comprehensive spending Review period. This reprofiling of emergency response cover will result in more paramedics on the ground delivering life-saving emergency care to those who need it.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any differences in the Health and Safety restrictions place on staff in rapid response vehicles compared to those in ambulances. (AQW 1152/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has a number of policies and procedures relating to health and safety, lone working, and the dispatch of rapid response vehicles and A&E ambulances. Generally, ambulance crews will not be deployed to known or suspected risk locations unless police officers are on-scene and have confirmed it is safe to approach.

Nurses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses have been trained in the last financial year. (AQW 1179/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: During the last financial year (April 2008 – March 2009) 645 nurses have completed training at undergraduate level in Northern Ireland.

Carparking Charges at Antrim Area Hospital

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans on the introduction of carparking charges at Antrim Area Hospital. (AQW 1187/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Car parking charges are an operational matter for individual Trusts but must be set against key guidance principles that demonstrate transparency in that they are justified as part of a wider, environmentally planned approach to travel management and facilitating access to our hospitals by patients, carers, visitors and staff. However, it is important that patients who attend hospital on a regular basis do not have the additional stress of worrying about paying for car parking. At present, under regional policy, many patients suffering from cancer and other serious long term conditions are entitled to free parking at hospitals. Trusts also have arrangements in place to offer assistance to people who meet low income criteria

Resources for Meals on Wheels

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he has introduced to ensure Social Services have the resources to deliver front line services, such as Meals on Wheels. (AQW 1188/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within the increasingly stretched resources at the disposal of my Department, care is taken to ensure that all Social Services, including Meals on Wheels, receive an appropriate share of available funds.

In the period 2007/08 to 2008/09 planned expenditure on all personal social services rose by £52.1m (8%) in Northern Ireland. More than half of the total 2008/09 social services expenditure was used for care of the elderly population to allow them to remain within a community setting including the provision of Meals on Wheels services.

Qualifying Criteria for Meals on Wheels

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the criteria for older people to qualify for the Meals on Wheels service. (AQW 1189/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Meals on Wheels services are provided for vulnerable people who are unable to prepare a meal for themselves or to obtain a cooked meal from another source, and who without the service would be nutritionally at risk. This is determined by individual needs assessments carried out by the HSC Trusts.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Plan

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for an update on the Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Plan as it relates to adults; and (ii) how these measures will be funded. (AQW 1191/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Strategic Action Plan was published in June 2009, to improve services to both children and adults affected by autism spectrum disorder. To ensure that the actions are implemented as effectively and efficiently as possible the multi disciplinary, multi agency multi Regional ASD Network (RASDN) is overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan. Whilst the implementation of the action plan is in the early stages, good progress is being made as the Network continues to promote a “whole life” approach to service improvement for children and adults, which recognises the importance of early intervention, provision of integrated health and social care services and linkage with education, employment, housing, leisure and benefits

To underscore the implementation of the action plan an additional £2.02m has been secured for investment in health and social care services to improve services to people of all ages affected by autism.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Costs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total administrative costs in each Health and Social Care Trust, for the last financial year. (AQW 1198/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information for the last financial year is not available.

Screening for Underlying Heart Conditions

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any facilities exist to screen young people for underlying heart conditions. (AQW 1245/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The UK National Screening Committee (NSC), which advises the four UK health departments on all aspects of screening, has previously considered the research evidence on screening for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM) and advised that the current evidence does not support the introduction of a screening programme. This advice was reviewed by the NSC in 2008 when I asked the Chief Medical Officer to write to the Chair of the NSC to ask if they would prioritise the planned policy review.

In December 2008 the NSC published the outcome of this review, and has advised: "Screening should not be offered. Pre-participation screening of athletes for HCM or other causes of sudden cardiac death should not be instituted at present."

Any young person who has any cardiac symptoms should contact their GP who will refer them to hospital as appropriate.

The Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing recommends that first-degree relatives of people found to have HCM or other inherited cardiac disease or who suffer a sudden cardiac death are offered access to genetic testing and subsequent specialist follow-up as appropriate.

CRY and The Sports Academy at University of Ulster, Jordanstown have established a clinic to test for certain conditions associated with sudden cardiac death.

Cost of Bariatric Surgery

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the costs of patients who travelled to the UK mainland for bariatric surgery in (i) 2007/08; and (ii) 2008/09. (AQW 1296/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost of patients travelling to the UK mainland for Bariatric Surgery in 2007/8 and 2008/9 is as follows.

Year	Number of Patients	Cost
2007/08	31	£355,151.00
2008/09	25	£348,986.00

Efficiency Savings: DHSSPS

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1316/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While I have always expressed deep concern about the pace of efficiencies, I have obtained assurances from the Health Trusts that in implementing their CSR

efficiency proposals the quality of services for patients and clients will be maintained or improved and that Priority for Action targets and commitments will be delivered. All efficiencies are being reinvested in service developments.

However due to pressures arising from pandemic flu, increased demand across all specialities and a low settlement above inflation budget settlement have made delivery of cash releasing efficiencies, and consequently financial breakeven, more challenging in 2009/10. As a result several Trusts have had to develop contingency plans containing proposals to bring themselves back into financial balance and these are currently being considered. I would emphasize that no decisions have been made and the proposals are still just proposals. My priority is to protect frontline services.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain why no consultation took place with patients, or patient charities, prior to the closure of the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital. (AQW 1350/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In relation to ME/CFS services at Belfast City Hospital, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have advised that the clinic was being provided purely on a voluntary basis by a consultant psychiatrist with a special interest in ME/CFS. However, the consultant concerned has recently retired and in preparation for his retirement, no new referrals were accepted from July. The Occupational Therapy element of this service is however continuing for existing patients.

The Trust did not consult patients with respect to this decision as the clinic in question was a not a commissioned service and therefore was not funded by the HSC Board

Waiting Time for Patients: Heart Surgery

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time for patients to have heart surgery following assessment. (AQW 1374/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average waiting time for heart surgery¹ at 30th June 2009, the latest quarter for which official data are available, was 48.29 days.

¹ This relates to all patients waiting for inpatient admission within the Cardiac Surgery specialty.

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset.

Forster Green Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the health and safety problems caused by the current staff shortages at Forster Green Hospital. (AQW 1412/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust continually endeavour to maintain safe staffing levels in all wards, including those at Forster Green Hospital. If unanticipated staff shortages occur the Trust have the opportunity to obtain additional staffing through a number of options such as the Trust's Nursing Bank, increased rotas, redeployment of staff from other areas, or by exception through nursing agencies.

However, the Trust has advised that they are not experiencing any current staffing difficulties at Forster Green affecting the health and safety of the Unit.

Forster Green Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the shortage of nursing staff in the Neurology Unit of the Forster Green Hospital. (AQW 1413/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust continually endeavour to maintain safe staffing levels in all wards, including those at Forster Green Hospital. If unanticipated staff shortages occur the Trust have the opportunity to obtain additional staffing through a number of options

such as the Trust's Nursing Bank, increased rotas, redeployment of staff from other areas, or by exception through nursing agencies.

However, the Trust has advised that they are not experiencing any current staffing difficulties at Forster Green affecting the health and safety of the Unit.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Clinic

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the recently closed Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic in Belfast City Hospital was not adequately funded. (AQW 1421/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Chronic Fatigue Syndrome clinic at Belfast City Hospital was provided by a consultant psychiatrist with a personal interest in chronic fatigue on a voluntary basis. In the 12 months to July 2009, 16 patients were seen at the clinic. The consultant concerned has recently retired and in preparation for his retirement, no new referrals have been accepted from July. The Occupational Therapy element of this service is however continuing for existing patients.

You will appreciate that in determining the allocation of resources for specific services it is for the Health and Social Care Board to assess demand and to decide what services should be provided and how they should be delivered. The clinic in question was not a commissioned service and was therefore not funded by the HSC Board.

Swine Flu Guidance

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when swine flu guidance will be distributed to the faith sector in Northern Ireland as was done in England and Wales. (AQW 1425/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has responsibility for developing swine flu guidance for those providing Health and Social Care services. The guidance issued in England and Wales for the Faith Sector was developed by the Department of Communities and Local Government and related to Pandemic Flu and local influenza pandemic committees.

Contact Youth Folio

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if any counselling providers had the opportunity to add their services to the Contact Youth folio after 31 March 2009; and (ii) if any other tendering events took place after those which were held in February and June 2008. (AQW 1428/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In delivering the "Lifeline" service, Contact Youth has developed partnerships with a number of organisations which provide counselling, mentoring, befriending, and complementary services throughout the Health & Social Care Trust areas. With regard to the specific information requested, I can confirm that:-

- i) Since 31 March 2009, two further organisations have been recruited to Contact Youth's Lifeline folio – Saver Naver and Protect Life (formerly known as Task). Both organisations had previously applied to promote Lifeline support services through Contact Youth's formal tendering process. Contact Youth reviews its service for gaps in provision on an ongoing basis, and it remains receptive to any counselling provider approaching them with a view to potentially providing services to Lifeline at a future date.
- ii) Contact Youth has not carried out any further tendering events for Lifeline since those held in February and June 2008.

Creggan Burn Health Centre

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the new build of the Creggan Burn Health Centre in Derry. (AQW 1439/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am unable to confirm at this time when the Creggan Burn Park Health and Care Centre project specifically will commence.

Forster Green Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assurance that patient care will not suffer as a result of the overtime ban at Forster Green Hospital. (AQW 1466/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust continually endeavour to maintain safe staffing levels in all wards, including those at Forster Green Hospital. If unanticipated staff shortages occur the Trust have the opportunity to obtain additional staffing through a number of options such as the Trust's Nursing Bank, increased rotas, redeployment of staff from other areas, or by exception through nursing agencies.

However, the Trust has advised that they are not experiencing any current staffing difficulties at Forster Green affecting the health and safety of the Unit.

Junior Doctors Shortage

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking, or intends to take, to address the ongoing shortage of junior doctors in hospitals. (AQO 192/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Recruitment and employment of the appropriate staff to deliver the range of services expected are primarily the responsibility of Trusts. There are 53 vacancies in the junior doctor workforce of 1700. This represents a vacancy rate of just 3%. However, I am acutely aware that the majority of vacancies exist in a small number of specialties, creating service difficulties. My Department is working closely with NIMDTA to explore options for the recruitment of junior doctors which is due to begin shortly for 2010.

I also want to stress that the number of junior doctors has increased from 1200 in 1997 to 1750 in 2009. Additionally funding has been secured to allow the medical school at QUB to expand by 40%. We will see the first impact of this expansion in the workforce next year.

Healthcare: Mid Ulster

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can give people in Mid-Ulster an assurance that they will have equal access to healthcare provision. (AQO 193/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I fully recognise the concerns of the mid-Ulster community about their access to hospital services and I assure you that my first priority is to ensure that people across Northern Ireland, including the people of mid-Ulster have access to services which are of the highest possible quality and are safe and sustainable.

In order to deliver against that essential priority, the Northern Trust has advised me that it must consolidate acute inpatient surgery at Causeway and Antrim Area Hospitals.

The Mid Ulster will be developed as a local hospital and will continue to provide the vast majority of hospital services required by the local community, including a minor injuries service, day surgery, day procedures, diagnostics and outpatient services.

DHSSPS: Budget

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of his Department's budget position. (AQO 194/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health Service is faced with increasing demand, pandemic flu and challenging efficiencies. I am in the business of helping to save lives; that is why I asked for exemption from efficiency savings. Sadly, even with a pandemic, I am still in a position of having to fight for the money I need. I trust that the Executive recognises these real issues in its response to September Monitoring.

With a pro-rata approach to cuts in 2010/11 I would be faced with cutting both capital and revenue investment and existing services. The cuts in my capital budget alone would equate to at least 2 health and care centres, several children's homes and a new local hospital.

The effect of this will be to increase pain and distress and to shorten lives. As an Executive, we must target any budget reductions on the lowest priority areas of our entire spending.

Operations Subcontracted to Private Hospitals

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many operations in the last year were sub-contracted to private hospitals and subsequently deemed to be sub-standard and needed to be repeated. (AQO 195/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Health and Social Care Board is responsible for negotiating and managing contracts with the Independent Sector on behalf of Trusts.

The Board has advised me that in the 2008/09 financial year there were no operations carried out by the Independent Sector which were sub-standard and needed to be repeated.

It should be recognised that with any medical procedure there will be a number of individual cases where the outcome is not all that was hoped for, despite all the relevant clinical standards being adhered to.

Mental Health Care for Older Persons: East Belfast

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken to provide individual care plans and social activities for older people with mental health and learning disabilities, particularly those over 65 years, as promised by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust following the closure of the mental health day centre provision in East Belfast. (AQO 196/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is a statutory requirement that service providers assess the health and care needs of individuals, and provide appropriate services.

The clients who formerly attended the mental health day centre in East Belfast have a range of healthcare needs including mental health conditions, learning disability, physical disability and sensory impairment. My Department has written to Belfast Trust asking the Trust to review the individual needs of those clients who have been temporarily placed in Everton Day centre.

Sunbeds

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any options are being considered for the regulation of the sunbed industry following the recently published statistics on the risks of skin cancer. (AQO 197/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am considering a range of possible measures for regulating the sunbed industry in Northern Ireland, with particular regard to the need to protect the health of children and young people under the age of 18.

DHSSPS: Capital Budget

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of his Department's capital budget. (AQO 198/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have been allocated £3.3bn across the 10-year ISNI period ending 2017/18 against a need estimated at more than £7.8bn. In the current CSR I received just over £700m against a bid of £1bn. £95m of this was dependant on the sale of surplus assets, however, the economic downturn has rendered this sales target unachievable and my CSR budget has effectively been reduced by more than £50m.

I now also have to manage Swine Flu pressures from within my existing resources, and have been asked by the DFP Minister to try to identify additional easements of £22m in 2009/10 and £26m next year. The result is that I am now struggling to maintain the capital development programme within current constraints.

Large elements of my planned programme to address the legacy of under investment in the health system could have to be delayed, with serious implications in terms of service risk and health and safety. Effectively my investment programme has been stalled just as it had begun to develop real momentum.

Hospitals and Primary Care need increased rather than reduced investment.

Cuts of the magnitude outlined above equate in infrastructure terms to at least 2 health and care centres, several children's homes and a new local hospital, comparable to the new Downe Hospital that I recently opened in Downpatrick.

Attention Deficit Disorder

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the provision of services for young people with Attention Deficit Disorder. (AQO 199/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Younger children with Attention Deficit Disorder are treated in the community by paediatric services. Older children are treated by child and adolescent mental health services. An additional £1m provided in 2007/08 to enhance child and adolescent mental health teams is now recurrent.

Earlier this year my Department endorsed NICE guidelines on the diagnosis and management of ADHD in children, young people and Adults and these will apply to local services.

In addition to statutory services, my Department also provides core funding for NI-ADD, a voluntary organisation which provides a range of services and support to these children and their families.

Acute Services: Mid-Ulster Hospital

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to seek funding to retain acute services at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. (AQO 200/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Finance and Personnel in relation to services at the Mid-Ulster hospital.

Funding is not the reason for changing how we provide acute services in the Northern Trust area. These changes are being made in the interests of patient safety and to ensure that we can provide the highest possible quality services which are safe and sustainable into the future.

Muscular Dystrophy

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to improve services for patients with muscular dystrophy in Northern Ireland, following Lord Walton's report on services for patients in the United Kingdom. (AQO 201/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am fully committed to providing appropriate care for all people with a disability in Northern Ireland, including those with Muscular Dystrophy. I welcome the Walton Report, and will wish to consider it in detail as my Department continues to develop services for people with a disability. It should be recognised that Health is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, however, my Department is currently developing a Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy, which will shape the future strategic direction of physical and sensory disability services in Northern Ireland.

Moreover, in recognition of public interest in the provision of specialist neurology services, I recently commissioned the Health and Social Care Board to undertake a full and comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the 2002 Review of Adult Neurology Services. In parallel with this process, my officials are reviewing the continued relevance of the Review's recommendations in light of any professional or other guidance which has issued since their publication. The Walton Report will be fully considered as part of this evaluation and will help inform the future provision of services.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Orange Arches

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of orange arches that have been erected in each of the last three years which (i) met his Department's regulations regarding safety and insurance; or (ii) were not approved by his Department or did not meet safety and insurance regulations. (AQW 695/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that the number of orange arches that have been erected in each of the last three years, which met Roads Service's regulations regarding safety and insurance, are outlined in the table below:-

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Number of Consents	45	45	48

I can further advise that Roads Service does not maintain a central database of the number of orange arches which did not receive formal consent.

NI Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department intends to refund the Causeway Hospital for bottled water bought during 3-4 days in mid-September when NI Water failed to provide suitable drinking water. (AQW 763/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that following essential work on the water distribution system there was some discolouration of the water supply to the Causeway Hospital, but subsequent tests confirmed that the water was safe to drink.

NIW will consider any claims for the cost of bottled water through its normal claims process. Should the Causeway Hospital wish to submit a claim it should contact PL Claims Section, Customer Relations Centre, PO Box 1026, Belfast, BT1 9DJ.

Railway Line Closures

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number and duration of closures of the railway line in the environs of Lurgan and in the Upper Bann constituency over the past 12 months. (AQW 792/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following table which details the number and duration of closures of the railway line in and around the Lurgan and Upper Bann areas over the past year.

	October 2008 - September 2009		
	Date	Time	Total closure
1	20/10/2008	13.16 - 14.53	1hr 37min
2	09/11/2008	22.24 - 06.23	7hr 59min
3	22/02/2009	06.39 - 09.02	2hr 23min
4	08/03/2009	10.57 - 19.27	8hr 30min
5	24/03/2009	22.40 - 00.37	1hr 57min
6	27/03/2009	19.30 - 00.37	5hr 07min
7	28/03/2009	20.30 - 00.05	3hr 35min
8	30/03/2009	06.20 - 09.25	3hr 05min

	October 2008 - September 2009		
	Date	Time	Total closure
9	31/03/2009	06.00 - 09.45	3hr 45min
10	04/04/2009	21.35 - 12.24	14hr 49min
11	25/04/2009	20.10 - 22.30	2hr 20min
12	01/05/2009	23.51 - 05.05	5hr 14min
13	18/06/2009	12.05 - 19.18(19/06)	31hr 13min
14	05/07/2009	13.45 - 15.03	1hr 48min
15	10/07/2009	23.09 - 05.00	5hr 51min
16	20/07/2009	17.36 - 20.55	3hr 19min
17	17/09/2009	18.04 - 06.00	11hr 56min
18	18/09/2009	17.39 - 08.07(20/09)	38hr 28min
19	21/09/2009	05.30 - 7.30	2hr 0min
20	25/09/2009	23.45 - 08.51	09hr 06min

Railway Line Closures

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs associated with closures of the railway line in the environs of Lurgan and in the Upper Bann constituency in the past 12 months, including the cost of alternative transport provided. (AQW 793/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that the direct costs associated with these closures would be in the region of £221,000. This relates to costs for malicious damage and bus substitutions as a result of these security alerts. The estimated costs for signalling and permanent way for the recent incidents in Lurgan on 17 and 18 September 2009 are also included. These costs do not include the loss of revenue paying customers that may have arisen as a result of the closures.

Consultancy: DRD

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 153/10, to detail (i) the nature of consultancy provided and the projects covered in 2005/06 and 2006/07; and (ii) the net benefits of the consultancy. (AQW 885/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The tables below set out the nature of the consultancy, the projects covered and the net benefits of each for the 2005/06 and 2006/07 financial years.

DRD EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY PROJECTS 2005-06

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Infrastructure Health Check	Independent assurance that Departmental computer network was secure.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Quality Accreditation	Independent assurance that all Departmental websites met mandatory minimum accessibility requirements.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	HMRI costings iro Commissioning New Rolling stock for NIR	Independent assurance the statutory requirement for the introduction to passenger service of new trains was met.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Legal advice on City of Derry Airport - State Aid application	Independent legal advice to enable an accurate State Aid application to the EU for approval of safety related capital expenditure at the City of Derry Airport.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Review of Belfast City Airport Provisions for the management of aircraft noise	The audit provided independent quality assurance that the Department's noise monitoring arrangements were fit for purpose.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	ISO 9001 Accreditation 05-06	Independent assurance that all Roads Service contractors comply with Roads Service Contract Specification requirements.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Advice on regulation of new water company	Independent advice and guidance from OFWAT, the water regulator in England and Wales, on the development of the regulatory framework for the new water company.
Assurance - Corporate governance	Sophos configuration in W2K3	The design of an anti-virus infrastructure for the department's computer network.
Assurance - Investment appraisal	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project - Procurement Phase	Independent expert advice with the procurement of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Finance - Strategic	Provision of PPP Financial Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of PPP contract.
Finance - Strategic	Provision of PPP Insurance Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract.
Finance - Strategic	Provision of PPP Legal Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract.
Financial – Audit	Bangor relay	Report required by NIAO as part of the research for their report into the Upgrade of the Belfast-Bangor Relay.
Financial – Audit	Bangor relay	Report required by NIAO as part of the research for their report into the Upgrade of the Belfast-Bangor Relay.
Financial – Audit	End of year audit FDR/ Confares/Bus route subsidy 04-05	Independent annual assurance on spend on the NI Concessionary Fares and Fuel Duty Rebate schemes.
Financial – Audit	End of year audit FDR/ Confares/Bus route subsidy 05-06	Independent annual assurance on spend on the NI Concessionary Fares and Fuel Duty Rebate schemes.
Financial – Economic appraisal	Advice on licence issues associated with water charges	Specialist advice on Water Service's Public and Private Partnerships with the department's proposals for the development of the regulatory framework and licence for the new company.
Financial – Economic appraisal	Strategic and Financial Review of the Water Service	Specialist advice to identify options for the establishment of a self funding water and sewerage industry in NI.
Financial – Economic appraisal	Strategic and Financial Review of the Water Service (IFM)	Expert advice to update the Integrated Financial Model (IFM), which formed part of the Strategic and Financial Review of Water Service, as a result of a Ministerial decision to delay the introduction of water charges from April 2006 to April 2007.
Financial – Economic appraisal	Strategic and Financial Review of the Water Service (IFM)	An updated version of the Integrated Financial Model (IFM), which formed part of the Strategic and Financial Review of Water Service, as a result of a Ministerial decision to delay the introduction of water charges from April 2006 to April 2007.
Financial – Feasibility study	Accessibility Analysis	Expert advice and associated estimate of the revenue funding necessary to meet appropriate standards of accessibility to public transport in both the Rural and Other Urban Areas.
Financial – Feasibility study	EU Project Assessment	Independent specialist assessment of a proposed EU funded project. This assessment is a requirement of the EU selection process.
Financial – Feasibility study	Contract C085 - Consultancy Support for the Efficiency Programme - Client Services Function	Independent advice and expertise in implementing Water Service's Business Efficiency Strategy and Rolling Business Efficiency Programme to achieve efficiency gains.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Financial – Feasibility study	Contract C086 - Consultancy Support for the Efficiency Programme - Contract Services Function	Independent review of specific efficiency projects and validation of performance indicators identified potential cost efficiencies within contracts in Water Service.
Human Resources	Appointment of Directors - Linked to Veredus	Recruitment of senior personnel in critical areas such as Asset Management, Operations, Finance & Regulation and Legal Services within Water Service.
Human Resources	Commissioner on recruitment panel	Compliance with recruitment procedures for senior civil service roles, in this case the recruitment of new directors within Water Service.
Human Resources	Develop Change Workshops	Expert advice and guidance in preparing employees for transition to Northern Ireland Water Limited.
Human Resources	Recruitment for Operations posts - Linked to Veredus	Recruitment of senior personnel within Operations directorate within Water Service.
Human Resources	Recruitment of Directors & Heads of Departments	Recruitment of senior personnel in critical areas such as Asset Management, Operations, Finance & Regulation and Legal Services within Water Service.
Management – Organisational development	Advice to Roads Service Board on future administration arrangements for roads functions with RPA	Independent advice on financial and governance implications of the Review of Public Administration.
Management – Organisational development	Review of RSD stores and use of Qualtec	Specialist preparatory advice for anticipated impact of Review of Public Administration and AccountNI. Supply Chain Manager introduced to improve co-ordination and consistency across Roads Service Direct.
Management – Organisational development	Specialist Advisor - DPE	Specialist advice to the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Project. These skills were transferred to staff.
Management – Organisational development	Asset Management Model	Specialist advice to deliver an asset management model to optimise the asset base and enable staff and processes to deliver best value for the customer.
Management – Organisational development	Consultancy - Efficiency	Specialist advice and knowledge / skills transfer from another UK water provider in the fields of efficiency, human resources, tariff design, energy management, billing and cash collection.
Management – Organisational development	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project	Independent expert advice to design, procure and implementation of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project - Implementation phase	Independent expert advice to design, procure and implementation of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Due Diligence	Independent expert advice for the transition to a GoCo.
Management - Organisational development	HR-IT Consultancy	Independent expert advice to develop IT systems to enhance the HR function within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Mobile Work Management Project - Implementation phase	Independent expert advice to implement a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Performance Measurement	MOM (MS Pilot Project)	Specialist advice to deliver an Operations Console that presents core ICT support roles and tasks in real-time. ICT staff have been trained in the concepts, techniques and skills to maintain the new Operations Management solution within Water Service.
Management - Performance Measurement	Contract C125 - Consultancy Assignment Independent Certifier for OFWAT Regulatory returns	Independent advice to assign investment requirements for Waste Water Treatment Works.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Review of the Rural Transport Fund Programme	Specialist advice and guidance the ensure Rural Transport Fund services are delivered to rural dwellers who need them most.
Management - Policy appraisal and review	Planning Policy Statement 14 - Sustainable Development in the Countryside	Independent comprehensive expert advice on the planning issues to be considered in the Review of the Rural Planning Policy.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Advice on development of water reform legislation	Expert legal advice in water industry law, regulatory and environmental issues and legal processes to draft new legislation to establish a self funding regime for the delivery of water and sewerage services through the introduction of charges to domestic customers.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Legal Advice to NIAER on water reform legislation	Expert regulatory assessment of the key provisions of the new water and sewerage draft legislation.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	External consultancy - no further information available	Strategic procurement assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction which generated significant cost savings.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	PCSPS Legal Fees	Expert advice to develop a Scheme Trust Deed and Rules in line with pension legislation.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Pensions - J Goodchild	Interim appointment of manager of pension scheme to provide technical input until appointment of a full time manager.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Professional Services	Actuarial expertise to negotiate with Government Actuary Department and calculate initial employer's contribution rate upon formation of GoCo pension scheme.
Management - Strategic Management	Expert financial advice - PSO high level review	Expert financial advice on financial governance arrangements for the Public Service Obligation to ensure greater transparency and accountability in the financial information provided by Northern Ireland Railways.
Management - Strategic Management	Expert marine advice on the Rathlin Ferry Service	Expert technical marine advice providing assurance on the operation of the Rathlin Ferry Service.
Management - Strategic Management	Review of PSO	Expert advice to develop a comprehensive Financial Memorandum to improve financial governance arrangements over the Public Service Obligation.
Management - Strategic Management	Advice on Sustainable Transport	Expert advice in the development of cycling blueprints contained in the Transport Plans for Belfast and 29 other towns.
Management - Strategic Management	BVR Bonus Review	Expert advice on the verification of the bonus scheme.
Management - Strategic Management	Water Reform Programme Management - Planning and Reporting	Expert specialist advice to develop and maintain a Consolidated Programme Plan for the multiple projects that made up the water reform programme.
Management - Strategic Management	WR Programme Risk Healthcheck Report	Independent assessment of the risks associated with the water reform programme and guidance on the development of an initial risk register.
Management - Strategic Management	Crown Immunity Costs - EQR	Expert advice on implications of loss of Crown Immunity upon transition to GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Incinerator site Protection and monitoring	Expert advice regarding environmental considerations surrounding Incinerator site.
Management - Strategic Management	Pensions Project	Programming expertise relating to new pension contribution rate for payroll as part of GoCo pension scheme.
Management - Strategic Management	PPC Applications for Dunmurry	Regulatory advice and the production of a Pollution Prevention Control permit application for Sewage Sludge generation in line with regulatory requirements and timelines under European Directive.
Management - Strategic Management	PPC Applications for Omagh WWTW	Regulatory advice and the production of a Pollution Prevention Control permit application for Sewage Sludge generation in line with regulatory requirements and timelines under European Directive.
Management - Strategic Management	PPC applications for Strabane WWTW	Regulatory advice and the production of a Pollution Prevention Control permit application for Sewage Sludge generation in line with regulatory requirements and timelines under European Directive.
Management - Strategic Management	Preparation for GOCO training and development strategy	Specialist advice relating to GoCo development strategy.
Management - Strategic Management	Preparation of PPC Permit Application for incinerator	Regulatory advice and the production of a Pollution Prevention Control permit application for Sewage Sludge generation in line with regulatory requirements and timelines under European Directive.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Management - Strategic Management	Production of trade effluent discharges database	Specialist advice on trade effluent discharges database.
Management - Strategic Management	Provision of a Training & Development Strategy	Training and coaching of change facilitators to prepare employees for transition to GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Review of risk assessment & efficiency action plan	Specialist advice on Business Risk Process for the transition to a GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Risk Management Pilot Scheme	Specialist advice with development of Compliance Assurance Risk Model.
Management - Strategic Management	Technical Review of DMARGIS	Independent technical advice to develop a software system to meet Water Service's short and medium term asset information needs.
Management - Strategic Management	Tests of likely Significance(TOLS)	Independent expert assessment under the habitat directive of environmental impact of potential water and sewerage projects.
Organisation & Change Management	DPE - Implementation (Phase 2)	Specialist advice to the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Project. These skills were transferred to staff.
Procurement	Water Service PPP Directorate Professional Advisory Commission re PPP/PFI	Specialist advice and expertise in the efficient procurement of PPP partners and the successful development of PPP projects.
Procurement	Provision of PPP Technical Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract.
Research Projects	NISTRM	Prompt delivery of revised traffic forecast data, revised local government division growth factors (using new housing growth indicators) and handover of key modelling datasets to allow RS to manage the future use of the transport model.

DRD EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY PROJECTS 2006-07

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Comms support on redesign & implementation of SOPHOS	The design of an anti-virus infrastructure for the department's computer network.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Quality assurance on review of DRD's noise monitoring scheme at Belfast City Airport, and expert advice on Departments input to Examination in public of Planning Agreement at Belfast City Airport	Expert advice on noise monitoring scheme and expert input to Examination in Public of Planning Agreement at Belfast City Airport.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Assessment of Translink's application for COPE status	Independent assurance for Translink to be recognised as a Centre of Procurement Expertise (COPE).
Assurance - Quality accreditation	ISO Accreditation 06-07	Independent assurance that all Roads Service contractors comply with Roads Service Contract Specification requirements.
Assurance - Quality accreditation	Advice on regulation of new water company	Independent advice and guidance from OFWAT, the water regulator in England and Wales, on the development of the regulatory framework for the new water company.
Finance - Strategic	Provision of PPP Legal Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of PPP contract.
Finance – Strategic	Provision of PPP Financial Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of PPP contract.
Finance – Strategic	Provision of PPP Insurance Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of PPP contract.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Financial – Audit	End of year audit FDR/ Confares/Bus route subsidy	Independent annual assurance on spend on the NI Concessionary Fares and Fuel Duty Rebate schemes.
Financial – Economic appraisal	Provision of financial services - water reform	Specialist expert financial advice and accounting guidance on the mechanism for transferring responsibility for the delivery of water and sewerage services to a government owned company.
Financial – Feasibility study	Feasibility study on rapid transit in the BMA	Specialist advice to develop a strategic Outline Case to assess routes and technology options for Rapid Transit.
Financial – Feasibility study	Contract C085 - Consultancy Support for the Efficiency Programme - Client Services Function	Independent advice and expertise in implementing Water Service's Business Efficiency Strategy and Rolling Business Efficiency Programme to achieve efficiency gains.
Legal Services	Development of policy for delivery of new NI legislation	Expert advice on harbours legislation enabling the drafting of a Harbours Bill and subordinate harbours legislation.
Management - Accountancy	Finance Division Consultancy Support	Specialist advice and review of reporting suite and chart of accounts for Account NI.
Management - Accountancy	Actuarial services in relation to pay restructuring exercise carried out within operations directorate	Expert advice relating to Voluntary Early Redundancy costings within Water Service.
Management - Accountancy	Financial Systems Project	Expert advice regarding the replacement of Water Service's financial system upon formation of GoCo.
Management - Accountancy	Implementation Support to Financial Systems Project	Expert advice and guidance to realise cash and non-cash benefits from the transition to a GoCo.
Management - Accountancy	WasteWater Efficiency Review	Expert advice and identification of opportunities for improvement in mechanical and electrical services through benchmarking against other UK water companies
Management - Organisational development	Implementation of Windows 2003 Active Directory Environment	Specialist advice regarding the security of the Department's computer network.
Management - Organisational development	Executive search to Chairman of Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Expert advice and executive search resulted in improved pool of candidates put forward to the selection panel for assessment.
Management - Organisational development	Car clubs scoping study for Northern Ireland	Expert advice confirmed the validity of "car club" concept as a sustainable travel option for Northern Ireland, enabling progression towards pilot operation.
Management - Organisational development	Advice to Roads Service Board on future administration arrangements for roads functions with RPA	Independent advice on financial and governance implications of Review of Public Administration.
Management - Organisational development	Specialist Advisor - DPE	Specialist advice to the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Project. These skills were transferred to staff.
Management - Organisational development	Due Diligence	Independent expert advice for the transition to a GoCo.
Management - Organisational development	Efficiency Model	Independent expertise in interrogating the model and its outputs within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Non Domestic Tariff Model	Independent expertise to develop a Tariff Model for non-domestic customers in Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project	Independent expert advice with the procurement of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Review of modelling project	Specialist advice to validate that outputs from Integrated Financial Model and Combined Tariff Model were free from material error and fit for purpose within Water Service.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Management - Organisational development	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project	Independent expert advice with the procurement of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Econometrics for Regulatory Submissions	Specialist advice to model Water Service opex and capex efficiency against other UK water suppliers.
Management - Organisational development	Customer Billing/Contacts/ Mobile Work Management Project - Implementation phase	Independent expert advice with the procurement of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Mobile Work Management Project - Implementation phase	Independent expert advice with the procurement of a Customer Contact and Billing function and a Mobile Works Management System within Water Service.
Management - Organisational development	Support for Corporate and Business Plan	Expert knowledge transfer from another UK water provider in water specific issues in preparing the Strategic Business Plan.
Management - Organisational development	Drinking Water Safety Plan	Expert advice in the preparation of independent Water Research Council Report.
Management - Performance Measurement	Review of DRD's noise monitoring scheme at Belfast City Airport	Expert acoustical advice and professional assistance in the presentation to the Examination In Public of the Department's role in using noise modelling and noise monitoring in the exercise of its powers to mitigate the effects of airport noise.
Management - Performance Measurement	Interim Reporter	Independent assessment of Capital Works Programme for Strategic Business Plan submission.
Management - Performance Measurement	Regulatory Advice	Expert advice regarding economic regulation.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Review of the Rural Transport Fund Programme	Specialist advice and guidance to ensure Rural Transport Fund services are delivered to rural dwellers who need them most.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Facilitation of Planning Policy Statement 14 (PPS14)	Expert advice and facilitation of 6 regional workshops as part of the public consultation on draft Planning Policy Statement 14.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Preparation of non-statutory integrated spatial framework for North West	Expert specialist advice, jointly commissioned by DRD and DEHLG, to provide a draft spatial framework which would support the cross-border North West Gateway initiative jointly led by the Office of the First and Deputy Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Update of Retail Study carried out in 2003	Expert advice as part of the public consultation on draft Planning Policy Statement 5.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Moving Traffic Offences Business Case	Expert advice which sourced best practice and produced a successful Business case to allow the enforcement of moving traffic offences in bus lanes to proceed.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Advice on development of water reform legislation	Expert legal advice in water industry law, regulatory and environmental issues and legal processes to draft new legislation to establish a self funding regime for the delivery of water and sewerage services through the introduction of charges to domestic customers.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Legal Advice to NIAER on water reform legislation	Expert regulatory assessment of the key provisions of the new water and sewerage draft legislation.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement Project	Expert strategic procurement advice and assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Consultancy fees re business plan	Expert advice and guidance to write and design services for the production of a summary document of the Strategic Business Plan.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Strategy 2010	Expert advice to the Water Service executive team in a strategic planning workshop to plan the Strategy 2010 deliverables within a GoCo
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Pensions Project	Specialist pension administrator set up and administered new GoCo pension scheme.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement Project	Expert strategic procurement advice and assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement Project	Expert strategic procurement advice and assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement Project	Expert strategic procurement advice and assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	3 days consulting to operations by database audit on electricity supply	Independent audit on electricity supply.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Legal Advisors	Expert legal advice in water industry issues ensuring compliance with laws and regulations during transition to GoCo.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	ITS - Balance Scorecard consultancy	Specialist advice to identify improvements to analytical services laboratory in the monitoring of water and trade effluent samples.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Provision of Company Pensions Actuarial Advice	Expert advice regarding various aspects of setting up GoCo pension scheme. Actuarial expertise in negotiating with Government Actuary Department and calculation of initial employer's contribution rate. Expertise in development of Scheme Trust Deed and Rules.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Pensions Project	Third party pension administrator appointed to set up and administer new GoCo pension scheme, costs now met by the scheme.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Business Transformation	Expert advice and independent monitoring and reporting to Water Service Executive Team of performance against the Transformation Plan.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement	Expert advice for the award of procurement contracts to ensure compliance with EC Regulations.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement Project	Expert strategic procurement advice and assistance in areas of e-sourcing and e-auction.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Procurement	Expert advice for the award of procurement contracts to ensure compliance with EC Regulations.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Strategic Business Plan Support	Expert advice in the development of the Strategic Business Plan
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Strategy 2010 Support	Expert strategic advice regarding the re-engineering of the business.
Management - Policy appraisal and review	Water Service Financial Advisors	Expert advice to assist Water Service transition to Northern Ireland Water (NIW). Transfer of skills and knowledge to NIW staff took place.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	HR Consultancy	Expert advice delivered a performance management system and pay and grading review within Water Service.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	PR Consultancy	Specialist advice on media issues prior to the transition to GoCo.
Management – Policy appraisal and review	Rebranding for new company & metering leaflet	Expert advice regarding branding issues due to transition to GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Business Development Analysis for NIR	Expert advice on future railway investment provided assurance that an Economic Appraisal being commissioned by Translink was based on accurate and unbiased passenger demand information.
Management - Strategic Management	Review of PSO	Expert advice delivered a comprehensive Financial Memorandum which improved financial governance arrangements over the Public Service Obligation.
Management - Strategic Management	Review of timing of software issues for smartpass	Expert advice on the continued unbroken use of smart passes during re-issue project.
Management - Strategic Management	Expert marine advice on the Rathlin Ferry Service	Expert technical marine advice providing assurance on the operation of the Rathlin Ferry Service.
Management - Strategic Management	Programme Management WRSB strategy	Expert advice on improving the understanding of best practice in Benefits Management and how it could be applied to the water reform programme.
Management - Strategic Management	Programme Management Support	Specialist advisers developed and maintained a Consolidated Programme Plan for the multiple projects that made up the water reform programme.

Nature of Consultancy	Project Description	Benefits
Management - Strategic Management	ITS - Test of likely significance	Expert advice related to environmental impact of potential water and sewerage projects.
Management - Strategic Management	Training Consultancy/OD Transformation Toolkit	Expert advice in developing the HR function and HR strategy to facilitate the transition to GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Technical Review of WIS GIS system	Independent technical expertise and advice for the development of geographical information systems within NIW
Management - Strategic Management	Crown Immunity /EQR	Expert advice provided a gap analysis related to loss of Crown Immunity upon transition to GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	SBP/Technology Programme	Specialist advice on achieving efficiencies using telemetry.
Management - Strategic Management	Payroll Project	Expert advice to design early stages of the project to develop a new HR and payroll IT system within Water Service.
Management - Strategic Management	Implementation of ITIL - New Payroll System	Preparatory work in setting out the company's user requirements and project initiation documentation for new HR and payroll IT system.
Management - Strategic Management	Capital works programme	Expert advice to provide a transparent, expert challenge to the proposed capital works programme as part of the Strategic Business Plan.
Management - Strategic Management	Data Gap Analysis for Underground Assets	Expert advice identified full Capital Maintenance Planning Common Framework (CMPCF) approach could not be developed at the time but enabled work to commence on collecting and storing the data that would allow a full CMPCF approach to be implemented over time within Water Service.
Management - Strategic Management	CIPD Training	Specialist training of internal staff to become accredited trainers which enhanced overall internal staff training.
Management - Strategic Management	Test of Likely Significance	Independent assessment under habitat directive of environmental impact of potential water and sewerage projects.
Management - Strategic Management	ITS - Consents to discharge project	Expert advice and support enabled tight timescales to be met when applying for formal discharge consent in preparation for the move to a GoCo.
Management - Strategic Management	Review of analytical services	Expert advice and review of laboratory services to identify possible rationalisation.
Management - Strategic Management	Routestar training	Specialist training for meter reading team.
Management - Strategic Management	SBP-CWP	Expert advice within the Strategic Business Plan process to assign investment requirements for Waste Water Treatment Works.
Marketing	DPE PR Campaign (Professional Fees only)	Specialist media advice in advance of the introduction to Decriminalised Parking Enforcement in October 2006.
Marketing	Water Reform Customer Awareness Media Campaign	Specialist comprehensive advertising campaign on the planned introduction of domestic water charges wef 1 April 07.
Marketing	Communications brand audit	Specialist media advice in advance of a public awareness media campaign on the introduction of water and sewerage charges which were to be introduced in April 2007.
Organisation & Change Management	DPE - Implementation (Phase 2)	Specialist advice to the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement Project. These skills were transferred to staff.
Procurement	Water Service PPP Directorate Professional Advisory Commission re PPP/PFI	Professional advice and expertise in the efficient procurement of PPP partners and the successful development of PPP projects.
Technical – Project Support	Provision of PPP Technical Advice	Specialist support to assist the Department procure and deliver two packages of road schemes using the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) form of PPP contract.
Research Projects	.Net developers Consultancy	Specialist advice increase level of skill in IT development teams.
Research Projects	Redesign of Rathlin Ferry Pass	Expert advice to redesign scheme based on Internal Audit recommendations in circumstances where in-house development was not possible.

A5 Road: Estimated Costs

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a breakdown of the estimated costs for the completion of the A5 road. (AQW 898/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The current estimated cost of the A5 project is £650 - £850 million.

The breakdown of the upper figure is as follows:

	£M
Construction	540
Fees/Surveys/etc	60
Statutory Authorities	27
Acquisition of Land/Compensation	53
Risk	170

If you require clarification on the cost estimate, please contact the A5 WTC team at Roads Service, Boaz House, 15 Scarffes Entry, Omagh, Co Tyrone BT78 1JH (telephone 028 8225 4786).

M2 Roadworks: Average Journey Time

Mr D Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average journey time since the road works began for (i) a private car from the Sandyknowes roundabout to Belfast City Centre; (ii) a private car from Rush Park to Belfast City Centre; and (iii) the Airbus from Templepatrick to Belfast City Centre. (AQW 903/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service has a system of Automatic Number Plate Recognition Cameras (ANPR) on the city bound carriageway of the M2 motorway from just north of Sandyknowes to the gantry at the top of Nelson Street off-slip. These cameras are used only for the estimation of journey times and the information gathered is encrypted and stored for a maximum of a rolling 24 hour period.

Roads Service has advised that during the time when the roadworks were present on the M2, this system was not operational, as the lane alignments were changed on several occasions to facilitate the construction works.

However, since the completion of the roadworks, the system is again operational and I can report that the morning peak, between approximately 7:45am and 9:30am, show journey times from Sandyknowes to Nelson Street at an average maximum of 20 minutes. For the remainder of the day, the inter peak period, the journey time is a reasonably constant average of seven minutes.

Roads Service do not hold journey time information from Rush Park to City Centre, however, I am advised that from Greencastle to Nelson Street, the morning peak journey time is 14 minutes and the inter peak time is three minutes.

Translink has also advised that it does not hold specific journey time information for the period during the works on the M2. However, they have recordings for Monday 7 September 2009, which gives a representative sample of the normal journey times for the Airbus 300 during the winter school term and where there are no major delays on the M2 Motorway. I can advise that on this date, the average journey time for the Airbus 300 from Templepatrick to Belfast City centre was 23 minutes.

Private Consultancy: DRD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 153/10, if the figure for private consultancy includes expenditure on (i) capital projects; (ii) Private Finance Initiatives; and (ii) agencies of his Department; and, if not, to detail the expenditure on these. (AQW 914/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The expenditure figures for private consultancy firms which were provided in my response to AQW 153/10 included agencies of this Department and Private Finance Initiatives.

The figures provided excluded expenditure on capital projects. Capital projects are part of the core business of Roads Service and Water Service (prior to 1 April 2007) and do not fall within the definition of external consultancy as defined in the NICS central guidance. The information relating to these projects is not readily available at the level of detail required.

Illegally Erected Flags and Signs

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development how many illegally erected flags and signs Roads Service has taken down in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) 2009/10 to date. (AQW 923/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of the number of illegally erected flags and signs removed by my Department's Roads Service since April 2007 are provided in the table below.

Year	Number of illegally erected flags and symbols removed	Number of illegally erected signs removed
2007 - 2008	201	7,331
2008 - 2009	372	4,857
1 April - 30 September 2009	160	2,046

Road or Footpath Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road or footpath schemes are planned for the Kilcooley estate area of Bangor over the next five years. (AQW 949/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Road or Footpath Schemes: Crawfordsburn

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road or footpath schemes are planned for the Crawfordsburn Village area over the next five years. (AQW 950/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

NI Water: Procurement

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development how NI Water is to improve its procurement process and increase opportunities and accessibility for contractors and sub-contractors. (AQW 952/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is currently developing a long-term capital works procurement strategy which will involve the use of an Alliance Framework and will be fully in line with procurement best practice. The strategy, which was outlined by NIW over three Alliance workshops with the local supply chain in August, will provide a number of benefits including capital savings and efficiencies and opportunities for the local construction industry. In addition, NIW will continue to use competitive tendering to meet part of its procurement needs, thereby providing further opportunities for local contractors and consultants.

Public Transport Concessionary Fares

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the extent of concessionary fares available to people with epilepsy who use public transport; and (ii) any concessionary status which is afforded to adults or carers who accompany persons with epilepsy on public transport. (AQW 953/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Epilepsy in itself does not entitle an individual to concessionary travel. However, depending on the frequency of attacks and severity of an individual's condition, a person with epilepsy could be eligible for a half fare concession under the Disability Living Allowance or the Driving Licence Refused categories. The Concessionary Fares Scheme does not at present provide concessions for carers or companions.

Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have used the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service since the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct on 20 August 2009, compared with the total number of passengers who used the service in the equivalent periods in (i) 2006; (ii) 2007; and (iii) 2008. (AQW 967/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information on how many passengers have used the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service since the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct compared with the total number of passengers who used the service in the equivalent periods in (i) 2006; (ii) 2007; and (iii) 2008.

Year Period 6	Passenger Journeys
2006/07	79,012
2007/08	90,868
2008/09	82,573
2009/10	14,468

The period 6 figure for 2009/10 is not comparable with previous years. This is because the figures have not been adjusted for passengers purchasing tickets in the South. Translink have indicated that comparable period 6 figures will be available in the near future.

Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the total amount of revenue generated by passengers using the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service since the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct on 20 August 2009; and to provide corresponding figures for the same periods in (i) 2006; (ii) 2007; and (iii) 2008. (AQW 968/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information on the total amount of revenue generated by passengers using the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service since the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct and the corresponding figures for the same periods in (i) 2006; (ii) 2007; and (iii) 2008.

Year Period 6	Revenue (£)
2006/07	463,468
2007/08	472,595
2008/09	533,762
2009/10	238,130

The period 6 figure for 2009/10 is not comparable with previous years. This is because the allocation of revenue with Iarnrod Eireann has not been completed. The NIR period 6 2009/10 estimate therefore includes revenue which will transfer to Iarnrod Eireann and excludes any transfers from Iarnrod Eireann. Translink have informed me that in net terms the figure is likely to reduce.

Final period 6 figures will be available in the near future.

Road or Footpath Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road or footpath schemes are planned for the Silverstream area of Bangor. (AQW 1013/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Half Fare SmartPass

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the current policy with regard to refunding the unused cash portion of a return ticket purchased by (i) a Half Fare Smart Pass holder; and (ii) a non Half Fare Smart Pass holder. (AQW 1020/10)

Minister for Regional Development: When half-fare paying Smart Pass holders purchase a return ticket they pay for half of two full fare single tickets. One ticket is issued. Translink has advised that this ticket is treated as a return ticket and its policy for all return tickets is that no refund is given if the outward journey is undertaken but the return journey is not.

In all cases where the return journey cannot be made because the train is delayed or cancelled passengers may be entitled to compensation under the delay repay scheme. Details of the Delay-Repay scheme are shown in the Translink Passenger's Charter and are also available on www.translink.co.uk/delayrepay.asp

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will examine (i) the running time for the 06.20 Belfast to Londonderry NI Railway service; and (ii) ways to achieve a pre 9.00 arrival on the Belfast to Londonderry service. (AQW 1022/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of one proposal to alter the timetable for the 6.20 from Belfast to Derry, proposed by the 'Into the West' group. Translink, who are operationally responsible, reviewed the proposed change and remain of the view that a greater amount of time benefit accrues to more people under the existing timetable.

Translink have however informed me that they will continue to review timetables on the Derry line in the context of the whole network and will seek to deliver further improvements in running times, where feasible, in the near future.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 507/10, if the NI Railway services departing Belfast Central Station at 16.10; 16.40; 17.10; 17.40; and 18.10 all terminate in either Portrush or Londonderry. (AQW 1023/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have told me that this is true apart from the fact that the 16.40 service terminates in Ballymena. Train utilisation for all evening peak time services on the Derry line from Belfast is highest between Belfast and Ballymena. Therefore it is important to have greater capacity on this part of the line. The 16.40 service relieves demand on the other services, which terminate beyond Ballymena and that on all services beyond Ballymena standing for extended periods is not a problem for any evening services.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 507/10, how the compression of services helps to relieve overcrowding on NI Railway services departing at 16.10; 16.40; 17.10; 17.40; and 18.10 on the Belfast to Londonderry line, given that passenger numbers are likely to remain, or increase, due to the cancellation of the former 15.30 service. (AQW 1026/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have told me that the 15.30 service, being off peak, was only filled to around 20% capacity. The relocation of this train to peak time means that what was off peak surplus capacity is now utilised in peak time when passenger numbers are higher.

School Children from Rural Areas getting to school by bus

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has had any discussion with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development regarding issues faced by school children from rural areas in getting to school by bus. (AQW 1027/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have had discussions with both the Minister of Education, regarding gritting of school bus runs during winter months, and with the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, regarding the general issue of gritting/snow clearance of rural roads.

As I announced in my Statement to the Assembly on 28 September 2009, I have asked Roads Service to introduce improvements to the operational response around rural schools that are regularly affected by adverse weather conditions.

These improvements will ensure better communications between Roads Service and schools which experience difficulties, and will allow Roads Service to provide a more flexible and timely response, as and when road conditions necessitate.

The required changes to operational practice will be in place for the commencement of this year's winter season.

School Warning Light

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when the new school warning light at Greyabbey primary school will be in operation. (AQW 1028/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service has advised that the flashing warning signs to be installed at Greyabbey Primary School have been ordered and, in the interim, the poles have been erected.

These signs are manufactured in England and the components must be electrically tested before erection commences on site. While Roads Service cannot give a definitive date for installation, they would be hopeful that the signs will be operational within the next couple of months.

External Consultants: DRD Expenditure on A5 Works

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent to date on external consultants on the proposed A5 route; and what is the projected total cost for these consultants. (AQW 1030/10)

Minister for Regional Development: External consultants were engaged by the Department to provide the necessary skills to procure the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) Contracts on the A5 (Tullyvar Improvements).

As these contracts cover a bundle of improvement schemes in two packages, including the maintenance of 180 kilometres of roads for the next 30 years, it is not feasible to breakdown the specific costs relating to the A5 improvements.

External Consultants: DRD Expenditure on A4 Works

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent to date on external consultants on the proposed A4 route; and what is the projected total cost for these consultants. (AQW 1031/10)

Minister for Regional Development: External consultants were engaged by the Department to provide the necessary skills to procure the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) Contracts on the A4.

As these contracts cover a bundle of improvement schemes in two packages, including the maintenance of 180 kilometres of roads for the next 30 years, it is not feasible to breakdown the specific costs relating to the A4 improvements.

External Consultants: DRD

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to phase out or reduce the costs of external consultants. (AQW 1032/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department minimises the costs of external consultants by only engaging them after full consideration of all in-house alternatives and where they will provide value for money.

The Department procures and manages all external consultancy projects in accordance with the procedures set out in the NICS central guidance which includes:-

- Completing a business case for each project, justifying the need for the consultant and the benefits to be realised;
- Obtaining the appropriate approvals at Director level or above;
- Procuring the consultancy using the services of a Centre of Procurement Expertise to ensure best value for money;
- Managing the consultancy using an appropriate methodology;
- Completing a post project evaluation to ensure that the objectives of the assignment are met; and
- Disseminating any lessons learned.

The Department records detailed compliance and financial information relating to all external consultancy projects on a dedicated consultancy database. This information is reported to and monitored by the Departmental Board on a quarterly basis. The Department also carries out detailed checks on project documentation to ensure full compliance with the guidance.

Pay and Display Machines: Newtownabbey

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of repairing pay and display machines in Newtownabbey in each of the last three years. (AQW 1079/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is unable to provide details of the repair costs of pay and display machines in each of the last three years, but can provide details of the cost of maintaining pay and display machines, since the commencement of the parking enforcement contract with NSL on 30 October 2006. Details of maintenance costs for the machines in Ballyclare are detailed below.

Town	30 October 2006 to 29 October 2007	30 October 2007 to 29 October 2008	30 October 2008 to 31 August 2009
Ballyclare	£2,505.16	£2,833.86	£2,427.92

Belfast Rapid Transit System

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the progress of the Belfast Rapid Transit System. (AQW 1086/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Rapid Transit Division is preparing a project works programme denoting main milestones up to December 2011 and is taking forward primary legislation to allow for the implementation and operation of Rapid Transit.

Topographical, geotechnical, traffic and parking surveys have been commissioned and should be completed by the end of November 2009. These will be used in the Outline Business Case to verify the findings of the Strategic Outline Case.

BACKGROUND NOTE

- The project team is currently working on updating the programme for the approval of the Programme Board.
- You have issued the draft paper to Executive colleagues summarising the Rapid Transit policy proposals and seeking their comment in advance of the paper being included on the agenda for the Executive meeting scheduled on 22 October 2009.
- Traffic and Parking surveys on all route options are completed. Topographical, Geotechnical and Deflectograph surveys and a land adoption search are ongoing.

Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many passengers used the Belfast – Dublin Enterprise; and (ii) the income generated by this route, in each of the six months prior to the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct on 20 August 2009. (AQW 1097/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information.

Period Number	Dates	Passenger Journeys	Revenue (£)
12 2008/09	23/02/09 – 29/03/09	76,592	520,716
1 2009/10	30/03/09 – 26/04/09	64,816	332,754
2 2009/10	27/04/09 – 24/05/09	58,215	342,893
3 2009/10	25/05/09 – 28/06/09	72,545	471,350
4 2009/10	29/06/09 – 26/07/09	58,433	312,496
5 2009/10	27/07/09 – 23/08/09	64,517	390,195

The figures above include all passenger trips on the Enterprise but the income figures represent the share to NI Railways.

Belfast to Dublin Railway Line

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how much passenger revenue is likely to be lost on the Belfast – Dublin railway line as a result of the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct on 20 August 2009. (AQW 1098/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink say that it is very difficult to assess the impact of the Malahide bridge incident at this stage and therefore how much passenger revenue is likely to be lost.

They have informed me that patronage loss to date could be down by 60% on the Belfast – Dublin railway line. However, the passenger and revenue figures for the period immediately after the incident have not yet been finalised between Iarnrod Eireann and NIR. The Department of Transport in Dublin state that the bridge re-opening is planned for late November. However the length of time taken to carry out work of this nature is always open to a degree of uncertainty. It is also difficult to know with any degree of certainty when passenger figures will fully recover even if the re-opening takes place as currently planned.

For all these reasons it is difficult to quantify the likely loss of passenger revenue. I can, however, report that as part of normal in year financial monitoring Translink have estimated a potential loss of between £1m-£2m depending on the factors listed above. These figures will be subject to ongoing review and verification.

A8 Roadworks: Vesting of Properties.

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail how many properties will be acquired to facilitate the remaining dualling work on the A8 and the estimated costs of acquiring these properties; and (ii) to provide an update on the vesting process. (AQW 1101/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that dualling the remaining stretch of single carriageway, on the A8 Belfast to Larne road, will require the acquisition of a further four properties in addition to the one building already owned by the Department. In May 2009, Land and Property Service estimated the cost of the four properties, which consist of a private dwelling, a building site, a derelict building and an agricultural barn, to be in the region of £550,000.

Roads Service and its Consultants are working on the final stage of the scheme assessment process and will be in a position to publish draft Orders, which will include a draft Vesting Order, in early to mid 2011.

Cancelled Trains

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many trains which have been cancelled in each of the last five years. (AQW 1102/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information.

Period-Year	NIR local network Cancellations	Enterprise Cancellations
Oct 04 to Sept 05	836	0
Oct 05 to Sept 06	899	1
Oct 06 to Sept 07	736	0
Oct 07 to Sept 08	630	0
Oct 08 to Sept 09	522	0

By way of context, each year in excess of 100,000 train services are operated in the NIR network and approximately 5,500 Enterprise services are operated

Road or Footpath Schemes: Groomsport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road or footpath schemes are planned for the Groomsport Village area. (AQW 1103/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Road or Footpath Schemes: Millisle

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road or footpath schemes are planned for the Millisle area. (AQW 1104/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Winter Services Around Rural Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will extend option two, as outlined in his statement 'Winter Services Around Rural Schools' to the House on 28 September 2009, to include all rural schools. (AQW 1115/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Option 2, referred to in my statement, 'Winter Services Around Rural Schools' is targeted at the 46 schools, which had specific problems, throughout the winter of 2008/09 that resulted in their closure.

The list will change and adapt over time due to climatic variations. However, extending the list to all rural schools would not be an effective manner in which to deploy resources.

Dropped Kerb Schemes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what 'dropped kerb' schemes are planned for the North Down area over the next financial year. (AQW 1145/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a programme of works for the provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving in North Down, for the 2010/11 financial year, has not been finalised. However, I can advise that the following locations will be included.

- Abbey Ring, Holywood (various locations);
- Willowbrook Area, Bangor (various locations);
- Breezemount Estate, Bangor (various locations);
- Owenroe Drive/Ballygowan Gardens, Bangor; and
- Owenroe Drive/Clandeboyne Road, Bangor.

I can further advise that there may be an opportunity for Roads Service to commence some of this work in the latter part of this financial year.

Scheduled Maintenance Work on Motorways

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the next scheduled maintenance work on each motorway. (AQW 1157/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Firstly, I should explain that the maintenance of the motorways in the North is undertaken by those contractors who were awarded the Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) Package 1 and Package 2 contracts.

The DBFO Package 1 contract was awarded to Highway Management and includes the maintenance of some 60 kilometres of the M1, M2, M3, M5, M22 and A8(M) for a period of 30 years. DBFO Package 2 was awarded to Amey Lagan Roads and includes the maintenance of some 120 kilometres of the M1, A1, A101 and A4 for a period of 30 years.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that major maintenance schemes, scheduled for commencement on the North's motorways in the next three months, are as follows:

- M1 – Resurfacing J10 – J9 eastbound;
- M1 – Resurfacing J7 and J8 westbound;
- M1 – High Friction Surfacing J14 and J15 slip roads;
- M1 – Sprucefield Bridge Repairs;
- M1 – Ballyskeagh Bridge Repairs;
- M1 – Safety Barrier Replacement at Tamnamore East Bridge, Tamnamore West Bridge, Laghey Bridge, Tempanroe Bridge, Douglas Bridge, Stangmore East Bridge, Stangmore West Bridge, Beattie's Corner Bridge, and Hunts Corner Bridge; and
- M2 – Six Mile Water Bridge Repairs

Routine inspections and maintenance work will also continue to be carried out on the North's motorways.

Roadworks: Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the roadworks carried out by (i) Roads Service; (ii) other departmental bodies; and (iii) non-Government companies in the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas, since 01 September 2009. (AQW 1160/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service has advised that it has undertaken the following roadworks in the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas since 01 September 2009:-

Carriageways

- Ransevyn Drive, Whitehead;
- Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus;

Traffic Management Schemes

- Carnmoney Village, Glengormley – pelican crossing almost completed;
- Prince Charles Way, Carnmoney – pelican crossing very recently started;
- Doagh Road, Ballyclare – pedestrian refuge;

Footways

- Doagh Road, Ballyclare;
- Ballyeaston Road, Ballyclare;
- Ransevyn Drive, Whitehead;

Private Streets Enforcements (remedial works carried out by Roads Service due to Developer de-faulting on commitments)

The Beeches, Hightown Road, Glengormley;

- Willow Heights, Carnmoney Road, Glengormley;
- Rodgers Quay, Carrickfergus;
- Prospect Loanen, Carrickfergus;

Street Lighting installation

- Dean Park, Castlemara, Carrickfergus;
- Glenville Drive, Parade and Green, Whiteabbey;
- Shore Road, Whiteabbey; and
- Bleach Green Ave, Whiteabbey.

Road Service officials have also advised that NI Water provided notification of 172 road openings in the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas between 1 September and 7 October 2009.

I can also advise of the number of road openings notified to Roads Service by non Government companies in the Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas between 1 September and 7 October 2009:-

- NIE – 132;
- Phoenix Natural Gas – 126;
- Virgin Media – 22; and
- BT – 17.

Cost of Publishing and Translating Material in Irish and Ulster Scots

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of publishing and translating all material from his Department in Irish and Ulster-Scots format for the last ten years. (AQW 1164/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department was created in December 1999. From that time, to 1 October 2009, my Department has spent the following amounts in publishing and translating all material in Irish and Ulster-Scots:

Cost in £s of material published and translated:

Year	Irish	Ulster-Scots
1999-2000	Nil	Nil
2000-2001	Nil	Nil
2001-2002	Nil	Nil
2002-2003	Nil	Nil
2003-2004	148	134
2004-2005	338	Nil
2005-2006	436	Nil
2006-2007	411	175
2007-2008	893	49
2008-2009	5514	202
1 April to 1 October 2009	1529	Nil
Total:	£9269	£560

Collisions on the A26

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the accident history on the A26 road in the vicinity of Glenavy village, in the last 5 years; and (ii) any measures his Department has taken to improve road safety in this location. (AQW 1176/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service aims to improve road safety, where possible, and to this end, receives data on collisions involving personal injury from the PSNI. This data is used to identify locations where there are numbers of collisions occurring, over a three-year period, and to identify a common cause which can be treated by engineering measures.

The original collision data remains under PSNI control and you may wish to contact them directly regarding precise collision details. However, Roads Service has advised that the stretch of the A26 in the vicinity of the Main Street and Lisburn Road junctions has had a total of 15 collisions, in the 5-year period between 2004 and 2008 inclusive.

Roads Service has adopted a proactive approach to improving road safety. As part of this, a number of Route Management Studies have been undertaken, to identify potential improvements which could enhance road safety, or alleviate congestion. The A26 Route Management Strategy identified a number of potential improvements at various junctions along the route, including a roundabout at the junction of the A26 / Lisburn Road, and a right turn pocket at the junction of the A26 / Main Street.

Each of these proposals will be assessed in detail before being prioritised for possible inclusion in any future Minor Works programme. The implementation of each scheme will, therefore, depend on the overall scheme priority, successful completion of statutory processes, and the necessary funding being available.

Translink: Delay-Repay Scheme

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of compensation vouchers issued by Translink under the 'Delay-repay' scheme in relation to (i) Northern Ireland Railways (ii) Ulsterbus (iii) Metro in each of the last five years; and to detail the total value of these vouchers. (AQW 1211/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Delay-Repay compensation scheme was introduced on Friday 29 February 2008, offering compensation to any ticket holder (bar passengers entitled to free travel schemes) in Northern Ireland Railways. The scheme does not apply to Ulsterbus or Metro. Hence single, return, weekly, monthly and annual ticket holders are all entitled to claim compensation if their local rail services have been delayed:-

- 30 – 59 minutes, entitled to 50% of the single fare paid
- 60 – 119 minutes, entitled to 100% of the single fare paid
- Greater than 119 minutes, entitled to 100% of the return fare paid

All compensation is paid in NI Railways vouchers and can be claimed up to 28 days after the delay.

The total number of compensation vouchers issued by Translink under the Delay-repay scheme in relation to Northern Ireland Railways is shown in the table below:

Financial Year	No of Vouchers issued	Total Value of vouchers
2007/08 (March 2008 only)	78	£178
2008/09	681	£2,786
2009/10 (To 30 Sept 2009)	209	£673

Vehicles Damaged by Potholes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how much compensation has been paid to vehicle owners in each constituency for repairs to vehicles damaged by potholes or other road deficiencies, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1260/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The amount of compensation paid to vehicle owners in each constituency for repairs to vehicles damaged by potholes or other road deficiencies in each of the last five financial years is shown below. This information cannot be provided on a constituency basis as it is held on a Section Office basis. Roads Service Section Office areas correspond roughly with District Council areas.

Roads Service Section Office	Vehicle Damage Compensation Paid By Year				
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Antrim	£6,9636.91	£6,627.14	£5,518.30	£2,221.95	£2,207.22
Ards	£8,883.04	£7,038.99	£4,429.49	£9,817.54	£6,413.14
Armagh	£3,749.27	£6,456.10	£4,424.64	£5,370.94	£11,286.40
Ballymena & Larne	£7,707.36	£8,033.69	£8,278.51	£5,875.58	£7,536.18
Ballymoney & Moyle	£2,292.12	£4,547.75	£2,925.02	£3,753.81	£2,533.07
Banbridge	£3,726.09	£3,048.23	£3,069.64	£3,900.72	£3,115.25
Belfast North	£2,390.24	£2,843.32	£8,125.78	£2,171.45	£1,253.15
Belfast South	£5,480.10	£474.55	£1,048.21	£8,476.90	£2,757.99
Castlereagh	£4,663.89	£1,913.36	£28,048.96	£3,809.35	£1,931.29
Coleraine	£1,939.25	£4,606.85	£1,593.78	£957.77	£4,025.52
Cookstown	£3,235.77	£5,111.04	£3,112.97	£4,501.47	£11,118.40
Craigavon	£4,850.41	£1,830.50	£4,151.07	£7,766.89	£3,649.51
Down	£3,046.51	£3,210.26	£3,884.05	£4,452.79	£5,532.29
Dungannon	£6,351.74	£7,829.79	£5,856.67	£5,747.39	£9,073.04
Fermanagh	£6,357.17	£4,814.15	£5,351.55	£7,129.00	£9,229.72
Limavady	£815.29	£485.50	£238.52	£796.39	£1,877.43
Lisburn	£16,846.16	£12,930.67	£16,821.03	£8,817.50	£17,699.88
Londonderry	£7,066.62	£2,466.08	£2,278.93	£6,905.68	£2,588.56
Magherafelt	£1,729.47	£2,549.89	£1,462.21	£2,685.77	£1,314.88
Newry & Mourne	£28,033.62	£15,599.00	£33,773.36	£30,638.85	£43,197.01

Roads Service Section Office	Vehicle Damage Compensation Paid By Year				
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Newtownabbey & Carrick	£6,100.73	£8,896.73	£4,660.00	£6,151.56	£6,707.87
North Down	£1,253.06	£1,621.19	£925.45	£681.29	£3,200.43
Omagh	£6,921.09	£3,210.21	£7,918.98	£7,368.52	£9,775.77
Strabane	£7,6237.39	£876.25	£633.21	£999.01	£2,065.07
Strangford Ferry	£393.80	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Total	£148,407.10	117,021.24	£158,530.33	£140,998.12	£170,089.07

Chronic Road Congestion

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what steps his Department is taking to tackle the chronic road congestion in Newtownabbey adjacent to the Doagh Road, Shore Road, Whiteabbey Station Road, Monkstown Road, Jordanstown Road, Circular Road and the Glenville Road; and (ii) what plans his Department has to ensure that any future road openings will take account of the impact on traffic patterns across a wider area than that adjacent to the excavation or installation scheme. (AQW 1334/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Northern Ireland Water (NIW) are carrying out essential improvements to their infrastructure in the Newtownabbey area, and that this work is still ongoing on the Doagh Road. Unfortunately, it was inevitable that these works were likely to cause significant traffic disruption.

Roads Service, PSNI and NIW considered all possible methods of construction and traffic management control, in detail, prior to commencement of the works. Closure of the Doagh Road to expedite the works was considered. However, this was rejected as it was likely to cause very significant traffic congestion in the wider area.

The works on the Doagh Road are progressing well, with lane closures and temporary traffic signal controls in use. NIW and its contractor for the work on the Doagh Road have agreed to a longer working day and weekend working, and it is hoped that this will lead to completion of the works earlier than anticipated.

The impact of road openings on traffic patterns, across a wider area, is constantly monitored to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum. Measures, such as, Variable Message Signs, and alterations to traffic signal timings, may be used to improve traffic flow.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development why the current NI Railways Londonderry line timetable now refers to 'Derry', when the original timetable referred only to 'Londonderry'; and who made the decision to make this change. (AQW 1336/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that in regard to the general issue of dual naming, destination boards on NIR trains now refer to Derry/Londonderry instead of Londonderry and have done since the end of November 2007.

In addition, in respect of publications and documents, while NIR have no documented policy, the practice is to use a mixture of "Derry", "Londonderry" and the combined "Derry/Londonderry"

Therefore it is consistent to have the timetable with dual naming.

I have been informed by Translink that the decision to use the titles "Londonderry Line" and "Derry Line" on the new Derry/Londonderry timetable was taken by NIR management in response to customer expectations.

Half Fare SmartPass

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 687/10, whether the Return Fares Scheme for Half Fare Smart Pass holders has ever been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. (AQW 1338/10)

Minister for Regional Development: No. As set out in my answer to AQW 687/10, the screening exercise undertaken earlier this year indicated that an Equality Impact Assessment was not required.

New Bus Station in Banbridge

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on his Department's plans to build a new bus station in Banbridge. (AQW 1406/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The issues surrounding the identification of a suitable site for a new bus station have not been resolved. Plans to build a new bus station in Banbridge depend on resolution to this issue as well as securing the necessary budgetary provision.

Review of Public Administration: DRD Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 834/10, to detail all expenditure by his Department, and agencies of his Department, on the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 1424/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In my reply to the Member's Assembly Question AQW 834/10, I detailed the consultant's fees and approximate staff costs incurred by my Department's Roads Service on the Review of Public Administration. Any other staff costs incurred within the Department would be very minimal and are not recorded separately.

Compensation Claims: Roads Service

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development how much compensation has been paid out to those tripping and falling on pavements in East Antrim, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1471/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Unfortunately, my Department's Central Claims Unit does not hold the information in the format requested. However, Central Claims Unit does maintain a record of compensation claims details for each Roads Service Section Office. The area of the East Antrim constituency extends over three Section Offices. It includes some parts of the Ballymoney and Moyle Section Office near Glengariff, the Larne district within the Ballymena and Larne Section Office and the Carrickfergus district and three Newtownabbey wards within the Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus Section Office. Claims figures for the Glengariff area and the three Newtownabbey wards could only be extracted at a disproportionate cost. The following figures show the amounts of compensation paid by Central Claims Unit for each of the last five financial years to those tripping and falling on pavements in the Larne and Carrickfergus Section Office areas and also in respect of all of the Newtownabbey Section Office area, which includes the Newtownabbey constituency wards.

	Compensation Paid
2008/09	
Carrickfergus Section Office	£6,000.00
Larne Section Office	£5,000.00
Newtownabbey Section Office	£32,621.00
Total	£43,621.00

	Compensation Paid
2007/08	
Carrickfergus Section Office	£4,100.00
Larne Section Office	NIL.00
Newtownabbey Section Office	£39,962.50
Total	£44,062.50
2006/07	
Carrickfergus Section Office	£750.00
Larne Section Office	£2,375.00
Newtownabbey Section Office	£76,220.41
Total	£79,345.41
2005/06	
Carrickfergus Section Office	£14,500.00
Larne Section Office	£17,500.00
Newtownabbey Section Office	£23,415.66
Total	£55,415.66
2004/05	
Carrickfergus Section Office	£40,750.00
Larne Section Office	£1,500.00
Newtownabbey Section Office	£48,000.00
Total	£90,250.00

Efficiency Savings: DRD

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1535/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has a target to deliver 3% efficiencies of some £22 / £44 / £65 million over the Budget period 2008-11. To date the Department has delivered these savings without any impact on its services.

Background

1. In line with the approach adopted by Whitehall Departments, Departments here developed plans to deliver cumulative efficiency savings of 3% a year over the Budget period 2008-11, including an annual real reduction in civil service administration costs of 5%, in order to accommodate expected cost pressures, and at the same time deliver improvements in public service provision. All resources released by this work are reallocated to public services here.
2. The objective of the Department's Efficiency Delivery Plans is to demonstrate how we propose to achieve 3% resource and 5% admin annual net cashable efficiencies, amounting to some £22 million / £44 million / £65 million (of which £0.8 million / £3.1 million / £5.4 million is Admin) .
3. The Department identified, at a high level, 3% efficiency reductions within the roads rail and bus capital programmes, corporate service functions and through efficiencies incorporated within the Northern Ireland Water subsidy requirement, as set out in the table below.

Efficiency Delivery Plan - Categories	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000
Overall DRD Efficiencies	22,463	44,250	65,384
Water Efficiencies - to be incorporated within the NIW subsidy requirement	9,014	17,758	26,239
Remaining DRD Efficiencies	13,449	26,492	39,145
Of which Admin Efficiencies	830	3,130	5,366
Generation of additional income	3,494	3,952	4,412
Reduction in capital budget for plant / depot additions / refurbishment	2,500	2,500	2,500
Other Capital efficiencies	2,600	8,000	7,790
Reductions in rail / bus capital	1,100	5,950	4,500
NITHC Asset Disposals	0	0	11,600
Core Costs (Resource)	475	510	527
Bus route subsidy	2,450	2,450	2,450
Subtotal	12,619	23,362	33,779
Service Delivery Efficiencies (Admin)	830	2,995	5,099
Reductions in Core Costs (Admin)	0	135	267
Admin Subtotal	830	3,130	5,366
Total	13,449	26,492	39,145

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Housing Allocations

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to list the total number of social housing allocations in each of the last two years, broken down by the religious background of the new tenant.

(AQW 872/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): Table 1 gives the breakdown of the Housing Executive allocations for the period requested. Housing Associations allocate houses using the Housing Executive Common Waiting List and Table 2 gives the breakdown of Housing Associations allocations for the period requested.

TABLE 1 – HOUSING EXECUTIVE ALLOCATIONS

	2007/08	2008/09
Catholic	2,864	3,061
Other	417	578
Protestant	3,457	3,604
Undisclosed	549	885
Total	7,287	8,128

TABLE 2 – HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS ALLOCATIONS

	2007/08	2008/09
Catholic	5864	6126
Other	796	812
Protestant	4944	5374
Undisclosed	808	962
Total	12,412	13274

NB: Housing Association data is gathered by way of a questionnaire and in 2007/08 it is estimated that 84% of tenants completed the questionnaire and in 2008/09 it is estimated that 85% completed the questionnaire.

Funding for Community Workers

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department ring-fences funding for community workers. (AQW 943/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department does not ring fence funding for any individual post or worker. Decisions on what is funded are based on the evaluation of a detailed application and a robust economic appraisal in which consideration is given to value for money and whether the option presented offers the best way to address deprivation and/or disadvantage within the target community.

In some programmes the Department seeks to sustain and build a stronger community infrastructure through the funding of core posts in regional and sub-regional organisations. For example, under the Regional Infrastructure Programme and the Community Investment Fund, funding is provided towards the salaries of key staff providing services to the voluntary and community sector on a regional or sub-regional basis. However in all cases a decision to fund is based on the assessment and appraisal of a formal application.

Housing Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what housing schemes are planned for the Silverstream area of Bangor. (AQW 1006/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has confirmed that there are no schemes planned in the Silverstream area of Bangor.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many active cases are currently being dealt with by the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1011/10)

Minister for Social Development: As at the end of August 2009, 101,129 people were claiming Incapacity Benefit. This includes both claims where an amount of Incapacity Benefit is in payment or where National Insurance credits only are being awarded.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to provide details of any backlog within the Incapacity Benefit Branch, including the reasons for this backlog. (AQW 1014/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is currently no backlog in the processing and delivery of work in Incapacity Benefit Branch. The outstanding work is within acceptable levels.

Derelict Buildings

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the extent and range of her Department's power and authority to compel property owners in towns and villages to make safe and improve the appearance of derelict buildings. (AQW 1045/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department cannot compel private individuals in towns and villages to make purely cosmetic improvements to their own property.

In respect of urban regeneration, my Department has powers under Part VII of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 to acquire land by agreement, or compulsorily by vesting order, but chiefly as part of a development scheme where it is considered that an urban area should be developed, re-developed or improved. Such schemes are undertaken in settlements of more than 4,500 people, which is the current policy definition of an urban area. Such schemes may address these issues, but not as a primary objective.

The Housing Executive has powers under Article 63 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. It gives the Housing Executive the authority to secure or demolish premises in order to either prevent damage or to protect housing accommodation and to recover costs from the owner where appropriate. This legislation is complemented by the Belfast Improvement Acts, most relevant being the Belfast Improvement Act 1878 and the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 which empower Belfast City Council to take action in relation to dangerous buildings and structures and environmental issues (removal of rubbish etc.). There is an overlap in responsibility under legislation as regards Belfast, and therefore the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council act in partnership to ensure compliance with the requirements of Article 63.

I am not aware of any housing legislation which requires an owner to merely improve the appearance of a derelict building.

Staff Transfer: DSD

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her Department's policy in relation to staff who request, and are offered, a transfer to another area. (AQW 1058/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development operates within the Northern Ireland Civil Service Vacancy Management Policy. Under this Policy, staff may be placed in a priority pool for a transfer if they fall within the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and a transfer would be considered a reasonable adjustment or they have compelling welfare considerations which would necessitate a transfer. Staff may also seek a transfer through the Elective Transfer process which gives staff across all departments the opportunity to apply directly for advertised vacancies for which they satisfy the criteria, provided that they can be released from their existing post, taking account of business needs.

Housing Schemes: Dromore

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing schemes planned by the NI Housing Executive for Dromore in the next financial year. (AQW 1070/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is one new build scheme planned for Dromore over the period April 2009 – March 2010. The scheme, at Beechgrove Phase 2 in Dromore, will provide 5 units of general household accommodation and is being developed by South Ulster Housing Association.

There are two kitchens schemes in the programme for Dromore for next year. The first scheme involves kitchen replacement to 55 properties in the Dromore rural area with an estimated cost of £300k. The second scheme involves kitchen replacement to 33 properties in Dromore town with an estimated cost of £180k. Both schemes will proceed subject to funding being available.

NI Housing Executive

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes have been allocated by the NI Housing Executive in (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey, in each month, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1087/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available in the format requested. The Housing Executive records allocations on a quarterly basis by District Office as detailed in the table below.

Quarter ending	Newtownabbey 1	Newtownabbey 2	Carrickfergus	Larne
Jun-06	34	36	37	31
Sep-06	30	35	34	35
Dec-06	27	36	27	27
Mar-07	27	53	39	30
Jun-07	22	48	38	17
Sep-07	19	32	22	25
Dec-07	24	50	24	23
Mar-08	9	50	24	16
Jun-08	24	39	21	18
Sep-08	33	33	22	21
Dec-08	24	34	49	33
Mar-09	41	51	44	18

Social Housing Waiting List: Strangford

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the waiting list for social housing in the Strangford constituency. (AQW 1092/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The Strangford constituency comprises the whole of the Ards Council area plus small parts of Down and Castlereagh and the table below provides figures for all three Council areas.

Waiting List	June 2009
Ards District	1,684
Down District	1,281
Castlereagh District	1,357
Total	4,322

Incapacity Benefit Claims

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development for the average time taken to process an Incapacity Benefit claim. (AQW 1124/10)

Minister for Social Development: Following the introduction of ESA from 27 October 08, new claims to IB are only accepted where the claim links back to a previous IB claim (known as a linking claim). Whilst there is no longer a Public Service Agreement target set for processing Incapacity Benefit claims, the actual average clearance time for an IB claim is still monitored. The average clearance time for a claim to Incapacity Benefit (IB) is 20.4 days. This figure relates to the month of August 2009, which is the last month for which there are full figures available.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the annual budget for the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1127/10)

Minister for Social Development: The allocated budget for Incapacity Benefits Branch for 2009/10 is currently £6,149,000. A breakdown of this allocation is provided in the table below.

Business Area	Budget
Programme Salary costs	£6,051,000
General Administrative Expenditure	£98,000
Total	£6,149,000

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if there is a dedicated call handling section in the Incapacity Benefit Branch. (AQW 1154/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is no dedicated call handling section within Incapacity Benefit Branch. Telephone duties are carried out by processing staff as they regularly have to contact customers and other operational business areas to progress claims.

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff within the Incapacity Benefit Branch are tasked on a daily basis with tackling benefit fraud. (AQW 1158/10)

Minister for Social Development: Incapacity Benefits Branch has three trained Fraud Liaison Officers. In addition to this, fraud awareness is delivered to operational staff in the branch on an annual basis and all staff are aware of their responsibility to report any incidences of suspected fraud to a Fraud Liaison Officer.

Benefit Advice for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, given that 90% of blind and partially sighted people do not secure their full benefit entitlement, what steps her Department is taking to ensure they receive their full entitlement. (AQW 1182/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am committed to ensuring that everyone gets the benefit to which they are entitled. In this case I understand that the percentage reference originates from Action for Blind People, quoting an RNIB statistic from 2002. Since then much work has been done to increase the uptake of benefit across all customer groups.

Social Security Agency staff, as part of day to day business, provide a range of services to ensure that all people are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits. These include:

- Outreach services
- Promotional activity
- Departmental website
- Network of local and centralised offices.
- Publication of leaflets.

Copies of documents and leaflets are available in Braille, audio tape or large print on request.

Recently, the Agency introduced a Benefit Adviser Service through the NI Direct web site. It provides a benefit calculator with information on 27 benefits/credits/allowances and a Calculation and Comparison Service for 11 benefits. This service is available to both working age and older people and can be accessed anonymously by individuals or advice organisations with internet access.

Since 2005 the Agency has delivered Benefit Uptake Programmes to increase awareness and uptake of social security benefits. These Programmes targeted older people, families, people with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities. As a result, almost 350,000 letters and leaflets have been sent out and an additional £27 million of annual benefit has been generated.

While the Agency has not targeted blind or partially sighted people in particular through its benefit uptake activities, I would point out that they may have been selected through the normal process of identifying vulnerable customers to be contacted through the Programmes. The 2009/10 benefit uptake activities include offering full benefit assessments to 25,000 people as well as extending the Agency's outreach provision.

Social Housing: Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the waiting list for social housing in (i) the Newtownabbey area; and (ii) the Carrickfergus area. (AQW 1209/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of people on the Waiting List for social housing in Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus at end of June 2009 were:-

Newtownabbey 1	801
Newtownabbey 2	902
Carrickfergus	1021

Crumlin Road Courthouse

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on her Department's involvement in the plans to develop the Crumlin Road Courthouse and jail properties. (AQW 1218/10)

Minister for Social Development: The development of the Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood park site is being taken forward subject to a Masterplanning process. Following completion of consultation on a draft EQIA I am currently considering options on the draft Masterplan proposals. I would hope to be in a position to progress these within the near future.

I have recently announced the extension of the public tours of the Gaol. These have been ongoing since April 2009 and they have been extremely popular with over 22,000 visitors this year. A further major programme of restoration work on the Gaol is commencing with the refurbishment of the Gatehouse and Governor's Corridor, due to begin in early 2010.

The development of Crumlin Road Courthouse is not the responsibility of my department as it is owned privately and the owner has ambition to develop the site when market conditions are right. Departmental officials have been working with the developer in an effort to bring about its redevelopment.

This Grade B+ listed building is located in a prominent position on a major arterial route opposite the Crumlin Road Gaol and Government remains keen to ensure that development in this area is carried out in an integrated way.

Regeneration of Smaller Town Centres

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development if there is provision within her budget to provide funds for the regeneration of smaller town centres such as Carnlough, Bushmills and Dromore. (AQW 1219/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has responsibility for the regeneration of urban areas in Northern Ireland. The current policy definition of 'urban' by the NI Statistics Research Agency is a settlement with more than 4,500 residents. The only provision within my budget therefore is for new schemes within such areas.

Dromore in County Down is defined as 'urban' and has benefited from urban regeneration funding in the recent past. DSD provided funding of £175,000 for the Dromore Public Realm Improvement Scheme completed in August 2008. Dromore has also benefited by £38,500 from the Department's Town Centre Promotions and Marketing programme.

Although my Department has not funded new projects in rural villages since 2004, there are a number of legacy projects which the Department has honoured. Both Bushmills and Carnlough were supported in a joint initiative with the International Fund for Ireland, resulting in investment of just under £1.6 million in Bushmills and £590,000 in Carnlough.

Funding to Groups in the Kilcooley Estate

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding given to groups in the Kilcooley estate, in each of the last three years; and the purpose of each award. (AQW 1227/10)

Minister for Social Development: The following groups have been funded by DSD in the Kilcooley Estate in the last three years:

Group	Programme	06/07 £	07/08 £	08/09 £	Purpose of funding
Kilcooley Community Forum	Neighbourhood Renewal	42,673.42	43,293	43,581.22	Support and development of the Kilcooley Forum
Kilcooley Community Forum	Neighbourhood Renewal			2,971.60	Upgrade of Forum Computers
Kilcooley Community Forum	Small Grants for Volunteering			1,000	Small grants to support groups and individuals to maximise potential, bringing greater benefits to wider community.
First Friends Play Group	Neighbourhood Renewal	9,751.28	17,003	8,122	Provision of child care and establishment of a community enterprise group.
North Down Impact-Access all Areas	Neighbourhood Renewal	4,791.62			Cross-community project with Poleglass.
North Down Alternatives	Neighbourhood Renewal			27,994.85	Targeting anti-social behaviour, youth at risk, community capacity, the fear of crime and the needs of vulnerable residents.
Kilcooley Women's Education and Development Group	Small Grants for Volunteering	1,000	1,000	1,000	Small grants to support the promotion and establishment of education programmes for women, young people and pre-school children
Kilcooley Women's Education and Development Group	Neighbourhood Renewal	4,032.60			Provision of audio transcription equipment for paralegal training
Kilcooley Women's Education and Development Group	Neighbourhood Renewal			£25,153	STEP project to provide accredited training and an employment mentoring service for women from Kilcooley
The Square Centre	Small Grants for Volunteering			£1,000	Small grant to support the community café, nearly new shop to assist vulnerable and socially excluded residents

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) desktop computers; (ii) laptop computers; (iii) fax machines; and (iv) telephones are utilised within each section of the Appeals Service. (AQW 1228/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is provided in the table below:

Section	Desktop Computers	Laptop Computers	Fax Machines	Telephones
Prehearing	22			12
Hearing	25			16
Post Hearing	16			14
Administration and Support	16	1	2	10
Total	79	1	2	52

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many active cases are currently being dealt with by the Appeals Service. (AQW 1229/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Appeals Service is currently dealing with 3,555 active cases, figure correct at 30th September 2009.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Appeals Service (ii) whether the Appeals Service is fit for purpose; and (iii) how often it has attained its Key Performance Indicators targets. (AQW 1230/10)

Minister for Social Development: (i) & (ii) The Appeals Service provides an essential service which brings together the parties to the appeal and the judiciary for the fair and independent delivery of decisions in a way that best meets both the expectations of all parties to the appeal and the demands of the public purse.

Approximately 12,600 appeals were processed in 2008-09 with customers receiving their final determination within 16 weeks of the appeal being received in The Appeals Service. In processing these appeals The Appeals Service arranged just under 17,000 Tribunal hearings, involving a range of 24 different types of appeals, in 17 cities and towns across Northern Ireland. This consistent performance demonstrates the branch's effectiveness and supports the view that it is fit for purpose.

(iii) The average time to bring a case to hearing has improved from just less than 15 weeks in March 2006 to 11 weeks in September 2009. In addition the number of appeals currently in the system is well within acceptable levels.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development the average time taken by the Appeals Service to process (i) a Disability Living Allowance Appeal; (ii) a Rent Officer Appeal; (iii) an Incapacity Benefit Appeal; and (iv) an Employment and Support Allowance Appeal. (AQW 1232/10)

Minister for Social Development: The average time to process an appeal to hearing is:-

- | | |
|--|----------|
| (i) Disability Living Allowance Appeal | 11 weeks |
| (ii) Rent Assessment Appeal | 9 weeks |
| (iii) Incapacity Benefit Appeal | 10 weeks |
| (iv) Employment and Support Allowance Appeal | 6 weeks |

Replacement Windows: Glen Estate

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development when the new dwellings on the Glen Estate, Newtownards will have replacement windows fitted. (AQW 1242/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's planned improvement and maintenance programme has been affected by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget. The Housing Executive is therefore currently unable to confirm when improvement works to these properties will be completed.

Housing Executive Tenancies

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenancies were terminated due to anti-social behaviour in each local Council area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1255/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The table below details the number of properties recovered by the Housing Executive District Office administrative area because of anti social behaviour for the last three years.

District Office	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast West	2	1	3
Belfast East	0	1	0
Belfast North	3	1	1
Belfast South	1	0	0
Belfast Shankill	0	0	0
Bangor	0	1	2
Newtownards	1	1	0
Castlereagh	0	0	1
Lisburn 1	3	3	7
Lisburn 3	0	0	0
Downpatrick	0	0	4
Banbridge	0	0	0
Newry	1	0	3
Armagh	1	0	1
Lurgan/Brownlow	0	2	2
Portadown	1	1	0
Dungannon	2	3	0
Fermanagh	2	5	1
Ballymena	0	2	1
Antrim	0	0	0
Newtownabbey 1	0	0	1
Newtownabbey 2	0	0	2
Carrickfergus	0	0	1
Larne	0	0	1
Ballycastle	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	2	0
Waterloo	0	0	0
Waterside	0	0	2
Collon	0	3	1
Limavady	0	0	2
Magherafelt	0	0	2
Strabane	0	0	0
Omagh	0	5	2
Cookstown	0	2	3
Total	17	33	43

Housing Schemes: Lisburn

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the housing schemes planned by the NI Housing Executive for Lisburn, in the next financial year. (AQW 1263/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go on site in subsequent years. The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed, as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of funding in any given year.

Details of the Housing Executive's programmes of activity are included in their District Housing Plans which are reviewed annually and presented to local councils. The Lisburn District Housing Plan is available at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to transfer additional staff to the Appeals Service. (AQW 1266/10)

Minister for Social Development: Staffing levels in The Appeals Service are monitored on an ongoing basis and when necessary, reviewed, to ensure they reflect variations in workloads. At present there is one vacancy in the branch and a suitable candidate is being identified to fill this post.

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the annual budget for the Appeals Service. (AQW 1267/10)

Minister for Social Development: The allocated budget for The Appeals Service for 2009/10 is currently £4,640,899. A breakdown of this allocation is provided in the table below.

Business Area	Budget
Wages & Salaries	£1,765,899
General Administrative Expenditure	£2,875,000
Total	£4,640,899

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints have been received by the Appeals Service from (i) individual claimants; (ii) Citizens Advice Bureau staff; (iii) solicitors; and (iv) elected representatives such as Councillors, MLAs or MPs, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1268/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information regarding Citizen Advice Bureau staff is not available; any complaints from this body are included in the totals for representatives from voluntary sector.

The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Year	Claimants	Representatives from Voluntary Sector	Solicitors	Elected Representatives	Total
2004-2005	25	1	4	2	32
2005-2006	17	4	0	2	23
2006-2007	15	1	1	0	17
2007-2008	13	2	1	3	19
2008-2009	11	7	0	1	18
Totals	81	15	6	8	109

Appeals Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development if there is a dedicated call handling section in the Appeals Service. (AQW 1269/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Appeals Service does not operate a dedicated call handling section.

Improvement Scheme in the Glen Estate, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she would agree to review the improvement scheme in the Glen Estate, Newtownards, aimed at increasing the bungalow dwellings from one bed to two bed, if there should be a shortfall in funding. (AQW 1276/10)

Minister for Social Development: These proposed Multi Element Improvement works would involve all of the 16 affected bungalows getting an extension to provide an extra bedroom at a total cost of some £833,000. The Housing Executive's planned improvement and maintenance programme has been affected by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget. The Housing Executive did review its programme and is currently unable to confirm when improvement works to these properties may commence.

Credit Unions

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with Credit Unions to explore their proposals for investing in the social housing programme. (AQO 170/10)

Minister for Social Development: I met with the President of the Irish League of Credit Unions and an ICLU Board member on 8 June 2009. This discussion centred on the impact of proposed legislation on credit unions and how credit unions can contribute to social development initiatives including issues regarding housing.

Following on from this meeting officials from Housing Division met with representatives of the Credit Union movement on 25 June.

Whilst the Credit Union movement was keen to explore how it could invest in a range of social projects across the North, including housing, no detailed proposals were tabled.

The issue here is that any borrowing would need to be guaranteed by the Department and would score as public expenditure. This would ultimately mean the Departmental Expenditure Limit for my Department would exceed that set by the Northern Ireland Executive.

I understand the Credit Union movement plan to have further discussions with the Minister for Finance to see how any investment from them could be structured.

Payment of Contractors

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if the Grants Office is meeting its targets for payment of contractors employed to carry out disabled adaptations; (ii) what the time frame is for payment; and (iii) how many contractors are still awaiting an interim payment before submitting their signing-off certificates. (AQW 1292/10)

Minister for Social Development: I understand the Member is referring to the Housing Executive's Lisburn Grants office. The Lisburn Grants Office is currently taking on average 6.8 weeks to process payments for Disabled Facilities Grants. The Housing Executive aims to make all grant payments within 6 weeks of a request from the grant applicant, provided all relevant invoices, guarantees and certificates have been received. At the end of September, there were 5 interim payments for Disabled Facilities Grants waiting to be processed.

Funding

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding awarded by her Department to Councils in the South Down constituency, in each of the last three years; and to detail the total planned investment in the constituency over the next three years. (AQW 1293/10)

Minister for Social Development: It is not possible to provide the information in the way requested as we do not record all funding by electoral ward and therefore I have included the funding awarded in each of the last three years to the District Council Areas which, in whole or in part, make up the South Down constituency, i.e. Banbridge, Down and Newry & Mourne, with the exception that funding in Newry City has been excluded:

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	Grand Total
Regional Development Office(RDO)	£4,473,617	£302,180	£4,905,863	£9,681,660
Voluntary & Community Unit(VCU)	£615,351	£644,718	£654,225	£1,914,294
Total	£5,088,968	£946,898	£5,560,088	£11,595,954

The Housing Executive does not provide funding directly to Councils.

The total planned investment in the South Down constituency area over the next three years is:

	£,000			
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
RDO	5,785	460		6,245
VCU	572	60	45	677
Housing	11,517			
Grand Total	17,874	520	45	18,439

In relation to the planned investment over the next three years, the Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes of activity beyond the current financial year and cannot therefore advise when individual schemes are likely to go on site in subsequent years. The Housing Executive will review its programmes when budgets have been confirmed as the delivery of these programmes is dependent on the availability of finance in any given year.

In the South Down constituency 3 Jobs & Benefits offices remain to be delivered in Newcastle, Downpatrick and Ballynahinch. Plans are well advanced for the Newcastle Jobs & Benefits office at an estimated capital cost of £2.36m. A number of potential sites are being investigated for the location of the new Downpatrick Jobs & Benefits office and based on current assumptions the cost estimate for this development is upwards of £7.25m. The estimated cost of the Ballynahinch Jobs & Benefits office is around £1.93m but due to the need to complete the development of the Downpatrick office to accommodate staff from Ballynahinch, this office is unlikely to be progressed within the 3 year window. Final costs cannot be confirmed until developers have been appointed to take forward the necessary work.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of homes purchased under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme, in each of the last five years; (ii) the purchase price of each property; and (iii) how much was received when each was sold on. (AQW 1303/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has provided the following information. Table 1 details the number of homes purchased under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme in each of the last five years.

TABLE 1

Year	Properties Purchased
2004/2005	58
2005/2006	69
2006/2007	22
2007/2008	22
2008/2009	46

TABLE 2 ATTACHED DETAILS THE PURCHASE PRICE AND RESALE PRICE OF THE PROPERTIES SOLD IN EACH OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
1	£47,000	£43,113	£83,550	£61,000	£75,000	£125,000	£590,000	£790,000	£155,000	£83,000
2	£52,000	£44,000	£33,500	£22,000	£160,000	£266,000	£80,000	£160,000	£220,000	£150,000
3	£73,000	£65,500	£61,000	£61,000	£322,000	£300,000	£115,000	£180,000	£220,000	£132,000
4	£38,000	£36,500	£135,000	£145,000	£110,000	£180,000	£120,000	£221,000	£143,500	£75,000
5	£59,500	£52,000	£73,000	£66,500	£280,000	£262,000	£84,500	£113,000		
6	£130,000	£45,000	£85,000	£78,500	£106,500	£129,000	£135,000	£100,000		
7	£57,000	£53,000	£47,000	£40,000	£73,000	£85,000	£180,000	£226,000		
8	£58,000	£50,000	£78,000	£74,000	£165,000	£162,500				
9	£74,000	£66,500	£53,000	£45,000	£295,000	£330,000				
10	£85,000	£72,000	£63,000	£50,000	£300,000	£270,000				
11	£62,250	£56,000	£166,000	£130,000	£69,000	£67,000				
12	£55,500	£40,000	£80,000	£55,500	£180,000	£77,500				
13	£68,000	£60,000	£200,000	£165,000	£89,000	£89,250				
14	£40,000	£35,500	£77,500	£72,000	£40,000	£64,000				
15	£73,500	£65,000	£45,000	£43,000	£167,500	£186,500				
16	£45,000	£40,000	£247,000	£215,000	£60,000	£65,000				
17	£122,500	£105,000	£38,000	£34,000	£225,000	£237,500				
18	£68,000	£50,000	£305,000	£257,500	£156,000	£165,000				
19	£58,000	£46,000	£58,500	£52,000	£295,000	£304,000				
20	£75,000	£60,000	£43,000	£43,000	£235,000	£236,000				
21	£66,000	£55,000	£67,000	£65,000	£167,500	£175,000				
22	£180,000	£156,480	£20,000	£20,500	£130,000	£153,000				
23	£77,750	£70,000	£77,000	£79,000	£120,000	£128,500				
24	£172,500	£152,500	£57,500	£66,000	£262,500	£252,500				
25	£315,000	£249,999	£133,000	£145,000	£100,000	£114,500				
26	£170,000	£152,500	£53,500	£48,000	£160,000	£170,000				
27	£71,000	£63,000	£177,000	£161,000	£53,500	£61,500				
28	£67,500	£60,000	£175,000	£135,000	£120,000	£142,500				
29	£71,980	£40,000	£92,000	£110,000	£190,000	£180,000				
30	£46,000	£41,000	£230,000	£192,000	£116,000	£127,000				
31	£255,000	£248,500	£127,500	£90,000	£116,000	£126,500				
32	£327,000	£305,000	£500,000	£510,571	£80,000	£96,000				
33	£86,000	£79,000	£54,000	£57,000	£435,000	£435,000				
34	£68,250	£64,750	£121,000	£126,000	£127,000	£133,000				
35	£35,916	£25,000	£207,650	£190,000	£89,000	£95,000				

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
36	£64,400	£62,000	£72,000	£68,000	£285,000	£330,000				
37	£183,500	£170,000	£240,000	£237,500	£186,000	£197,000				
38	£59,500	£57,000	£150,000	£151,000	£101,000	£129,000				
39	£39,000	£36,000	£238,000	£197,500	£90,000	£117,000				
40	£53,000	£51,000	£76,000	£70,000	£86,950	£119,000				
41	£54,600	£50,000	£129,000	£119,500	£59,000	£88,000				
42	£175,000	£175,000	£65,000	£67,000	£235,000	£267,500				
43	£62,500	£55,000	£112,000	£104,000	£162,500	£157,500				
44	£59,000	£53,000	£268,500	£260,000	£145,000	£156,500				
45	£185,000	£160,000	£157,500	£135,000	£152,000	£165,000				
46	£128,000	£123,500	£82,500	£82,500	£142,000	£188,000				
47	£26,000	£23,000	£45,000	£42,000	£130,000	£172,000				
48	£65,000	£63,500	£160,000	£153,500	£97,500	£137,500				
49	£81,000	£78,000	£49,750	£48,000						
50	£158,000	£147,000	£150,000	£153,000						
51	£57,500	£54,000	£123,000	£117,000						
52	£65,000	£61,000	£75,000	£86,000						
53	£176,500	£167,000	£260,000	£212,000						
54	£210,000	£178,000	£220,500	£216,000						
55	£130,000	£128,000	£130,000	£128,500						
56	£145,000	£138,500	£67,000	£74,000						
57	£160,000	£142,500	£96,000	£92,000						
58	£130,000	£127,000	£82,000	£85,000						
59	£130,000	£130,000	£80,000	£85,000						
60	£232,000	£171,000	£115,000	£115,000						
61	£137,500	£130,000	£112,000	£102,000						
62	£145,000	£136,000	£118,000	£114,000						
63	£149,000	£145,000	£86,000	£86,000						
64	£132,500	£122,500	£262,500	£246,500						
65	£42,500	£39,750	£55,000	£55,000						
66	£160,000	£151,500	£145,000	£166,000						
67	£105,000	£103,000	£197,000	£199,500						
68	£232,000	£210,000	£110,000	£106,000						
69	£46,000	£52,500	£132,500	£129,000						
70	£90,000	£100,000	£355,000	£345,000						
71	£136,000	£134,000	£228,000	£205,000						
72	£170,000	£165,000	£106,000	£113,000						

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
73	£165,000	£140,000	£96,500	£98,000						
74	£127,500	£100,000	£99,500	£98,000						
75	£120,000	£117,000	£86,000	£90,000						
76	£222,500	£220,000	£64,000	£70,000						
77	£102,500	£100,000	£160,000	£170,000						
78	£120,000	£120,000	£183,000	£192,000						
79	£75,000	£72,000	£155,000	£155,000						
80	£43,000	£47,000	£125,000	£138,000						
81	£129,000	£140,000	£112,500	£126,000						
82	£149,000	£142,000	£102,500	£99,000						
83	£166,500	£172,700	£75,000	£75,000						
84	£128,500	£100,000	£300,000	£285,000						
85	£152,500	£149,000	£185,000	£180,000						
86	£133,000	£128,000	£132,000	£132,500						
87	£113,000	£114,000	£60,000	£68,500						
88	£140,000	£130,000	£122,500	£133,500						
89	£110,000	£100,000	£93,000	£99,000						
90	£91,500	£90,000	£130,000	£130,000						
91	£78,000	£74,000	£142,000	£144,000						
92	£137,000	£135,000								
93	£173,000	£152,750								
94	£163,500	£163,500								
95	£142,000	£139,000								
96	£297,000	£282,500								
97	£80,000	£82,000								
98	£177,500	£155,000								
99	£135,000	£136,200								
100	£182,500	£173,000								
101	£172,500	£163,000								
102	£145,000	£145,000								
103	£108,000	£111,500								
104	£130,000	£121,000								
105	£160,000	£155,000								
106	£170,000	£151,000								
107	£154,000	£145,000								
108	£271,000	£250,000								
109	£93,500	£93,500								

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
110	£57,000	£63,500								
111	£128,000	£124,000								
112	£162,500	£150,000								
113	£250,000	£240,000								
114	£173,000	£182,000								
115	£70,000	£66,750								
116	£195,000	£187,500								
117	£122,500	£118,000								
118	£277,500	£250,000								
119	£156,000	£152,000								
120	£120,000	£110,000								
121	£130,000	£130,000								
122	£147,500	£135,000								
123	£94,000	£99,500								
124	£79,000	£77,000								
125	£147,000	£136,750								
126	£53,000	£52,000								
127	£120,000	£110,000								
128	£136,500	£134,500								
129	£86,500	£89,000								
130	£94,500	£94,500								
131	£163,500	£166,000								
132	£56,000	£54,000								
133	£38,500	£37,500								
134	£38,500	£55,000								
135	£180,000	£164,000								
136	£90,000	£85,000								
137	£92,500	£90,000								
138	£84,000	£80,000								
139	£217,500	£193,400								
140	£160,000	£148,500								
141	£165,000	£180,000								
142	£280,000	£249,500								
143	£200,000	£182,000								
144	£46,000	£47,500								
145	£48,000	£48,500								
146	£190,000	£222,000								

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
147	£177,500	£160,000								
148	£91,000	£93,750								
149	£178,500	£186,000								
150	£85,000	£86,500								
151	£98,000	£101,000								
152	£68,500	£74,401								
153	£62,500	£68,750								
154	£195,000	£202,500								
155	£59,000	£56,000								
156	£187,500	£187,500								
157	£177,500	£175,000								
158	£55,000	£52,000								
159	£134,000	£125,000								
160	£78,000	£70,000								
161	£182,000	£182,000								
162	£205,000	£200,000								
163	£191,500	£188,000								
164	£166,000	£165,500								
165	£85,000	£89,000								
166	£137,000	£134,000								
167	£141,000	£138,500								
168	£197,000	£192,000								
169	£40,000	£41,500								
170	£70,000	£74,500								
171	£122,500	£123,000								
172	£102,000	£102,000								
173	£131,000	£130,000								
174	£270,000	£259,000								
175	£99,000	£95,000								
176	£191,000	£200,000								
177	£76,000	£53,000								
178	£152,500	£157,000								
179	£117,500	£115,000								
180	£123,000	£120,000								
181	£170,000	£162,000								
182	£82,500	£93,000								
183	£89,000	£89,800								

Table 2 - SPED RESALES										
	2004/2005		2005/2006		2006/2007		2007/2008		2008/2009	
	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price	Purchase Price	Resale Price
184	£115,000	£111,000								
185	£160,000	£166,000								
186	£125,000	£132,000								
187	£43,000	£39,000								
188	£158,950	£151,000								
189	£99,500	£96,000								
190	£77,500	£77,500								
191	£88,000	£88,000								
192	£37,000	£39,500								
193	£97,000	£94,950								
194	£72,750	£71,500								
195	£67,000	£69,500								
196	£86,000	£94,000								
197	£132,500	£128,000								
198	£191,500	£184,000								
199	£77,500	£77,500								
200	£125,000	£118,000								
201	£123,500	£121,000								
202	£105,000	£101,000								
203	£108,000	£110,750								
204	£37,750	£38,000								
205	£80,000	£78,000								
206	£85,000	£85,000								
207	£187,000	£187,000								

Efficiency Savings: DSD

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what services in her Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1305/10)

Minister for Social Development: During 2008/09 and in the first six months of 2009/10, my Department has succeeded in fully protecting frontline Social Security and Child Maintenance services from the effects of challenging efficiency targets.

However, cyclical maintenance in Housing and delivery of Environmental Improvement Schemes were affected in 2008/09 and funding for some Voluntary and Community Sector projects had to be discontinued.

In the first half of 2009/10, reinvestment of efficiency savings has assisted in protecting key service delivery priorities such as the Children and Young People's and Modernisation Funds. However, there have been further efficiencies in respect of planned and cyclical maintenance, some regeneration programmes have been reprioritised and there have been further reductions in the funding made available for the Voluntary and Community sector.

Social Housing: Larne

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the waiting list for social housing in the Larne area. (AQW 1363/10)

Minister for Social Development: At 30 June 2009 there were 531 housing applicants on the social housing waiting list for Larne.

Housing Upgrade: Culmore Gardens, West Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development if she would consider bringing forward the upgrade of the frontage of the houses in 1, 4, 11, 13 and 19 Culmore Gardens, West Belfast. (AQW 1375/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently no further improvement schemes programmed for the properties in question.

NI Housing Executive Homes: West Tyrone

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive homes in West Tyrone are currently vacant; and how many of these have been vacant for more than twelve months. (AQW 1381/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below contains the number of vacant dwellings, along with the number which have been vacant for more than 12 months, for the Strabane and Omagh District Council areas which include the areas within the West Tyrone parliamentary constituency.

	Vacant Dwellings
Strabane	10 (of which 3 are vacant for over 12 months)
Omagh	50 (of which 26 are vacant for over 12 months)

Decent Homes Standard

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how the suspension of the home improvement or private sector grants scheme, will impact on the ability of the Housing Executive to meet the targets for the Decent Homes Standard by 2014. (AQW 1432/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Decent Homes Standard target only applies to social housing and as such will be unaffected by any reduction in funding available to homes in the private sector.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to outline (i) what discussions she has had with other Ministers and Departments recently regarding the transfer of neighbourhood renewal; (ii) when these discussions took place; and (iii) if budgets will be included in any transfer. (AQW 1543/10)

Minister for Social Development: On the 13th of May this year as Chair of the Ministerial Group on Neighbourhood Renewal I met with representatives of Departments and representatives of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. The transfer of the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal to the new local Councils in May 2011 was discussed at that meeting and welcomed by representatives from local government.

The new local Councils will receive the full resources that are associated with the operational delivery of functions transferring from my Department.

NI Housing Executive

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the NI Housing Executive regulates housing associations contracted to supply social housing. (AQW 1555/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not have a regulatory function. Responsibility for regulating Housing Associations rests with the Governance and Inspection Team within the Department for Social Development.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme. (AQO 218/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme, or SPOD, is aimed at meeting the needs of small isolated deprived areas which do not qualify under the Department's mainstream Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. This programme includes areas such as Finaghy, Drumcoo in Dungannon, Riverdale in Larne and Kilmacormick in Enniskillen. Funding of the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme will continue until 31 March 2010. An independent evaluation report of the first three years of the Programme (up to 31 March 2009) received by my Department is currently under consideration. I will make a decision on the future of the Programme before the end of this year.

Social Housing Deficit

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on her Department's current social housing deficit. (AQO 221/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Budget was facing a £100 million shortfall before the June Monitoring Round and the £20 million allocation received, while welcome, was needed just to meet existing contractual commitments in relation to Private Sector Grants. However a condition imposed by the Executive relating to this additional funding meant that an additional £20 million from within existing resources was to be released to the Egan contractors.

In order to meet this condition and to deploy the £20 million for grants, the Housing Executive will have to postpone other maintenance and related works, including suspending asbestos removal and change of tenancy repairs. The Housing Executive is continuing to investigate the possible options and ramifications of releasing the required funding. So, even meeting Executive stipulations on the £20 million we are still left with an £80 million shortfall.

The recent Housing Needs Assessment carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has identified a need for 3,000 homes to be built each year to meet housing need. I agree with this assessment.

Members should understand, and I believe most do, that Housing is the only mainstream Government Programme that is dependent on a high level of capital receipts coming in from house and land sales.

The economic downturn has made it impossible to bring in this money. It is no-one's fault. But the only way to fix the problem is to allocate a sufficient budget for housing that is not dependent on house sales. And if we sell lots of houses then the money is returned to the centre.

I say it again, we need to once and for all put housing on a firm financial footing.

Housing Budget

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development how the shortfall in the housing budget will impact on planned housing programmes in the next financial year. (AQO 222/10)

Minister for Social Development: The projected £107 million shortfall in the Housing capital budget for the next financial year can only be addressed by reducing planned expenditure across all housing programmes. I will again try to protect the most vulnerable in society and available funding will have to be directed to priority programmes and to where commitments already exist.

However by doing so, the other housing programmes, such as Private Sector grants and capital improvements to Housing Executive properties, cannot be fully funded without the allocation of additional funding from the Executive.

£107 million is a great deal of money. It is not a question of belt-tightening or being a bit more creative – we are doing all of that. We will need to work an economic miracle to meet our programme targets in the year ahead.

Town Centre Regeneration: Antrim and Ballyclare

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the town centre regeneration programmes for Antrim and Ballyclare. (AQO 223/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am pleased to advise that there has been positive progress in relation to the delivery of projects and masterplans for the future regeneration of Antrim and Ballyclare.

In Antrim I can confirm that an Environmental Improvement scheme at Railway Street is scheduled to commence in January. A masterplan to guide the development of the town centre is currently being prepared with Antrim Borough Council and will go out for public consultation later this month. Other regeneration projects are currently being worked up for the town. However these will require an economic appraisal and any decision to fund them will be subject to the Department's budget being available to cover the cost of these new schemes.

In Ballyclare I opened a £676,500 public realm scheme around the Town Square in September. I am also pleased to announce that funding of £315,000 has been committed towards a new scheme along Main Street that will commence in January 2010. Funding for the appointment of consultants to prepare a masterplan for the town was approved on 24 September 2009 and the assignment is due to commence in November 2009.

Sample Review

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development if the recommendations contained in the Sample Report are still part of her housing strategy. (AQO 224/10)

Minister for Social Development: Sir John Semple was asked to undertake a review of affordable housing in September 2006. He produced a report in the spring of 2007 which contained 80 recommendations that spanned the work of a number of government departments. Although the housing market and challenges facing us today are very different to those which faced Sir John then, many of his recommendations have already been implemented and others continue to be delivered over the longer term. The New Housing Agenda, which I launched last year, in effect took forward much of work still to be delivered from Semple, along with new proposals and initiatives identified since Semple was first published. The New Housing Agenda sets out a radical and energetic agenda for housing which has not been seen for a generation, and it continues to have my full and total support.

Regeneration of Lisburn City Centre

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the potential funding for implementation of the proposed masterplan for the regeneration of Lisburn City Centre. (AQO 226/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Lisburn masterplan is planned to be delivered over the next 10 to 15 years. Our ability to implement the actions identified in the masterplan is constrained by a number of factors, including:

- The complexity of the work involved in regeneration schemes;
- The extent of the financial resources which the Department can secure in general for urban regeneration;
- The staff resources in DSD and partner organisations; and
- The planned transfer of responsibility for regeneration to local authorities in May 2011.

I do not know at this stage what funding will be available from Treasury and through DFP for future projects. However, I can assure you that each proposal will be considered against other competing priorities and a fair decision arrived at.

Social Housing: Semple Report

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made in implementing the developer's contribution to social and affordable housing, as set out in the Semple Report. (AQO 227/10)

Minister for Social Development: Legal responsibility for the introduction of Developer Contributions for social and affordable housing rests with the Department of the Environment. I am extremely disappointed that Northern Ireland remains the only region within these islands where developers are not required to contribute to the provision of much-needed social and affordable housing.

While I do recognise that this is a complex policy issue that requires sensitive handling in a number of regards, for example economic feasibility, it is essential that the Department of the Environment takes swift steps to develop a scheme as soon as possible. I have arranged a meeting with Minister Poots to determine how we can collectively expedite the introduction of this much needed scheme.

Housing Executive Homes: Heating

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive homes had their heating systems changed in each of the last three financial years. (AQO 228/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of heating systems in Housing Executive properties changed in each of the last three years is as follows:-

2006/07	5420
2007/08	4060
2008/09	2959

Shared Future: Public Meetings

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the public meetings she has been holding about how we can build a Shared Future. (AQO 229/10)

Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. Taking action to achieve the vision of a Shared Future has been high on my agenda since taking office as Minister.

I believe that the failure to agree an agreed policy and a programme of action focused on a shared future is a serious impediment to cementing the peace process; it is a failure of political leadership. The lack of progress in this area has a particularly damaging impact on tackling the problems of our most disadvantaged communities and so I have already taken steps to introduce Shared Future measures in some of my Department's existing programmes. I have for example introduced screening every 'new build' scheme that comes forward onto the Social Housing Development Programme to explore its potential for inclusion as a Shared Future development. I have also, in partnership with the International Fund for Ireland, established the Shared Neighbourhood Programme.

But these developments alone cannot tackle our problems of sectarianism and division. In my view, the successful achievement of the vision for a shared future based on equality and mutual respect will require actions not only to tackle the scourge of sectarianism but to challenge and address division and separation on other grounds, such as disability, race or cultural background. Recent events around the experience of the Roma families and the long running abuse targeted at migrant communities serves to underline that position.

It is important, therefore, to develop a broader strategic approach to this important issue and over the past 2 months or so I have hosted a series of public meetings – ten so far with others planned - to discuss how a shared future agenda might be progressed. The primary purpose of these meetings has been to listen to what the people have to say about the problems faced by communities and to hear their suggestions for possible ways forward. The meetings have been well attended, reflecting an appetite and a strong desire for taking forward the shared future agenda.

I intend to develop proposals based on, amongst other things, the ideas and suggestions generated at these meetings and will bring my findings and proposals to my Executive colleagues in due course.

Housing Budget 2010-11

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what is the projected shortfall in the housing budget for 2010/11. (AQO 230/10)

Minister for Social Development: The projected shortfall in the housing capital budget for 2010/11 is £107 million and this will impact on all Housing spending programmes.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Parliament Buildings: Cost of Repair and Maintenance

Mr J Dallat asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the cost of repair and maintenance to the roof of Parliament Buildings; and (ii) to indicate the cost of repairing damage to offices through water leaks, in the last five years. (AQW 1029/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson):

- (i) The roof of Parliament Buildings is comprised mainly of a series of flat roofs with a barrel roof over the central office accommodation.

The flat roofs are of 'upside down' construction with a waterproof membrane, insulation and protective slabs on top of a reinforced concrete slab.

Unfortunately, the waterproof membrane has broken down in several areas and extensive repairs have been necessary.

This work was carried out during the summer recess 2009 and was the most extensive since the refurbishment of Parliament Buildings. It is expected to cost in the region of £10,000.

Unfortunately it is not possible to separate the costs for previous minor repairs from routine maintenance costs for cleaning debris, weeding, repairs to gutters and downpipes etc.

An investigation into how best to resolve ongoing issues with water ingress has been carried out and initial options and costs for long term repairs have been presented to the Assembly Commission for their consideration.

A full scheme detailing recommendations and costs is being compiled. It is anticipated that the proposed solution will incorporate environmental considerations such as rainwater harvesting.

Additional work is due to be carried out in relation to the tiles on the upper part of the roof above Room 401, however the cost is not yet known for this work.

- (ii) Unfortunately it is not possible to separate the cost of redecorating offices in Parliament Buildings specifically in relation to water damage from the roof. A programme of redecoration was carried out in 2002-2003, including windows, radiators, ceilings, walls, skirting, architraves and doors. All staff offices, meeting rooms, MLA's offices, Party Support rooms, Ministerial offices and Executive offices were redecorated in this project. The total cost for this work was £250,499.69 of which £121,044.59 was paid in the financial year 2003-2004.

Youth Assembly

Mrs N Long asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on its plans for a Youth Assembly; and (i) how it is envisaged it will function; and (ii) its planned role and remit. (AQW 1050/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): As part of the Assembly Commission's commitment to improve engagement with the general public, youth parliaments in a number of contexts have been investigated and proposals for a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly are under development.

Informal discussions with young people and other stakeholders are currently taking place. The Speaker intends to formally launch the concept of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly at an event in Parliament Buildings on 20th November.

Blue Flax Restaurant

Mr T Burns asked the Assembly Commission (i) to detail the total number of complaints which have been received about the Blue Flax restaurant, in each of the last three years; and (ii) to provide a summary of the nature of the complaints. (AQW 1185/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): For the purpose of this answer, please find the following table that sets out the total number of complaints received since September 2006 to September 2009, and broken down by category/nature of complaint. The complaints have been received through the feedback facility that is available to all Members and staff through AssISt.

	September 2006 to September 2007	September 2007 to September 2008	September 2008 to September 2009
Food Quality	6	2	9
Portion Size	2	1	4
Waiting Time	4	1	1
Cost	2	1	8
Service/Staff	1	1	2
Hospitality	1	0	4
Miscellaneous	6	4	8
Totals	22	10	36

Blue Flax Restaurant

Mr T Burns asked the Assembly Commission to detail the total income generated by the Blue Flax restaurant in each of the last three years. (AQW 1186/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): For the purpose of this answer, the following table sets out the total income generated in the Blue Flax restaurant from September 2006 to September 2009 (3 year period). The figures are nett.

Year 1 – September 2006 to September 2007	£214,374.76 *
Year 2 – September 2007 to September 2008	£284,942.30
Year 3 – September 2008 to September 2009	£290,224.95

* It should be noted that due to the changeover of catering contractors in early 2007, specific figures for income in the Blue Flax restaurant are not available. This is the case in February 2007. However, in this specific example I have added the overall catering income for that month as the Blue Flax makes up a large proportion of this.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 23 October 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Integrated Development Fund Budget

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any monies previously allocated to the Integrated Development Fund budget have been reallocated to other budgets or programmes. (AQW 302/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Of the 32 pilot projects submitted for approval to date, 31 have been formally approved and Integrated Development Funding support totalling £45.2m has been made available to the projects. The most recent project to be submitted for approval, Broadbridge Dualling in the North West, is being considered.

In the October 2007 Monitoring Round the Executive agreed, because of the extreme pressures facing Departments at that time, to reassign all of the uncommitted remaining Integrated Development Fund resources, totalling £14.5m capital at that point, to help meet a range of urgent in-year pressures.

Those outstanding pilot projects which had previously received approval in principle may still be brought forward as bids for funding, subject to the provision of the required economic appraisals. Following formal endorsement by OFMDFM/DFP Ministers, each will be considered, as a high priority, for funding support by the Executive as part of the quarterly financial monitoring process.

Executive's Investment Strategy

Mr P Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline capital projects that will be commencing over the next 2 years as part of the Executive's Investment Strategy, to help local firms through these difficult times. (AQW 577/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is currently planned to advertise 232 major capital construction projects totalling an estimated £2.06 billion under the procurement process in the next two years as part of the Executive's Investment Strategy. An additional £279 million of smaller works (projects with an estimated value of less than £1m) are also planned during this period. These figures exclude projects where work is already on the ground or that have already completed their procurement phase, and also those that have not yet received full departmental approval. All future capital projects are subject to the availability of resources.

Hospitality Expenditure

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how much their Department spent on (i) hospitality; and (ii) alcohol, in (a) 2007-2008; (b) 2008-2009; and (c) this year to date. (AQW 925/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not possible to provide the information broken into the categories requested as the information is not held in this format.

Table 1 below summarises total Departmental spend on hospitality in 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and from 1 April 2009 to 31 August 2009.

TABLE 1:
OFMDFM HOSPITALITY SPEND, 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 AUGUST 2009

	2007/08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)	2009/10 (£'000s) 1 Apr to 31 Aug
Total Hospitality spend	207	238	70

Hospitality

Mr J Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of money spent by their Department on hospitality, broken down by (i) drinks; (ii) food; and (iii) entertainment, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1033/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not possible to provide details of hospitality spend for our Department broken down by (i) drinks; (ii) food; and (iii) entertainment as requested, as the information is not held in this format.

Table 1 below however summarises total Departmental spend on hospitality in 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09.

TABLE 1:
OFMDFM HOSPITALITY SPEND, 1 APRIL 2006 TO 31 MARCH 2009

	2006-07 (£'000s)	2007-08 (£'000s)	2008/09 (£'000s)
Total Hospitality spend	120	207	238

Costs of Division

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what advice his Department has given to other Departments and Agencies concerning Costs of Division. (AQW 1221/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In August 2007 we advised the Executive that the cost of division research was commissioned by the previous administration on 29 March 2006 and was conducted and finalised during direct rule. It is an independent piece of research. The interpretation of and commentary on the datasets contained in the report represent the views of Deloitte and not those of the First Minister, deputy First Minister or the Executive and the report of itself does not form an agreed basis for future policy development.

Funding for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if any funding is available to help blind and partially sighted people who live below the poverty line. (AQW 1243/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Although OFMDFM does not have any available funding to help blind and partially sighted people here, including those below the poverty line, the department has been working closely with RNIB in the implementation of the Vision Strategy.

The department is represented on the Vision Strategy Implementation Group and associated Priority Action Group on Accessibility and Inclusion.

OFMDFM is committed to raising awareness of the barriers affecting blind and visually impaired people through the facilitation of Visual Awareness Training within the department.

The forthcoming Promoting Social Inclusion Disability Report will also contain recommendations that seek to address the range of barriers that face all disabled people and prevent them from participating economically and socially.

Efficiency Savings: OFMDFM

Ms J McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what services in their Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1275/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: As part of the Budget 2008-11 process the Executive agreed that all departments would deliver the same 3% per annum efficiency savings over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11. As a consequence, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will deliver £13.83 million of savings by 2010-11.

Efficiency savings in OFMDFM have been achieved through an improvement in and refocusing of the delivery of programmes and functions. Efficiency savings have been delivered through the exercise of control over discretionary spend, restructuring to avoid duplication of work, and the streamlining of processes across the Department.

Discrimination Against Blind People

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they are aware of the recent Action for Blind People survey that reports that two thirds of blind people face discrimination when seeking employment; and what help they, along with other Departments, can offer to blind and partially sighted people. (AQW 1337/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: With regard to blind people facing discrimination when seeking employment, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 contains measures designed to prevent discrimination against disabled people in employment or when seeking employment. Among these measures is a duty on employers to make “reasonable adjustments” to a policy, practice or procedure related to the working environment. The duty to make reasonable adjustments applies to the recruitment process and during all stages of employment.

Our department is represented on the inter-departmental Vision Strategy Implementation (NI) Group which has been set up to take forward the Vision Strategy. We are also represented on the Implementation Groups associated Priority Action Group on Accessibility and Inclusion which is looking at the accessibility of written materials with the aim of ending exclusion in terms of leisure activities and the external environment.

We would also draw attention to the forthcoming Promoting Social Inclusion Disability Report which contains recommendations that seek to address the range of barriers faced by many disabled people in accessing employment opportunities.

The Department for Employment and Learning’s (DEL) Disablement Advisory Service (DAS) provides a range of disability employment programmes to meet the needs of people with disabilities including those who are blind or have a visual disability. The particular programme that is appropriate for each individual can be discussed, agreed and accessed through Employment Advisers based in local Jobs and Benefits Offices/ Jobcentres. DAS also has a team of Occupational Psychologists to assist Advisers provide their services.

In addition, DEL has two representatives, including the Head of DAS, who sit on the Vision Strategy Implementation (NI) Group and also on its Education and Employment Priority Action Group. The main purpose of this Action group is to obtain equal educational attainment and to maximise access to employment for the blind and visual impaired people.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: OFMDFM

Mr C Boylan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) if they intend to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion within their Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long they anticipate it will last. (AQW 1344/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have no plans to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion within our department. Nonetheless we are mindful of the need to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and value for money in the operation of the department and have been monitoring our staffing levels carefully for some time. Indeed the size of the Department has reduced from 408 staff in post in September 2007 to 394 in September 2009. We are currently considering how best to utilise our staff resource to maximise delivery across

the range of our departmental responsibilities and in that context all vacancies arising are assessed on a case by case basis related to business need. For the past 2 years officials have carefully scrutinised all vacant posts and only those posts supported by a strong business case and approved by the Accounting Officer have been filled – whether through internal transfer, promotion or recruitment. An example of posts supported by a strong business case are the recent external recruitment competitions to fill key legal posts in the Office of the Legislative Counsel.

£29m for Good Relations

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how the £29m for good relations within the current budget has been allocated. [R] (AQW 1391/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The £29m approximately, settlement for good relations within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period 2008-2011 has been allocated as follows:

2008/2009	£8.405m
2009/2010	£9.742m
2010/2011	£10.788m

Funding has been allocated in 2008/09 and 2009/10 mainly to the Community Relations Council through grant-in-aid, the District Councils Community Relations Programme, the Minority Ethnic Funding Scheme, Summer Diversionary Programmes, funding for a range of community relations projects and organisations.

Funding allocations for 2010/11 have not yet been decided.

Brussels Visit

Mr P Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the recent visit to Brussels. (AQO 144/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 21 and 22 September 2009, Junior Minister Kelly led a delegation of civil servants to Brussels. The main purpose of the visit was to hold a meeting of the Barroso Taskforce Working Group. The Minister also hosted a reception for some of our key contacts in Brussels. During a programme of visits over the two days, the Minister met senior European Commission officials and the Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, Pawel Samecki, and presented him with the 2008/09 end of year report on our European engagement.

He also met senior European Commission officials, who advised on the Commission response to the economic downturn and on a proposal for a new microcredit facility for SMEs and the unemployed. The issue of a conflict resolution centre was also raised.

The Report demonstrates the breadth of the Executive's engagement with the European Institutions. We have had increased success in securing transnational and interregional funding and research and development funding. We have contributed to policy discussions on areas of importance to us and we have increased the number of our officials working in the European Commission.

Following the Taskforce Working Group meeting, officials from 8 Departments met their Commission counterparts in a series of bilateral meetings on issues across the spectrum of EU policy areas.

The Taskforce initiated by President Barroso has helped us enormously in our engagement with Europe and we have written to congratulate him on his recent re-election for a further 5-year term. President Barroso has shown himself to be a great friend to us.

Peace III

Mr A Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment on the efficiency of the distribution of Peace III funding to successful applicants. (AQO 145/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM is the Accountable Department for the following Priorities under the PEACE III Programme:

- Priority 1.1 – Building Positive Relationships at the local level;
- Priority 1.2 – Acknowledging and dealing with the past; and
- Priority 2.2 – Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society.

To meet these responsibilities the Department meets with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) on a regular basis to receive progress reports and to monitor the implementation of these parts of the Peace III Programme.

Within each of these priority areas, there is evidence of both substantial progress already made and also further progress to be achieved. The Department will continue to monitor developments to ensure that Programme objectives are achieved for the benefit of all sections of the community.

Brussels Visit

Mr S Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the recent EU Taskforce Group meeting in Brussels and their Department's progress against key targets. (AQO 147/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On behalf of OFMDFM, Junior Minister Kelly led a delegation of civil servants to Brussels on 21 to 22 September 2009. While the Minister and officials had broader programmes of meetings and visits, the primary purpose of the visit was to hold a meeting of the Barroso Taskforce Working Group.

The working group was addressed by Ronnie Hall, the Commission official tasked with leading the Commission taskforce team, Maurice Maxwell, the Commission representative in Belfast, and by officials from both the UK and Irish Permanent Representations.

NICS officials from 8 Departments provided updates on key activities planned and progress made on priority areas.

Points of discussion included Commission praise for the good work done in preparing the Bombardier State Aids case and continued interest in a conflict resolution centre. The Commission are also keen to build relationships with local government and NGOs.

Both the UK Representation and Irish Representation officials stressed the need to continue to engage with the Institutions in Brussels and the value of high level meetings in opening doors at official level.

Progress against the key targets set out in the Priorities for European Engagement 2008 – 2009 document are listed in the Priorities for European Engagement End of Year Report 2008 – 2009, a copy of which can be downloaded at http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/barroso_task_force_-_end_of_year_report_2008_09_-_final_publication-2.pdf

Some highlights include:

Promotion of our policy interests by input to the UK policy position on Cohesion Policy, the EU Budget Review, Trans-European Networks, and the Common Agricultural Policy Health Check;

Fast-tracked approval of 4 Structural Funds programmes worth €1.1 billion;

Increased success in INTERREG IV trans-national and interregional funding programmes;

Success in securing €4.5 million of research and development funding from the 7th Framework Programme; and

More civil service secondments to European Union institutions, giving staff the opportunity to learn at first hand how they function.

Breach of Executive Confidentiality

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the reference made by the First Minister on 22 September 2009 on the “451 issues agreed by the Executive” is a breach of Executive confidentiality.

(AQW 1738/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We consider that a reference in numerical terms to the overall volume of business progressed by the Executive is not a breach of its protocol on confidentiality.

Economic Taskforce

Mr S Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Economic Taskforce. (AQO 244/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Cross Sector Advisory Forum, established to continue our dialogue with business, trade unions, voluntary and community and other stakeholders, met on 7 October. This was the third plenary session since April.

The work of the Forum is a key element in our response and provides us with an opportunity to gather further ideas on the Executive's approach to building recovery. Over the summer the Forum's sub-groups have been working on a substantive range of issues covering: infrastructure, planning and procurement; business and skills; hardship, poverty, debt and energy; agriculture; banking, finance and lending; and housing and property, to bring forward ideas for remedial action to address problems arising from the Economic Crisis. An update of the work of the sub-groups was given to the plenary on 7 October. We have asked the sub-groups to submit a recommendations paper to us by 31 October.

We pay close attention to the impact of the recession on the local economy and issues surrounding the downturn which continues to be a standing item on the agenda of the Executive's meetings.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Efficiency Savings: DARD

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what services in her Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1304/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): My Department has in place 12 Efficiency Delivery Plans (EDPs) in place to deliver the 3% efficiency savings required under the Budget 2008-11. Services affected are noted below in association with the relevant EDP:

- **AFBI** - In 2008/09 AFBI ceased to provide certain services to DARD. Work on Food Microbial Technology & Food Biofilm Research. Agroforestry research was reduced to demonstration-only status and some aspects of work on plant rhizobia were phased out.

In the first half of 2009/10 efficiency savings have not affected provision of services to DARD although some minor aspects are to be discussed and agreed for cessation with DARD by 31 December 2009.

- **Rural Development:** savings associated with new Rural Development Programme - During 2008/09, DARD officials were working with Councils, Social Partners and Rural Representatives to constitute the Local Action Groups in preparation for delivery of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. The procurement process for the Delivery Agent for Axis 1 was also ongoing. The efficiency saving did not affect this process significantly, although progress was slower than might have been expected. In the first six months of 2009/10 the Local Action Groups were fully constituted and working to deliver Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme. The Delivery Agent for Axis 1 was in place and in the process of implementing the various measures. While the efficiency savings did not affect this process significantly, we had to use staff input from other parts of Service Delivery Group to assist.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been spent (i) by her Department; and (ii) by Departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public

sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1313/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The attached Annex provides information regarding the amounts spent on advertising in public sector jobs sections of the Belfast Telegraph, the News Letter, the Irish News and other newspapers by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

The Annex also provides information regarding the amounts spent by DARD's Agencies, the Forest Service and Rivers Agency, and non-departmental public bodies sponsored by DARD.

A20 Road, Mountstewart, Greyabbey

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if his Department is paying for the banking work that is being carried out at the main A20 road at Mountstewart, Greyabbey. (AQW 1339/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD Rivers Agency staff recently carried out works to the designated sea defence at Kilnatierny. These works involved the removal of two sections of the sea defence to allow inundation of the lands immediately behind the defence for environmental and economic benefit. The material removed from the defence was used on site at the behest of the landowner to help reinforce the bank of the A20 road at Mountstewart, Greyabbey. This also resulted in DARD Rivers Agency making substantial savings as costs associated with the transportation and disposal costs for the material were avoided.

Rock Armouring at Mountstewart

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if there are any environmental reasons for the rock armouring at Mountstewart, Greyabbey. (AQW 1340/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD Rivers Agency, in conjunction with the National Trust and the NI Environment Agency, carried out works on a designated sea defence at Kilnatierny on the outskirts of Greyabbey. Whilst the works were not carried out for specific environmental reasons, DARD Rivers Agency and the National Trust felt that the agricultural land immediately behind the sea defence, which is owned by the National Trust, will be better utilised to develop priority inter-tidal habitat, of value for over-wintering wildfowl. Therefore Rivers Agency staff removed two sections of the sea defence to allow the inundation of the wetland at high water only. Rock armouring was imported to the site and used to protect the remaining structure from damage by the sea. It is anticipated that once the inter-tidal habitat has been properly established Rivers Agency would recommend de-designation of the sea defence to the Drainage Council for NI. If approved Rivers Agency would then be relieved of maintenance responsibility.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DARD

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) if she intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across her Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long she anticipates it will last. (AQW 1342/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development currently has no plans to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion.

Farm Businesses

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farm businesses currently operating; and how many people are employed by these businesses. (AQW 1352/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Based on data gathered for the June Agricultural and Horticultural Survey (2008), there are approximately 26,000 farm businesses in the north of Ireland. Some 31,000 people are engaged in a full-time or part-time capacity as farmers or business partners on these farms. A further 11,600 workers are employed on a full-time, part-time or casual basis.

Staff Numbers: DARD

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of Civil Servants employed by her Department, broken down by grade, in each division and agency. (AQW 1353/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The attached Annex provides information regarding the number of Civil Servants employed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, broke down by grade, in each division and agency.

ANNEX

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

	Permanent Secretary	1
Central Services Group		
	Deputy Secretary	1
DHR & Business Improvement Division	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	4
	Deputy Principal	13
	HPTO (Civil Engineer Assistant)	1
	Staff Officer	17
	Executive Officer I	11
	Executive Officer II	16
	Administrative Officer	16
	Support Grade Band 1	1
	Administrative Assistant	9
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	3
	SGB 2 Watchperson/Cleaner	5
	SGB 2 Watchperson/Cleaner (Casual)	2
	Support Grade Band 2	6
	Support Grade Band 2 (Casual)	2
	Typist	2
		109
Finance Division	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	5
	Accountant (Grade7)	2
	Deputy Principal	5
	Auditor DP MIIA or BATS	1
	Auditor DP MIIA and BATS	1
	Accountant (DP)	3
	Staff Officer (Accountant)	1
	Staff Officer	12
	Auditor (SO) MIIA or BATS	2
	Auditor (SO) MIIA and BATS	1
	Executive Officer I	13
	Personal Secretary	1

	Executive Officer II	11
	Administrative Officer	11
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	5
		76
DHR & Business Improvement Division	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	4
	Deputy Principal Information Officer	1
	Deputy Principal	7
	Staff Officer	9
	Information Officer	1
	PTO Graphic Designer	2
	Executive Officer I	7
	Senior Personal Secretary	1
	Personal Secretary	3
	Executive Officer II	8
	Technical Grade1 (DARD)	1
	Administrative Officer	12
	Typist	1
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	2
		61
Information Systems and Management Division	ICT Level 8	1
	Principal	1
	ICT Level 7	2
	ICT Level 6	2
	Deputy Principal	4
	Staff Officer	3
	Librarian	1
	ICT Level 5	8
	ICT Level 4	15
	Executive Officer I	1
	Assistant Librarian	1
	ICT Level 3	10
	Executive Officer II	8
	Administrative Officer	10
	Administrative Assistant	3
		70
Rural Policy	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	1

	Deputy Principal	3
	Staff Officer	3
	Executive Officer I	1
	Administrative Officer	1
		10
Forest Service Agency		
Forest Service Agency	Assistant Secretary	1
	Forest Operations Officer	1
	Principal	1
	Divisional Officer (G7)	2
	Forest Officer I	7
	Deputy Principal	3
	Accountant (DP)	1
	Staff Officer (Accountant)	1
	Staff Officer	5
	Forest Officer II	12
	PTO Graphic Designer	1
	Forest Officer Grade III	24
	Executive Officer I	2
	Area Forest Engineer	2
	Senior Mapper	1
	Personal Secretary	1
	Executive Officer II	9
	Mapper	4
	Administrative Officer	21
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	2
	Industrial	138
		240
Rivers Agency		
Rivers Agency	Chief Executive UG5	1
	Superintendent Civil Engineer (G6)	2
	PPTO Civil Engineer	8
	Accountant (Grade7)	1
	SPTO (Civil Engineering Assistant)	8
	SPTO (Civil Engineer)	15
	ICT Level 6	2
	Deputy Principal	4
	Accountant (DP)	1
	Staff Officer (Accountant)	1

	Staff Officer	4
	Inspector Group 4	8
	ICT Level 5	1
	HPTO (Civil Engineer)	4
	HPTO (Civil Engineer Assistant)	13
	Agricultural Inspector Grade III	2
	Scientific Officer	2
	PTO (Civil Eng Assistant)	25
	ICT Level 4	2
	Graduate Trainee Civil Enginr	2
	Executive Officer I	6
	Area Foreman (PTO)	6
	Personal Secretary	1
	Executive Officer II	10
	Technical Grade I (DARD)	19
	Administrative Officer	13
	Typist	3
	SGB 2 Watchperson/Cleaner	1
	Sandwich Course Student	2
	O Level Tr Civ Eng Assistant	8
	Administrative Assistant	12
	Industrial	232
		419
Central Policy Group		
	Deputy Secretary	1
Policy and Economics	Ch Agricultural Economist (G5)	1
	Principal Agric Economist (G7)	4
	Principal	4
	Senior Agricultural Economist	3
	Deputy Principal	5
	Staff Officer	6
	Inspector Group 4	5
	Agricultural Economist	4
	Executive Officer I	3
	Senior Personal Secretary	1
	Personal Secretary	2
	Executive Officer II	7
	Administrative Officer	10
	Administrative Assistant	3
		58

Animal Health and Welfare Policy	Assistant Secretary	1
	Veterinary Officer (G7)	2
	Principal	4
	Deputy Principal	13
	Staff Officer	13
	Executive Officer I	6
	Executive Officer II	8
	Administrative Officer	3
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	2
		53
Farm, Food and Environmental Policy	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	3
	Deputy Principal	10
	Staff Officer	18
	Executive Officer I	6
	Executive Officer II	8
	Administrative Officer	5
	Administrative Assistant	4
		55
Fisheries Division	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	2
	Chief Fisheries Officer	1
	Deputy Principal	5
	Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer	1
	Staff Officer	5
	Senior Fisheries Officer	3
	Fisheries Officer 1	6
	Executive Officer I	4
	Fisheries Officer 2	8
	Executive Officer II	5
	Administrative Officer	4
	Typist	1
	Administrative Assistant	2
		48
Scientific Advisory	Assistant Secretary	1
Service Delivery Group		
	Deputy Secretary	1
CAFRE Development and Educational Services	Assistant Secretary	1
	Senior Principal (G6)	2

	Veterinary Officer (G7)	1
	Agricultural Inspector Grade I	8
	Deputy Principal	1
	Agricultural Inspector Grade II	52
	Staff Officer	2
	Librarian	1
	Inspector Group 4	3
	ICT Level 5	1
	Higher Scientific Officer	1
	Agricultural Inspector Grade III	134
	Accommodation Manager	2
	Scientific Officer	3
	PTO (Civil Eng Assistant)	1
	Inspector Group 3	1
	Inspector Group 2	23
	ICT Level 4	1
	Forest Officer Grade III	1
	Executive Officer I	1
	Audio Visual Technician	1
	Assistant Librarian	2
	Assistant Accommodation Manager/ess	1
	Accommodation Manager (Enniskillin)	2
	Inspector Group 1	1
	ICT Level 3	4
	Food Technology Tech	6
	Executive Officer II	14
	Support Grade Band 1	1
	Assistant Scientific Officer	6
	Administrative Officer	19
	Typist	6
	Support Grade Band 2	2
	SGB 2 Watchperson/Cleaner	3
	Sandwich Course Student	2
	Cleaner	1
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	21
	Industrial	60
		393
Rural Development	Assistant Secretary	1
	Senior Principal (G6)	1

	Principal	6
	Agricultural Inspector Grade I	4
	Deputy Principal	22
	Agricultural Inspector Grade II	23
	Staff Officer	38
	Inspector Group 5	5
	Inspector Group 4	1
	Agricultural Inspector Grade III	32
	Inspector Group 3	9
	Inspector Group 2	16
	Executive Officer I	26
	Senior Personal Secretary	1
	Personal Secretary	3
	Inspector Group 1	5
	Executive Officer II	40
	Administrative Officer	126
	Typist	4
	Support Grade Band 2 (Casual)	1
	Support Grade Band 2	2
	Cleaner	1
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	6
	Administrative Assistant	104
		477
Rural Payments and Inspection	Assistant Secretary	1
	Principal	3
	Agricultural Inspector Grade I	3
	Deputy Principal	9
	Agricultural Inspector Grade II	13
	Staff Officer	16
	Inspector Group 4	37
	Agricultural Inspector Grade III	30
	Inspector Group 2	36
	Executive Officer I	17
	Agricultural Inspector Grade IV	1
	Executive Officer II	37
	Administrative Officer	94
	Typist	1
	Support Grade Band 2	2
	Support Grade Band 2 (Casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant (Casual)	3

	Administrative Assistant	13
		317
Veterinary Service		
	Deputy Secretary	1
Logistics	Sp Veterinary Officer (G6)	4
	Veterinary Officer (G7)	16
	Principal	2
	Divisional Veterinary Officer	11
	Deputy Principal	8
	Staff Officer	7
	Senior Meat Inspector	1
	Inspector Group 4	3
	ICT Level 5	1
	Senior Imports Inspector	3
	Poultry Meat Inspector	1
	Meat Inspector	2
	Inspector Group 2	10
	ICT Level 4	2
	Executive Officer I	9
	Senior Personal Secretary	1
	Personal Secretary	1
	Inspector Group 1	44
	ICT Level 3	5
	Executive Officer II	10
	Administrative Officer	28
	Administrative Assistant	7
	Industrial	5
		182
Operations	Sp Veterinary Officer (G6)	3
	Veterinary Officer Testing	22
	Veterinary Officer (G7)	83
	Temporary Veterinary Officer	5
	Divisional Veterinary Officer	11
	Deputy Principal	1
	Senior Meat Inspector	10
	Inspector Group 5	1
	Inspector Group 4	16
	Poultry Meat Inspector	12
	Meat Inspector	108
	Inspector Group 3	2

	Inspector Group 2	16
	Executive Officer I	3
	Inspector Group 1	121
	Executive Officer II	5
	Administrative Officer	30
	Administrative Assistant (casual)	1
	Administrative Assistant	15
		465
Overall Total		3039

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people are employed in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Hillsborough. (AQW 1355/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute employs a total of 102 staff in Hillsborough.

Young Entrants Scheme for Farmers

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's position on the re-establishment of a young entrants scheme for farmers; and to provide an update on the progress of discussions with key stakeholders on this issue. (AQW 1357/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The New Entrants Scheme formally closed to new applications on 27 February 2009, although applicants had until the end of June 2009 to provide necessary documentation connected with their application. An in-depth assessment to evaluate the Scheme's impact and cost effectiveness is just concluding. As part of this assessment, my officials met with stakeholders to share emerging findings and listen to views on the way ahead. I expect to receive the report on this assessment within the next month and will consider my next steps thereafter.

Rock Armouring, Greyabbey

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for the rock armouring at Mount Stewart, Greyabbey. (AQW 1382/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD Rivers Agency, in conjunction with the National Trust and the NI Environment Agency, carried out works on a designated sea defence at Kilnatierny on the outskirts of Greyabbey. The works involved Rivers Agency staff removing two sections of the sea defence to allow the inundation of the wetland immediately behind the Sea Defence, owned by the National Trust, at high water only. Rock armouring was imported to the site and used to protect the remaining structure from damage by the sea. It is anticipated that once the inter-tidal habitat has been properly established Rivers Agency would recommend de-designation of the sea defence to the Drainage Council for NI. If approved Rivers Agency would then be relieved of maintenance responsibility.

Dog Licences

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what has been the increase in dog licences granted in each local Council in the last year. (AQW 1415/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Dog statistics are collated on a calendar year basis, and therefore the last two years for which my Department has complete figures are 2007 and 2008. The number of

dog licences granted in each local Council in the years 2007 and 2008, and the difference between the years, are detailed in the following table.

Council	Dogs licensed 2007	Dogs licensed 2008	Increase
Antrim	3758	3819	61
Ards	5897	7331	1434
Armagh	2980	3791	811
Ballymena	7123	7115	-8
Ballymoney	3024	2805	-219
Banbridge	3340	3494	154
Belfast	10411	10677	266
Carrickfergus	2021	1803	-218
Castlereagh	3487	3958	471
Coleraine	6278	6621	343
Cookstown	1883	3567	1684
Craigavon	4902	4875	-27
Derry	1825	1859	34
Down	6384	6627	243
Dungannon	2102	2195	93
Fermanagh	4831	4815	-16
Larne	3275	3446	171
Limavady	2349	2234	-115
Lisburn	8649	9288	639
Magherafelt	1930	1883	-47
Moyle	1608	1681	73
Newry and Mourne	4037	4697	660
Newtownabbey	5063	5176	113
North Down	4765	5915	1150
Omagh	2149	2366	217
Strabane	2216	2170	-46
Total	106287	114208	7921

Dog Licence Fee

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department's proposal to increase the dog licence fee includes reduced fees for older people and people in receipt of benefits.

(AQW 1419/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current licence fee of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the dog control legislation. As a result, the bulk of the cost of the dog warden service in councils is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just by licensed dog owners. In fact the dog licence fees currently collected by some councils amount to less than 10 per cent of the cost of providing a dog warden service.

As I said in the Assembly on 12 October, I am proposing that the licence fee should be increased to a more appropriate level, with significant reductions for certain groups such as pensioners and those on benefits. I am proposing, subject to Executive approval, to consult on the basis of 3 options. These include a preferred option

based on an inflation-linked rise, an option to maintain the status quo, and an option which covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my preferred option, a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over; the cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5; the cost to owners whose dog is neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5; and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983. Under my proposal, as is the case now, guide dogs will be exempt from the licensing requirement.

I believe this option for the licence fee will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and reduce the number of strays and unwanted dogs. It will also provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the costs of dog control.

The licence fee is only one part of my proposals for new dog control measures. I believe that the measures I am proposing to require micro-chipping of all dogs, provide powers to councils to place conditions on dogs and their owners where there are concerns about dog behaviour and to make attacks by a dog on another dog an offence, will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when these are put out to public consultation.

Pigs' Blood

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what information her Department holds on the health risks of spreading material containing pigs' blood onto land. (AQW 1437/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 does not permit the direct landspreading of raw blood, or material containing it. The purpose of this is to safeguard animal and public health. As this process is not permitted, DARD does not hold information on the health risks of spreading material containing pig's blood on land.

However, the Animal By-Products Regulations (NI) 2003 do not prevent the landspreading of material containing pig's blood if the blood has been processed in approved premises, such as a composting plant.

Dog Licences

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for the percentage of dogs that are licensed. (AQW 1458/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Councils license just over 100,000 dogs annually. As it is unknown how many dogs there are in the north of Ireland as a whole, we do not know what percentage of dogs are currently licensed in the north.

In 2008, 114,208 dog licences were issued here.

Microchipping of Dogs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dogs have been microchipped in each of the last five years. (AQW 1459/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department does not hold records of the number of dogs that have been micro-chipped.

Licensing and Microchipping of Dogs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total income generated by her Department from the licensing and microchipping of dogs. (AQW 1460/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The income from the licensing of dogs goes to the Local Councils. The current licence fee £5 has not been reviewed since 1983 and falls far short of the cost of providing the dog warden services.

My Department does not require, organise or perform micro-chipping of dogs, and therefore generates no income from this.

My Department therefore generates no income from the licensing or micro-chipping of dogs.

Dog Control

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the annual cost of dog control, including the cost of dog wardens. (AQW 1461/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Local councils are responsible for enforcing the Dogs (NI) Order 1983. As information on the cost of enforcement is not routinely provided to my Department, it does not hold data for all councils.

The costs for Armagh, Belfast, Fermanagh and Ballymena for the most recent financial year available are set out in Table 1.

TABLE 1
COSTS OF DOG CONTROL FOR ARMAGH, BELFAST, FERMANAGH AND BALLYMENA FOR THE MOST RECENT FINANCIAL YEAR AVAILABLE.

Council	Licence income (£s)	Dog control Costs (£s)	Shortfall	Licence income as % of costs
Armagh	16,000	112,837	96,837	14
Belfast	56,142	682,586	626,444	8
Ballymena	37,067	101,061	63,994	36
Fermanagh	20,000	84,791	64,791	23

Dog Licences

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dog licences have been issued, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1462/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The number of dog licences granted in each of the last 5 years for which my Department has complete figures is set out in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DOG LICENCES GRANTED BY LOCAL COUNCILS IN THE LAST 5 CALENDAR YEARS (2004-2008) (FROM FIGURES PROVIDED TO DARD BY LOCAL COUNCILS)

Year	Number of licences
2004	94909
2005	95367
2006	102991
2007	106287
2008	114208

Right of Access for Horse Riders

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to allow horse riders the same right of access to publicly owned land as walkers. (AQW 1472/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The majority of publicly owned land that falls within the remit of my Department is managed by the Forest Service. Within our forestry, there is in excess of 100

kilometres of designated pony trekking trails. In addition, we have a number of arrangements which facilitate local pony trekking centres, local pony clubs and the Irish Long Distance Riding Association.

I recently launched a strategy to develop the recreational and social use of our forests. In this, DARD has committed to producing operational guidelines in relation to developing cycling and horse riding trails in forests. The strategy places greater emphasis on forest recreation provision, as part of forest management planning, and seeks to increase the accessibility of forests to the public. The provision of additional horse riding access will be considered by Forest Service where there is a demand and where additional access can be accommodated.

My Department has no control over country parks that are privately owned, or ones offering public access such as those owned by organisations like the National Trust. Any country parks controlled by Borough and District Councils do not fall within DARD's remit.

DOE have advised that horse riding is only permitted within specified areas in NI Environment Agency (NIEA) properties at Crawfordsburn, Redburn and Castle Archdale Country Parks due to concerns relating to the safety of other users. In addition, walkers are only allowed access to publicly owned land where permission has been given.

Dog Licences

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for assessment of the fairness of dog owners being forced to pay an increased dog licence of £50 to make up for the actions of irresponsible dog owners, most of whom do not pay the current £5 fee; and whether an increased fee is more likely to discourage a lot more dog owners not to pay. (AQW 1483/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since Questions 1483/10 and 1484/10 refer to the same subject matter, this response deals with both questions together.

The current licence fee of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the dog control legislation. As a result, the bulk of the cost of the dog warden service in councils is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just by licensed dog owners. In fact the dog licence fees currently collected by some councils amount to less than 10 per cent of the cost of providing a dog warden service.

During my Review of the legislation, local councils suggested figures for dog licences ranging up to £70. My officials explored with the ARD Committee some early ideas on a fee of £50 with 50 per cent reductions for the owners of neutered dogs, people aged 65 or over and those on certain means-tested benefits.

As I said in the Assembly on 12 October, it is extremely unfortunate that this exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. I have listened very carefully to the concerns of the Committee and the public and have taken these into account in developing my proposals for consultation.

I am proposing, subject to Executive approval, to consult on the basis of 3 options. These include a core option based on an inflation-linked rise, an option to maintain the status quo, and an option which covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my core proposal: a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over; the cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5; the cost to owners whose dog is neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5; and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983. Under my proposal, as is the case now, guide dogs will be exempt from the licensing requirement.

I believe this core proposal for the licence fee will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and reduce the number of strays and unwanted dogs. It will also provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the costs of dog control.

The licence fee is only one part of my proposals for new dog control measures. I believe that the measures I am proposing to require micro-chipping of all dogs, provide powers to councils to place conditions on dogs and their owners where there are concerns about dog behaviour and to make attacks by a dog on another dog an offence, will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when these are put out to public consultation.

Dog Licences

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the new proposed £50 dog licence (i) will there be any discount introduced for pensioners; and (ii) will there be any allowances for people with guide dogs or hearing dogs. (AQW 1484/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since Questions 1483/10 and 1484/10 refer to the same subject matter, this response deals with both questions together.

The current licence fee of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the dog control legislation. As a result, the bulk of the cost of the dog warden service in councils is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just by licensed dog owners. In fact the dog licence fees currently collected by some councils amount to less than 10 per cent of the cost of providing a dog warden service.

During my Review of the legislation, local councils suggested figures for dog licences ranging up to £70. My officials explored with the ARD Committee some early ideas on a fee of £50 with 50 per cent reductions for the owners of neutered dogs, people aged 65 or over and those on certain means-tested benefits.

As I said in the Assembly on 12 October, it is extremely unfortunate that this exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. I have listened very carefully to the concerns of the Committee and the public and have taken these into account in developing my proposals for consultation.

I am proposing, subject to Executive approval, to consult on the basis of 3 options. These include a core option based on an inflation-linked rise, an option to maintain the status quo, and an option which covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my core proposal: a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over; the cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5; the cost to owners whose dog is neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5; and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983. Under my proposal, as is the case now, guide dogs will be exempt from the licensing requirement.

I believe this core proposal for the licence fee will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and reduce the number of strays and unwanted dogs. It will also provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the costs of dog control.

The licence fee is only one part of my proposals for new dog control measures. I believe that the measures I am proposing to require micro-chipping of all dogs, provide powers to councils to place conditions on dogs and their owners where there are concerns about dog behaviour and to make attacks by a dog on another dog an offence, will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when these are put out to public consultation.

Puppy Farming

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to introduce legislation to restrict puppy farming; and what consideration has been given to imposing heavier restrictions on puppy farmers, rather than imposing £50 licence fees on dog owners. (AQW 1485/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: It is my intention, subject to Executive approval, to bring a new Animal Welfare Bill to the Assembly around the same time as the Dog Control Bill. The new Animal Welfare Bill will provide powers to regulate, through subordinate legislation, all dog breeding establishments. Specific proposals to enhance the standards required to protect and improve the welfare of dogs in breeding establishments will be subject to full consultation at that time.

Regarding the dog licence fee, the current fee of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the dog control legislation. As a result, the bulk of the cost of the dog warden service in councils is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just by licensed dog owners. In fact the dog licence fees currently collected by some councils amount to less than 10 per cent of the cost of providing a dog warden service.

During my Review of the legislation, local councils suggested figures for dog licences ranging up to £70. My officials explored with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee some early ideas on a fee of £50 with 50 per cent reductions for the owners of neutered dogs, people aged 65 or over and those on certain means-tested benefits.

As I said in the Assembly on 12 October, it is extremely unfortunate that this exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. I have listened very carefully to the concerns of the Committee and the public. I am proposing, subject to Executive approval, to consult on the basis of 3 options. These include a preferred option based on an inflation-linked rise, an option to maintain the status quo, and an option which covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my preferred option: a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over; the cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5; the cost to owners whose dog is neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5; and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983.

I believe this option for the licence fee will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and reduce the number of strays and unwanted dogs. It will also provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the costs of dog control.

The licence fee is only one part of my proposals for new dog control measures. I believe that the measures I am proposing to require micro-chipping of all dogs, provide powers to councils to place conditions on dogs and their owners where there are concerns about dog behaviour and to make attacks by a dog on another dog an offence, will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when these are put out to public consultation.

Dog Licences

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to explain the rationale for her proposal to raise the cost of a dog licence from £5 to £50. (AQW 1557/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current licence fee of £5 falls far short of the cost of enforcing the dog control legislation. As a result, the bulk of the cost of the dog warden service in councils is currently borne by all ratepayers, not just by licensed dog owners. In fact the dog licence fees currently collected by some councils amount to less than 10 per cent of the cost of providing a dog warden service.

During my Review of the legislation, local councils suggested figures for dog licences ranging up to £70. My officials explored with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee some early ideas on a fee of £50 with 50 per cent reductions for the owners of neutered dogs, people aged 65 or over and those on certain means-tested benefits.

As I said in the Assembly on 12 October, it is extremely unfortunate that this exploratory thinking on the licence fee was wrongly presented in the media as a firm proposal. I have listened very carefully to the concerns of the Committee and the public and have taken these into account in developing my proposals for consultation.

I am proposing, subject to Executive approval, to consult on the basis of 3 options. These include a core option based on an inflation-linked rise, an option to maintain the status quo, and an option which covers the full cost of the dog warden service.

Under my core proposal: a dog licence will be free to those aged 65 and over; the cost to those on benefits will be pegged at the current price of £5; the cost to owners whose dog is neutered will also be pegged at the current price of £5; and the full fee cost to others will be £12.50, reflecting the increase in inflation since the fee was last reviewed in 1983.

I believe this core proposal for the licence fee will help the elderly, protect those on benefits, encourage neutering and reduce the number of strays and unwanted dogs. It will also provide some additional resource to local councils to meet the costs of dog control.

The licence fee is only one part of my proposals for new dog control measures. I believe that the measures I am proposing to require micro-chipping of all dogs, provide powers to councils to place conditions on dogs and their owners where there are concerns about dog behaviour and to make attacks by a dog on another dog an offence, will be widely welcomed and I look forward to hearing the responses from all stakeholders when these are put out to public consultation.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the consultation on her proposals for dealing with dangerous dogs will begin. (AQW 1607/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Subject to the approval of the Executive, I intend to launch a public consultation on my proposals for new dog control measures in November 2009.

Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the theft of cattle under the control of DARD officials in county Armagh on 5 October 2009, whether her Department is in breach of paragraphs 13 and 20 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972; and if not, to provide reasons. (AQW 1713/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The apparent theft of the cattle is under police investigation and it would be inappropriate to comment until the investigation is completed.

Diseases of Animals Bill

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the organisations her Department has consulted on the Diseases of Animals Bill. (AQW 1831/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department consulted with some 400 organisations and individuals in January 2008 on proposals for a Diseases of Animals Bill. I have arranged for a list of the consultees to be forwarded to you. A copy of the consultation list has also been placed in the Assembly Library.

Cattle Theft

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 1713/10, if she will make public her Department's submission to the PSNI or reveal it, in confidence, to the Agriculture Committee. (AQW 1908/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The apparent theft of the cattle is under police investigation and it would be inappropriate to comment until the investigation is completed. If the Committee wishes I can arrange for an Official to attend to provide a briefing and respond to any questions that can be answered without jeopardising the PSNI investigation or any potential prosecution which may arise from it.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent (i) by his Department; and (ii) by Departmental Agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1314/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The information requested is set out at Annex A.

ANNEX A

	04/05 (£)	05/06 (£)	06/07 (£)	07/08 (£)	08/09 (£)
Department					
Belfast Telegraph	512	4,842	-	22,195	23,003
News Letter	600	2,127	-	11,133	13,010
Irish News	584	2,256	11,607	8,432	10,436
Other	473	24,418	1,446	22,798	19,953
TOTAL	2,169	33,643	13,053	64,558	66,402
Non Departmental Public Bodies					
Belfast Telegraph	13,795	24,766	20,125	39,942	60,295
News Letter	2,284	3,696	3,048	3,421	3,899
Irish News	1,649	2,691	2,259	2,577	3,074
Other	1,992	544	400	15,982	36,433
Total	19,720	31,697	25,832	61,922	103,701

Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland (OSNI) and Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) were Departmental Agencies until 31 March 2008 and 31 March 2006 respectively. PRONI did not incur any advertising costs in this period.

Information requested in relation to OSNI is not readily available and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost, as indicated by the DFP Minister.

Events Sponsored by Waterways Ireland

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the events sponsored by Waterways Ireland in the last financial year; (ii) the cost of these events; (iii) the civil servants, public representatives and elected representatives who were invited; (iv) who attended; and (v) the decision making process for selection of the events. (AQW 1376/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Waterways Ireland promotes recreation on the inland waterways through a range of activities including a Sponsorship Programme and through Joint Activities. Joint Activities are developed in partnership with other organisations such as the Waterways Ireland Riverfest supported by Waterways Ireland in conjunction with the local organising committee, Coleraine Borough Council and the Lower Bann Partnership.

2008 Financial Year (Jan – Dec 2008)

- (i) Events supported by Waterways Ireland, please see attached spreadsheet Annex A;
- (ii) The costs were: Joint Activities: €132,000 - £105,000
 Sponsorship: €72,500 - £57,520
- (iii) Waterways Ireland does not organise the Sponsored events and as such has no record of civil servants, public representatives and elected representatives who were invited to attend events.
- (iv) Staff of Waterways Ireland attended these events in a promotional or technical role but as Waterways Ireland was not the organiser of the sponsored events or joint activities I am not aware who attended other than Waterways Ireland staff themselves.
- (v) Joint Activities: Waterways Ireland assesses applications based on the potential impact of the activity on long term waterway recreation, and on local community waterway awareness; promotion of the waterways and their potential impact on the local economy.

Sponsorship: The criteria for the assessment of applications under the Sponsorship Scheme are attached at Annex B. These criteria are provided to all applicants in the application pack.

ANNEX A

	Name of Event	Waterway	Activity
Mar 2008	Waterways Ireland Erne Junior Pike Fishing Classic	Erne	Angling
	Erne Head of the River	Erne	Rowing
Apr 2008	Waterways Ireland Pike Challenge	SNN & S.E.W	Angling
	Waterways Ireland Schools League	Erne	Angling
May 2008	Limerick Regatta and Waterways Ireland Row For It Junior Rowing League	SNN, O'Briensbridge	Rowing
	King of the Barrow	Barrow	Angling
	The Garadice Gamble	SEW	Angling
	The Grand Canal Offaly Voyage 2008	Grand Canal	Arts
	Portora Regatta and Waterways Ireland Row For It Junior Rowing League	Erne	Rowing
	Boatmans Reunion	SNN, L. Derg	Boatman's Reunion
	TriAthy 2008	Barrow	Swimming
	Tasting Sessions in Rowing	Erne	Rowing
June 2008	Iniscealtra Festival of Arts	SNN, L. Derg	Community Festival
	Carlow Regatta and Waterways Ireland Row For It Junior Rowing League	Barrow	Rowing
	Garadice Lake Triathlon	SEW	Swimming
	Castleconnell Sprint Regatta	SNN, Castleconnell	Rowing
	Athlone Regatta and Waterways Ireland Row For It Junior Rowing League	SNN, L. Ree	Rowing
	Waterways Ireland Waterford & District Annual Coarse Angling Festival	Barrow	Angling
	8th Annual Mullingar RCAG Rally	Royal Canal	Rally
	Shannonbridge Midsummer Festival	SNN, Shannonbridge	Arts
	Crom Living History and Have A Go Day	Erne	Envt./Heritage
	Laser Connaught Event	SNN, L. Derg	Sailing
	Lough Erne Relay Challenge	Erne	Swimming
	Waterways Ireland MacGregor Rally (also Mar)	SNN, L. Ree	Sailing
July 2008	Féile Brian Ború (Swim competition)	SNN, L. Derg	Community Festival
	Lisnaskea Water Festival	Erne	Community Festival
	Lough Ree Environmental Summer School & Arts Festival	SNN, L. Ree	Envt./Heritage
	An tSuca Fiain	SNN, Ballinasloe	Community Festival
	All Ireland Championships	Barrow	Angling
	Daingean Festival	Grand Canal	Community Festival

	Name of Event	Waterway	Activity
August 2008	Irish Long Distance Swimming Championship	Erne	Swimming
	C-O-S Sprints Regatta & Waterways Ireland Row For It Junior Rowing League	SNN, C-O-S	Rowing
	RCAG Western Rally (Mullingar to Abbeyshrule)	Royal Canal	Rally
	Wakejam II	Erne	Watersports
	Gransha Youth Club Water Activities	Erne	Watersports
	RCAG Western Rally (Abbeyshrule to Ballymahon)	Royal Canal	Rally
	Annual Crom Trip	Erne	Rowing
	NCFFI Junior Canal Championships	Royal Canal	Angling
Sept 2008	Gig 'n the Bann Cross Community Festival	L Bann	Arts
	Lough Key Triathlon	SNN, L. Key	Swimming
	Irish Gay Rowing Weekend	SNN, C-O-S	Rowing
	Enniskillen Arts Festival	Erne	Arts
	Bann Head of the River	L Bann	Rowing
	Waterways Ireland Erne World Pike Fishing Classic 2008	Erne	Angling
Jan 2009	*St Michaels Head of the River	SNN, O'Briensbridge	Rowing
Feb 2009	*Shannon Head of the River	SNN, C-O-S	Rowing
	Joint Activities		
May 2008	Waterways Ireland Classic Fishing Festival	Erne	Angling
June 2008	Waterways Ireland Riverfest	L Bann	Community Festival
July 2008	Waterways Ireland triAthlone	SNN, Athlone	Triathlon
August 2008	Waterways Ireland Scarriff Harbour Festival	SNN, Scarriff	Community Festival
August 2008	Waterways Ireland Classic Boat Regatta	SNN, L Derg	Sailing

* The Sponsorship Programme for 2009 was open to applicants until the 3 Feb 2009. As evaluation only takes place after the closing date, events taking place in Jan Feb 2009 would not be able to be supported, so they are included in the 2008 programme.

Annex B

Criteria for Application for Sponsorship

Applications are assessed according to the following criteria and assigned a score with sponsorship funding assigned to the highest scoring Events. Only Events which meet the essential criteria will be considered.

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

The Event must:

1. Be water-based or a waterside activity on one or more of the seven waterways under the remit of Waterways Ireland;
2. Attract new waterway users in an active capacity and not just as spectators;
3. Be consistent with a sustained balanced use of the waterways with due regard for the environment, ecology, natural and built heritage and biodiversity of the waterways;
4. Apply for and receive event approval from the Waterways Ireland Inspector of Navigation. (This is to ensure that the Event is in compliance with the bye-laws and other navigation considerations. See attached for the

“Application for Approval of an Event” form which should be completed and submitted with the Sponsorship Application); and

5. Have public liability insurance and insurance which indemnifies Waterways Ireland against claim. See attached for the “Insurance Confirmation Form” which should be completed by your Insurance Company and submitted with the Sponsorship Application.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

Equality of Access

There should be equal access of participation in the Event for groups highlighted under the Waterways Ireland Equality Scheme, which provides equality for people regardless of:

- Age
- Dependents
- Disability
- Gender
- Marital Status
- Political Opinion
- Race
- Religious Belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Member of the Traveller Community

Cross Border Participation

As a North/South Implementation Body, Waterways Ireland promotes cross-border participation in events on the waterways, i.e., involvement of competitors/spectators from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at the same Event.

Development of non-established Events

Where possible, funding will be assigned to assist with the development of new Events which provide additional opportunities to attract more users to the waterways.

All-island Strategy for Angling Tourism

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress has been made in developing an all-island strategy for angling tourism. (AQW 1407/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The development of a cross-border strategy for angling tourism falls within the remit of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and its counterpart in the Irish Republic, Fáilte Ireland. They are responsible for product development in their respective countries. Tourism Ireland is the agency responsible for marketing the angling product overseas and enacting the strategy as developed by the two Tourist Boards.

Inland Fisheries Branch have established a small dedicated Promotions Team to raise awareness of Northern Ireland and the Public Angling Estate which comprises 64 fisheries owned or leased by the DCAL, as a first class venue for local and international anglers within a confined budget allocation.

The Promotions team have worked closely with Fáilte Ireland who produced leaflets, e-brochures and Centre of Excellence brochures which include the Public Angling Estate and angling tourism in Northern Ireland. DCAL's fishery officers also work with Tourism Ireland while attending angling shows in a number of locations in Europe. Shows in Europe have contributed to increasing numbers of visiting tourist anglers to Northern Ireland.

Anglers

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures his Department has taken to address the concerns of anglers in relation to (i) the quality of angling; (ii) the quality of information on angling; (iii) the attractiveness of the environment; and (iv) the accessibility of angling waters. (AQW 1408/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The DCAL angling website allows anglers to make complaints and seek advice on angling related issues. The Department has a team dedicated to responding quickly to queries

raised by anglers through the angling website. Staff can quickly alert technical staff to issues raised and seek their professional advice to enable a detailed accurate response to the angler.

DCAL has built up efficient, effective working relationships with Rivers Agency, NIEA, Loughs Agency, DARD, NI Water and other water related bodies to provide an efficient, accurate response to queries or issues raised by anglers.

The Department is constantly improving the DCAL Angling Website (www.dcal-fishingni.gov.uk) to make it more user friendly. Angling guides updated on a regular basis and are provided free to anglers. A promotions team constantly take on board recommendations raised by anglers when reviewing and updating the guides. The Department works closely with Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland to produce detailed accurate information to the tourist angler. Tourism Ireland has recently produced e-brochures on angling with input from DCAL.

The Department targets areas of concern which have been highlighted by anglers. DCAL technical staff work with local councils, forestry service and land owners in an effort to control litter, dog fouling, illegal fishing etc. The Department is also considering the addition of photographs in angling brochures and the website to show anglers the attractiveness of the environment.

Access to the Public Angling Estate is through a DCAL permit which is available on-line and at most tackle shops. Clubs also distribute day tickets at local tackle shops and other local outlets. Put and Take fisheries sell day tickets on site. Physical access is provided at most waters in the form of car parks, paths and fishing stands. Disabled access is also provided for at a numbers of waters which are listed in the new Disabled Anglers Guide.

Northern Ireland: Tourist Destination for Anglers

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department has met with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop a strategy to promote Northern Ireland as a tourist destination for anglers; and if he has considered an all-island strategy with Tourism Ireland. (AQW 1411/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL together with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and the Loughs Agency of the Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, commissioned a report on the Socio-Economic Impact of Angling, which made recommendations for a joint agency approach to maximising the marketing and promotion of the angling product. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and DCAL are supportive of a “multi-agency” approach and welcome such co-operative partnerships.

DCAL and the NITB recognise partnership as the way forward for successful tourism development and delivery of a prized product in a niche market.

DCAL Fisheries Officers work with Irish Republic Fisheries Board Officers on the Tourism Ireland stands at overseas Angling Shows, advising anglers on angling waters and opportunities on both sides of the border. DCAL also works with Tourism Ireland in organising visits by overseas angling media or tour operators. The recent Pike fishing visit by Jouke Jansma from De Roofvis Magazine, The Netherlands was organised by DCAL technical staff working with Tourism Ireland and NITB with input from Central Fisheries Board (on the basis that they could also visit an Irish Republic water if they wished during their visit)

Grant-making Arrangements for Arm's-Length Bodies

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his officials are working with the Arts Council and the Ulster-Scots Agency, in the same way they are working with Sports NI, to examine clauses in their grant-making arrangements to advise if changes are required. (AQW 1486/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department and its Arms Length Bodies continually review procedures to ensure that the allocation of public funding is effective and fit for purpose.

Bands: Funding

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, which are linked to the UVF or the UDA, can avail of funding through his Department, the Arts Council, or the Ulster-Scots Agency. (AQW 1487/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Bands: Funding

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if bands, that carry UVF flags, should be allowed to avail of funding through his Department, the Arts Council or the Ulster-Scots Agency. (AQW 1488/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not fund bands directly.

Individuals and organisations can avail of funding from the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster-Scots Agency, through its Financial Assistance Scheme, may provide funding for musical tuition. Through the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme and Small Grants Programme funding is available for musical tuition and musical instruments. All organisations securing funding from either of these sources must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policies of the respective funding organisation.

Olympic Bid from Portadown Rowing Club and the Silverwood Equestrian Centre, Lurgan.

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when a final decision will be made in relation to the Olympic bid from Portadown Rowing Club and the Silverwood Equestrian Centre, Lurgan. (AQW 1814/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am unaware of any Olympic bid from Portadown Rowing Club and the Silverwood Equestrian Centre, Lurgan.

The Elite Facilities Programme is about creating a facility, performance and participation legacy for Northern Ireland beyond 2012 that will also cover key gaps in facility provision across the sports infrastructure.

Applications to Stage Two of the Elite Facilities Programme competition have been made; for both rowing and canoeing facilities by Portadown 2000; and for equestrian facilities in Lurgan by The Meadows Equestrian Centre & Stud Ltd.

The recent judicial review decision on the Elite Facilities Programme competition will now allow Sport NI to move forward with this programme. However, the announcement of successful applications has been delayed to allow for the Court's judgement to be implemented.

I am informed by Sport NI that it hopes to be in a position to provide interested parties with an update on the programme timetable later this month.

Receptions: Sporting Achievement

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many receptions he has sponsored in recognition of sporting achievements since coming to office; and (ii) to detail who received a reception and for what reason. (AQW 1895/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since taking up office on 1 July I have hosted one reception in recognition of sporting achievement. On 10 August 2009 I hosted a reception for Tony McCoy at Parliament Buildings where family and friends joined with the horse racing fraternity in celebrating his achievement in winning 3,000 National Hunt races.

GAA Grounds and Competitions

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an update on his discussions with the GAA regarding the naming of grounds and competitions. (AQO 266/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have raised a number of concerns following recent publicity around the naming of grounds and competitions. I have made it clear that my major priority is to promote sport as a vehicle for improving community relations and community cohesion in Northern Ireland and that I expect all governing bodies, including the GAA, to do all they can to support these objectives. What happened at Galbally in August is unacceptable and I am sure that many senior figures in the GAA will be as horrified as I am that a sports ground was used for this type of activity.

I have asked Sport Northern Ireland to carry out a review of their existing terms and conditions of grant to sport specifically focusing on strengthening the shared and better future and good relations requirements of funding. I also understand the Ulster Council of the GAA is working to establish the exact circumstances surrounding the use of the Galbally Pearses grounds in August for a commemoration of deceased members of terrorist organisations. I look forward to receiving reports on both these matters when completed.

All governing bodies must continue working to recognise and promote further the role sport has in creating a shared and better future.

East-West Links

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what he is doing to promote East-West linkages. (AQO 267/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: One of the Northern Ireland Executive's priorities is developing East-West relationships with other parts of the United Kingdom and as Scotland is our nearest neighbour and given the cultural, historical and social connections we share, I am committed to promoting and enhancing this relationship.

My recent fact finding visit to Scotland, which included meetings with the culture and sports Ministers and visits to cultural organisations and institutions, provided me with both an opportunity to explore with Scottish colleagues how cultural connections can be strengthened and share with them positive aspects of the Northern Ireland experience.

My Department, through Foras na Gaeilge, contributes to the Colmcille Initiative which was launched in 1997 and receives funding from Northern

Ireland, Scotland and the Irish Republic, fostering support for the Gaelic languages and developing links between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.

Additionally through the British-Irish Council I will work with other Council members to bring forward areas of mutual interest that deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.

Irish-Language Strategy Delay

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the reasons for the delay in bringing his Department's Irish Language Strategy to the Executive. (AQO 268/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since taking up office I have been actively considering the issues surrounding the enhancement and development of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture and the enhancement and protection of the development of the Irish language.

I have also been taking account of the position of other regional or minority languages across the United Kingdom, especially the situation in Scotland which has close parallels to Northern Ireland in terms of regional and minority languages.

I intend to bring a paper on the high level principles on which the Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages Strategy might be based to the Executive in the near future.

Sports Stadia

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether his Department supports a shared sports stadium. (AQO 269/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Members will be aware that a decision has been taken not to proceed with the proposal to develop a multi- sports stadium at the former Maze site. In the light of this decision the Governing Bodies of the three main ball sports were asked to identify their preferred option to meet their sports' strategic needs. Their proposals centred on the redevelopment of the existing main stadiums, namely the GAA's Casement Park, Rugby's Ravenhill Park and Windsor Park in respect of the IFA.

The proposals put forward by the Governing Bodies are for the development of three separate stadia tailored to their sports' individual requirements as the most practical and effective way forward.

Nevertheless Sports' Governing Bodies have a key role to play in a shared and better future for all our communities and will be encouraged to develop further opportunities and strategies to bring our communities together by opening up their sports and stadia to all.

Ministerial Receptions: DCAL

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list all the receptions he has hosted since taking up office. (AQO 270/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since taking up office on 1st of July I have hosted 5 receptions:

- i. On 10 July I welcomed delegates of worldwide Imperial Orange Councils to Stormont. Delegates attended from across the globe for the 43rd Triennial Conference;
- ii. On 22 July 2009 I joined with competitors and guests at a reception in Stormont to send my best wishes to the Northern Ireland Team travelling to the 2009 World Police and Fire Games in Vancouver;
- iii. I hosted a reception in the Marriott Pinnacle Hotel, Downtown Vancouver on Friday 31 July for the Northern Ireland Team competing in the 2009 World Police and Fire Games in Vancouver;
- iv. On 27 July 2009 I welcomed competitors in the 5th World Dwarf Games to Belfast. I met with the President of the Dwarf Athletic Association UK (DAAUK) and competitors from across the world taking part in the Games, a major international event in the Paralympic calendar; and
- v. On 10 August 2009 I hosted a reception for Tony McCoy at Parliament Buildings where family and friends joined with the horse racing fraternity in celebrating his achievements.

Sport and Physical Recreation Strategy

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an update on the 'Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation', including a timetable for implementation. (AQO 271/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), has prepared a final version of a planned new Northern Ireland Sports Strategy now entitled "Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019". The final version of this strategy has been forwarded to the Northern Ireland Executive for consideration at a future meeting. I have been pressing and will continue to press for this to be considered and agreed by the Executive as soon as possible. Once approved by the Executive, work on implementation would begin immediately. Full implementation is expected to take place over a 10 year period.

Arts Sponsorship

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking to encourage private sector sponsorship of the Arts. (AQO 272/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am committed to the development of the arts in Northern Ireland and recognise that the sustainable development of the sector will require funding from a variety of sources public, private and voluntary.

Whilst the current economic climate presents a more challenging environment in which to secure private sector donations to the arts, I would be supportive of those activities which will maximise funding from such sources.

My Department, through the Arts Council, continues to fund Arts and Business (NI). Arts and Business aims to promote mutually beneficial relationships through a range of measures between business, the arts and the public sector in order to increase the level of private sector investment in the arts.

In addition, my Department has ensured that strategic arts infrastructure projects, such as the Lyric Theatre, the Crescent Arts Centre and the Metropolitan Arts Centre are proactive in seeking funding from the private sector towards capital project costs. This includes a requirement that such projects set in place a formal fundraising strategy and, where necessary, appoint a fundraising manager.

Olympic-sized Swimming Pool in Bangor

Mr A McFarland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Olympic-sized swimming pool in Bangor; and when it will be completed. (AQO 273/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Olympic sized swimming pool is being developed by North Down Borough Council supported by the investment of £15m of public funding through Sport NI. The project is part of a £42m leisure development by the Council, to be sited at the Valentine Playing Fields in Bangor.

The timescale for construction rests with North Down Borough Council who are focused on completing the building project as quickly as possible.

I am informed by Sport NI that the Project is currently at invitation to tender for contract stage, is on track within the project timeline and on target for completion in early 2012.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Working Groups: DE

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number and type of working groups currently carrying out work on behalf of her Department. (AQW 550/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tá seacht ngrúpa oibre is fiche ag déanamh oibre ar son na Roinne Oideachais faoi láthair. Seo iad a leanas:-

There are twenty seven working groups currently carrying out work on behalf of the Department of Education. These are:-

Autism Spectrum Disorder Conference Planning Group

This group is co-led with the Department for Education and Science and is tasked with organising an All-Ireland conference on Autism Spectrum Disorder to take place in Armagh in November 2009.

Sub-Group of Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children & Young People

This group considers provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools including transition to adulthood and the provision of health and social care intervention.

Middletown Centre for Autism Building Integrated Project Team

This group is co-led with the Department for Education and Science and is representative of those involved in the project to design and build the Middletown Centre for Autism. This includes Architects, Engineers, Surveyors and officials from both the Department of Education in the north and the Department for Education and Science in the south.

Community Use of School Premises Working Group

An informal working group made up of key educational stakeholders co-ordinated by CCMS which was established to explore how best to achieve the increased use of school premises by the wider community.

Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Programme

Programme being developed by key stakeholders and interested parties.

It will focus on the post primary sector and be expected to address how a pupil's emotional health and wellbeing is promoted by the school, what support systems are available to support a pupil under stress and what support is available to a school in the event of a crisis.

Sharing In Education Programme Team

Reviews and makes recommendations for support on education-related applications to the International Fund for Ireland as part of the Department's role as managing agent.

Steering Group for the Review of SEN and Inclusion

Advising the Department on matters connected with review policy proposals.

Taskforce on Traveller Education

The Taskforce is cross-sectoral and includes members of the Traveller community across Ireland, representatives from a range of non-government organisations and government Departments and public bodies from all of Ireland. The aim of the Taskforce is to assist the Department develop an action plan on Traveller education.

Newcomer Factor of Common Funding Formula Working Group

This group has been set up to provide guidance to schools on clearly defined criteria that can be used in determining whether or not a newcomer pupil qualifies for the newcomer factor within the Common Funding Formula.

Traveller Factor of Common Funding Formula Working Group The Department established this group to develop guidelines for Principals and Boards of Governors on good practice. Specifically, these guidelines will outline how to use the Traveller factor of the Common Funding Formula to achieve the optimum support for Traveller children in schools.

The Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce

The key purpose is to finalise the revised literacy and numeracy strategy, including targets for the promotion of literacy and numeracy, and to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy.

The Irish Medium Literacy & Numeracy Working Group

Assembled to focus on developing a strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy in Irish-medium schools that is complementary to the English-medium literacy and numeracy strategy.

The Inter-Departmental Sub-Committee on Early Years and Childcare

To provide a forum to agree strategic, operational and resourcing responsibilities in relation to relevant childcare provision and early years between DE and DHSSPS.

The Regional Development Programme Group (Sure Start)

To provide a forum to oversee the development of the Programme for 2 year olds in Sure Start.

Regional Reference Group for the 0-6 Strategy

To provide a panel of expertise to advise on the delivery, policy and practice of Early Years for the Early Years Strategy.

Steering Group of the Update of the Multiple Deprivation Group

This group steers the update of the 2005 measures of spatial deprivation in the north of Ireland and the responses to the recommendations noted in the 2005 Multiple Deprivation Measure report. It quality assures the research and the effective dissemination, briefing and presentation of the research.

eSchools Project Board

Oversees the implementation of the eSchools data warehouse.

eSchools Project Management Group

The group works to agree changes to variables to be reported through various DE data collection exercises from schools and to discuss issues arising during, or as a result of, the data collection exercises themselves.

eSchools Strategic Review Board

The Board is responsible for reviewing the reports prepared by the e-Schools Project Director, reviewing progress on the e-Schools Development Roadmap, reviewing and considering major new or potential improvements to the Services identified by the Contractor, jointly producing, reviewing and agreeing a Strategic Plan and providing strategic direction to the Continuous Improvement Programme in addressing emerging stakeholder requirements.

e-Schools Business Change Working Group

The aim of this group is to review and propose revisions to current business processes based on the use of the e-Schools solution, to improve processes and achieve added benefits, including educational benefits.

Data and Research Advisory Sub-Group of the Obesity Prevention Steering Group

One of four Advisory Groups established to take forward the Fit Futures Implementation Plan, designed to address childhood obesity. Its function is to advise, comment and provide formative feedback to the Obesity Prevention Steering Group on the Fit Futures Implementation and on those relevant issues related to the key activities assigned. Membership of the group includes representatives from DHSSPS, DE, DCAL, Food Safety Promotion Board, Food Standards Agency, Health Promotion Agency.

Education Research Forum

The Forum includes representatives from all the Higher Education Institutions in the north of Ireland, the Education and Training Inspectorate, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. Its purpose is primarily to exchange research information, knowledge and skills and to inform analytical thinking on current and emerging issues in relation to education.

DE/NIO longitudinal research study on young men

Research into the transition of young males in post-primary education across a five year time frame. It focuses on their experiences in terms of education, of violence and factors that affect mental, emotional and physical health and self-esteem.

USID group (Using Schools Information and Data)

The USID group is jointly chaired by the Education and Training Inspectorate and C2k. The group examines the use of schools data in schools and shares best practice models.

C2k Liaison Working Group

This group is responsible for ensuring the consistency and standard of data to be included in the schools annual data collections.

NSPCC Staying Safe research steering group

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is being funded by the Department of Education to undertake research exploring the development of a child abuse prevention programme within primary schools. This research aims to access the views of a range of key stakeholders in relation to this issue, including teachers, parents, children and school staff and it comprises an in-depth case study based in the Ballymena area.

Area-Based Planning Exercise for Post-Primary Education, Central Group and 5 Area Groups

This exercise was commissioned to test the concept of area based planning in the post-primary sector that was related to the efficient and effective delivery of the Entitlement Framework (EF). The outcomes of this exercise were intended to anticipate and inform the area-based planning work to be undertaken by the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

STEM subjects

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education why £0.8 million for STEM subjects in specialist schools was surrendered to the Department of Finance and Personnel. (AQW 863/10)

Minister of Education: The £0.8 million funding surrendered to the Department of Finance and Personnel was capital funding which had been made available under the Innovation Fund.

Níl an cistiú seo, a dearbhaíodh i mí Eanáir 2008, ar fáil ach chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do thionscadail chaipitiúla i dtaca le sainscoileanna STEM atá ar aon dul le bunaidhmeanna na tairisceana. Ó tharla gur urraíodh an cistiú seo agus de bharr comaoineacha cáinainéise níos leithne, rinne mé an cinneadh go mbeadh na scoileanna a sainíodh agus a shaineofar ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2009 ar aghaidh ar na scoileanna deireanacha a shaineofar mar shainscoileanna faoin chóras reatha.

This funding, which was confirmed in January 2008, could only be used to support capital projects related to STEM-specialist schools in line with the original intentions of the bid. Since this funding was secured and in the context of wider budget considerations I decided that the schools designated from September 2009 would be the last to be designated as specialist schools under the current model. This changed policy context and shortened timescale meant that further capital investment would not have represented value for money. Any funding secured from the Innovation Fund cannot be transferred either to other areas of activity within DE nor indeed to other measures within our STEM programme. As a result, and in line with current budgeting rules, any surpluses in funding must be surrendered to DFP at the earliest opportunity for reallocation. This funding was surrendered to DFP in the September monitoring round.

Meetings with Qualifications Bodies

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail any meetings that she or her officials have held with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Scottish Qualifications Authority or equivalent agencies in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 911/10)

Minister of Education: My officials and their colleagues in the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) are in regular contact with their respective Qualifications' Regulators - the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England and the Department for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning (DCELLS) in Wales.

Areas of common interest include: maintaining qualifications' standards; the development of skills related qualifications; increasing access to qualifications; referencing qualifications to the new European Qualifications Framework; and crisis management (particularly in relation to the outbreak of a swine flu pandemic).

Tá córais dhifriúla do scrúduithe poiblí i ndeisceart na hÉireann agus in Albain. Bhuaileadh oifigigh ó mo Roinn agus ó CCEA leis na húdaráis cáilíochtaí in Albain agus sa deisceart, ar roinnt ócáidí le hiniúchadh a dhéanamh ar réimsí a d'fhéadfaí níos mó comhoibrithe a dhéanamh orthu agus leis an dea-chleachtas a chomhroinnt.

The south of Ireland and Scotland operate different public examinations systems. Officials from my Department and CCEA have also met on many occasions with the qualifications authorities, in Scotland and the south, to explore areas for increased co-operation and sharing of best practice.

2009 Biennial Report of the Chief Inspector

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action her Department is taking to implement the findings of the latest 2009 Biennial Report of the Chief Inspector. (AQW 931/10)

Minister of Education: I have welcomed the Chief Inspector's Biennial Report covering inspections during the period 2006-2008. The Inspectorate's evaluations, especially the Chief Inspector's Report, are considered carefully by the Department and inform significantly my reform programme, including my approach to School Improvement, and Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, the creation of the Education and Skills Authority, the development of Irish Medium Education, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and other policy areas.

Tá mé iontach sásta gur thaispeáin an Tuarascáil go raibh feabhsuithe i ngach réimse atá faoi chúram na Roinne agus cuirim fáilte roimh an aitheantas a thugann an tuarascáil do gach duine a bhíonn i dteagmháil le páistí agus le daoine óga lá i ndiaidh lae.

I am delighted that the Report has shown improvements in all areas under the responsibility of the Department and I welcome the recognition that this accords to all those in daily contact with children and young people.

Promotion of Good Mental Health in Schools

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to promote good mental health in children under the school health curriculum. (AQW 946/10)

Minister of Education: I believe strongly in supporting our children and young people in succeeding at school and in preparing for life and work. The revised curriculum, which is now in place in all year groups in all grant aided schools, has a very clear focus on raising standards in literacy and numeracy and on delivering a broad and balanced education that can stimulate and excite all young people. It has a very clear focus on developing skills as well as knowledge – including the skills that young people need to make healthy choices, to build self-confidence and self-esteem and to build constructive relationships.

Is bunmhír thábhachtach den churaclam athbhreithnithe í Forbairt Phearsanta, ó leibhéal na bunscoile ar aghaidh. Tugtar tacaíocht do na daoine óga trí thuiscint níos fearr a thabhairt dóibh ar fhadhbanna sláinte mheabhrach, lena n-áirítear cúiseanna, cosc, agus straitéisí a fhorbairt le deileáil le haon fhadhbanna a bhíonn nó a bheidh acu, nó ag duine a bhfuil aithne acu orthu, le linn a saoil.

Personal Development is an integral part of the revised curriculum, from primary level onwards. It supports our young people in better understanding mental health problems, including causes, prevention, and developing strategies to deal with any problems they, or someone they know, experience throughout their lives.

In addition my Department is in the process of developing a Pupils' Emotional Health and Wellbeing Programme, initially to focus on the post primary sector. The Programme will address how a pupil's emotional health and wellbeing is promoted by the school, both through the curriculum and all other school activity, what support systems are available to support a pupil under stress and what support is available to a school in the event of a crisis.

The Programme will contribute to the building of resilient emotional health and well being of pupils. Emotional wellbeing is critical in developing a healthy successful school community including developing a pupil's social, emotional and behavioural skills. It links with all non academic/curriculum matters affecting pupils such as Counselling, pastoral care, suicide prevention, anti bullying policy, discipline and healthy schools. It is intended to be a vehicle for providing the “glue” to link these individual policies/ services together in a consistent and coherent way. The outcomes from this work are expected during 2010.

Education and Library Board Support Staff

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many support staff are employed in each of the five Education and Library Boards. (AQW 1064/10)

Minister of Education: Thug na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an t-eolas atá sa tábla thíos maidir le líon na gcúntóirí ranga, cúntóirí buana agus sealadacha araon, a bhí fostaithe ag 1 Meán Fómhair 2009.

The five Education and Library Boards have provided the information in the table below in respect of the number of classroom assistants, both permanent and temporary, employed at 1 September 2009.

Bord/ Board	Béal Feirste/ Belfast	An tIarthar/ Western	An tOirthuaisceart/ North Eastern	An tOirdheisceart/ South Eastern	An Deisceart/ Southern	Iomlán Total
Líon na gCúntóirí Ranga/ Number of Classroom Assistants	1147	1472	1635	1362	1883	7499

Nutritional Standards of School Meals

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what action has been taken by her Department and the five Education and Library Boards to improve the nutritional standards of school meals. (AQW 1065/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir an Roinn Oideachais tús le próiseas le bia a fheabhsú i scoileanna trí thionscadal píolótach a thabhairt isteach chuig timpeall ar 100 scoil sa bhliain 2004 le tástáil a dhéanamh ar an dóigh ar glacadh le tabhairt isteach na gcaighdeán éigeantach cothaithe. Dá dheasca sin, thosaigh an Roinn

Oideachais, i gcomhar leis na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne agus le húdaráis eile scoile ag tabhairt isteach na gcaighdeán seo chuig scoileanna i rith théarma an fhómhair 2005 agus tá siad anois i bhfeidhm i ngach scoil anseo.

The Department of Education (DE) began the process of improving food in schools by implementing a pilot project in around 100 schools during 2004 to test the reaction to the introduction of compulsory nutritional standards. As a result DE, in conjunction with the Education and Library Boards and other school authorities, began to introduce the standards to schools during the autumn 2005 term and they are now in place in all schools here.

DE is also making available additional funding of over £3 million this year to improve the food content value of school meals, as it has done since 2006/07.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has appointed two Nutritional Associates to evaluate the nutritional quality of meals in schools and examine schools' general approaches to promoting healthy eating as part of the school inspection process.

In addition, DE and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) have also jointly funded the appointment of a Food in Schools Co-ordinator based in the Public Health Agency who is responsible for developing guidance on food in schools and for providing specialist support to Education Boards and Health partners. The "School Food – Top Marks" programme providing an essential guide for teachers, pupils, professional caterers and others in promoting and implementing healthier eating and drinking in schools was launched in March 2009.

The Department of Education has also been working with DHSSPS to draw up a Food in Schools policy document which draws together the range of strategies and plans that are being put in place to deliver improved nutrition for our school children.

The policy aims to ensure that school food is representative of the five food groups; makes a significant contribution to childhood nutrition and enables children to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to make healthy food choices both at school and at home. The draft policy was issued for public consultation on Monday, 14 September 2009 and I would encourage everyone to respond.

School Closures

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education if she has had any discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding his public comments about the need to close schools because of budgetary pressures.

(AQW 1066/10)

Minister of Education: Ní raibh aon phlé agam leis an Aire Airgeadais agus Pearsanra faoin ghá atá ann le scoileanna a dhruidim mar gheall ar bhrú buiséadach. Níl baint ar bith ag an Aire Airgeadais agus Pearsanra le druidim scoileanna.

I have not had any discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel about the need to close schools because of budgetary pressures. School closures are not a matter for the Minister of Finance and Personnel. All school closures are subject to the publication of a Development Proposal by the relevant Education and Library Board for the area in which the school is located. The publication of a Development Proposal initiates a statutory 2-month consultation period during which representations can be made to my Department. At the end of this period I make my decision on the Development Proposal.

School Building Projects

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many school building projects have been delayed by her Department in the past year.

(AQW 1067/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mo Roinn freagrach as réimse casta ceisteanna a bhainistiú maidir le tionscadail chaipitiúla tógála, cuid acu nach bhfuil neart ag an Roinn orthu.

My Department has responsibility for managing a complex range of issues in relation to capital building projects some of which are not within its control.

In the past year some 45 major capital projects have not commenced within the original envisaged timeframe. There have been various reasons for these delays including site acquisition issues; review of projected long term enrolments; revised plans required; revisions to economic appraisals; and the legal challenge to the Department's Major Construction Framework.

It should be noted that the Department of Education's overall final capital expenditure figure for 2008/09 was £199m. Which represents a spend of 99.1% against the full year's Capital Budget of £201m.

New School Building Works

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to give her Department's target lead-in time for new school building works, from the time of initial announcement to the date that building work begins. (AQW 1069/10)

Minister of Education: Nuair a fhógraítear scéimeanna caipitiúla tógála scoile, caithfear iad a chur faoi na céimeanna éagsúla pleanála/deartha sula mbainfidh siad an stádas amach nuair is féidir tairiscintí a bhronnadh.

When school capital building schemes are announced they must go through the various planning/design stages in order to get to a position where tenders can be awarded. As all schemes can vary in size and complexity they will encounter a different range of issues and as such there is no general target lead-in time from the time of announcement to the date building work begins. However, individual schemes do have an estimated start/completion date for the actual building works

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. At the heart of this are Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans. As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are now investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for the taxpayer. I have commissioned therefore a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

It is anticipated that this review will be completed in the near future.

North/South Educational Exchanges

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of North/South Educational Exchanges. (AQW 1117/10)

Minister of Education: Work is ongoing on developing proposals for a structure for a new programme and my colleague Batt O'Keefe and I continue to consider and will agree how best to progress the specific recommendations of the review.

Idir an dá linn, tá socraithe agam agus ag Batt O'Keefe go leanfar leis an Chuibhreannas Malartaithe Thuaidh Theas (NSEC) don bhliain 2009/10.

In the meantime, Batt O'Keefe and I have agreed that the North South Exchange Consortium (NSEC) will continue for the 2009/10 year.

Primary-School Class Sizes

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what steps her Department is taking to reduce primary school class sizes, further to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development Report of September 2009 highlighting averages across 31 nations. (AQW 1155/10)

Minister of Education: I am aware of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report, "Education at a Glance 2009" and its findings in relation to class sizes across 31 nations.

Is í cáilíocht na múinteoirí agus an teagaisc a chuireann siad ar fáil an príomhthionchar a bhíonn ar thorthaí foghlama, agus tá fianaise ann fosta go mbíonn tionchar dearfach ag ranganna níos lú i bhfoghlaim sna luathbhlianta ar thorthaí.

The quality of teachers and the instruction they provide is the key influence on learning outcomes, however, I am aware that there is evidence that smaller class sizes in early years learning can have a positive impact on outcomes.

In view of this evidence and the importance of early years development, funding to specifically support the Foundation Stage of the revised curriculum is fully delegated to primary schools. In 2009-10, this amounted to some £22.3 million and builds on and increases the funding previously available under the Making a Good Start programme. From April 2008, this has been provided directly to schools to ensure the provision of classroom assistance for all Year 1 and Year 2 classes in all grant-aided primary schools.

As I stated in my response to AQs 8427 and 8429 in July 2009, I have given priority to increasing funding to front-line school services and to increasing the proportion of available funding going to primary schools. The Local Management of Schools arrangements allow a school's Boards of Governors flexibility to take decisions on class sizes as part of their responsibilities for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing its budget. This allows Governors to determine how they use their delegated funding to maximum effect in accordance with their school's specific needs and priorities.

This includes determining the number of teachers, non-teaching staff including classroom assistants. Decisions, by schools, on class sizes must also be taken in certain cases in accordance with specific statutory limitations and educational and health and safety policy considerations.

Looking ahead, I have commissioned a review of schools' funding to examine a range of issues, with particular focus on bringing greater fairness and equality to the arrangements for distributing funding across all schools and targeting social need.

Storage Heaters in Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that still rely, in part or in whole, on storage heaters to provide heat for children at school. (AQW 1161/10)

Minister of Education: De réir an eolais a fuarthas ó na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne, ó Scoileanna Deonacha Gramadaí, agus ó Scoileanna Imeachtha faoi Chothabháil Stáit, seo a leanas na scoileanna a bhíonn ag brath go hiomlán nó go páirteach ar thaiscthéitheoirí:

According to information provided by Education and Library Boards, Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools, the following schools rely, in part or in whole, on storage heaters:

Belfast Royal Academy
Belmont House Special School
Belvoir Nursery School
Bunscoil an Iúir
Carnhill Nursery School
Castle Tower (Loughan) School
Corran Integrated Primary School
Craigavon Primary School
Devenish College, Enniskillen
Enniskillen Model Primary School
Foyle & Londonderry College
Gillygooley Primary School
Hunterhouse College
Lack Primary School
Larne High School
Lurgan Model Primary School
Mullaghduh Primary School

Newtownabbey Educational Guidance Centre
Newtownhamilton Primary School
Omagh North Nursery School
Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry
Portadown College
Portadown Integrated Primary School
Roddensvale Special School
Spa Primary School
St Benedict's College
St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry
St Columban's College, Kilkeel
St Mary's High School, Newry
St Mary's Primary School, Derrymore
St Mary's Primary School, Teemore
St Mary's-on-the-Hill Primary School
St Patrick's Primary School, Mullinahoe
St Patrick's Primary School, Newry
Thornfield House School
Tor Bank Special School
Tandragee Junior High School

Cost of Translating and Publishing Material in Irish and Ulster Scots

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of publishing and translating all material from her Department in Irish and Ulster-Scots format for the last ten years. (AQW 1163/10)

Minister of Education: The total cost is £151,190. This represents the cost of translating material from the Department of Education in Irish and Ulster-Scots since 1 April 2001, using the service – wide translation contract, and printing costs since 1 April 2005. Costs are included up to 31 March 2009. The Department does not hold details of Irish and Ulster-Scots translation costs prior to 1 April 2001 or details of printing costs prior to 1 April 2005.

Sa bhliain 2008, cheap an Roinn beirt Oifigeach Foirne Gaeilge le húsáid na Gaeilge a éascú sa Roinn. Tá roinnt dualgas ar na hoifigigh seo lena n-áirítear obair ar aistriúcháin phráinneacha. Ní áirítear ar leithligh na costais a thabhaítear agus tascanna ar leith á ndéanamh.

In 2008 the Department recruited two Irish Language Staff Officers to facilitate its use of Irish. These officers have undertaken a range of duties including urgent translation work. The costs incurred in carrying out specific tasks are not separately calculated.

Classroom Assistant Evaluations

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Education how many classroom assistant evaluations (i) have been completed; and (ii) are due to be completed, in the Southern Education and Library Board and North Eastern Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 1169/10)

Minister of Education: Fuarthas an t-eolas atá sa tábla thíos ó Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt agus an Oirthuaiscirt.

The Southern and North Eastern Education and Library Boards have provided the information in the table below.

Board	Number of Classroom Assistants	
	Job Evaluation payment process completed	Due to be Completed
North Eastern	272	1041
Southern	299	602

I am concerned about the length of time it is taking to complete the classroom assistant job evaluation process. There is a need for all parties involved to resolve outstanding issues at the earliest possible date. I have written to the Boards asking them to ensure that all outstanding cases are processed without delay.

Classroom Assistant Evaluation

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Education to outline the appeal procedures available to staff, following the classroom assistant evaluation process. (AQW 1170/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an socrú postmheastóireachta a rinneadh i mí na Samhna 2007 bunaithe ar thrí ghrád nua: Cúntóir Ranga (Ginearálta); Cúntóir Ranga (Riachtanais Speisialta); agus Cúntóir Ranga (Riachtanais Bhreise). Tá tuarastail athbhreithnithe agus riaráiste á n-íoc ar an bhonn sin.

The November 2007 job evaluation agreement is based on three new grades: Classroom Assistant (General); Classroom Assistant (Special Needs); and Classroom Assistant (Additional Special Needs). Revised salaries and arrears are being paid on that basis.

I am aware that there have been difficulties in agreeing the appropriate job description for some individual classroom assistants. In light of this difficulty, Board management and trade union sides, through the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC), have been working together to put in place a process for determining the most appropriate job description in such cases. I understand that this matter currently remains under consideration by the JNC.

Minister of Education's Meetings with MLAs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many official meetings she has had with MLAs from each party, in each of the last two years. (AQW 1180/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na gcuinnithe oifigiúla a bhí agam le Comhaltaí den Tionól Reachtach le dhá bhliain anuas:

In each of the last two years I have had official meetings with MLA's from each party as follows:

1 October 2007 - 30 September 2008

DUP	15 Meetings
UUP	11 Meetings
SF	9 Meetings
Alliance	2 Meetings
SDLP	2 Meetings

I also met with the Education Committee on 5 occasions

1 October 2008 - 30 September 2009

DUP	4 Meetings
UUP	6 Meetings
SF	14 Meetings
SDLP	1 Meeting

I also met with the Education Committee on 3 occasions.

Post-Primary-School Admission: False Addresses

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to prevent the use of false accommodation addresses to gain access to non-selective post-primary schools. (AQW 1246/10)

Minister of Education: Tá miontreoir oibríochtúil foilsithe ag an Roinn Oideachais (Iarscríbhinn 4 Imlitir 2009/07) le cabhair a thabhairt do scoileanna maidir lena ndualgas le heolas áirithe in iarratais iontrála d'iarbhunscoileanna a dheimhniú. Is féidir leis an eolas seo, de réir chritéir foilsithe iontrála scoile, an t-iarratasóir a cháiliú d'iontráil. Baineann an treoir seo leis na hiarbhunscoileanna go léir.

The Department of Education has published detailed operational guidance (Annex 4 of Circular 2009/07) to assist schools with their “duty to verify” certain information contained within applications for admission to post-primary schools which, according to a school’s published admissions criteria, may qualify the applicant for admission. The guidance applies to all post-primary schools.

An applicant’s address is one such example, as this can qualify an applicant for admission through criteria that give priority to those resident in a stated geographical area or through criteria that give priority to those whose residence is nearest to the school.

Area-Based Planning

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline the connections between the work of the area-based planning groups for post primary provision and the local Learning Communities. (AQW 1247/10)

Minister of Education: Tá Pobail Fhoghlama sa Cheantar bunaithe i ngach ceantar agus tá scoileanna ó gach earnáil páirteach iontu, le comhsholáthar 14-19 a phleanáil ar bhealach comhordaithe le fócas ar leith ar sheachadadh an Chreata Teidlíochta.

Area Learning Communities (ALCs) have been established, in all areas and involving schools from all sectors, to plan collaborative 14-19 provision in a co-ordinated way with a specific focus on delivering the Entitlement Framework. The remit of the area-based planning exercise was to consider the efficient and effective delivery of the Entitlement Framework on an area basis. There are therefore major overlaps between the ALC’s work and the intended outcomes of the post-primary area based planning exercise. ALCs have considered the issues in their area and how to address them and 18 ALCs made submissions to the Area Groups. These submissions, along with those from other interested parties, formed part of the evidence base for the Area and Central Reports. The work of the 5 Area Groups and the Central Group is now complete and the report is with me. I am currently considering the findings and recommendations and will issue my response in the near future.

Area-Based Planning

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how area-based planning and post-primary transfer are interlinked. (AQW 1248/10)

Minister of Education: Is í an aidhm atá ag pleanáil bunaithe sa cheantar ná a chinntiú go mbíonn deis ag páistí agus ag daoine óga teacht ar sheirbhísí agus ar áiseanna a fhreastalaíonn ar a riachtanais oideachais agus a chuidíonn leo lena gcumas iomlán a bhaint amach.

Area-based planning is about ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to access and benefit from services and facilities that can meet their educational needs and enable them to reach their full potential. In undertaking this, the Educational and Skills Authority will need to take into account my Department’s policy and practice relating to transfer, amongst others.

Children with Behavioural Issues

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children are currently in specialised units because of behavioural issues having been removed from mainstream schools; and (ii) what support is in place for these children when they return. (AQW 1279/10)

Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne go bhfuil 474 páiste atá 14 bliain d'aois nó níos lú ag freastal ar aonaid speisialaithe faoi láthair de bharr fhadhbanna iompraíochta. Tá roinnt de na páistí óga seo ag freastal ar na haonaid seo ar bhonn páirtaimseartha agus bítear ag súil go n-imeascfar formhór díobh i scolaíocht phríomhshrutha in am trátha. Is éadóigh go bhfillfidh daltaí níos mó ná 14 bliain d'aois ar ais ar scolaíocht phríomhshrutha.

The Education and Library Boards advise that some 474 children aged 14 or below are currently attending specialised units because of behavioural issues. Some of these young people are attending the units on a part-time basis and the expectation is that most will be reintegrated into mainstream school in due course. Pupils aged above 14 years are unlikely to return to mainstream school.

When a pupil returns to school, support is available in the form of outreach from the unit attended, peripatetic teacher support, as well as expertise from Curriculum Advisory and Support Service, Education Psychology Service, the Education Welfare Service and the Behaviour Support Team within each Board area.

The intensity and duration of the support available for children returning to mainstream school will depend on progress and need and also on the support already available in the school. A multi-agency support team which may involve the school, the pupils' parents, Board officers and a number of other professionals will produce a behaviour management plan and determine the level of support, if any, required. Support can include phased reintegration packages including additional resources such as the use of specialist Outreach Behaviour Support teachers, individual tutors and behaviour support assistants. In some instances the support will remain with the reintegrated pupil for some time.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DE

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Education (i) if she intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across her Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long it will last. (AQW 1393/10)

Minister of Education: Níl sé ar intinn agam, faoi láthair, moratóir ar earcaíocht ná ar ardú céime a thabhairt isteach sa Roinn.

I have no plans, at present, to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across my Department.

Advertising Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent (i) by her Department; and (ii) by departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1399/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

	Department of Education	NDPB's and Agencies
2008-09		
Belfast Telegraph	£ 9,402.96	£611,880.51
News Letter	£ 6,230.32	£ 33,383.40
Irish News	£ 4,707.08	£ 29,264.46
Others	£15,685.68	£288,116.62
Totals	£36,026.04	£962,644.99
2007-08		
Belfast Telegraph	£ 2,968.51	£565,164.92
News Letter	£ 2,272.31	£ 22,765.00

	Department of Education	NDPB's and Agencies
Irish News	£ 1,418.75	£ 20,897.67
Others	£ -	£ 56,727.66
Totals	£ 6,659.57	£ 665,555.25
2006-07		
Belfast Telegraph	£ 3,557.82	£533,788.67
News Letter	£ 1,708.73	£ 27,232.58
Irish News	£ 5,261.17	£ 28,872.20
Others	£27,399.70	£231,614.85
Totals	£37,927.42	£821,508.30
2005-06		
Belfast Telegraph	£ 5,758.08	£407,643.07
News Letter	£ 6,187.63	£ 30,381.27
Irish News	£ 9,695.91	£ 33,557.28
Others	£ 429.00	£285,502.57
Totals	£22,070.62	£757,084.19
2004-05		
Belfast Telegraph	£ 6,590.41	£517,538.41
News Letter	£ 4,100.90	£ 97,205.29
Irish News	£ 2,901.07	£ 82,297.63
Others	£ -	£229,971.17
Totals	£13,592.38	£927,012.50

Children with Special Educational Needs

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) if she has issued directions to Education and Library Boards on co-operation with parents of children who have Statements of Special Educational Needs, and who wish to enrol their child in a Grammar School; (ii) to outline her Department's understanding of why several parents have found it impossible to identify an officer within each Board to deal with this issue; and (iii) if she can now identify an officer with this responsibility within each Board. (AQW 1417/10)

Minister of Education: As indicated in the Department's published Transfer 2010 Guidance, children with statements of special educational needs will continue to transfer to post-primary schools, including grammar schools, on the basis of the content of their statement. The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, and the Supplement to the Code, clearly outline the parent's role during the annual review of a child's statement of special educational needs. The Code of Practice advises that parents' views should always be sought. The Code and the Supplement may be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk.

Tá tugtha le fios ag príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne dom nár chuala siad faoi aon tuismitheoir a raibh deacracht aige nó aici teagmháil a dhéanamh leo maidir le haistriú ó bhunscoil go hiarbhunscoil.

I am advised by the Chief Executives (CEs) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that they are unaware of any parent who has difficulty in contacting them on the matter of transfer from primary to post-primary.

I am further advised by the CEs that all children with statements of special educational needs who are transferring from primary to post-primary education have their statement reviewed prior to transfer to determine suitable provision and school placement. Within this process a range of correspondence is sent to parents which has clearly identified the contact name and telephone number of the relevant Board officer. The named Board officer is in contact with parents to share information and enable parents to express a preference of school for

their child's post-primary education. Any parent contacting the special education department of the Board will be able to discuss their child's post-primary placement with the relevant Board officer.

Schools: Exceptional Closures

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education how many days each (i) primary school; and (ii) secondary school has been closed for 'exceptional' reasons in the South Antrim constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1426/10)

Minister of Education: In imthosca eisceachtúla, nuair atá druidim scoile riachtanach ar chúiseanna nach bhfuil neart ag gobharnóirí scoile orthu, is féidir leis an Roinn íslíú a fhaomhadh ar an méid laethanta ba chóir don scoil bheith ar oscailt. Sna blianta 2004 go 2008, níor druideadh aon iarbhunscoil i dtoghcheantar Aontroim Theas mar gheall ar imthosca eisceachtúla.

In exceptional circumstances, where the closing of a school becomes necessary for reasons outside the control of the school governors, the Department can grant approval for a reduction in the required number of days during which a school should be in operation. In the years 2004 to 2008, none of the post-primary schools in the South Antrim Constituency was closed for exceptional reasons.

A list of the primary schools in the South Antrim Constituency for which the Department approved closure for exceptional reasons is provided below.

2004

School	No. of exceptional closure days
Maine Integrated Primary School	1
Moneynick Primary School	2
Tildarg Primary School	2

2005

School	No. of exceptional closure days
Greystone Primary School	1
Groggan Primary School	1
Mossley Primary School	1
Randalstown Primary School	1
Straid Primary School	1

2006

School	No. of exceptional closure days
Mossley Primary School	2
Tildarg Primary School	1

Schools: Exceptional Closures

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of 'exceptional closure' days for all (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools, across Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. (AQW 1427/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé socraithe agam go gcuirfear an t-eolas seo a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Primary-School Federations

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what her Department considers to be necessary for the formation of (i) a viable two-school primary federation; and (ii) a viable three-school primary federation, in relation to (a) enrolments; (b) minimum intake per year group; (c) travel-to-school distances; (d) distances between individual sites; and (e) teacher numbers. (AQW 1429/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtar amach sa Pholasáí do *Scoileanna Inbhuanaithe a foilsíodh i Mí Eanáir sa bhliain 2009, na sé chritéar seo a leanas chun inmharthanacht scoileanna a mheasúnú.*

- Eispéireas oideachasúil ar Ardchaighdeán
- Treochtaí rollaithe seasmhacha
- Staid airgeadais fhónta
- Ceannaireacht agus Bainistíocht láidir
- Inrochtaineacht
- Naisc láidre leis an phobal.

My Sustainable Schools Policy, published in January 2009, defines a set of six criteria to be used in considering the viability of schools as follows:-

- Quality Educational Experience
- Stable Enrolment Trends
- Sound Financial Position
- Strong Leadership and Management
- Accessibility
- Strong Links with the Community.

The quality of education provided will be the overriding consideration.

The policy recognises that existing small schools may work together to meet local need. This may be through federation, where small schools on separate sites come together to form a single school. Such proposals would be considered on a case-by-case basis against the range of criteria and indicators set out in the policy, taking account of individual local circumstances.

Primary-School Federations

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many schools have been considered for ‘federation’ in the last five years; and how many are currently being considered. (AQW 1430/10)

Minister of Education: Breathnaíodh dhá thogra le haghaidh cónaidhme le cúig bliana anuas. Níl aon togra eile á bhreathnú faoi láthair.

Two proposals for federation have been considered in the last five years. No other proposals are currently being considered.

Statementing Process

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to outline the process for getting a child statemented and how long this takes. (AQW 1467/10)

Minister of Education: The statementing process may be initiated by an Education and Library Board or at the request of a parent or the child’s school. The process is set out in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the Supplement to the Code. These may be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk.

The time scale for conducting a statutory assessment is set out in the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005, which may also be accessed at www.deni.gov.uk. From the date that the Board notifies the parent that it is considering making an assessment or from the date that a request to carry out an assessment is

received from the parent or school the Board has 6 weeks, subject to certain statutory exceptions when it may be impractical to meet the 6 week timescale, in which to decide whether to carry out a statutory assessment.

Má bheartaíonn an Bord ar mheasúnú reachtúil a dhéanamh, bíonn 10 seachtain aige ón dáta ar cuireadh in iúl don tuismitheoir an measúnú a chríochnú, arís faoi réir eisceachtaí reachtúla áirithe ina mbeadh sé neamhphraiticiúil amscála na 10 seachtaine a chomhall. Ar chríochnú an mheasúnaithe, bíonn 2 seachtain ag an Bhord chun ráiteas beartaithe riachtanais speisialta oideachais a eisiúint nó chun a chur in iúl don tuismitheoir nach bhfuil sé de rún aige ráiteas a dhéanamh.

If the Board decides to carry out a statutory assessment it has 10 weeks, again subject to certain statutory exceptions when it may be impractical to meet the 10 week timescale, from the date on which it notifies the parent to complete the assessment. On completion of the assessment the Board has 2 weeks to issue a proposed statement of special educational needs or to inform the parent that it does not propose to make a statement.

The Board has a further 8 weeks from the date on which it served the proposed statement on the parent in to issue the final statement, making a total of 26 weeks in which to complete the statementing process.

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to introduce training for teachers and classroom assistants in dealing with children affected by Autism spectrum disorders. (AQW 1474/10)

Minister of Education: The provision of annual programmes of basic and more advanced training on autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) for teachers and classroom assistants in all schools is a strategic objective of the Inter-Board ASD Group.

An annual programme of training for teachers and classroom assistants is delivered through the ASD Services in each Education and Library Board (ELB), and the high volume, well attended courses have been positively evaluated. These include training in ASD awareness, promoting positive behaviour, promoting communication, autism and sensory issues, transition planning, encouraging social skills and practical strategies for pupils with ASD. As a result of this training, a large proportion of children with ASD are supported by their own teachers and assistants without the need for intervention by the ASD Service.

In addition, and to complement the ELB training, the Middletown Centre for Autism has developed a comprehensive programme of training encompassing a wide range of specialist topics related to autism spectrum disorders. The training commenced in November 2007 and since then 1501 education professionals including teachers, classroom assistants and educational psychologists have attended training delivered by the Centre.

In the current academic year from August until 22nd October 2009, 571 professionals and parents will have been trained by the Centre. This includes 259 teachers and 187 classroom assistants.

Tá réamheolaire iomlán agus ilchineálach oiliúna ag an Ionad don bhliain 2009-2010 agus tá an oiliúint ar fad dírithe go sonrach ar mhúinteoirí agus ar chúntóirí ranga atá ag obair le páistí agus le daoine óga ar speictream an uathachais. Chomh maith leis sin, forbrófar cláir chreidiúnaithe oiliúna do mhúinteoirí agus do chúntóirí ranga.

The Centre has a full and varied training prospectus for 2009-2010 with all training specifically targeted towards teachers and classroom assistants working with children and young people on the autism spectrum. In addition, accredited training programmes are to be developed for both teachers and classroom assistants.

Southern Education and Library Board Music Service

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education if the Southern Education and Library Board has carried out a full Equality Impact Assessment on the Music Service, and if so, to outline the findings. (AQW 1495/10)

Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag an mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Theas dom nach ndearna sé measúnú comhionannais iomlán ar a sheirbhísí ceoil. Tá mo Roinn, áfach, ag forbairt beartais um sholáthar sheirbhísí ceoil a chuirfidh an tÚdaras nua Oideachais agus Scileanna ar fáil agus beidh sé á chur i bhfeidhm de réir ár ndualgas reachtúil comhionannais.

The Southern Education and Library Board tells me that it has not carried out a full Equality Assessment on its music service. However, my department is in the process of developing a policy on the provision of music

services by the new Education and Skills Authority and this will be taken forward in keeping with our statutory equality duty.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has confirmed that the schools listed below receive music tuition and that all schools in the SELB area who have requested tuition have been accommodated this year.

School Name	Sector
Dromore Central Primary	Controlled Primary
Millington Primary	Controlled Primary
Kings Park Primary, Lurgan	Controlled Primary
Kilkeel Primary	Controlled Primary
Edenderry Primary, Banbridge	Controlled Primary
Cookstown Primary	Controlled Primary
Waringstown Primary	Controlled Primary
Hardy Memorial Primary	Controlled Primary
Abercorn Primary	Controlled Primary
Edenderry Primary, Portadown	Controlled Primary
Tandragee Primary	Controlled Primary
The Armstrong Primary	Controlled Primary
Ballydown Primary	Controlled Primary
Carrick Primary, Lurgan	Controlled Primary
Markethill Primary	Controlled Primary
Bocombra Primary	Controlled Primary
Hart Memorial Primary	Controlled Primary
Iveagh Primary	Controlled Primary
Dungannon Primary	Controlled Primary
Maralin Village Primary	Controlled Primary
Ballyoran Primary	Controlled Primary
Howard Primary	Controlled Primary
Drumadonnell Primary	Controlled Primary
Orritor Primary	Controlled Primary
Windsor Hill Primary	Controlled Primary
Bush Primary	Controlled Primary
Lurgan Model Primary	Controlled Primary
Moyallon Primary	Controlled Primary
Bronte Primary	Controlled Primary
Fivemiletown Primary	Controlled Primary
Moneymore Primary	Controlled Primary
Brackenagh West Primary	Controlled Primary
Annalong Primary	Controlled Primary
The Cope Primary	Controlled Primary
Hamiltonsbawn Primary	Controlled Primary

School Name	Sector
Woods Primary	Controlled Primary
Donaghey Primary	Controlled Primary
Aughnacloy Regional Primary	Controlled Primary
Richmount Primary	Controlled Primary
Orchard County Primary	Controlled Primary
Ballytrea Primary	Controlled Primary
Richmond Primary	Controlled Primary
Killyman Primary - Amalgamating Sep08	Controlled Primary
Mullavilly Primary	Controlled Primary
Carntall Primary	Controlled Primary
Darkley Primary	Controlled Primary
Poyntzpass Primary	Controlled Primary
Gilford (Craigavon Memorial) Primary	Controlled Primary
Dromore Road Primary	Controlled Primary
Birches Primary	Controlled Primary
Bessbrook Primary	Controlled Primary
Derryhale Primary	Controlled Primary
Cortamlet Primary	Controlled Primary
Drumhillery Primary	Controlled Primary
Milltown Primary	Controlled Primary
Newmills Primary	Controlled Primary
Churchill Primary	Controlled Primary
Donaghmore Primary	Controlled Primary
Coagh Primary	Controlled Primary
Moy Regional Primary	Controlled Primary
Augher Central Primary	Controlled Primary
Keady Primary	Controlled Primary
Total Controlled Primary Pupils	
Percentage CP schools with Tuition	72%
Kilbroney Integrated Primary	Controlled Integrated Primary
Total Controlled Integrated Primary Pupils	
Percentage CIP schools with Tuition	
Bunscoil an Iuir	Other Maintained Primary
Seagoe Primary	Other Maintained Primary
Total Other Maintained Primary Pupils	
Percentage OMP Schools with Tuition	50%
Bridge IPS	Grant Maintained Integrated Primary

School Name	Sector
Portadown IPS	Grant Maintained Integrated Primary
Saints and Scholars IPS	Grant Maintained Integrated Primary
Total Grant Maintained Integrated Primary Pupils	
Percentage GMI schools with Tuition	50%
Lisanally School	Controlled Special
Rathore	Controlled Special
Total Controlled Special Pupils	
Percentage CSp Schools with Tuition	40%
St Francis' Primary, Lurgan	Maintained Primary
Tannaghmore Primary	Maintained Primary
Holy Trinity Primary, Cookstown	Maintained Primary
St Dallan's Primary, Warrenpoint	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Dungannon	Maintained Primary
St Anthony's Primary, Craigavon	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's Convent Primary, Newry	Maintained Primary
Primate Dixon Memorial Primary	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Armagh	Maintained Primary
Cloghogue Primary	Maintained Primary
St Ronan's Primary, Newry	Maintained Primary
St John the Baptist Primary, Portadown	Maintained Primary
Carrick Primary, Warrenpoint	Maintained Primary
St Brendan's Primary	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Banbridge	Maintained Primary
Armagh Christian Brothers'	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Carnagat	Maintained Primary
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St Peter's Primary, Cloughreagh	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Ballymaghera	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Mullabawn	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Mayobridge	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Crossmaglen	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, C'croppan	Maintained Primary
Edendork Primary	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's Primary, Bessbrook	Maintained Primary
St Francis' of Assisi Primary	Maintained Primary
St Clare's Convent Primary, Newry	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Aghacommon	Maintained Primary

School Name	Sector
St Colman's Abbey Primary, Newry	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Cabra	Maintained Primary
St Teresa's Primary, Lurgan	Maintained Primary
Ballyholland Primary	Maintained Primary
Mount St Catherine's Primary	Maintained Primary
St Bronagh's Primary, Rostrevor	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Armagh	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Moy	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's Primary, Meigh	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's Primary, Galbally	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Donaghmore	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Cullyhanna	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Pomeroy	Maintained Primary
Dromintee Primary	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Dunamore	Maintained Primary
Our Lady's and St Mochua's D'noose	Maintained Primary
St Brigid's Primary, G'drummond	Maintained Primary
St Colmans' Primary, Kilkeel	Maintained Primary
St Peters' Primary, Moortown	Maintained Primary
Presentation Primary	Maintained Primary
St Jarlath's Primary Blackwatertown	Maintained Primary
St Francis' Primary, Aghaderg	Maintained Primary
St Brigid's Primary, Mountjoy	Maintained Primary
Clonalig Primary	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Gilford	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Granemore	Maintained Primary
Killowen Primary, Rostrevor	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Middletown	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Derrymore	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Loup	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's & St James' Pr Poyntzpass	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Stewartstown	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Ballygawley	Maintained Primary
Grange Primary	Maintained Primary
Killeen Primary	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Maralin	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Derrynaseer	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Rathfriland	Maintained Primary
St Oliver Plunkett's Primary, Ballyhegan	Maintained Primary

School Name	Sector
St Colman's Primary, Dromore	Maintained Primary
St Colman's Primary, Bann	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Aughnacloy	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Ballymoyer	Maintained Primary
Jonesborough Primary	Maintained Primary
Moneydarragh Primary	Maintained Primary
Clea Primary	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Maghery	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Glassdrumman	Maintained Primary
St Brigid's Primary, Drumilly	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Derrytrasna	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Drumgreenagh	Maintained Primary
St Paul's Primary, Cabra	Maintained Primary
St Laurence O'Toole's Primary, Belleeks	Maintained Primary
Clontifleece Primary	Maintained Primary
Laghey Primary	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Glencull	Maintained Primary
Anamar Primary	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Eglish	Maintained Primary
Total Maintained Primary Pupils	
Percentage MP Schools with Tuition	68%

Southern Education and Library Board Music Service

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to list the schools, by sector, which participate in the Music Service's instrumental tuition organised by the Southern Education and Library Board. (AQW 1498/10)

Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag an mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Theas dom nach ndearna sé measúnú comhionannais iomlán ar a sheirbhísí ceoil. Tá mo Roinn, áfach, ag forbairt beartais um sholáthar sheirbhísí ceoil a chuirfidh an tÚdaras nua Oideachais agus Scileanna ar fáil agus beidh sé á chur i bhfeidhm de réir ár ndualgas reachtúil comhionannais.

The Southern Education and Library Board tells me that it has not carried out a full Equality Assessment on its music service. However, my department is in the process of developing a policy on the provision of music services by the new Education and Skills Authority and this will be taken forward in keeping with our statutory equality duty.

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Donaghey Primary	Controlled Primary
Aughnacloy Regional Primary	Controlled Primary
Richmount Primary	Controlled Primary
Orchard County Primary	Controlled Primary
Ballytrea Primary	Controlled Primary
Richmond Primary	Controlled Primary
Killyman Primary - Amalgamating Sep08	Controlled Primary

School Name	Sector
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Carntall Primary	Controlled Primary
Darkley Primary	Controlled Primary
Poyntzpass Primary	Controlled Primary
Gilford (Craigavon Memorial) Primary	Controlled Primary
Dromore Road Primary	Controlled Primary
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Cortamlet Primary	Controlled Primary
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Milltown Primary	Controlled Primary
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Churchill Primary	Controlled Primary
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Keady Primary	Controlled Primary
Total Controlled Primary Pupils	
Percentage CP schools with Tuition	72%
Kilbroney Integrated Primary	Controlled Integrated Primary
Total Controlled Integrated Primary Pupils	
Percentage CIP schools with Tuition	
Bunscoil an Iuir	Other Maintained Primary
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Total Other Maintained Primary Pupils	
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Total Controlled Special Pupils	
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School Name	Sector
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Holy Trinity Primary, Cookstown	Maintained Primary
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St Ronan's Primary, Newry	Maintained Primary
St John the Baptist Primary, Portadown	Maintained Primary
Carrick Primary, Warrenpoint	Maintained Primary
St Brendan's Primary	Maintained Primary
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Ballyholland Primary	Maintained Primary
Mount St Catherine's Primary	Maintained Primary
St Bronagh's Primary, Rostrevor	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Armagh	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Moy	Maintained Primary
St Joseph's Primary, Meigh	Maintained Primary

School Name	Sector
St Joseph's Primary, Galbally	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Donaghmore	Maintained Primary
St Patrick's Primary, Cullyhanna	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Pomeroy	Maintained Primary
Dromintee Primary	Maintained Primary
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Clea Primary	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Maghery	Maintained Primary
St Mary's Primary, Glassdrumman	Maintained Primary

School Name	Sector
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St Paul's Primary, Cabra	Maintained Primary
St Laurence O'Toole's Primary, Belleeks	Maintained Primary
Clontifleece Primary	Maintained Primary
Laghey Primary	Maintained Primary
St Malachy's Primary, Glencull	Maintained Primary
Anamar Primary	Maintained Primary
St John's Primary, Eglish	Maintained Primary
Total Maintained Primary Pupils	
Percentage MP Schools with Tuition	68%

Polish Pupils

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Education how many Polish children are enrolled in (i) primary schools; and (ii) secondary schools. (AQW 1512/10)

Minister of Education: Níl eolas ar náisiúntacht na ndaltaí ar fáil. Bailítear eolas ar theanga theaghlaigh na ndaltaí, áfach. Is ar an bhonn sin amháin atá an t-eolas sa tábla thíos á chur ar fáil.

Information on pupil nationality is not available. However, details of the home language of children is collected. Information has been provided on this basis in the table below.

Pupils enrolled in primary and post primary schools who have Polish recorded as their home language – 2008/09

School type	Pupils
Primary	1,790
Post primary	835
Total	2,625

Source: School census.

Note:

1. Primary school figures include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

University Attendance

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many (i) Protestant school leavers; and (ii) Catholic school leavers opted to attend university in Northern Ireland in 2008/09 and 2009/10. (AQW 1561/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh le fáil sa tábla thíos. Baineann an suirbhé is déanaí ar na daoine a d'fhág an scoil le daltaí a d'fhág an scoil sa bhliain acadúil 2007/08 agus coinníonn sé taifead dá gceann sprice don bhliain acadúil 2008/09. Ní bheidh fáil ar an eolas do cheann sprice don bhliain acadúil 2009/10 go dtí mí Bhealtaine 2010.

The information requested can be found in the table below. The most recent school leavers survey relates to pupils leaving school in 2007/08 and records their destination for the 2008/09 academic year. Destination data for the 2009/10 academic year will not be available until May 2010.

Number of school leavers with a destination recorded as NI Higher Education Institution (1) by religion of pupil 2008/09

	Number
Protestant	2,454
Catholic	3,788
Other(2)	466
Total	6,708

Source: School Leavers Survey

Notes

1. Excludes special and independent school leavers.
2. Other category includes Other Christian, No religion and Non Christian.

Department of Education Funded Projects

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education to list all projects her Department has funded, in each constituency, since devolution; and to detail the cost of each project. (AQW 1574/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar na freagraí a thug mé don Uasal Dáithí McKay, Comhalta Tionóil Aontroim Theas, agus don Uasal Peter Weir, Comhalta Tionóil Dhún Theas, i dtaca le AQW 458/10 agus AQW 835/10 a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 9 Deireadh Fómhair 2009.

I refer the member to the answers I provided Mr Dáithí McKay, the member for North Antrim, and Mr Peter Weir, the member for North Down, in respect of AQW 458/10 and AQW 835/10 both published in the Official Report on 9 October 2009.

Educational Underachievement

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education to detail all factors that contribute to educational underachievement in Protestant working class areas. (AQW 1575/10)

Minister of Education: As Education Minister, my focus is on raising standards for all young people and tackling educational underachievement wherever it exists.

Ní bhaineann na príomhfachtóirí a théann i bhfeidhm ar thearcghnóthachtáil le haon phobal amháin go heisiatach. Léiríonn taighde go soiléir go bhfuil ceangal idir tearcghnóthachtáil agus míbhuntáiste socheacnamaíoch. Sa tuaisceart, tá bearna ró-mhór ann idir na daoine is buntáistiúla agus na daoine is míbhuntáistiúla. Téann bochtaineacht ábharach agus bochtaineacht ardaidhme taobh le taobh rómhinic.

The main factors contributing to underachievement are not exclusive to one community. Research clearly shows the link between underachievement and socio-economic disadvantage. In the north, we have too wide a gap between the most and least disadvantaged. Too often, material poverty is compounded by poverty of aspiration.

Even among schools with similar levels of disadvantage, performance varies greatly. Traveller children experience some of the worst educational outcomes of any minority ethnic group.

I am taking forward a major reform programme that will enable every young person to fulfil her or his potential.

On 30 April 2009, I launched 'Every School a Good School – A Policy for School Improvement'. This flagship policy will tackle underachievement and promote equality and the raising of standards across the north.

Transfer 2010 will lay the foundations of a system based on social justice, equality and excellence. These programmes will be supported by other key reforms aimed at raising standards. These include the revised curriculum; the Entitlement Framework for post-primary pupils; a revised literacy and numeracy strategy; an early years' strategy; the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion; support for Newcomer

pupils; and the Extended Schools programme. I am also working through the North South Ministerial Council to tackle underachievement.

Allegations of Abuse in Schools

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education to outline the responsibilities placed upon schools in each sector which has received allegations of abuse. (AQW 1577/10)

Minister of Education: Tá treoir na Roinne do scoileanna ar an dóigh ar chóir déileáil le líomhaintí i dtaca le drochíde amhrasta leagtha amach i gCiorclán 1999/10 agus baineann paragraif 28-31 le nósanna imeachta don tuairisciú. Baineann an treoir seo leis na scoileanna deontaschúnta go léir.

The Department's guidance to schools on how they must deal with allegations of abuse or suspected abuse is set out in Circular 1999/10 and paragraphs 28 to 31 deal with the procedures for reporting. The guidance applies to all grant-aided schools.

The person receiving the allegation, or noticing signs of possible abuse, must notify the designated teacher for child protection. The designated teacher must notify the Principal and together they will decide, taking advice as necessary, if the information is such that the matter should be referred immediately to social services or the police. Where schools' staff are unsure about the need for a referral advice is available from the Child Protection Support Service for Schools or the relevant Health and Social Care Trust's Gateway Team.

Unofficial Selection Tests

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education how many year-7 pupils from the maintained sector are taking the unofficial selection tests this year. (AQW 1776/10)

Minister of Education: Ní heol don Roinn Oideachais líon na ndaltaí a iontráladh do theisteanna easaontacha. Is féidir an t-eolas seo a fháil uathu sin atá freagrach as riar na dteisteanna easaontacha.

The number of pupils entered for breakaway tests is not known to the Department of Education. This information can only be provided by those who are responsible for administering breakaway tests.

Unofficial Selection Tests

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education how many year-7 pupils from the controlled sector are taking the unofficial selection tests this year. (AQW 1777/10)

Minister of Education: Ní heol don Roinn Oideachais líon na ndaltaí a iontráladh do theisteanna easaontacha. Is féidir an t-eolas seo a fháil uathu sin atá freagrach as riar na dteisteanna easaontacha.

The number of pupils entered for breakaway tests is not known to the Department of Education. This information can only be provided by those who are responsible for administering breakaway tests.

Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin Newbuild

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the new build for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin on the Cliftonville playing fields. (AQW 1778/10)

Minister of Education: Tá scéim móroibreacha caipitil do Bhunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin ag céim an Bhreithmheasa Eacnamaíochta. Moltar sa Bhreithmheas Eacnamaíochta go dtógfar foirgneamh nua ar shuíomh pháirceanna imeartha Cliftonville.

A major capital works scheme for Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin is at revised Economic Appraisal (EA) stage. The EA recommends a new build on the Cliftonville playing fields site. In September 2009, the Department of Education issued comments on the EA and a further revised EA is expected to be submitted shortly. Following approval of the EA, it has been agreed that the scheme will proceed to project development and design stage and arrangements for any site purchase can proceed. The project will then be in a strong position to compete for funding from a future capital announcement.

Dromintee Primary School Capital Scheme

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when the capital scheme for Dromintee primary school will commence. (AQW 1866/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé riachtanach go bhfuil an mórinfheistiú seo san eastát oideachais i gcomhréir leis agus mar thacaíocht ag an chreat beartais atá á chur i bhfeidhm agam. Tá Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith, An Curaclam Athbhreithnithe, *Scoileanna Inbhuanaithe agus An Creat Teidlíochta* lárnach den chreat beartais seo. De réir mar a thagann forbairt ar phleanáil cheantarbhunaithe, beidh na polasaithe seo mar stiúradh ag athstruchtúrú an eastáit agus na pleananna infheistithe a éireoidh as sin. Mar Aire Oideachais, caithfidh mise a chinntiú go soláthraíonn na hacmhainní substaintiúla atá á n-infheistiú againn faoi láthair, go soláthraíonn na hacmhainní atá á n-infheistiú againn faoi láthair na torthaí is fearr do na páistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiniócoir. Mar sin de, tá athbhreithniú ar na tionscadail atá á ndéanamh faoi láthair údaraithe agam lena dheimhniú go bhfuil siad ar fad i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais agus dá bhrí sin go mbeidh siad inmharthana san fhadtréimhse.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. At the heart of this are Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans. As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are now investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for the taxpayer. I have commissioned therefore a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

It is anticipated that this review will be completed in the near future and subject to the outcome of the review it is estimated that construction work on the new school building for Dromintee Primary School could commence in Spring 2010 with an estimated completion date of around Spring 2011.

Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, to detail (i) the annual salary for the Chair; and (ii) the amount paid to Board members in expenses in the last financial year. (AQW 1941/10)

Minister of Education:

- i. Ba é an tuarastal bliantúil a íocadh le Cathaoirleach CCEA sa tréimhse 2008/09 ná £16,680. Cuireadh na sonraí ar fáil i gcuntais fhoilsithe 2008/09 de chuid CCEA.
- i. The annual salary paid to the CCEA Chair in 2008/09 was £16,680. Details have been provided in CCEA's 2008/09 published accounts
- ii CCEA's Council during 2008/09 consisted of a Chair and 14 other members. The total amount of expenses paid in 2008/09 to the 14 Council members and Chair who served during this period was £5,084.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

University Places

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail for each of the last three years (i) the number of students who accepted places at university; (ii) the number of students who dropped out during their first year; and (iii) the number who dropped out and were re-admitted. (AQW 1281/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):

- (i) The total number of first year enrolments (including all levels and mode of study) at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions for each of the last three available years are as follows:
 - 2005/06 – 22,725

- 2006/07 – 21,115
- 2007/08 – 20,970

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

- (ii) Information on drop out rates is available for full-time undergraduate entrants only and cannot be provided for all levels and mode of study as provided in (i) above.

The following figures show the number of full-time undergraduate entrants to Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions that are no longer in Higher Education after year of entry, for each of the last three available years:

- No longer in HE in 2005/06 following entry in 2004/05 – 1,065
- No longer in HE in 2006/07 following entry in 2005/06 – 1,175
- No longer in HE in 2007/08 following entry in 2006/07 – 935

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

- (iii) The Department does not hold information on the number of students who dropped out of HE and were readmitted.

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Numeracy and Literacy Skills

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of people between the ages of 16 and 64 who are perceived to lack basic numeracy and literacy skills; and (ii) the level of funding allocated to address this issue. (AQW 1282/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) showed that in 1996, around 24% of the working age population of Northern Ireland (just over 250,000 people based on current estimates of working age population) were operating at the lowest levels of prose literacy.

The OECD has developed a follow up Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which aims update to the 1996 IALS and DEL has committed to participate in this survey. However, as the PIAAC survey will not commence until 2011 and results will not be available until 2013, DEL has commissioned an interim measure to model existing data from a range of other sources to inform ongoing policy and assess the impact of its current strategy. The results will be available by the end of 2009.

- (ii) Between 2002-03 and 2008-09, approximately £39.5 million was spent on the Essential Skills programme

Undergraduate University Places

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many full-time undergraduate students are currently studying in university in Northern Ireland or elsewhere; and how many full-time undergraduate university places are available. (AQW 1329/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: There were 29,950 full-time undergraduate students enrolled at Northern Ireland Higher Education institutions in 2007/08. 27,795 of these were from Northern Ireland. In the same academic year the Maximum Student Number (MaSN) allocation for full-time undergraduate places funded by the Department for Employment and Learning at Northern Ireland Higher Education institutions was 25,727. The remainder were mainly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

In addition, in 2007/08 there were 13,305 full-time undergraduate students from Northern Ireland at Higher Education institutions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. These places are funded by the respective funding bodies in these areas.

Sources: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), Higher Education Authority (HEA) and University Grant Tables

Notes: Enrolment figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and the latest available enrolment data are for 2007/08.

Undergraduate Places at Queen's University and the University of Ulster

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people applied for first year undergraduate places in the University of Ulster and Queen's University in each of the academic years between 2004/05 and 2009/10. (AQW 1331/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Applicant figures have been provided by the University of Ulster and Queen's University and cover Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applicants only i.e. applicants to first year full-time undergraduate courses.

The number of people applying for first year full-time undergraduate places at the University of Ulster and Queen's University in each of the academic years between 2004/05 and 2009/10 through UCAS is detailed in the table below:

	University of Ulster	Queen's University
2004/05	13,988	11,758
2005/06	15,241	11,948
2006/07	14,284	11,547
2007/08	13,428	11,908
2008/09	13,014	11,085
2009/10	13,971	11,818

Source: Figures provided by the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DEL

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long it will last. (AQW 1394/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This Department recently imposed a temporary pause on filling vacancies by means of recruitment and promotion in order to take stock of the impact of budgetary constraints and reassess staffing needs. The situation will be reviewed once the Department has completed its workforce planning exercise.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much has been spent (i) by his Department; and (ii) by departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1401/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: (i) The table below details the amount spent (including VAT) by the Department for Employment and Learning on advertising in the public sector jobs sections of the Belfast Telegraph, the Newsletter, the Irish News and other papers in the last five financial years.

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Belfast Telegraph	£2744.77	£6834.46	£15823.40	£9580.88	£8260.56
Newsletter	£1862.27	£4200.12	£9810.17	£6301.34	£5308.25
Irish News	£1258.30	£4091.85	£8549.54	£4923.19	£4083.25
Other Newspaper	£819.00	nil	£43690.79	£5370.80	£11159.60

(ii) The table below indicates the total spent (excluding VAT) by non-departmental public bodies on advertising in the public sector jobs sections of the Belfast Telegraph, the Newsletter, the Irish News and other papers in the last five financial years.

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Belfast Telegraph	£9290.00	£5717.00	£5756.00	£3826.00	£1640.00
Newsletter	£2863.00	£2609.00	£2617.00	£3050.00	£1300.00
Irish News	£2018.00	£1884.00	£1723.00	£1944.00	£839.00
Other Newspaper	£3180.00	nil	nil	£245.00	nil

‘Protestant Student Exodus’

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the cost of preparations made by his Department for the debate on ‘Protestant Student Exodus’ which was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 6 October 2009. (AQW 1434/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Preparations for the debate included inputs from branches in Higher Education Division, Analytical Services, the Careers Service and Skills in Industry Division. In addition, the Department of Education provided supplementary statistics on the school-leaver population. Costs have been calculated on the basis of hourly inputs by grade and Divisions

The total cost of preparations for the debate is calculated as £1,356 for the Department for Employment and Learning.

Stranmillis College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the religious breakdown of pupils at Stranmillis college. (AQW 1446/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at Stranmillis University College, broken down by religious background, in 2007/08 is detailed in the table below:

Protestant	680
Catholic	160
Other	30
Not known/available	385
Total	1,255

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Information on religion is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI institutions.
- (4) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.

St Mary’s College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the religious breakdown of pupils at St Mary’s college. (AQW 1447/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at St Mary’s University College, broken down by religious background, in 2007/08 is detailed in the table below:

Protestant	10
Catholic	910
Other	5
Not known/available	75
Total	1,000

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Information on religion is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI institutions.
- (4) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Energy Providers

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when domestic energy consumers in Northern Ireland will be able to choose their energy provider, as is the case for energy consumers in rest of the UK. (AQW 1351/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The electricity supply market in Northern Ireland has been fully open to competition since 1 November 2007 when the Single Electricity Market (SEM) was established. This combined the wholesale power generation markets in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for the purposes of driving down power generation costs. NIE Energy remains the only electricity supplier to the domestic market in Northern Ireland at present although some companies have indicated their willingness to enter this sector.

The natural gas market in the Greater Belfast licensed area has been fully open to supply competition since 1 January 2007. At present Phoenix Supply is the principal supplier of natural gas to the domestic market within this licensed area, however a number of companies hold gas supply licences in the Greater Belfast licensed area, and the Utility Regulator and my Department will continue to encourage companies to offer domestic gas consumers the option of switching supplier.

My Department co-operates with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) to encourage new suppliers' participation in the retail energy market in Northern Ireland. Since the introduction of the SEM there has been increasing interest in obtaining new electricity and gas supply licences, and evidence of increasing energy supply competition in the industrial and commercial sector. However, given the small market here compared to the much larger market in Great Britain where competition is well established, it may take some time to establish effective competition in the domestic energy sector.

NIAUR has recently formed a dedicated team tasked with establishing a regulatory programme to deliver competition, and has consulted on a range of competition issues within the past year seeking views on how to improve energy retail competition.

Invest NI

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs and total inward financial investment generated by each Invest NI office, outside of Northern Ireland, in each of the last five years (AQW 1359/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI currently has a network of 11 offices located outside Northern Ireland. In addition, Invest NI has representatives based in Tokyo and Seoul.

Invest NI has a network of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) offices located in North America (Boston, New York, San Jose), Europe (London, Brussels, Dublin) and South Asia (Mumbai). These offices focus on promoting Northern Ireland as a location capable of providing solutions to the business needs of new investors.

Invest NI also operates Trade Development Centres in Boston, Dubai, Mumbai, Dusseldorf, Taipei and Shanghai which provide practical assistance to Northern Ireland companies seeking to develop and secure new business and strategic business partnerships in those markets. In addition, Invest NI has a representative in Seoul who focuses on promoting technology development and university links.

Inward investment is the culmination of a process involving the participation of many Invest NI teams, often from across different offices. As such, it is not possible to align each investment with a particular office. The tables below detail the number of jobs promoted and planned investment in the last five financial years by source region.

2004-05	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	6	181	133	11.86
Great Britain	8	1154	12	36.56
North America	17	1044	785	123.36
Republic of Ireland	16	238	382	22.61
India	2	850	0	15.22
Asia Pacific	2	0	0	0.06
Total	51	3467	1312	209.67
2005-06	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	3	641	278	73.26
Great Britain	11	670	33	27.12
North America	10	1412	2812	211.53
Republic of Ireland	5	179	95	32.98
India	1	158	0	7.43
Asia Pacific	1	40	63	9.88
Total	31	3100	3281	362.19
2006-07	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	3	398	90	15.66
Great Britain	4	93	0	5.90
North America	8	885	93	60.89
Republic of Ireland	8	818	21	47.42
India	3	1227	0	42.70
Asia Pacific	1	30	0	3.23
Total	27	3451	204	175.80
2007-08	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	3	298	276	35.70
Great Britain	7	308	67	12.32
North America	14	422	1102	119.56
Republic of Ireland	7	324	30	41.09

India	2	834	0	19.96
Asia Pacific	2	552	0	27.50
Total	35	2738	1475	256.13
2008-09	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	6	775	2	85.67
Great Britain	12	262	3	17.02
North America	11	1667	0	574.81
Republic of Ireland	13	1345	152	107.38
India	0	0	0	0
Asia Pacific	1	6	0	0.39
Total	43	4055	157	785.27
Total 2004/05 - 2008/09	Offers	New Jobs Promoted	Safeguarded Jobs	Planned Investment £'m
Continental Europe	21	2293	779	222.14
Great Britain	42	2487	115	98.91
North America	60	5430	4792	1,090.15
Republic of Ireland	49	2904	680	251.48
India	8	3069	0	85.31
Asia Pacific	7	628	63	41.07
Total	187	16811	6429	1,789.07

Notes:

1. Figures include offers of assistance towards both first-time inward investments and reinvestments by existing externally-owned clients.
2. Table totals may not add due to rounding
3. New Jobs Promoted represent the number of jobs expected to be promoted by the project.
4. Safeguarded Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.
5. Total Planned Investment includes planned investment by the client and Total Assistance Offered by Invest NI.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much has been spent (i) by her Department; and (ii) by departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1400/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Please see attached tables which detail advertising expenditure by DETI and its Non Departmental Public Bodies in the public sector jobs sections of the papers listed above, in each of the last five years.

(I) DETI CORE

Newspaper	2004/05 Total in £'s	2005/06 Total in £'s	2006/07 Total in £'s	2007/08 Total in £'s	2008/09 Total in £'s
(A) Belfast Telegraph	0	0	0	0	5,435
(B) Newsletter	0	0	0	0	3,970
(C) Irish News	0	0	0	0	5,055

Newspaper	2004/05 Total in £'s	2005/06 Total in £'s	2006/07 Total in £'s	2007/08 Total in £'s	2008/09 Total in £'s
(D) Other Newspapers	0	0	0	0	9,892

Note: There is no expenditure for DETI Core for the years 2004/05 to 2007/08, since prior to 2008/09, DFP Recruitment Service bore the cost of recruitment advertisements.

(II) DETI NON DEPARTMENTAL PUBLIC BODIES

Newspaper	2004/05 Total in £'s	2005/06 Total in £'s	2006/07 Total in £'s	2007/08 Total in £'s	2008/09 Total in £'s
(A) Belfast Telegraph	93,841	68,553	117,370	59,560	85,749
(B) Newsletter	36,538	38,204	68,742	31,958	53,517
(C) Irish News	26,476	25,951	49,596	24,401	41,771
(D) Other Newspapers	27,118	85,911	15,712	27,579	90,200

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if he has held discussions with the Scottish Government regarding the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry; and if so to provide an update.

(AQW 1431/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have been in regular contact with my Scottish Government Ministerial counterparts with regard to how best to take forward the recommendations contained in the consultants' report into the case for restoring the ferry service and plan to discuss the matter further when I meet Jim Mather MSP, Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, at the IBEC/CBI Summit in Edinburgh today.

Wildlife: Tourism

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to encourage people to visit the wildlife of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 1524/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The natural landscape and prolific wildlife of Northern Ireland is an important part of the tourism offering. The NITB through all the distribution channels available to it i.e. www.discovernorthernireland.com and the media and marketing campaigns ensures that the message about Northern Ireland's great wildlife is promoted and information is readily available.

The website highlights all the key wildlife to see in each region, and this year as part of National Wildlife Week, NITB ran a PR campaign supported by a visitor guide of Northern Ireland's wildlife hot-spots.

The Tourist Board's current marketing campaign 'Explore More' focuses on the great outdoors, encouraging people to get out and about and enjoy whatever they are interested in, including the enjoyment of a countryside rich in wildlife.

Self-Employed Persons

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people are currently self-employed, broken down by constituency if available.

(AQW 1898/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of the number of self-employed persons in Northern Ireland are available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS design does not support the production of sufficiently reliable self-employment estimates at constituency level.

LFS self-employment estimates are available at district council level, but these estimates are based on relatively small sample sizes and should therefore be treated with caution. The table below provides LFS self-employment estimates for the period January to December 2008 by district council area. The confidence interval associated with these estimates has also been provided for information.

NORTHERN IRELAND SELF-EMPLOYMENT ESTIMATES BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA¹, 2008

District Council	Estimated number of self-employed	95% Confidence Interval
Antrim	3,000	+/- 2,000
Ards	5,000	+/- 2,000
Armagh	4,000	+/- 2,000
Ballymena	4,000	+/- 2,000
Ballymoney	3,000	+/- 1,000
Banbridge	5,000	+/- 2,000
Belfast	11,000	+/- 3,000
Carrickfergus	2,000	+/- 1,000
Castlereagh	4,000	+/- 2,000
Coleraine	3,000	+/- 1,000
Cookstown	3,000	+/- 2,000
Craigavon	6,000	+/- 2,000
Derry	4,000	+/- 2,000
Down	5,000	+/- 2,000
Dungannon	4,000	+/- 2,000
Fermanagh	6,000	+/- 2,000
Larne	2,000	+/- 1,000
Limavady	2,000	+/- 1,000
Lisburn	7,000	+/- 2,000
Magherafelt	4,000	+/- 2,000
Moyle	2,000	+/- 1,000
Newry & Mourne	10,000	+/- 2,000
Newtownabbey	4,000	+/- 2,000
North Down	6,000	+/- 2,000
Omagh	4,000	+/- 2,000
Strabane	2,000	+/- 1,000
Northern Ireland	115,000	+/- 10,000

- 1 Estimates at District Council Area level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should, therefore, be treated with caution.
- 2 The 95% confidence interval provides a range in which the true self-employment figure would be expected to fall 95% of the time, if the sample was drawn repeatedly.

Source: Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey, January – December 2008.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**Cottonmount Site**

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what action his Department is taking to ensure there is no repeat of the odour from the Cottonmount site; and (ii) should there be a repeat, what plans are in place to ensure a prompt response.

(AQW 1302/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): (i) As a result of complaints received from residents living close to the Cottonmount landfill site towards the end of September 2009, staff from the Land and Resource Management (LRM) unit of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) carried out an inspection of the site on 1 October 2009.

During their visit on the 1 October 2009, the operator was in the process of installing two temporary deodorising units to deal immediately with the problem. The operator was instructed to install a permanent deodorising unit and this was in place by 5 October 2009.

(ii) On the detection or notification of any further incidents of odour from this site, LRM staff will carry out a prompt and full investigation. This may result in requesting the operator to carry out remedial measures within a specific timeframe or NIEA taking further action if required.

CO2 Emissions

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline the Executive's commitment to reducing CO2 emissions; (ii) whether it supports the reduction of vehicles on the road; and (iii) what steps it is taking to bring about this reduction. (AQW 1377/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Executive is committed to reducing emissions of all greenhouse gases including CO2. In its Programme for Government (2008-2011) the Executive set a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% in 2025 on 1990 levels.

It is clear that current patterns of transport and the high level of dependency upon the private car have a significant impact on our CO2 emissions. If that impact is to be reduced, it will require a move towards cleaner vehicles and more sustainable transport choices.

The Department for Regional Development, through its TravelWise initiative, seeks to promote and encourage sustainable modes of travel as alternatives to the private car. Walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing are promoted to businesses, commuters and schools as part of the drive to help reduce congestion and contribute to reduction in CO2 emissions.

A key objective of the review of the Regional Transportation Strategy, recently announced by the Minister for Regional Development, is to ensure more sustainable transport arrangements which provide for a proper balance between the needs of people, business and the environment. To inform the review in this regard, the Department for Regional Development has taken forward work to establish the greenhouse gas emissions of road transport arrangements in the North of Ireland, with a view to identifying and costing an appropriate policy and strategy response.

Review of Public Administration: Statutory Transition Committees

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the numbers and percentages of women and members of ethnic minority communities on council Transition Committees set up under the Review of Public Administration; and for his assessment of the arrangements in place to ensure their participation. (AQW 1392/10)

Minister of the Environment: The table below details the numbers and percentages of women currently on the voluntary transition committees. The information requested in respect of ethnic minority communities is not readily available.

I am content the arrangements that will be put in place for the establishment of the Statutory Transition Committees will ensure, as far as is practicable, inclusivity across the political parties. It will then be a matter for the individual political parties on the constituent councils to determine, in consultation with their elected members, who is best placed to represent them on the Statutory Transition Committees.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION ON TRANSITION COMMITTEES

Councils	Female Members on TC	% Members
Lisburn/Castlereagh	1	6.3
North Down/Ards	3	18.8
Down/Newry Mourne	1	6.3
Armagh.Banbridge/Craigavon	2	13.3
Antrim/Newtownabbey	5	31.3
Larne/Ballymena/Carrickfergus	2	13.3
Ballymoney/Coleraine/Moyle/Limavady	5	25.0
Dungannon/Cookstown/Magherafelt	0	0.0
Omagh/Fermanagh	0	0.0
Derry/Strabane	6	37.5
Belfast	2	10.0

Recruitment and Promotion

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long he anticipates it will last. (AQW 1395/10)

Minister of the Environment: Due to financial pressures in the Department arising mainly from a significant reduction in planning fee income, action has been taken to restrict expenditure on staffing in the Department. This includes restrictions on filling vacant posts through recruitment and promotion and these have been in place since the start of September. Exceptions to these restrictions will be considered in areas such as those funded from sources outside the NI Departmental Equalisation Limit and where it is considered that vacancies need to be filled because of the urgency or priority of the work associated with specific posts. These arrangements will be kept under review in the light of the Departments overall financial position, but I anticipate they will remain in place for at least the rest of this financial year.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been spent (i) by his Department; and (ii) by Departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1402/10)

Minister of the Environment: The table below provides details of expenditure by my Department, split between the core and the three agencies, and the non-departmental public bodies affiliated to my Department, on advertising in the public sector jobs sections of newspapers for each of the last 5 years.

DOE Core Department	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
Belfast Telegraph	1,810	3,488	6,482	1,967	8,231
News Letter	892	2,084	1,094	-	4,379
Irish News	1,476	1,328	3,218	790	3,485
Other Newspapers	-	-	3,962	1,047	-
Sub Total	4,178	6,900	14,756	3,804	16,095

DOE Core Department	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
DOE Agencies					
Belfast Telegraph	33,965	32,638	16,111	14,727	10,857
News Letter	18,627	18,640	10,392	10,296	5,016
Irish News	20,712	14,076	9,985	14,219	4,207
Other Newspapers	7,396	5,893	6,193	-	3,459
Sub Total	80,700	71,247	42,681	39,242	23,539
Non - departmental public bodies					
Belfast Telegraph	3,379	6,618	9,461	17,939	14,284
News Letter	1,483	1,056	1,295	-	-
Irish News	1,145	2,312	4,283	7,863	6,514
Other Newspapers	-	-	4,833	1,760	-
Sub Total	6,007	9,986	19,872	27,562	20,798
Overall Total	90,885	88,133	77,309	70,608	60,432

Omagh Area Plan

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been spent on preliminary works for the draft Omagh Area Plan. (AQW 1470/10)

Minister of the Environment: The West Tyrone Area Plan 2019 was being prepared under the provisions of the Planning Order 1991 to replace the Omagh Area Plan 2002 and the Strabane Area Plan 2001. Work on the Plan however has ceased as a consequence of the ongoing litigation regarding the Environmental Reports which accompanied the draft Northern and Magherafelt Area Plans.

Work began on the Plan in September 2004 and it is estimated that approximately £958,000 has been spent on preparation. This comprises of £78,300 for consultancy costs – for a community consultation and for a retail capacity study as well as £28,800 for printing, advertising and other internal costs. While it is difficult to give a precise figure for staff costs it is estimated that they are in the order of £850,000. In taking forward this plan, the Department has sought to keep costs to a minimum by undertaking the majority of the research work using Departmental staff.

Marine Conservation Zones

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of the Environment when the designation of Marine Conservation Zones will begin, in the light of the international targets for 2010 and 2012. (AQW 1477/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently designating a number of Marine Protected Areas as part of our obligations under the Habitats and Birds Directive. These sites will assist in meeting the 2010 and 2012 international targets and play an important role in fulfilling the UK government's commitment to marine conservation.

Efficiency Savings: DOE

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of the Environment what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1499/10)

Minister of the Environment: To meet the efficiencies in 2008-09 and the year to date, the Department implemented a 15% reduction in non salary running costs along with the suppression of certain low priority vacant posts and a reduction in consultancy spend.

Furthermore, a significant element of the overall efficiency savings have been delivered by phasing out the Waste Management Grant Scheme which funded district councils to implement their waste management plans to put in place minor infrastructure projects to meet waste recycling targets. At a lesser cost the Department established the Programme Delivery Support Unit (PDSU) in conjunction with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to assist the waste management partnerships (representing the district councils) on procurement and delivery of their waste management plans through the Strategic Waste Infrastructure Fund (SWIF). The Executive allocated £200m to the SWIF over the Budget 2008-11 period (2008-09 to 2010-11).

The above measures have had minimal effect on the Department's ability to deliver frontline services for 2008/09 and the first 6 months of 2009/10.

Public Service Vehicle Tests

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware that taxi drivers' profits are down by 40% this year as a result of the cost of Public Service Vehicle tests; and what action he intends to take to address this. (AQW 1509/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the DFP guidance on fees and charges within "Managing Public Money Northern Ireland", the Agency is required to recover in full the costs associated with delivering a service.

The fee for a taxi PSV licence increased to £138.50 on 1 April 2009, an increase of £12 on the previous fee. It is unlikely that the £12 increase in the cost of the PSV licence could result in a drop of 40% in taxi drivers' profits.

Given the requirement for full cost recovery, as set out above, I am unable to reduce the PSV fee, but I am very much aware of the implications of any cost increase on any industry in the current economic climate. I have asked officials to ensure that the costs are kept under continuous review so that services are delivered in the most cost effective manner.

External Consultants: DOE Expenditure

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 1057/10, to detail the £182,375 expenditure on the website project; and to explain why this expenditure is no longer deemed to be external consultancy expenditure. (AQW 1522/10)

Minister of the Environment: The £182,375 expenditure relates to the payment of a contract let to AEA Technology for the creation and maintenance of an air quality website and archive which provides a primary source of air pollution and monitoring information to a wide audience and fulfils the Department's legal obligation under the Air Quality Framework Directive and Air Quality Standards Regulations.

The contract was originally regarded as external consultancy, however, following further review of the Department of Finance and Personnel Guidance on the Use of External Consultants this work should have been classed as "contracted services" and therefore should not have been deemed as external consultancy.

Public Service Vehicle Test Fees

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the 9.5% increase in Public Service Vehicle test fees, given that there was also a 4% increase in the previous year. (AQW 1526/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the DFP guidance on fees and charges within "Managing Public Money Northern Ireland", the Agency is required to recover in full the costs associated with delivering a service.

The recent PSV Taxi Licence fee increase of £12 (9.5%) covers increased costs from inflation and pay awards over the period from 1 April 2007 (when the fee was last increased) to March 2010.

A breakdown of the costs incurred in the PSV licensing process is set out below:

PSV TAXI LICENCE FEE

Direct Costs	
Labour	£ 44.64
Enforcement Cost	£ 20.00
Taxi Plating	£ 22.05
Taxi IT System Costs	£ 9.93
Booking System	£ 2.03
Testing Equipment PFI	£ 4.11
Overhead Costs	
Labour (e.g. IT, finance, personnel & customer services staff)	£ 15.82
Overheads (e.g. IT, stationery, training, travel, telephone)	£ 8.40
Accommodation (rent, rates, heat, light, security, cleaning)	£ 8.17
Central DOE/DRD/DFP charges	£ 3.28
Total Costs	£138.43
Fee	£138.50

Taxi Drivers Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with the Taxi Drivers Association regarding the cost of a Public Service Vehicle test. (AQW 1532/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department's officials have had no recent discussions with any of the Northern Ireland Taxi Drivers Associations regarding the cost of a Public Service Vehicle (PSV) test. However, discussions on a wide range of taxi related matters including costs take place on a regular basis.

Taxi Licences

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxi licences have been issued in each of the last five years. (AQW 1562/10)

Minister of the Environment:

Year	Taxi Driver Licences	Taxi Vehicle Licences
2008/09	3,501	11,034
2007/08	4,279	10,597
2006/07	4,728	9,899
2005/06	4,403	10,219
2004/05	3,821	6,742

Taxi Licences

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment if he has any plans to limit the number of taxi licences issued each year. (AQW 1563/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to limit the numbers of taxi licences issued, as my Department does not have the legislative powers to do so.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many public hire taxis are currently operating in Belfast City Centre. (AQW 1564/10)

Minister of the Environment: At 13 October 2009, there were 519 taxis licensed to operate as Belfast Public Hire taxis.

Public Hire Taxis

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what action he has taken to assess the environmental impact of large numbers of public hire taxis circling Belfast City Centre on a daily basis, due to the limited number of spaces in official taxi ranks. (AQW 1565/10)

Minister of the Environment: The impact of traffic in Belfast city centre is monitored on an ongoing basis. However, equipment such as that used to monitor air quality is unable to differentiate between taxis and other vehicles, so no separate assessment has been made of the specific impact of Belfast public hire taxis.

I understand that legislation came into effect on 17 August 2009 to provide 10 new spaces for public hire taxis in Chichester Street and that the Department for Regional Development is presently assessing other sites for possible enhanced or new taxi provision.

Brent Geese

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if the numbers of Brent geese at Strangford Lough is currently greater than it has been for the past few years. (AQW 1572/10)

Minister of the Environment: Strangford Lough is the single most important site in the world for Light-bellied Brent Geese outside the breeding period.

Counts co-ordinated by Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Castle Espie recorded the following maximum numbers of Light-bellied Brent Geese on Strangford Lough in recent years.

Year	Number of Birds
2002/03	17,520
2003/04	21,500
2004/05	26,250
2005/06	21,885
2006/07	24,658
2007/08	29,417
2008/09	26,718
2009/10	28,583 (to date)

Whilst there has been a general increase in the Strangford Lough population of Light-bellied Brent Geese over the past seven years, the numbers present in October 2007 have to date not been exceeded.

WasteTyres site, Mayobridge

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what is the permitted storage capacity of the approved WasteTyres site at Chapel Hill, Mayobridge; (ii) for his assessment of whether the site presents any health hazards to employees or local residents; and (iii) for his assessment of the fire risk at the site which may arise as a result of regular fires on the nearby Tamnaharrie Mountain. (AQW 1605/10)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) The total quantity of tyres accepted at the site per year must not exceed 7,000 tonnes and the total quantity of waste stored at the site at any one time, must not exceed 300 tonnes: 270 tonnes unprocessed and processed end of life tyres and 20 tonnes of metal.
- (ii) The licence contains conditions which, if complied with, will ensure that the activity is carried out without risk of harm to human health or the environment. The licensed site does not currently present a significant risk to employees, local residents or the environment.

However the waste company has extended its process operations to the baling of tyres which is not authorised by the licence. There is a significant risk to human health and the environment due to the presence of a very large quantity, estimated at 400,000 tyres (3,200 tonnes) which are baled and currently stored on adjacent land which falls outside the licensed area. Should this stockpile catch fire, the effect on the local area is likely to be serious.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency issued a Notice requiring the company to remove all end of life tyres currently stored in excess of the quantities permitted by the licence, by 17 October 2009 otherwise the Agency will consider suspending the licence. The company has also been informed that the baling of tyres is not authorised by the existing licence and that the baled tyres currently stored on adjacent land have no authorisation and must be removed as soon as possible.

- (iii) The site is surrounded by a road on one side and open fields with watercourses. Tamnaharrie Mountain is situated a greater distance from the site. The fire risk presented as a result of regular fires on Tamnaharrie Mountain is therefore considered to be low.

Nature Conservation on Public Estates

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to improve protection and restoration of nature conservation on public estates. (AQW 1614/10)

Minister of the Environment: As part of the review of the Wildlife Order it is proposed to place a new statutory duty upon Departments and Public Bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity, in a way that is consistent with the exercise of their functions. This duty will be particularly relevant to those parts of the public sector which have responsibility for estate management.

Irish Hare Population

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he would consider the export of hares from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland to further enhance the hare population there. (AQW 1615/10)

Minister of the Environment: The results of an all island survey of Irish hares, carried out by Queen's University in 2007, suggest that population densities of Irish hares are similar in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Therefore I see no valid scientific reason to translocate Irish hares at this time. The Northern Ireland Species Action Plan for the Irish hare highlights the need to conserve the local stock and as the Northern Ireland population is known to fluctuate between years it would be unwise to move any hares from their local groups.

Translocations of any wild animals would only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Studies show that moving animals can cause extreme stress to the individuals during capture, transportation and after release in a new environment. Additionally, the impacts of translocations on the local genetic uniqueness of the species would need to be carefully considered, as local populations may have adapted to survive in the specific environmental conditions in which they are found.

Planning Decisions

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment if he would consider passing on the cost of legal cases taken by developers to those same developers who are delaying planning decisions. (AQW 1650/10)

Minister of the Environment: The award of costs is a matter which falls within the exclusive competence of the courts.

Taxi Licences

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxi licences have been issued to drivers in the East Antrim constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 1671/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of taxi drivers' licences issued to residents in areas covered by the BT38 and BT40 postcodes for each of the last 3 years is as follows:

2008/09	107
2007/08	122
2006/07	166

Licensed Taxi Drivers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many licensed taxi drivers have been operating in each of the last five years. (AQW 1672/10)

Minister of the Environment: Taxi drivers' licences are 5-year licences and the number issued in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

2008/09	3,501
2007/08	4,279
2006/07	4,728
2005/06	4,403
2004/05	3,821

Bio-Diversity

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how Bio- Diversity will be delivered for conservation. (AQW 1703/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy was launched in September 2002 and all members of the Northern Ireland Executive signed up to delivering its 76 recommendations.

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group was established in 2004 to advise the Minister of the Environment on progress in the implementation of the Strategy. I have just received their most recent Report and am assessing its recommendations with my officials.

The Department of the Environment and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) have a major part to play in delivering the Strategy, but do so alongside other government Agencies/Departments. For example, DARD delivers biodiversity action through its Countryside Management Scheme; the Forest Service is active in the promotion of grant aid for native woodland planting; and business, in the form of the Quarry Products Association, has developed several projects targeting vulnerable species. My Department has encouraged all Departments to develop Biodiversity Implementation Plans.

Within NIEA a large number of delivery projects have been co-ordinated and funded. The grant aid programme has a category for biodiversity projects and many education, community and NGO projects have been supported. Habitat action plans have been published for 38 priority habitats in Northern Ireland; while over 400 priority species, all requiring some positive action, have been identified and species action plans prepared in an effort to conserve the most vulnerable.

The delivery of these actions is being co-ordinated through a number of habitat delivery groups, all are cross-sectoral with representation from Government Departments, NGOs, academics, business representatives and landowners. These delivery groups have developed work plans aimed at focusing effort to deliver biodiversity on the ground.

Local biodiversity action is being spearheaded by biodiversity officers based in District Councils. To date, 15 Council areas have developed local biodiversity action plans with associated targets and have established voluntary partnerships to take forward the delivery of biodiversity action across Northern Ireland.

11 New Councils

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm if plans for 11 new councils by 2011 are on target; and what funding his Department plans to make available in support of this new model. (AQW 1725/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am confident that local government reform will be delivered in May 2011.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of Local Government Service Delivery, which I put to the Strategic Leadership Board last week, provides a detailed assessment of the options to deliver the key services by the 11 new councils. It clearly shows that there are significant benefits to be had from the reform and I will be using this as a basis to analyse funding issues for consideration and decisions by the Finance Minister and the Executive.

Illegal Waste Sites

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment how many inspections have been carried out by his Department on the illegal waste sites at (i) Moneyguard Road in Trillick; and (ii) Slatting in Garrison; and (iii) for his assessment of the risks to public health from these illegal waste sites. (AQW 1854/10)

Minister of the Environment: At both sites, intrusive inspections have been carried out and a number of test pits have been dug, to allow officials to assess the nature, quantity and origin of the waste present, to determine the polluting potential of the waste and to determine whether or not any efforts had been made by the defendants to prevent pollution.

The site at Moneygar Road Trillick is currently subject to legal proceedings in the Crown Court and it is therefore not possible to give information on the number of inspections.

The site at Slatting was subject to one major intrusive inspection during the course of a criminal investigation into the site.

In relation to public health issues, in both cases, the body of the waste has been capped with a layer of clay and stones and the sites are not readily accessible to the public.

The Department is mindful in such cases of the potential for pollution of the environment and harm to human health and has been in detailed negotiations with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland (where the waste originated) to ensure that it is returned. The removal and return of the waste will remove the source of pollution and in so doing will eliminate risk both to human health and to the environment.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the location; and (ii) the number of vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service at (a) Deputy Principal level; and (b) all higher levels, broken down by grade, in each Government Department. (AQW 1139/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The location and number of vacancies in permanent posts in each Northern Ireland Civil Service department at the grades of (a) Deputy Principal; (b) Grade 7; (c) Grade 6; and (d) Senior Civil Service are set out in the attached table.

VACANCIES (FULL TIME EQUIVALENT BASIS) IN THE ELEVEN NI DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES IN GRADES: DP; UNIFIED GRADE 7; UNIFIED GRADE 6; SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE, AT 1 OCTOBER 2009

Department	Deputy Principal ¹		Unified Grade 7 ²		Unified Grade 6 ²		Senior Civil Service ³	
	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)	Number	Location (posts)
Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD)	4.4	Belfast (3.4), Ballymena (1)	11	Belfast (3) Antrim (1) Province Wide (7)	4	Belfast (3) Location to be confirmed (1)	2	Belfast
Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL)	2	Belfast	0	-	0	-	0	-
Education (DE)	0	-	2	Bangor	0	-	0	-
Employment & Learning (DEL)	9	Belfast	1	Belfast	0	-	1	Belfast
Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI)	0	-	4	Belfast	0	-	0	-
Finance & Personnel (DFP)	6	Belfast (3) Bangor (3)	9	Belfast (8) Bangor (1)	3	Belfast (1) Ballymena (1) Londonderry (1)	2	Belfast
Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSSPS)	1	Belfast	8	Belfast	1	Belfast	8	Belfast
Environment (DOE)	2	Belfast	2	Belfast	3	Belfast (2), Coleraine (1)	1	Belfast
Regional Development (DRD)	1	Belfast	6	Belfast	2	Belfast	1	Belfast
Social Development (DSD)	11	Belfast	13	Belfast (11) Londonderry (2)	2	Belfast	1	Belfast
Office of the First & Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)	1	Belfast	3	Belfast	0	-	2	Belfast
Total	37.4		59		15		18	

1 General service grades only

2 Unified Grades, comprise both general service and professional/technical grades

3 Senior Civil Service comprises both general service and professional/technical grades

Civil Servants' Pay

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to outline the pay rise awarded to Civil Servants in the Department of Education in (a) 2007/08; and (b) 2008/09; and (ii) how this compares with average pay rises in the private sector. (AQW 1288/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: NICS pay awards are determined centrally by DFP and apply to all employees across the eleven departments. While individual employees may receive differing base pay rises due to individual circumstances, the overall average increase to base pay is calculated on an NICS-wide basis and reported as such.

The pay awards for Northern Ireland Civil Servants compared to the NI Private Sector in 2007/08 and 2008/09 are set out below. The NICS figures are based on the average base pay increase for staff in post. The figure

provided for the NI Private Sector is based on information taken from the results of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). The ASHE survey information related to the pay-week which included 16th April 2008. The estimated pay increase figure was calculated by comparing the 2008 ASHE figure with that available for 2007. The results are therefore not necessarily representative of pay over a longer period and are not directly comparable with the NICS pay award figures. An estimate for the average increase for the year to April 2009 is not yet available as ASHE 2009 results are due to be published in November 2009.

Year	NICS Pay Awards			Private Sector
	Non- Industrial	Industrial	Senior Civil Service	ASHE
2007	4%	3.44%	2.52%	3.7%
2008	4%	3.5%	2.48%	N/A

Efficiency Savings: DFP

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what services in his Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year. (AQW 1307/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: No services in the Department of Finance and Personnel have been adversely affected by efficiency savings either in the last financial year or in the first six months of this financial year.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has been spent (i) by his Department; and (ii) by Departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1315/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel spent £569,921 and Departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies spent £23,622 on advertising in public sector jobs sections within the last five years. The attached table details the expenditure on each newspaper.

The department's figures include costs for all other departments as it incurs the costs for corporate competitions. The agencies did not incur any costs in 2007-08 or 2008-09 as the costs were borne by the department corporately.

The figures exclude the costs for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), as the body is unable to disaggregate its costs between the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department of Finance in the Republic of Ireland and the European Union.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE & PERSONNEL

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
Belfast Telegraph	42,609	22,053	29,504	28,677	33,636	156,479
News Letter	22,952	11,974	19,178	20,020	21,074	95,198
Irish News	16,424	10,034	13,334	12,693	13,713	66,198
Other	69,129	29,496	40,467	64,428	48,526	252,046
Total	151,114	73,557	102,483	125,818	116,949	569,921

AGENCIES

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
Belfast Telegraph	3,184	1,480	2,149			6,813
News Letter	1,949	929	1,304			4,182
Irish News	1,421	669	957			3,047
Other	5,736	568	3,276			9,580
Total	12,290	3,646	7,686			23,622

Pension Funds

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total number of senior Civil Servants who have received one-off payments, bonuses, or 'top-ups' paid into their pension funds; and the amount of these payments, in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 1348/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: This information is not held centrally by DFP and is not readily available from departments.

Civil Service Equal Pay Claim

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline progress on the Civil Service equal pay claim; and when he expects a final outcome to negotiations. (AQW 1383/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Officials are engaged with NIPSA with the aim of achieving a negotiated settlement to the equal pay claims, if possible.

I am determined to seek a resolution to this matter as soon as possible. However, there are very complex issues associated with the claims and there is still a lot of work to be done before the matter will be resolved. It is for this reason that I am unable to give a timescale for the resolution of this issue.

Capital Receipts

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all capital receipts received against budget targets to date, across all Departments. (AQW 1385/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table sets out the latest position for capital receipts against the plans agreed in Budget 2008-11. This reflects the information provided by departments to DFP.

The latest information for 2008-09 is the Provisional Outturn position, whilst for 2009-10 the latest position available is the Forecast Outturn returns received from departments at the beginning of September. Departments have not yet had the opportunity to revise plans for 2010-11.

DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL RECEIPTS

		£million			
		2008-09		2009-10	
		Budget 2008-11	Prov. Outturn	Budget 2008-11	Forecast Outturn
DARD	Rivers Agency Plant, Vehicles & Machinery	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1
	Omagh Regional Office	-1.0			
	Forest Service	-3.1	-2.5	-3.1	-0.1
	Processing & Marketing Grants	-4.3	-2.3		

		£million			
		2008-09		2009-10	
		Budget 2008-11	Prov. Outturn	Budget 2008-11	Forecast Outturn
	Agri-Food Waste Challenge			-1.0	-1.0
	NI Rural Development programme Axis 1, 3 & 4	-2.7	-0.3	-8.4	-10.2
	NI Rural Development Programme Axis 2	-0.3	-0.3	-1.0	-0.5
	CAFRE Recurrent Capital	-0.9	-0.0	-0.3	-0.3
	Fisheries Grants	-2.3	-3.3	-3.0	-0.6
	Woodland Grant Scheme	-0.5		-0.5	
	Rural Development Capital Grants	-2.5	-4.5	-0.2	-0.2
	Forest Service SRC	-0.1	-0.1	-0.0	-0.0
	ISB Computer Equipment				-0.2
	Veterinary Capital		-0.0		
Total DARD		-17.8	-13.4	-17.7	-13.2
DCAL	Libraries Disposals	-1.0	-0.4	-1.0	-0.3
	Museums Sale of Land	-4.6			-2.0
Total Dcal		-5.6	-0.4	-1.0	-2.3
DE	DE Departmental Capital		-0.2		
	Capital Receipts - ELB	-12.0	-4.2	-19.0	-18.0
	Capital Receipts - Vol	-2.5	-0.0	-2.5	
	Capital Receipts - Youth Services - ELB/Statutory	-0.5		-0.5	
	ELBs - Sale of Buildings - NBV		-0.0		
	EUPRP Projects		-0.0		
Total DE		-15.0	-4.4	-22.0	-18.0
DEL	SRIF Receipts		-2.4		-5.8
Total DEL			-2.4		-5.8
DETI	Next Generation Networks	-0.1		-3.0	-3.0
	Broadband Stimulation	-0.5	-0.2	-1.0	-0.2
	Broadband Local Access Contract		-0.4		
	International Connectivity	-0.9	-3.9	-6.3	-34.0
	Renewable Energy			-0.9	
	Enterprise Support(Invest NI)-Capital Grant to Bus	-1.4	-1.5	-1.5	-2.6
	Enterprise Support(Invest NI)- Capital Receipts	-25.0	-17.7	-15.0	-6.0
	European Programmes	-2.1	-0.1	-2.1	-0.8
	European Programmes - Interreg IV - Receipts				-0.2
	Giant's Causeway Visitor's Centre				-0.0
	Signature Project Receipts	-2.3		-11.5	-8.5
Total DETI		-32.2	-23.8	-41.3	-55.4

		£million			
		2008-09		2009-10	
		Budget 2008-11	Prov. Outturn	Budget 2008-11	Forecast Outturn
DFP	Procurement ICT Systems		-0.1		
	NICS Residual Office Estate Capital Building works				-0.5
	Workplace 2010 PPP	-175.0			
Total DFP		-175.0	-0.1		-0.5
DHSSPS	Disposals	-55.0	-2.1	-15.0	-15.0
	European Programmes - Interreg - Receipts				-0.1
Total DHSSPS		-55.0	-2.1	-15.0	-15.0
DOE	DVA Enforcement Function Projects		-10.0		
	DVA - Recoupment from DVLA	-0.3	-1.1	-0.3	-0.7
	EHS - Capital Grants to District Councils		-0.1		
Total DOE		-0.3	-11.2	-0.3	-0.7
DRD	Strategic Road Improvements (SRIs)		-7.9		-1.1
	Local Transport & Safety Measures(LTSMs)&Other		-1.0		-1.8
	Roads - Asset Disposals	-1.0	-0.8	-1.0	-1.0
	Rail - New Trains				-0.7
	Land Disposals		-0.8		
	Departmental Sundry Capital		-0.0		
Total DRD		-1.0	-10.5	-1.0	-4.6
DSD	Urban Development Grants		-0.1		
	CRISP		-1.4		
	Comprehensive Development	-0.4	-3.1	-1.7	-22.8
	Peace III Creating Shared Public Spaces				-7.7
	House and Land Sales	-80.4	-8.2	-68.7	-6.0
	Loan Repayment (NIHE)	-97.5	-97.9	-92.1	-92.1
	Loan Repayments (HA)	-0.9	-3.9	-0.8	-0.8
	HA Grant Repayments	-4.9	-1.4	-4.9	-1.0
	Modernisation of Service Delivery Arrangements		-0.2		
Total DSD		-184.1	-116.3	-168.2	-130.3
Total¹		-486.0	-184.6	-266.5	-245.8

Figures may not add due to roundings.

Amounts of less than £50k are shown as £0.0 million

Background Note

1. In Budget 2008-11 a total of £1.4 billion capital receipts were identified against departmental baselines. This figures does not include the £199 million of receipts that were expected to be generated over the Budget period in light of the findings of the Capital realisations Taskforce (CRT). This is because the late identification of this component meant it was not possible to attribute receipts to specific departments as part of the Budget process.
2. Subsequent to the final Budget 2008-11 being agreed in January 2008, the level of receipts from the disposal of surplus assets has been adversely

affected by the downturn in the property market, leading to a shortfall in income against the original plans.

3. In 2008-09, based on provisional outturn, only £184.6 million of capital receipts were realised against an original plan of £486 million. The shortfall in this year was due mainly to the Workplace 2010 project (£175 million), house and land sales (£72 million) and the deferral of the Belvoir Park site (£50 million) by DHSSPS.
4. For 2009-10 the latest information available is the Forecast Outturn returns received from departments at the beginning of September. These returns indicate forecast receipts of £245.8 million against an original plan of £266.5, in this instance a shortfall of £62.7 million in house and land sales has been offset by increases in other areas. In addition, the capital receipts plans for 2009-10 are less dependent upon asset sales than the other years of the budget period meaning the situation should be less volatile.
5. Departments have not yet had an opportunity to revise plans for 2010-11. However a significant pressure of £200 million has been identified in respect of Crossnacreevy whilst a further shortfall in respect of house and land sales is to be expected. DSD have also indicated the likely slippage of the North East Quarter development project (Royal Exchange), however, in this instance the loss of the £123 million receipt will be offset by a reduction in the corresponding capital expenditure requirement of £233 million.

Cleared by Head of Division – Michael Daly xx October 2009

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Buildings in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Estate

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail which buildings in the Northern Ireland Civil Service estate are not currently being used for Government or commercial purposes. (AQW 1387/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Two buildings in the DFP Government office estate are not currently being used. These are Longbridge House (Belfast) which is to be occupied by 19 October 2009 and Gola Road (Lisnaskea) which is to be sold by end of 09/10 financial year.

Workplace 2010

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the revenue his Department had expected had Workplace 2010 been successfully completed. (AQW 1388/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A capital receipt of £175m had been budgeted for in the 2008/09 financial year in relation to the Workplace 2010 contract. The impact on the NI Block of the bidders' decision to withdraw from the process was successfully managed in the 2008/09 financial year and there are no budgetary implications for subsequent years.

Promotion Within the Civil Service

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any changes to the process and opportunity for promotion of staff within the Civil Service since the start of the previous financial year. (AQW 1435/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There have been no changes to the process for promotion of staff within the Civil Service since the start of the previous financial year. In March 2009 HRConnect took over responsibility for the administration of all Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) promotion competitions in line with NICS policy. The new system provides an online application facility which is available to the vast majority of civil servants. Promotion opportunities are determined by the number of vacancies across the NICS with current indications showing vacancy levels reducing.

Funding from European Union and European Commission

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount of European Union, and European Commission, funding allocated to (i) Northern Ireland; and (ii) North-South projects, for each year since 1998, in tabular form. (AQW 1476/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Year	Northern Ireland Projects	North-South Projects
1998	£172,913,145.29	£10,785,917.00
1999	£407,565,455.57	£39,052,817.71
2000	0	0
2001	£157,845,950.71	£1,446,131.35
2002	£223,817,897.96	£23,009,670.92
2003	£258,761,572.65	£26,501,389.09
2004	£186,871,695.27	£62,774,522.74
2005	£86,051,407.11	£12,104,560.69
2006	£166,341,895.76	£26,318,804.78
2007	£35,604,475.38	£4,803,426.44
2008	£138,941,124.37	£50,678,937.04
2009	£76,386,152.00	£37,711,378.61

Notes To Table

1. The figures show commitments made by Letter of Offer and are drawn from three rounds of European Funding programmes in Northern Ireland, 1994-99, 2000-2006 and 2007-2013.
2. For 1998 and 1999 the figures are taken from the allocations made to the programmes in euro for those years converted to sterling at a rate of €1.40 = £1. The figures for North-South projects are extracted from a database of Peace I projects plus the allocations to the Interreg II programme.
3. No commitments are shown for 2000. All commitments for the 1994-99 programmes had to be made by 31 December 1999. The Commission Decisions approving the 2000-2006 programmes were not signed until 2001.
4. For 2000-2006 programmes the figures are extracted from the EU funding database, showing for each year projects where the Letter of Offer acceptance date falls within the year. Because continuing commitment is allowed during the closure period, the years covered include 2001 to 2009.
5. Northern Ireland projects are those where the percentage of Irish Funding is 0%. North-South projects are those where the percentage of Irish funding is greater than zero.
6. For 2007-2013 programmes the figures are extracted from the EU funding database, showing for each year projects where the Letter of Offer acceptance date falls within the year. For the cross-border programmes, PEACE III and Interreg IVA, all projects are regarded as being cross-border projects.

Privately Owned Properties

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current number of privately owned (i) flats/apartments; (ii) detached houses; (iii) semi-detached houses; and (iv) terrace houses. (AQW 1478/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Table 1 shows details of all domestic properties currently in the Valuation List analysed by dwelling type. Table 2 shows similar data, but excludes those properties that are in public authority ownership. However, given that the domestic rating system is primarily concerned with occupation, ownership data is not currently collected for every property and therefore it is not possible to provide the precise information requested. It is possible, nevertheless, to identify the bulk of properties that are in public ownership and by deduction the approximate number of privately owned properties, analysed by dwelling type, albeit that the final numbers will be marginally overstated.

TABLE 1:

TOTAL DOMESTIC PROPERTIES IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND VALUATION LIST

Detached	266,058
Semi-Detached	182,679
Terrace	222,491
Flat/Apartment	73,405

Total	744,633
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TABLE 2

TOTAL DOMESTIC PROPERTIES IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND VALUATION LIST, EXCLUDING THOSE IN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Detached	264,593
Semi-Detached	163,645
Terrace	159,846
Flat/Apartment	42,858
Total	630,942

External Consultants: DFP Guidance

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's guidance on the use of external consultants. (AQW 1521/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP has produced comprehensive guidance for departments on the use of external consultants. This guidance follows the principles set out in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in Northern Ireland.

Both the guidance on the use of external consultants, issued as Finance Director Letter FD(DFP) 04/09, and MPMNI are available from the publications section of the Accountability and Accountancy Services Division (AASD) website www.aasdni.gov.uk.

General Register Office

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to ensure that the backlog of work is cleared in the General Register Office for registration of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions; and that staff are available to answer telephone calls without undue delay. (AQW 1527/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The registration of births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and adoptions in Northern Ireland is in practice a partnership between the General Register Office (GRO) and the 26 District Councils. The actual registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships is carried out in the 26 District Registration Offices while adoptions, re-registrations, corrections and recorded name changes are carried out in GRO.

The majority of cases referred to GRO are processed within fifteen days (97% in 2008 and 99% in the period January to September 2009). On occasion, a particular case may take longer. In all instances GRO seeks to complete the process as quickly as possible and to ensure that telephone calls are answered as soon as possible in busy periods.

Varney II Report

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking to implement the recommendations of the Varney II Report, 'The Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland'. (AQW 1547/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The second Varney Review contained a wide range of recommendations. The previous Finance Minister circulated Sir David's second report to my Executive colleagues, asking each Minister to consider the recommendations relevant to their department and implement these, if appropriate. The key recommendations relevant to my Department focused on public sector pay policy and procurement policy to assist Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs).

As you will be aware I have taken a robust approach to public sector pay policy and will continue to do so.

In terms of procurement policy there are a number of initiatives underway in Northern Ireland to assist SMEs. This includes regular engagement with key stakeholders; standardisation of pre-qualification questions; roll out of eSourcing NI (an electronic procurement system); and the implementation of the Construction Industry Forum's Procurement Task Group Report. All these actions will combine to assist our SMEs in bidding for, or benefitting from, public sector construction contracts.

Bain Report

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Bain report on the location of public sector jobs will be considered by the Executive. (AQW 1586/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Agendas for Executive meetings are agreed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, taking account of proposals made by Ministers. I have provided a paper on the location of public sector jobs to the Executive and I am keen to have a discussion on the matter at the earliest opportunity.

Flooding Incident Line

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm the location of the call centre for handling Flooding Incident Line calls. (AQW 1594/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: *The location of the two contact centres used to deliver the Flooding Incident Line are:*

Causeway Exchange	Orchard House
1-7 Bedford Street	40 Foyle Street
Belfast BT2 7EG	Londonderry BT48 6AT

Varney II Report

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current status of the Varney II Report – “The Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland” in policy-making. (AQW 1596/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The second Varney Review contained a range of economic policy recommendations, impacting on most Northern Ireland Executive departments. That is why the previous Finance Minister circulated the second Varney Review report to Executive colleagues, asking them to consider the recommendations relevant to their department and implement these, if appropriate.

I note that the recommendations in the recently published Independent review of Economic Policy (IREP) and Sir David's second report are broadly consistent. There are, however, differences of emphasis and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons why the Enterprise Minister, Arlene Foster, has initiated a 6 week consultation period on the IREP report.

Sudden Cardiac Death

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many children and young people have died as a result of Sudden Cardiac Death in each Health and Social Care Trust area in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2009. (AQW 1696/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Cause of death statistics are classified by the International Classification of Diseases. There was one registered sudden cardiac death¹ of a person aged under 25 in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in 2007. There have been no such deaths registered of persons aged under 25 during 2008 or the first half of 2009.

¹International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code I46.1

External Consultants: DFP Guidance

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if the appointment of consultants by Departments is subject to Government tendering protocols. (AQW 1749/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP has produced comprehensive guidance for departments on the use of external consultants. This guidance follows the principles set out in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in Northern Ireland.

Both the guidance on the use of external consultants, issued as Finance Director Letter FD(DFP) 04/09, and MPMNI are available from the publications section of the Accountability and Accountancy Services Division (AASD) website www.aasdni.gov.uk.

Reform of Local Government

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department has anticipated the Department of the Environment figures on what rates existing councils will be expected to levy following their amalgamation into the new 11 council model; and to provide details of the estimated figures. (AQW 1788/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Officials from my Department have been liaising closely with counterparts in the Department of the Environment on this issue.

Although some analysis has also been carried out internally within DFP, this does not provide a realistic view of what ratepayers in each of the existing councils will be expected to pay following the amalgamation into the new 11 council model.

There are a number of factors that need to be decided before ratepayer impact can be gauged, including the arrangements for the funding of functions transferring from central government to the new local authorities, the impact of this transfer of functions on the regional rate, the redistribution of general grant, final council boundaries, the effect of the next non domestic revaluation exercise and last but not least the timing and extent of any efficiency savings that will result from the reorganisation. All these matters will have to be taken into account in considering the final impact on rate bills.

This whole process is about delivering efficient local government and recent press speculation that it will lead to rate increases of over 20% in some areas is absurd and mischievous. I can therefore reassure ratepayers that this is about delivering value for money and the Executive will not preside over a local government reform process that would lead to rate increases of this scale.

Flood Incident Line

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel where Flood Incident Line staff are based. (AQW 1793/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: *The Flooding Incident Line staff are based in two contact centre sites:*

Causeway Exchange	Orchard House
1-7 Bedford Street	40 Foyle Street
Belfast BT2 7EG	Londonderry BT48 6AT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Acute Hospital in Enniskillen

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent to date on external consultants for the new acute hospital in Enniskillen; and for an estimate of the final overall cost. (AQW 1053/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): From 1 April 2004 a total of £5.8million has been spent by the Western HSC Trust on a range of services including Design fees, Legal, Financial, Facilities Management, Specialist Technical Design, Health Planning, Capacity Planning, Government Actuary, Equipment and Equality Adviser.

It is expected that a further £800,000 will be spent between now and the opening of the New Hospital, in 2012.

Cost of Legal Advice by HSC Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of legal advice in each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last financial year. (AQW 1147/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The costs to the Health and Social Care Trusts for legal advice in 2008-09 are set out in the table below:

HSC Trust	2008-09
Belfast HSC Trust	£575,000
Northern HSC Trust	£620,000
Southern HSC Trust	£491,150
South Eastern HSC Trust	£685,683
Western HSC Trust	£621,332

Health Service Staff

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the turnover of staff in the Health Service in the last financial year. (AQW 1178/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Staff turnover is defined as the number of leavers from HSC organisations plus those moving between HSC organisations, expressed as a percentage of the average staff in post 2008/09. This is based on headcount of staff.

PERCENTAGE TURNOVER OF STAFF IN HSC ORGANISATIONS

2008/09	8.0%
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Source: Human Resource Management System

Notes:

Doctors in training have been excluded from the calculation due to the planned rotation of these staff between organisations during training.

The turnover calculations exclude bank staff and those with a whole-time equivalent of less than or equal to 0.03.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulance hours will be replaced by rapid response vehicles in the Craigavon ambulance station area. (AQW 1197/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Craigavon, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service plans to replace 2,711 emergency ambulance hours with 11,680 paramedic rapid response hours during the current comprehensive spending review period, giving a net increase of 8,969 paramedic rapid response hours. This reprofiling of emergency response cover will result in more paramedics on the ground delivering life-saving emergency care to those who need it.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nursing vacancies there are in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1199/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest information centrally available is provided in the table below.

The 212 (198.1 WTE) qualified nursing vacancies represent a vacancy rate of 1.3% (or 1.4% based on WTE).

NURSING VACANCIES BY TRUST AS AT 31ST MARCH 2009

Trust	Qualified Nursing 1 Staff Vacancies 2	
	Headcount	WTE 3
Belfast HSC Trust	93	90.7
Northern HSC Trust	33	29.5
South Eastern HSC Trust	11	9.4
Southern HSC Trust	36	31.5
Western HSC Trust	39	37.0
Total	212	198.1

Source: Health & Social Care Vacancy Survey at 31 March 2009

Notes:

1. Qualified Nursing includes Midwifery
2. A vacancy is defined as a post which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
3. WTE = whole-time equivalent.

Nurses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses are currently employed in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1200/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

Nurses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses were employed in each Health and Social Care Trust in the last financial year. (AQW 1201/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

Doctors' Posts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many doctors' posts are currently vacant in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1202/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The latest centrally available information is provided in the table below.

The 139 (137.1 WTE) medical staff vacancies represent a vacancy rate of 3.6% (or 3.8% based on WTE).

MEDICAL1 STAFF VACANCIES2 IN HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUSTS AS AT 31ST MARCH 2009

HSC Trust	Headcount	WTE3
Belfast	51	50.2
Northern	4	3.5
South Eastern	1	1.0
Southern	27	26.4
Western	56	56.0
TOTAL	139	137.1

Source: Health & Social Care Vacancy Survey at 31st March 2009

Notes:

4. Medical staff vacancies include consultant, registrar, associate specialist, staff grade, house officer, medical officer and hospital practitioner posts.
5. A vacancy is defined as a post which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
6. WTE = whole-time equivalent.

Private Counsellors/Psychotherapists

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of private counsellors or psychotherapists used by the Health Service in each Health and Social Care Trust area .
(AQW 1204/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Three (0.63 whole-time equivalent) private psychotherapists are used in the South Eastern Trust and 2 (0.16 whole-time equivalent) are used in the Western Trust. The other Trusts do not use any private sector counsellors or psychotherapists.

Counselling Services

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients currently awaiting counselling services following a referral from their GP (i) in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) broken down by age group (a) under 18; (b) 18-25; (c) 26-35; (d) 36-50; (e) 51-65; and (f) over 65.
(AQW 1205/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Reciprocal Health Agreement

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the implications for residents of Northern Ireland from the decision by the UK Government to terminate the Reciprocal Health Agreement with the Isle of Man from April next year.
(AQW 1212/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware that the Department of Health in England have decided to terminate the UK-wide reciprocal health agreement with the Isle of Man in April 2010 on the basis that it represents poor value for money for the tax-payer. It is my view that the ending of the agreement will have limited impact on Northern Ireland residents. Those who will be affected, primarily tourists to the Isle of Man, will, as is the procedure in any other non-EU country, be able to cover their healthcare costs while on the island through the prior purchase of travel insurance.

Ambulance Services: Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how ambulance cover in the Newtownards area will be affected by the proposal to reconfigure the provision of ambulance services.

(AQW 1213/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has no plans to change ambulance cover in the Newtownards area. However, NIAS does plan to introduce additional paramedic rapid response hours at Bangor Ambulance Station which will be dynamically deployed to provide additional cover throughout the North Down and Ards area.

Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Framework

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding is available for the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Framework.

(AQW 1214/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The delivery of the Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing is supported in the current budget (2008-09 to 2010-11) by £12million invested in cardiovascular services, £14million in stroke services, and £11million to expand renal capacity, as well as other service development funding for elective care, specialist drugs, acute services, and long-term conditions.

Number of People Registered as Blind

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been registered as blind in the age groups (i) 18 and under; (ii) 19-30; (iii) 31-50; and (iv) 50 and over, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1215/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people registered as blind is not collected centrally, but is recorded by each Health & Social Care. The information provided by the five HSC Trusts is detailed in the table below.

NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO BECAME REGISTERED AS BLIND IN EACH OF THE LAST 3 YEARS BY AGE GROUP (2006 - 2009) ¹

Age Group	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Under 18	8	8	6
Aged 19 - 30	14	9	8
Aged 31 - 50	33	26	24
Aged 50 & over	253	247	273
Northern Ireland	308	290	311

¹ A year refers to the period 1st April to 31st March.

Action for Blind People

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the Action for Blind People survey which states that two thirds of blind people face discrimination when seeking employment, what help does his Department offer to blind and partially sighted people.

(AQW 1216/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People with visual impairment, including those who are blind and partially sighted, receive a comprehensive assessment of their needs. This assessment, which is undertaken by a multidisciplinary team, focuses on the social, emotional, and practical needs of people who have been diagnosed as blind or partially sighted. Service users are signposted to other organisations and agencies, who can provide support in areas such as training and employment.

My Department is represented on the inter-departmental, inter-agency Vision Strategy Implementation (Northern Ireland) Group to implement the UK Vision Strategy in Northern Ireland. One of its key priorities is to maximise employment for blind and partially sighted people. In addition, my Department is developing a Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy which is expected to be issued for consultation in early 2010. The Strategy will complement existing strategies and partnerships and aim to improve the health and well being of all people including those with sensory disabilities in Northern Ireland. Blind and partially sighted people will be engaged during this process.

Dystonia

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8613/09 and AQW 8590/09, (i) if he is aware of the condition 'dystonia'; and (ii) when he expects figures relating to the condition to become available. (AQW 1217/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware of the neurological condition Dystonia. There were 176 admissions to Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland during 2007/08, which is the latest year for which information is available, where Dystonia was recorded as the primary diagnosis.

Day Care Staff

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed in day care settings in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1223/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below in respect of all HSC staff employed in statutory facilities.

CURRENT STAFF EMPLOYED IN DAY CARE SETTINGS¹ IN HSC TRUSTS

HSC Trust	Headcount	WTE ²
Belfast	1,045	843.1
Northern	703	313.3
South Eastern	398	293.8
Southern	342	240.4
Western	395	326.3

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

- 1 Day care settings include day centres, adult centres, special schools and resource centres that do not provide 24 hour care.
- 2 WTE= whole-time equivalent

Day Care Staff

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number sick days taken by staff employed in day care settings in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each quarter of 2008/09. (AQW 1224/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information relating to sickness absence levels in HSC Trusts is published bi-annually on the Departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm. The information is presented across terms and conditions groups rather than specific to particular settings.

Day Care Staff

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people with a learning disability in each Health and Social Care Trust area were unable to attend day-care because of staff being absent on sick leave during the past twelve months; and (ii) how many of these people were offered alternative services. (AQW 1225/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within the Belfast, Northern and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts no clients were unable to attend day care due to staff being on sick leave.

Within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust 128 clients were unable to attend Day Care because of staff sick leave over the past 12 months, however 108 of these received an alternative service. In most instances clients missed only one or two days.

In the Western Health and Social Care Trust one client's access to day care has been affected by staff sickness, and an alternative service was not available for a 6 day period.

HR Costs: DHSSPS

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by (i) his Department; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) Health Trusts, in running their Human Resources/Personnel sections, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1234/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

IT Costs: DHSSPS

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by (i) his Department; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) Health Trusts, in running their Information Technology sections, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1235/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Equality Unit Costs: DHSSPS

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by (i) his Department; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) Health Trusts, in running their Equality units, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1236/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Internal Audit Costs: DHSSPS

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by (i) his Department; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) Health Trusts, in running their Internal Audit sections, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1237/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Records Management Costs: DHSSPS

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by (i) his Department; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) Health Trusts, in running their Records Management sections, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1238/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Funding for Blind and Partially Sighted People

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any funding is available to help blind and partially sighted people who live below the poverty line. (AQW 1241/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Where a patient with a visual impairment declares that they have financial pressures, the Health and Social Care Trusts make referrals, as appropriate, to the Social Security Agency, Citizens Advice Bureau, Independent Advice Centres, or to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Trust staff actively encourage, signpost, and support service users with a visual impairment to apply for benefits or to confirm that they are in receipt of all the benefits to which they may be entitled.

Ambulance Specification

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the full specification of an operating ambulance. (AQW 1249/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Specifications for Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) A&E ambulances and rapid response vehicles may be found on the NIAS website at the following address: http://www.niamb.co.uk/docs/our_services_rapid_response.html

Rapid Response Vehicle Specification

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the full specification of an operating rapid response vehicle. (AQW 1250/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Specifications for Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) A&E ambulances and rapid response vehicles may be found on the NIAS website at the following address: http://www.niamb.co.uk/docs/our_services_rapid_response.html

Ambulances

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances are currently in use across all Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 1251/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not deploy A&E ambulances and rapid response vehicles on the basis of Health and Social Care Trusts. Emergency response resources are deployed using a dynamic tactical deployment plan, based on historical patterns of demand, to ensure the nearest resource is sent to an incident.

NIAS's fleet currently consists of 132 A&E ambulances and 11 rapid response vehicles. However, the number of A&E ambulance crews and solo paramedics on duty at any one time varies depending on the predicted level of demand.

Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many rapid response vehicles are currently in use across all Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 1252/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not deploy A&E ambulances and rapid response vehicles on the basis of Health and Social Care Trusts. Emergency response resources are deployed using a dynamic tactical deployment plan, based on historical patterns of demand, to ensure the nearest resource is sent to an incident.

NIAS's fleet currently consists of 132 A&E ambulances and 11 rapid response vehicles. However, the number of A&E ambulance crews and solo paramedics on duty at any one time varies depending on the predicted level of demand.

Ambulance/Rapid Response Vehicle

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the procedures that can be carried out from an ambulance but not from a rapid response vehicle; and (ii) the equipment carried by an ambulance but not by a rapid response vehicle. (AQW 1253/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answers I gave on 16 October 2009 to AQWs 1148/10 and 1149/10.

Cardiac Surgery

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the cancellation of contracts for cardiac surgery outside Northern Ireland will have on waiting lists and those awaiting urgent surgery. (AQW 1264/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have assured my Department that the temporary suspension on the use of independent sector providers for cardiac surgery will have no impact on urgent inpatient surgery.

The requirement placed on Trusts to achieve the waiting time targets in respect of outpatient, inpatient and day case treatment remains unchanged. Those waiting time targets are that from April 2009, no patient should wait longer than 9 weeks for a first outpatient appointment, 9 weeks for a diagnostic test and 13 weeks for inpatient or daycase treatment.

Leasing an Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation Therapy Machine

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 535/10, whether he will consider temporarily leasing an Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation therapy machine following the recent upsurge in swine flu. (AQW 1278/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Although there are currently no ECMO beds in Northern Ireland, arrangements exist to transfer patients to these facilities if a clinical recommendation is made. Provision of an ECMO service requires not only an ECMO machine, but staff who have had months, if not years of training and experience in providing this service. There are therefore no plans to temporarily lease ECMO equipment as it would be inappropriate to introduce an entirely new treatment at this time, due to the significant staff training requirements for such a specialised treatment.

Neurological Services: Causeway Hospital

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for the future of neurological services at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine. (AQW 1283/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Currently the Northern Trust has one neurologist, providing a service at Antrim Area Hospital.

The neurology service to Causeway is provided at present by two visiting neurologists from the Belfast Trust, this facilitates 6 neurology clinics to be held each month at the Causeway Hospital.

The Northern Trust continues to work with the Health and Social Care Board to assess demand and the allocation of resources for services, including neurology, and how these services should be delivered.

Northern Ireland Attention Deficit Disorder Support Centre

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he has taken to ensure payment is made to Northern Ireland -Attention Deficit Disorder Support Centre for services provided to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1289/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is for the Northern Ireland - Attention Deficit Disorder Support Centre to promote its services to Health and Social Care Trusts and enter into formal contracts with them for the delivery of its services. I understand that talks are ongoing between the Belfast Trust and NI-ADD.

Services for People affected by ADHD

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what measures the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will take to provide alternative services for children, adults and families of those people affected by ADHD, if NI-ADD is forced to withdraw its service; and (ii) if the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust guarantee that any proposed alternative will be to the same standard as that provided by NI-ADD. (AQW 1290/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Statutory services for younger children with ADHD are provided by community paediatric clinics and for older children by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. These services are subject to normal governance arrangements.

NI-ADD

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures will be taken to provide alternative services in the South Eastern and Northern Trust areas if NI-ADD is unable to provide the contracted service due to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's non-payment. (AQW 1291/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Statutory services for younger children with ADHD are provided by community paediatric clinics and for older children by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

24-hour Urgent Care Treatment: Tyrone County Hospital

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the 24-hour urgent care treatment will remain sustainable if night time radiography services are withdrawn from Tyrone County Hospital. (AQW 1297/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that, following the cessation of acute medical services in March 2009 at Tyrone County Hospital, the demand for out of hours radiology services has been low. The Trust is currently reviewing the radiology service at the hospital.

The Trust has also advised that any change to the radiology service will not impact on patient safety or outcomes. The Urgent Care and Treatment Centre will continue to function as a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

Night Time Provision of Radiography Services: Tyrone County Hospital

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans, immediate or in the short or long term, to withdraw night time provision of radiography services at the Tyrone County Hospital. (AQW 1298/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that, following the cessation of acute medical services in March 2009 at Tyrone County Hospital, the demand for out of hours radiology services has been low. The Trust is currently reviewing the radiology service at the hospital.

The Trust has also advised that any change to the radiology service will not impact on patient safety or outcomes. The Urgent Care and Treatment Centre will continue to function as a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse: Recommendations

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what engagement has taken place between his Department and authorities in the Republic of Ireland in relation to (i) the findings; and (ii) the recommendations of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report). (AQW 1308/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There has been considerable ongoing engagement at official level as part of discussions within the North South Ministerial Council arrangements to consider a range of issues which relate to child protection including the Republic of Ireland Government's response to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report).

Under North South Ministerial Council arrangements, officials North and South are considering reciprocal arrangements regarding vetting and barring and sharing information between jurisdictions.

I have also raised specific concerns with the Republic of Ireland Minister regarding safeguarding issues relevant to children in Northern Ireland arising out of the Ryan Report.

Subsequently, I have also been in contact with the Republic of Ireland Government regarding recommendations within their response to the Ryan Report highlighting their intention to bring forward legislation on information sharing and whether this will include sharing such information with relevant agencies in Northern Ireland.

Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to investigating the role of (i) public bodies and agencies; and (ii) other bodies in Northern Ireland in the abuse documented by the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report). (AQW 1309/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have been considering the issues highlighted by the Ryan Report regarding services for which my Department has policy responsibility. The Ryan Commission also covered agencies and services which fall within the policy remit of both the Department for Education and the NIO. The Executive as a whole would need to consider any proposal to establish such an inquiry here due to the cross cutting nature of such a proposal. I have asked other Ministers, particularly for Education and within the NIO for their views.

Different circumstances have existed here over many years compared to those within the RoI, including the different relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the State. For those services which I have direct responsibility for I am also taking account of the different regulatory framework which exists in Northern Ireland for the protection of children and how this has been strengthened over the last 20-30 years in particular. It is important that, in the event of such an inquiry here, that information gathered should be shared with the Police so that they can discharge their responsibilities. This also ensures that information can be accessed as part of vetting checks should individuals, who have been identified as posing a risk to children by an inquiry, seek to gain employment or volunteer in areas which would give them access to children.

Press Offices/Communication Units

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent (i) by his Department; (ii) by Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) by Health Trusts, in running their press offices/communication units, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1311/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent (i) by his Department; (ii) by Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) by Health Trusts, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1312/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Outpatient Clinics

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many outpatient clinics were cancelled in the last financial year. (AQW 1320/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on outpatient cancellations is collected on an appointment, not clinic, basis.

Physiotherapy Appointments: Waiting Times

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average waiting time for non-emergency physiotherapy appointments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1321/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the average waiting time for non-emergency physiotherapy appointments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is not available.

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who made the decision to stop accepting referrals to the M.E. clinic at Belfast City Hospital. (AQW 1323/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision to stop accepting referrals was taken by the Belfast Trust.

Specialist ME Facilities

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all Health Service specialist M.E. facilities. (AQW 1324/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 1059/10 on the 15 October 2009

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people diagnosed with M.E. are currently waiting to see a consultant. (AQW 1325/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people diagnosed with M.E. who are currently waiting to see a consultant is not available.

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for people diagnosed with M.E. to see a consultant. (AQW 1326/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the average waiting time for people diagnosed with M.E. to see a consultant is not available.

Occupational Therapist Posts

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many occupational therapist posts are funded by his Department. (AQW 1327/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not fund posts.

Doctors' Uniforms

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent by each Health and Social Care Trust as a result of the proposal to provide hospital doctors with uniforms. (AQW 1332/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No money has been spent by Health and Social Care Trusts as a result of a proposal to provide hospital doctors with uniforms.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DHSSPS

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion within his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long he anticipates it will last. (AQW 1341/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not intend to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion at present but is keeping the situation under review.

Epstein-Barr Virus-Associated HLH and X-linked Lymphoproliferative Syndrome

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been diagnosed with (i) Epstein-Barr virus-associated HLH; and (ii) X-linked Lymphoproliferative Syndrome, in the last three years. (AQW 1347/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of children who have been diagnosed with (i) Epstein-Barr virus-associated HLH; and (ii) X-linked Lymphoproliferative Syndrome is not available.

Fire Service Emergency Response Vehicles

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of Fire Service emergency response vehicles in operation; (ii) the mileage covered by these vehicles on official duties; and (iii) the mileage recorded in the log books for personal use, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1364/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service have 96 emergency response vehicles, which are used for official business only. The provision of individual mileage breakdowns for each vehicle could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

ME

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it would cost his Department to send all 7000 people diagnosed with M.E. to the UK mainland for treatment. (AQW 1368/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Over the last five years only two patients have been referred to the UK mainland for treatment. Given this limited base it would not be meaningful to estimate an accurate total cost for sending all patients diagnosed with ME to the UK mainland.

ME

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many M.E. patients have been referred to the UK mainland for specialist treatment in each of the last five years; and (ii) what was the cost of these referrals. (AQW 1370/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 2 patients were referred to the UK mainland for treatment of M.E. in the last five years.

The total cost of these referrals amounted to £3,753.

ME

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the training and instruction students at Queen's University Medical School receive in diagnosing and treating M.E. (AQW 1371/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Medical undergraduate students are taught about ME as part of the components of a range of clinical modules in years 3 – 5 of their education.

ME

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to help doctors and therapists develop the specialist knowledge required to diagnose and treat patients with M.E. (AQW 1372/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: ME is covered during years 3–5 of the medical undergraduate degree at QUB. Training is included in the Royal College of General Practitioners curriculum for GP training.

Specialist knowledge may be gained by attendance at annual conferences or in-house profession-specific training provided by each Trust.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the agencies referred to, and included in, the formulation of the Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan. (AQW 1373/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Public consultation on the ASD Strategic Action Plan ran from September to December 2008. Over 450 consultation responses were received. Officials also met face to face with a range of stakeholders, including individuals affected by ASD, Government Departments, and voluntary and community organisations.

A comprehensive list of organisations involved or referred to is available in the ASD Strategic Action Plan Consultation Response Document available on the DHSSPS website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/consultations/previous_consultations.htm

ME

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the M.E. clinic in Belfast City Hospital, for each of the last three years. (AQW 1378/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The full cost of providing the ME clinic is not available. Belfast Trust has advised that the clinic at Belfast City Hospital was being provided on a voluntary basis by a consultant with a special interest in ME.

Diabetes

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently registered as diabetic in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 1380/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, the total number of GP-registered patients aged 17 and over with diabetes mellitus is recorded. Table 1 shows the total number of people on the QOF diabetes register by Health and Social Care Trust, as at 31 March 2009.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PATIENTS ON DIABETES REGISTER (AGED 17 AND OVER)

Health and Social Care Trust ¹	Number of patients on Diabetes Register (aged 17 and over)
Belfast	15,073
South Eastern	11,665
Northern	15,954
Southern	11,574
Western	10,800
Northern Ireland	65,066

Source: Payment Calculation and Analysis System (PCAS) at 31 March 2009.

- 1 The Diabetes Register does not include patients' home address so patients have been assigned to Trust areas on the basis of the location of the GP practice at which they are registered rather than the patients' area of residence.

Obesity

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if his Department recognises obesity as a major health issue; and (ii) what his Department is doing to address the needs of obese patients. (AQW 1389/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has recognised obesity as a major issue and has allocated additional resources for the implementation of Fit Futures. The GMS contract also provides for the early detection and follow-up of patients with a BMI of over 30. The Department is also currently leading on the development of a cross-departmental Obesity Prevention Strategic Framework which will build on the recommendations contained within Fit Futures.

Obesity

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there is no dedicated obesity service, given that the impact of obesity on life expectancy is comparable to that of smoking, hypertension and high cholesterol. (AQW 1390/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At present the Health and Social Care Board does not commission a comprehensive bariatric surgical service in Northern Ireland. However, the Regional Medical Services Group (RMSG) has been considering whether a dedicated bariatric service, including surgery, should be established. On RMSG's recommendation, the Board has agreed to fund and carry out a limited pilot through which bariatric surgery for up to 150 suitable patients will be made available. The pilot is open for referrals from May to December 2009.

The Department is also leading on the development of a cross-departmental Obesity Prevention Strategic Framework which will set out a range of short, medium and long term outcomes to prevent obesity across the life course.

Forster Green Hospital

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there are limits on the number of agency staff at Forster Green Hospital. (AQW 1414/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Trust has assured me that there are no prescribed limits on the number of agency staff at Forster Green Hospital. Whilst the trust, like other trusts, is currently operating a range of workforce controls as part of its programme of efficiency savings, it will ensure that safe staffing levels are maintained in all wards, including at Forster Green Hospital.

Pigs' Blood

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what information his Department holds on the health risks of spreading material containing pigs' blood onto land. (AQW 1436/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department does not hold information on this matter.

Joint Carers Review

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Joint Carers Review between his Department and the Department for Social Development will be published. (AQW 1440/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am currently considering the Review of Support Provision for Carers draft report and will publish it shortly.

Sewerage Systems in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Premises

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who has financial responsibility for the upgrade of the sewerage systems that serve Belfast Health and Social Care Trust premises. (AQW 1442/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The financial responsibility for the upgrade of the sewerage systems servicing Belfast Health and Social Care Trust premises rests with Northern Ireland Water.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Recruitment

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give to nursing students about future employment, following the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust statement that it will not be recruiting any more staff. (AQW 1445/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast HSC Trust has not made a statement that it will not be recruiting any more staff.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Staffing Levels

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in the light of Belfast Health and Social Care Trust stating that it intends to lay off agency staff, stop using bank staff, and stop overtime, what actions he intends to take to ensure that front-line services will not suffer because of inadequate staffing levels. (AQW 1450/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Trust have assured me that there are no prescribed limits on the number of agency staff, use of bank staff or the stoppage of overtime within their Trust. Whilst the trust, like other trusts, is currently operating a range of workforce controls as part of its programme of efficiency savings, it is committed to providing safe and effective care to all patients, ensuring that safe staffing levels are maintained in all wards. Where there are staff shortages, the Trust will seek to provide sufficient staffing levels to safely manage and maintain the full complement of patients on the ward.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Staff Cuts

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the staff cut-backs being made at management level in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to ensure that low-paid workers do not suffer disproportionate cuts. (AQW 1451/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the Review of Public Administration all Health and Social Care Organisations are required to contribute towards achieving £53m savings by improving and streamlining their management structures. The Belfast HSC Trust has already delivered considerable savings under this initiative. Under the Trust's plans for delivering efficiency savings over the next three years they will focus on absence management, vacancy controls and the skill mix of staff at all levels. The review of the skill mix will be subject to detailed equality screening under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, if it was known that a saving of £25m was required this year, why the £4million spent on cosmetic works on maternity units in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust was not re-profiled and spent on staffing. (AQW 1452/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I approved an investment of £4m for urgent works to sustain services and address issues of infection control and patient safety at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. The investment has also been utilised to develop some additional capacity to meet a significant increase in the numbers of births since 2006.

I can assure you that the £4m spent by the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust was in respect of necessary maintenance works and not cosmetic works and was spent over two years in 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Advertising and Publicity: DHSSPS Expenditure

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent by his Department on advertising and publicity, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1454/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is shown in the table.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY: ADVERTISING AND PUBLICITY EXPENDITURE 2004-2009

2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
£485,591	£479,990	£425,611	£270,583	£189,332

Northern News Leaflet

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it costs to print, publish and distribute the 'Northern News' leaflet. (AQW 1455/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cost to print, publish and distribute Northern News, the staff newspaper of the Northern Trust, is £1,845 per issue. The leaflet is produced six times each year and 10,000 copies are distributed. Each copy therefore costs 18p to produce.

Outpatient Clinics

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many people failed to attend outpatient clinics, in the last financial year. (AQW 1457/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to Oral AQ 191/10 on 12 October 2009.

Musgrave Park Hospital Neurology Unit

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the delay in completion of the new neurology unit at Musgrave Park Hospital. (AQW 1463/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Previously approved plans for an interim unit at Musgrave Park Hospital were delayed by a review of services and capital priorities and by mergers of trusts following the Review of Public Administration.

I can confirm that funding has been identified for the project and remains available. My Department is considering urgently a business case for a permanent Neurology Unit on the Musgrave Park Hospital site and I remain committed to the project.

Musgrave Park Hospital Neurology Unit

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the funding for the new neurology unit at Musgrave Park is still available; and, if not, to where it has been directed. (AQW 1464/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Previously approved plans for an interim unit at Musgrave Park Hospital were delayed by a review of services and capital priorities and by mergers of trusts following the Review of Public Administration.

I can confirm that funding has been identified for the project and remains available. My Department is considering urgently a business case for a permanent Neurology Unit on the Musgrave Park Hospital site and I remain committed to the project.

Musgrave Park Hospital Neurology Unit

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that the planned transfer of the neurology unit from Forster Green Hospital to Musgrave Park Hospital will go ahead. (AQW 1465/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Previously approved plans for an interim unit at Musgrave Park Hospital were delayed by a review of services and capital priorities and by mergers of trusts following the Review of Public Administration.

I can confirm that funding has been identified for the project and remains available. My Department is considering urgently a business case for a permanent Neurology Unit on the Musgrave Park Hospital site and I remain committed to the project.

NI Fire and Rescue Service

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of cars used by officers of the NI Fire and Rescue Service to attend call outs; and (ii) how many of these cars are fitted with high visibility markings. (AQW 1475/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: NIFRS has 96 emergency response vehicles which are used by flexi duty officers to respond to emergency incidents. These are all white and are equipped with removable blue flashing roof beacons and highly audible whelp wailer systems to alert other road users when the vehicle is responding to an emergency incident. Recent additions to the fleet are also equipped with flashing headlights and blue flashing grill lights.

Musgrave Park Hospital Neurology Unit

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he remains committed to the new build neurology unit at Musgrave Park Hospital; and, if so, when he expects the construction to begin and the unit to be completed. (AQW 1492/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Previously approved plans for an interim unit at Musgrave Park Hospital were delayed by a review of services and capital priorities and by mergers of trusts following the Review of Public Administration.

I can confirm that funding has been identified for the project and remains available. My Department is considering urgently a business case for a permanent Neurology Unit on the Musgrave Park Hospital site and I remain committed to the project.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support is available for people diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families in the Derry area, particularly for adults affected by the condition. (AQW 1493/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has commissioned a range of voluntary organisations to provide services for both adults and children diagnosed with Autism. These include Autism Initiatives, Autism NI and the Cedar Foundation.

The services commissioned include support and social training; daily living skills training; provision of support groups, and a transition service to assist young people move from secondary education to further/higher education, employment/vocational training and into community services.

In addition the Trust works in partnership with other agencies such as the National Autistic Society and PEAT.

Use of Hire Cars by Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any Health and Social Care Trusts currently use hire cars for staff use. (AQW 1568/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are two paediatric Occupational Therapists at Oakwood Special School. However, the service is currently operating at a reduced level due to a member of staff working reduced hours. Normal service provision will resume with effect from December 2007. There are no plans to extend this service at the School.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why he agreed a second set of efficiency proposals from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust without the knowledge of the Health Committee. (AQW 1606/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not agreed a second set of efficiency proposals from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust.

Business Services Organisation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to provide an update on the creation of the Business Services Organisation (BSO); (ii) to detail the locations the BSO currently occupies in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT) area; (iii) to detail the locations the BSO will occupy in the SHSCT area after its proposed re-organisation; and (iv) if an equality impact assessment has been carried out on the proposed locations of the BSO. (AQW 1772/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Business Services Organisation (BSO) was established on 1 April 2009 to provide a broad range of regional business support functions and specialist professional services to the whole of the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

The BSO has completed all appointments to its Board which has met monthly since April 2009. Appointments to the BSO Senior Management team positions have also been completed. The BSO has agreed a Service Delivery Plan with the Department.

The locations that the BSO currently occupies in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area are:

- Internal Audit staff – centre of Armagh City;
- Procurement staff – Pinewood House on St Luke's site, Armagh; and
- Finance, Probity and IT staff – Tower Hill site, Armagh.

I have noted the BSO's draft proposals contained in a consultation paper, on the realignment and location of legacy Board functions including those for the Southern sector and agreed that the BSO can proceed to consult on these.

I have been advised that, during the preparation of these proposals, the BSO carried out detailed screening based on the information held in respect of the section 75 categories. The BSO has concluded, based on the information gathered, that there is no significant adverse impact on the basis of the section 75 groups and as such the organisation does not believe there is a need to carry out, publish and consult on a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Staff Changing Facilities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in each Health and Social Care Trust in providing adequate changing facilities for staff. (AQW 1797/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In February 2008 I announced that my department had issued a Dress Code Policy and Recommendations on Staff Changing.

A baseline review of changing facilities was undertaken at this time and indicated that there was already changing accommodation provided in most of the existing Acute Trust Facilities although in some areas additional capacity was required.

This is being addressed by each Trust on a staged implementation basis within their capital development plans and is planned into all major refurbishment schemes. All new Healthcare Facilities have full provision of changing facilities

Business Services Organisation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the creation of the Business Services Organisation, to detail (i) how many jobs are being displaced or relocated, by legacy area; (ii) which area of the four legacy Boards will have the most displaced staff; (iii) how many jobs are being displaced or relocated out of the Southern area, by grade; and (iv) how many jobs are being relocated into the Southern area, by grade. (AQW 1815/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The BSO has recently submitted to the Department a draft consultation paper on the proposed realignment and location of those legacy Board functions which became part of its organisation on 1 April 2009. I have now agreed that the BSO can proceed to consult on the proposals outlined in this paper. I will consider BSO's proposals on the way forward in relation to each function following the completion of this consultation process.

Agency Nurses

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has undertaken any review of the costs to the Health Service of hiring agency nurses; and, if so, what conclusions were reached. (AQW 1816/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of an ongoing programme of Value for Money audits, I have commissioned a review of the Use of Temporary Staff in the HSC to be undertaken during 2009/10.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

William Street, Lurgan (A76) Level Crossing Study

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to give details of (i) the economic factors; and (ii) the environmental factors, applied in the assessment and economic appraisal of all the options in the solution to the William Street, Lurgan (A76) Level Crossing study carried out by his Department in September 2007.

(AQW 1192/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has advised that options to address the issue of the railway crossing at William Street, Lurgan are considered in The Craigavon Urban Area Local Transportation Study, Technical Note 10: William Street Level Crossing, Lurgan, which was published in 2007. Scheme appraisals such as this consider a wide range of factors in detail, including, for example, issues related to the environment, safety, economy, integration and accessibility.

A copy of this report can be made available on request.

A8 Project Proposals

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many landowners, impacted by the A8 project proposals, have been contacted by his Department.

(AQW 1207/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its consultants have carried out extensive public consultation on the A8 scheme. This has included:

- over 250 people attending a public information event, held at the beginning of the study, in May 2008;
- over 350 people attending a public exhibition at the end of the Stage 1 "preferred corridors" assessment, in November 2008;
- over 590 people attending the preferred route announcement exhibition in August 2009. This exhibition presented the preferred route and invited comments from the public; and
- in the lead up to the preferred route announcement, over 160 potentially affected landowners were directly contacted in relation to the scheme.

At present, the preferred route impacts on 99 landowners and in September this year Roads Service's consultants began the process of re-contacting those affected by the scheme. Consultants are presently undertaking a second round of individual one-to-one consultations and it is anticipated that these consultations will be completed by the end of the year.

A8 Project

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if his Department has estimated how many landowners will be impacted by the A8 project; and (ii) if any estimate has been done to determine how much vesting will cost the Department.

(AQW 1208/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, at present, there are 99 landowners who will be impacted by the preferred route announced for the A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme. However, this number may change as a result of any alterations to the alignment during the scheme design process.

In relation to the estimated cost of vesting the land in question, the land and compensation costs, provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel's, Land and Property Service in May 2009, are in the region of £8 million.

Road and Footpath Schemes: Lisburn

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any road and footpath schemes planned for the Warren Gardens and Old Warren areas of Lisburn, over the next five years.

(AQW 1261/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Road and Footpath Schemes: Lisburn

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any road and footpath schemes planned for the Ballymacash; and Ballymacoss areas of Lisburn, over the next five years. (AQW 1262/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Craigtantlet Hills Roundabout

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposals for a roundabout system in the Craigtantlet Hills area of North Down. (AQW 1335/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that following the assessment of various options, it has identified a preferred layout for a potential scheme to improve safety and the flow of traffic in the Craigtantlet Hills area.

I can advise that design issues are presently being considered and it is estimated that this scheme is likely to cost in the region of £2 million. The inclusion of a scheme, for the Craigtantlet Hills area, in a future works programme would be subject to the various competing priorities, as well as the availability of the necessary land and finance and is unlikely to be considered for programming before 2012.

Roads: Upper Bann

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all (i) unadopted roads; (ii) roads that have been adopted in the last six months; and (iii) roads that are likely to be adopted within the next six months, in the Upper Bann constituency. (AQW 1349/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The table below lists those roads in the Upper Bann constituency, which are subject to Private Streets Order Legislation, that remain unadopted by my Department's Roads Service:-

Unadopted Roads in the Upper Bann Constituency	
9 Lower Quilly Road, Dromore	Opposite 7&8 Annesborough Industrial Estate, Lurgan
Quillyburn Manor, Dromore	Development at Bowen's Lane, Lurgan
Quillyburn Lane, Dromore	Boconnell Lodge, Lurgan
Old Railway View, Dromore	Development at Ashgrove (Stage 1), Lurgan
Bishopshill, Dromore	Dwelling at Gilford Road, Lurgan
Milebush Manor Dromore	Beechfield Manor, Lurgan
Jubilee Road, Dromore	Carrickvale Manor, Lurgan
Cambric Court, Dromore	Lake Street townhouse, Lurgan
The Demesne, Ballymacormick Road, Dromore	Development at 31-35 Lough Road, Lurgan
Princess Gate, Dromore	Development at Halfpenny Valley, Lurgan

Unadopted Roads in the Upper Bann Constituency	
Beech Grove, Dromore	Selshion Hall, Portadown
Barban Mews, Dromore	Carnreagh, Drumnagoon Road, Portadown
Laurel Mews, Dromore	Mahon Industrial Estate, Portadown
Wallace Court, Dromore	Lynedale Manor, Portadown
Kinallen Manor, Kinallen	Kernan Hill, Portadown
Mayfield, Kinallen	Rose Cottages, Portadown
Old School Court, Kinallen	Obins Street Flats, Portadown
Ashbridge Manor, Kinallen	Timnakeel Manor, Moy Road, Portadown
Kane Terrace, Kinallen	Ballyhannon Lodge, Portadown
Rockvale, Tullynisky Road, Kinallen	Breagh Lodge, Gilford Road, Portadown
65 Tulliniaskey Road, Waringsford	Chasewood, Long Lane, Portadown
Bann View Mews, Banbridge	Grace Manor, Mahon Road, Portadown
Bannview Road, Banbridge	Ashgrove Manor, Ashgrove Road, Portadown
Single Dwelling at Fort Street, Banbridge	13 Seagoe Road, Portadown
26 Old Newry Road, Banbridge	Willow Drive, Mahon Road, Portadown
Thorn Heights, Banbridge	Bocombra Manor, Old Lurgan Road, Portadown
Rathview, Banbridge	Lisnisky Lane, Portadown
Gowan Meadows, Banbridge	Mahon Court, Mahon Road, Portadown
Gowanvale, Banbridge	Breagh Road, Portadown
Windy Ridge, Banbridge	Orchard Meadows, Loughgall Road, Portadown
Limewood, Banbridge	Development at Armagh Road, Portadown
Moorlands, Castlewellan Road, Banbridge	Loughgall Road Roundabout, Portadown
Oak Grove, Banbridge	Ashgrove Road, Portadown
Site at Peggy Loaning, Banbridge	Proposed development at Loughgall Road, Portadown
Brookdale, Banbridge	Keelmount Grange, Moy Road, Portadown
Riverview Court, Banbridge	Obin Street, Corcrair, Portadown
Iveagh Manor, Banbridge	Selshion Grove, Dungannon Road, Portadown
Rowan Vale, Banbridge	College Manor, Portadown
Burn Brae , Banbridge	Bridgeford Meadows, Tandragee Road, Portadown
Oakdale/Oaklodge, Banbridge	Ballyoran Manor, Drumcree Road, Portadown
Old Bleach Green, Banbridge	Ashford, Drumcree Road, Portadown
Summerhill, Banbridge	Ballynacor Meadows, Carbet Road, Portadown
Site at 12 Townsend Street, Banbridge	Ballynacor Manor, Carbet Road, Portadown
80 Stramore Road, Gilford	Keelmount Mews, Scotch Street, Portadown
Chestnut Brae, Gilford	Drumnagoon Road (new verge), Portadown
Hunter's Hill, Gilford	Development at Obin Street, Portadown
Gilford Mill, Gilford	Lisnisky Lodge, Old Lurgan Road, Portadown
Roes Hill, Laurencetown	Housing Development at Ripley Terrace, Portadown
Linen Fields, Lenaderg	Development at Drumnagoon Road, Portadown

Unadopted Roads in the Upper Bann Constituency	
Cloverdale, Blackscull	Bannfoot Village Development, Portadown
Clover Valley, Blackscull	Filling Station at 134 Drumnagoon Road, Portadown
Riverside, Annaclone	Development at Tandragee Road, Portadown
Monteith Road, Annaclone	Development at Killycomaine, Portadown
Drumlin Grange, Moneyslane	Development at Old Lurgan Road/Lisnisky Lane, Portadown
Old Railway Close, Leitrim	Development at Cloncarrish Road, Birches
Carn Valley, Rathfriland	Coney Island View, Maghery
Fox Ridge, Rathfriland	Bluestone Hall, Craigavon
Ashleigh Meadows, Rathfriland	Ardowen Regeneration, Craigavon
Rathfriland Street, Loughbrickland	Balteagh Road, Craigavon
Scarvagh Locks, Gilford Road, Scarva	Oakfields, Moyravery, West Road, Craigavon
Development at Millennium Way, Lurgan	Lismore Manor, Craigavon
The Hollows, Lurgan	Limefield Rise, Craigavon
Silverwood Court, Lurgan	Hillcrest Manor, Craigavon
Castle Lane Mews, Lurgan	Mandeville Manor, Craigavon
Off Rectory Park, Lurgan	Carrigat Manor, Craigavon
Kiln Road, Lurgan	Larkfield Meadows, Craigavon
Shimna Walk/Pollock Mews, Lurgan	Cedar Wood, Calverstown Road, Bleary, Craigavon
Birchdale Manor, Lurgan	Ballinamoney Heights, Craigavon
Knockarammer Meadows, Lurgan	Old Fort Lodge, Craigavon
Development at Raughlan Meadows, Lurgan	Carrigat Crescent, Craigavon
Union Court, Lurgan	The Beeches, Ballymacbreadan Road, Magheralin
Kiln Lodge, Lurgan	Broomhill, Ballymacbreadan Road, Magheralin
Silverwood Leaves, Lurgan	Ballynadrone Meadows, Steps Road, Magheralin
Kilvergan Heights, Lurgan	Broomhill Grove, Magheralin
Bann Close, Lurgan	McMullen Glass Systems (R.T.L.), Magheralin
Lilburn Hall, Lurgan	Bracken Ridge, Ballymacbreadan Road, Magheralin
Beechfield Avenue, Lurgan	Development at Lurgan Road, Magheralin
Kings Park Mews, Lurgan	Cambrai Park, The Granary, Waringstown
Hillcrest, Lurgan	The Lawns, Clare Road, Waringstown
Glen Park, Lurgan	Moss View, Moss Road, Waringstown
Shannaghmore Park, Lurgan	Waringhall Place, Waringstown
Deerings Wood, Lurgan	Brae Manor, Dunkirk Road, Waringstown
Toberhewny Hall, Lurgan	Monree Hill, Donaghcloney
Willow Common, Lurgan	Winona Manor, Donaghcloney
River Glade Manor, Lurgan	Development at Moygannon Road, Donaghcloney
Belvedere, Lurgan	Monree Court, Donaghcloney
Gilpen Mews, Lurgan	Laurelvale Grove, Donaghcloney
Derryloiste Meadows, Lurgan	Strawhill, Donaghcloney, Donaghcloney

Unadopted Roads in the Upper Bann Constituency	
Toberhewny Lodge, Lurgan	Lagan View Manor, Donaghcloney
Charles Baron Lodge, Lurgan	Proposed Parking Victor Place, Dollingstown
Foxes Glen, Lurgan	Taughrane Lodge, Belfast Road, Dollingstown
Woodvale Gate, Lurgan	Development at Belfast Road/Dromore Road, Dollingstown
River Glade Court, Lurgan	Development at Derrymore Road, Aghagallon
James Street/Market Street, Lurgan	

The further table below lists those roads that have been adopted in the last six months:-

Roads adopted in the last six months in the Upper Bann Constituency	
Quillyburn Manor, Dromore	Grace Manor, Portadown
Mill Brae, Waringsford	Breagh Drive, Portadown
Primrose Way, Dromore	Windsor Avenue, Lurgan
Roughfort, Banbridge	Ripley Terrace, Portadown
Drumbroneth Road, Dromore	Silverwood Business, Lurgan
Villawood Road, Dromore	Carnreagh, Craigavon
Ballygowan Park, Banbridge	Baird Avenue, Donaghcloney
Rosconnor Terrace, Rathfriland	Prospect Way, Lurgan
Kinnalen Court, Kinallen	Beaumont Square, Lurgan
28 Monteith Road, Annaclone	Drumgor Heights, Craigavon
Meadowbrook, Craigavon	Beechfield Manor, Lurgan
Drumellan, Craigavon	Raughlan Meadows, Derrymacash
Monbrief Road, Craigavon	Bluestone Business Park, Craigavon
Bowens Lane, Lurgan	

Roads that are likely to be adopted in the next 6 months, subject to the developers addressing the necessary outstanding issues within suitable timescales, are listed in the table below.

Roads likely to be adopted in the next six months in the Upper Bann Constituency	
9 Lower Quilly Road, Dromore	Birchdale Manor, Lurgan
Quillyburn Lane, Dromore	Knockarammer Meadows, Lurgan
Old Railway View, Dromore	Raughlan Meadows, Lurgan
Princess Gate, Dromore	Union Court, Lurgan
Laurel Mews, Dromore	Kilvergan Heights, Lurgan
Wallace Court, Dromore	Beechfield Avenue, Lurgan
Mayfield, Kinallen	Silverwood Green, Lurgan
Old School Court, Kinallen	Kings Park Mews, Lurgan
Ashbridge Manor, Kinallen	Toberhewny Hall, Lurgan
Bann View Mews, Banbridge	Gilpens Mews, Lurgan
26 Old Newry Road, Banbridge	Foxes Hill, Lurgan
Thorn Heights, Banbridge	James Street/Mark Street, Lurgan
Rathview, Banbridge	Development at Halfpenny Valley, Lurgan

Roads likely to be adopted in the next six months in the Upper Bann Constituency	
Gowan Meadows, Banbridge	Ballyhannon Lodge, Portadown
Windy Ridge, Banbridge	Grace Manor, Portadown
Limewood, Banbridge	Development at Seagoe Road, Portadown
Oak Grove, Banbridge	Bocombra Manor, Portadown
Iveagh Manor, Banbridge	Lisnisky Mews, Portadown
Rowan Vale, Banbridge	Loughgall Road Roundabout, Portadown
Burn Brae, Banbridge	Bridgeford Meadows, Portadown
Site at 12 Townsend Street, Banbridge	Ballynacor Meadows, Portadown
80 Stramore Road, Gilford	Filling Station, Dungannon Road, Portadown
Clover Valley, Blackscull	Coney Island View, Birches
Riverside, Annaclone	Bluestone Hall, Craigavon
Drumlin Grange, Moneyslane	Limefield Rise, Craigavon
Old Railway Close, Leitrim	Hillcrest Manor, Craigavon
Carn Valley, Rathfriland	Carrigat Manor, Craigavon
Fox Ridge, Rathfriland	Bracken Ridge, Magheralin
Ashleigh Meadows, Rathfriland	Cambrai Park, The Granary, Waringstown
Scarvagh Locks, Gilford Road, Scarva	The Lawns, Waringstown
Development at Millennium Way, Lurgan	Windsor Lodge, Waringstown
Silverwood Court, Lurgan	Strawhill, Donaghcloney
Castle Lane Mews, Lurgan	

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: DRD

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if he intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across his Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long it will last. (AQW 1396/10)

Minister for Regional Development: DRD has no plans, at present, to impose a general moratorium on recruitment and promotion. However, Roads Service has recently introduced a temporary embargo on the recruitment of industrial staff. This will be regularly reviewed taking account of budgetary constraints and business need.

Staffing levels throughout the Department are continuously monitored and indications are that, as with the NI Civil Service overall, vacancy levels are reducing. Due to a range of factors relating to organisational change and the management of efficiencies, active steps to fill all vacancies are not being taken.

Steria and Crystal Alliance

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the £70m paid to Steria and Crystal Alliance has been recovered following the termination of their contract with NI Water. (AQW 1405/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the contract with Steria was awarded in 2006 and was expected to last seven years at a total cost of £70 million. At the end of December 2008, when notice of intention to terminate the contract was issued, NIW had paid approximately £27 million under the contract. NIW is currently negotiating with Steria on the commercial terms of the termination.

DRD Feasibility Studies

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline for each of the past five years (i) what transport related projects have required a feasibility study; (ii) why each was required; (iii) who carried out the study; (iv) what consultations took place before appointments were made; and (v) the total cost of each feasibility study. (AQW 1409/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The table below sets out the information requested. It covers transport related feasibility studies carried out by the Department, including Roads Service, and NITHC/Translink. All appointments were subject to the normal tendering process.

Transportation Related Project (i)	Financial Year(s)	Reason For Feasibility Study (ii)	Who carried out study (iii)	Consultations before appointment was made (iv)	Estimated Cost of study (£) (v)
York Street Interchange	2004/05 and 2005/06	To assess feasibility of a range of short and long term options to improve strategic road links between Westlink, M2 and M3.	Scott/ Wilson Consultants	None.	65,597
Belfast City Centre Bus Operations Study	2005/06	To investigate the impact on bus operations and patronage of the traffic management proposals for Belfast City Centre in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) 2015, paying particular attention to the efficiency and achievability of bus routes, stops and layover arrangements in developing a preferred scheme that is supportive of the public realm improvements programmed for the area.	Arups	None.	216,000
Building of a new Newry Railway Station	2005/06	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Kirk McClure Morton, Robinson & McIlwaine, WDR & RT Taggart, WH Stephens, Hastings & Baird	None.	270,000
NIR Stations – Disability Discrimination Act Compliance	2005/06	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Ove Arup	None.	219,000
Infrastructure New Train Vision	2005/06	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Ove Arup	None.	22,700
Train Protection Warning System (TPWS)	2005/06	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	AD Little, Tritec Signalling Ltd, Halcrow	None.	178,450
Belfast to Dublin Upgrade Feasibility	2005/06	Required to inform the joint NIR/IE Cross Border Development Strategy.	Booz Allen Hamilton	None.	13,500
Belfast Quality Bus Corridor Masterplan Study	2005/06	To produce a best practice guide and to develop appropriate initiatives to be applied to a flagship corridor.	Faber Maunsell/ AECOM	None.	105,000
York Road Running Shed Extension	2006/07	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Mott MacDonald	None.	21,860
Ballynahinch Bus Station	2006/07	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Kennedy Fitzgerald	None.	33,000
Corporate Asset Management System	2006/07	To look at possible solutions for this IT project.	Atkins	None.	85,283

Transportation Related Project (i)	Financial Year(s)	Reason For Feasibility Study (ii)	Who carried out study (iii)	Consultations before appointment was made (iv)	Estimated Cost of study (£) (v)
Closure of Brolly & McConaghy's User Worked Crossing	2006/07	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Ferguson McIlveen (Scott Wilson)	None.	3,030
Sea defences on Larne and Derry Line	2006/07	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Scott Wilson	None.	33,000
Sandyknowes Junction	2006/07 and 2007/08	To assess the feasibility of improvements to the strategic link between A8 and the M2.	Amey Consultants	None.	29,977
Railway Level Crossing, William Street, Lurgan	2006/07 and 2007/08	To investigate various engineering solutions to remove the railway level crossing.	WS Atkins Consultants	Representations made by local residents, Lurgan Forward and various Elected Representatives to remove level crossing.	14,000
Hillhead Road, Newry	2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10	To carry out a Option Study following slippage of road adjacent to Dromalane Quarry.	Scott/ Wilson Consultants	Representations made by adjacent landowners, road users and Newry and Mourne Elected Representatives including the local MP.	60,000
In 2008 a Strategic Outline Case was developed to consider the route and technology options for a rapid transit Network for the Belfast Metropolitan Area.	2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09	This was required to evaluate the potential to develop a rapid transit network for the Belfast Metropolitan Area.	Atkins/KPMG consultants	Proposals for rapid transit were included within the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP), Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) and the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS). All of these plans were subject to full public consultation.	415,169
Road Tolling Feasibility Study	2007/08	Requested by Secretary of State under the previous administration.	KPMG	None.	24,900
Finaghy Road North Bridge Replacement	2007/08	To assess options for bridge strengthening and carriageway widening.	Amey Consultants	None.	15,600
Antrim Integrated Transport Centre	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Design 2 Architects, Hastings & Baird, AH Design, Taylor and Boyd, Dillon PM, Glovers	None.	34,500
Track remedial works programme - Ballymena to Derry	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Hyder Consulting, Turner & Townsend	None.	344,500

Transportation Related Project (i)	Financial Year(s)	Reason For Feasibility Study (ii)	Who carried out study (iii)	Consultations before appointment was made (iv)	Estimated Cost of study (£) (v)
Ballymena Permanent Way store and yard	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	W&M Given Architects, VB Evans, Taylor & Boyd	None.	27,000
Meeting House Lane Miniature Stop Lights & Glebe Road Manually Controlled Barrier Upgrade Project	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Mott MacDonald	None.	130,000
Knockmore to Lurgan - Track Renewal (line speed upgrade)	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Hyder Consulting, Tritec Signalling Ltd, Mott MacDonald, Tasque Consultancy Ltd	None.	125,925
Enniskillen Boundary wall, bus Wash & Garage Improvements	2007/08	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	AWA Architects Ltd, Hood McGowan Kirk, Mott MacDonald, AH Design	None.	32,300
A5 Corridor Study	2007/08, 2008/09, and 2009/10	Study to examine the strategic options for the delivery of a potential 88 kilometres improvement to the A5 corridor between Aughnacloy and Londonderry.	Mouchel Consultants	A strong lobby for the scheme emerged from the consultation document "Expanding the Strategic Road Improvement Programme 2015".	41,000
Belfast City Centre Traffic Management Project	2007/08 and 2008/09	To assess feasibility of a range of short and long term options to deliver BMTP proposals for Belfast City Centre.	Arup Consultants	None.	151,000
Lisburn Road and Ormeau Road Bus Priority	2008/09	Required for collation of traffic data to assist appraisal of potential improvements to existing bus priority measures.	Amey Consultants	None.	30,871
Ballymartin Park and Ride	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Bennett Robinson Ltd, Taylor and Boyd, RPP Architects Ltd, Turner & Townsend	None.	54,600
Bus drivers' training facility	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Design 2 Architects	None.	20,300
Lisburn Park and Ride	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	White Young Green, Paul Monaghan Architects, Cyril Sweett Ltd	None.	31,500
Coleraine to Derry Track renewal	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Ove Arup, Furgo BKS, Mott MacDonald, Scott Wilson, Colas Rail	None.	155,600

Transportation Related Project (i)	Financial Year(s)	Reason For Feasibility Study (ii)	Who carried out study (iii)	Consultations before appointment was made (iv)	Estimated Cost of study (£) (v)
Adelaide New Train Maintenance Facility	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Hyder Consulting, Mott MacDonald, Scott Wilson	None.	537,600
Platform Extension Programme	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Atkins	None.	338,300
Proposed new Portadown Railway Station	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Tasque Consultancy Ltd, Taylor and Boyd, RPP Architects Ltd, Nigel Lynch Associates, JCP Consulting Ltd	None.	93,000
Coleraine Fuel Apron	2008/09	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	VB Evans, Faithful & Gould, Williams & Shaw Ltd	None.	8,560
Newry Southern Relief Road	2008/09 and 2009/10	Investigate the viability of a new southern relief road for Newry.	Scott/Wilson Consultants	A strong lobby for the scheme emerged from the consultation document "Expanding the Strategic Road Improvement Programme 2015".	869,000 (Includes cost to complete work this financial year)
Londonderry West Feasibility Study	2008/09 and 2009/10	Investigate the viability of a new A5, A6 and western cross link around the city of Londonderry.	Scott/Wilson Consultants	The "Local Transport Study of Londonderry" included consultation with key stakeholders, which suggested preliminary investigations be undertaken into western by-pass of the city.	114,000 (Includes cost to complete work this financial year)
Incident Support Units (ISU)	2009/10	To assess the feasibility of establishing an ISU service.	WSP Consultants	None.	39,224
Ramp Metering	2009/10	To assess the feasibility of introducing ramp metering along the M1/A12/M2 travel corridor.	WSP Consultants	None.	24,818
Chamber of Commerce House HQ	2009/10	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	WDR & RT Taggart, Turner & Townsend	None.	31,090
Carrickfergus Park and Ride	2009/10	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Design 2 Architects	None.	2,400
York Road Fuel Apron	2009/10	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Atkins, Williams & Shaw, Turner & Townsend, Boyd Partnership	None.	7,800
Building Services Upgrade Programme	2009/10	To develop outline designs for options and to make cost estimations.	Simpson & Crawford Consulting	None.	45,360

Road and Footpath Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what road and footpath schemes are planned over the next three years for the Rathmore area of Bangor. (AQW 1420/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned over the next three years for the Rathmore area of Bangor. (AQW 1422/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

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Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned over the next three years for the Silverstream area of Bangor. (AQW 1423/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Advertising of Public Sector Jobs

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent (i) by his Department; and (ii) by departmental agencies and non-departmental public bodies, on advertising in public sector jobs sections of (a) the Belfast Telegraph; (b) the News Letter; (c) the Irish News; and (d) other newspapers, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1443/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The figures requested are set out in the following tables:

RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING DRD CORE NEWSPAPERS

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Belfast Telegraph	2,548	10,932	Nil	6,445	9,147
News Letter	1,649	5,813	Nil	6,570	6,052
Irish News	1,252	4,420	Nil	4,626	5,054

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Other papers	Nil	11,336	Nil	1,081	10,428

**RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING
DEPT AGENCY - WATER SERVICE
NEWSPAPERS**

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Belfast Telegraph	19,777	29,480	121,156		
News Letter	8,747	11,378	54,085		
Irish News	6,316	7,944	36,562		
Other papers	5,600	12,908	55,733		

**RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING
DEPT AGENCY - ROADS SERVICE
NEWSPAPERS**

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Belfast Telegraph	20,969	28,373	6,715	5,322	24,942
News Letter	13,276	20,719	5,015	5,102	17,188
Irish News	10,526	12,666	3,557	2,565	11,989
Other papers	2,446	14,100	6,503	11,405	18,568

Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Morston Park area of Bangor. (AQW 1448/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Street Lighting Schemes: Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new street lighting schemes are planned for the Moira Drive area of Bangor. (AQW 1449/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

A5 Western Transport Corridor

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development if the four initial routes identified for the A5 Western Transport Corridor were costed, and if so, is the preferred route the cheapest option. (AQW 1468/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that four route options for the A5 Western Transport Corridor were presented at the public consultation events in February 2008. Following the consultation events, four additional route options were developed and costed. Some of these additional route options were hybrids of the route options presented in 2008.

The Preferred Route was selected from the additional route options, and it was not the cheapest option. However, I can advise that, in accordance with established methodologies, economics is only one of the criteria used in determining the best route option. The other criteria are safety, environment, integration and accessibility.

Roadmarking Contracts

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the value of the contracts awarded for road safety white line markings, including motorways and all roads adopted by his Department, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1473/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Roadmarking Contracts for its four Divisions were awarded in 2004 and 2005, for a five year term. Any work carried out over the last three years would have been awarded under these contracts. The estimated value of these contracts ranged between £1.5million and £2.0million per annum.

With regard to white line markings on motorways and the A8 (M), A12, A1 and A101, these are carried out under the two Design Build Finance Operate (DBFO) Contracts awarded in 2006 and 2007. Under these contracts, the Department pays the DBFO Company a single monthly payment for 30 years, which covers the cost of construction, as well as operation and maintenance. It is, therefore, not possible to provide the value of road marking contract, as this amount cannot be separated from the rest of the DBFO contract.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to penalty charge notices issued in Crumlin by National Car Parks (i) how many have been issued since the beginning of the contract; (ii) how many notices were paid in full within 14 days at the £30 rate; (iii) how many were paid after 14 days at the £60 rate; (iv) to detail the total revenue generated; (v) how many were contested; and (vi) how many contested notices were successfully repealed. (AQW 1480/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service became responsible for parking enforcement at the end of October 2006 and NSL Services Group (formerly NCP), is contracted to provide enforcement services.

Unfortunately, the Penalty Charge Notice processing IT system does not hold detailed information on a "per town" basis. However, I can advise that in the period since the commencement of the contract, to 30 September 2009, a total of 54 Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) have been issued in Crumlin. Of these, 40 have been paid, eleven have been cancelled or written off, and three are outstanding.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development why drivers who receive a penalty charge notice have to pay an additional £30 if they fail to pay within 14 days to cover administrative costs, as detailed on his Department's website; and to detail what costs are covered by this additional £30. (AQW 1481/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that the initial penalty charge for a parking contravention is £60, this is set by legislation. However, the legislation also states that the Department must apply a 50% discount if the penalty is paid within the first 14 days. This discount is applied to encourage prompt payment and avoid possible administrative costs.

Administration costs can arise if it is necessary for my officials to obtain details of the registered keeper of a vehicle from the Driver and Vehicle Agency, and subsequently issue a 'Notice to Owner'. It may also be necessary for my officials to deal with written challenges against an issued Penalty Charge Notice.

Bike Rental Scheme

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has considered a Bike Rental Scheme for large towns and cities similar to that introduced in Dublin. (AQW 1510/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of the Bike Scheme recently introduced in Dublin. While no specific consideration has been given to introducing such a scheme in the North, my Department will continue to explore the potential benefits of such schemes, based on the impact and uptake in Dublin and indeed elsewhere, as a means of continuing to promote sustainable travel options locally.

NI Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 506/10, how he plans to reduce the £74,893 of public money spent on taxi hire by NI Railways last year, especially in relation to crew movements. (AQW 1520/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The taxi costs of £74,893 relate to fares for security alerts, line closures, train failures, train cancellations, accidents and passenger transfers. Employee taxi hire costs are also included as taxis are sometimes required to move crews between depots (inter depot working). Inter-Depot working allows for major depots to cover smaller country depots without the requirement for localised overtime.

As far as taxis provided for staff are concerned, I have outlined previously the circumstances under which such provision is made, i.e. repositioning train crews during/after disruption to services. NIR confirm to me that such instances are closely regulated and that taxis are only used when it is the most economically viable solution, i.e. non-use of taxis would result in significant additional overtime costs.

Expenditure on taxis for passengers inconvenienced by security alert incidents/accidents/cancellations on rail services is something that is largely outside NIR control. Again these are subject to regulation and in times when security alerts are infrequent, the necessity to provide such a facility is minimised.

Road Schemes Newtownabbey

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development what road schemes are planned to address traffic issues in the Newtownabbey area. (AQW 1553/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Roads leading to Airports

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development if he would consider giving Roads Service the power to regulate parking on roads leading into airports where untoward car parking occurs. (AQW 1582/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I assume the Member's question relates to problems associated with motorists parking on the verges of Ballyrobin Road, leading to Belfast International Airport.

The issue of motorists parking along the Ballyrobin Road has been an ongoing problem since the Security Control Zones were relaxed in the late 1990s. My Department's Roads Service has provided a number of measures to deter parking on the verges along Ballyrobin Road, including the introduction of waiting restrictions (double yellow lines) and the raising of kerbs to physically prevent any parking on verges. The waiting restrictions cover the Ballyrobin Road from Killead Roundabout to the Airport, but have proven difficult to enforce. The raised kerbing has only been provided along the frontage of the Airport and was only possible to undertake with the support of Northern Ireland Office funding.

During this month (October 2009) Roads Service are carrying out a survey of motorists to determine the reasons why they park on the subject verges. This information will be reported back to Antrim Borough Council's Sub Group, who are considering this issue, and will have a bearing on the Sub Group's consideration on how best to take forward any further measures along Ballyrobin Road.

Public Hire Taxi Ranks

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any plans to increase the number of public hire taxi ranks in Belfast City Centre. (AQW 1603/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, with effect from 17 August 2009, it has introduced legislation to provide 10 new spaces for public hire taxis in Chichester Street. Ongoing works in Glengall Street will also provide additional space for taxis.

Roads Service meets regularly with representatives of the public hire taxi industry to discuss areas of concern, and is currently assessing a number of sites, within the city centre, for possible extension to existing ranks or the provision of new ranks.

Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times his Department has been in contact with the Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels, in each of the last 2 years; and to detail the reasons for this contact. (AQW 1611/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has been in direct contact with the Executive's European Office in Brussels on approximately 8 occasions for meetings. There has also been regular communication by phone and e-mail.

The reasons for this contact include:

- Meetings associated with work to progress the Barroso Taskforce Action Plan;
- "The Introduction to Europe" training course where the offices were used as a base;
- securing assistance in arranging meetings with the Trans European Network Executive Agency (TEN-T EA) which have led to the Department gaining access to continued European funding on roads and rail projects;
- obtaining updates on European policy developments likely to be of interest to the Department; and
- seeking advice and guidance on issues of relevance to the work of my Department.

Half Fare SmartPass

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to encourage the uptake by those eligible for the Half Fare SmartPass. (AQW 1637/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Department continues to encourage people to obtain a half fare Smartpass in a variety of ways. This includes traditional advertising campaigns, stakeholder meetings, direct mailing and Departmental websites. In addition, Translink promotes the Scheme on its website, and in the Travelling with Translink brochure, 12,000 of which are printed and distributed each year. I am pleased to say that a recent study showed that awareness of the Scheme amongst our target audience is good.

Rail Link in Templepatrick

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the costs and benefits of a rail link in Templepatrick. (AQW 1649/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have no current plans to construct a rail link at Templepatrick and the costs and benefits of such a facility have not been appraised.

Translink have however been considering a high quality integrated bus and rail facility to be located at Ballymartin which is close to Templepatrick. If the project proceeds, the first phase will be a bus based Park & Ride facility which would provide between 350 and 400 parking spaces. Planning permission is currently being considered.

Later phases could include a rail facility but because of funding restrictions no firm plans have been developed for this and the costs and benefits have not been assessed.

Greenisland A2 Road Widening Scheme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development when the Roads Service plans to engage with the community and businesses in East Antrim regarding the traffic management scheme for road-works associated with the proposed Greenisland A2 road widening scheme. (AQW 1657/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is currently developing a Temporary Traffic Management Strategy in relation to the proposed A2 Shore Road Greenisland scheme.

This process will include consultations with the businesses community and the Councils representing the area. I expect this process to be progressed over the 2010/2011 period.

Orange Arches

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 695/10, whether the orange arches in (i) Glenavy; (ii) Lisburn; (iii) Hillsborough; (iv) Dromara; (v) Moira; and (vi) Aghalee are recorded by his Department as having met Roads Service regulations regarding safety and insurance. (AQW 1771/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Orange arches erected in Market Square, Lisburn and Main Street, Glenavy, met the necessary safety regulations and insurance requirements. Consents under The Roads (NI) Order 1993 were issued following applications, which included the necessary insurance and structural assessment.

I can further advise that Roads Service does not maintain a central data-base of Orange arches which did not receive formal consent.

Flooding: Lower Ormeau

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development if the pumping station at River Terrace will now be manned 24 hours a day to prevent a recurrence of flooding in the Lower Ormeau area, and to alleviate the stress of residents whose properties are damaged by flooding and sewage overflow on a frequent basis. (AQW 1809/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I met with the residents of the Lower Ormeau area who were affected by the recent flooding and heard their concerns. I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the flooding at River Terrace resulted from intense rainfall over a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately this rainfall corresponded with a high water level in the River Lagan which prevented the operation of the gravity discharge from the pumping station.

The permanent manning of the pumping station is not considered necessary as it is fully automatic and is monitored constantly by a telemetry system which notifies on-call staff of any problems. However, pending the Belfast Sewer Tunnel becoming fully operational, NIW will ensure that staff are present at the pumping station during periods when heavy rainfall is forecast and the River Lagan is at high water level.

Trunk Road Network

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the length of the trunk road network in Co.Fermanagh; and (ii) the percentage of this trunk road network with less than five years left of useful life. (AQW 1810/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that the length of the trunk road network in County Fermanagh is 135.8 km. The percentage of this trunk road network which the Deflectograph machinery would suggest has a residual life of less than five years is 49%.

Belfast Sewer Project

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the exact date on which the Belfast Sewer Project will begin; and (ii) to confirm whether this project will ensure that sewage will no longer overflow into Balfour Avenue, River Terrace and the surrounding Lower Ormeau area. (AQW 1855/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the £160 million Belfast Sewer Project is nearing completion and the transfer of sewage flows from the existing sewerage system to the new infrastructure is planned to commence at the end of November and is expected to be fully operational by December 2009. The new infrastructure is designed for a one in thirty year storm return period and will significantly reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding in the Balfour Avenue, River Terrace and Lower Ormeau areas.

NI Water

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail NI Water's (i) current policy for new connections of water to domestic and business properties; and (ii) current connection charges for a water supply to a single house in the countryside. (AQW 1929/10)

Minister for Regional Development: AQW 1929/10

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it will approve applications for new water connections provided there is adequate water pressure and flow and subject to the customer installing the required plumbing and making payment of the relevant connection charges. The charges for connecting a property to the watermain are detailed in NIW's Scheme of Charges for 2009/10, which is available on its website at www.niwater.com. The cost of a connection will depend on the circumstances of each case, but the charge for a full standard water connection in a public area/roadway is £882. Where a connection is in private lands and the customer can undertake all excavation and reinstatement works at their own expense, the cost of a standard connection is £216.

Floods: Carrington Street and Ravenhill Road

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the exact cause of the recent flooding in Carrington Street and Ravenhill Road. (AQW 1968/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the flooding at Carrington Street and Ravenhill Road, on 9 October 2009, was caused by the inability of the local sewerage system and pumping station to cope with the extreme levels of rainfall that fell within a short period of time.

NIW has also advised of the history of flooding problems affecting this area and of the £170,000 scheme implemented in 2000 to reduce the risk of flooding at Carrington Street. The scheme included the construction of a wastewater pumping station to pump away excess flows from the drainage system during and after rain. Since its commissioning, the pumping station has operated automatically on each occasion that it has rained and the implementation of the scheme appeared to have successfully addressed the problem until a further report of minor external flooding in the area was received in June 2007. On that occasion, and subsequently in August 2008, July 2009 and August 2009 extreme levels of rainfall that fell within a short period of time overwhelmed the local sewerage system and the pumping station was unable to cope with the sheer volumes of water flowing into it.

Prior to the flooding incidents on 12 July and 31 August 2009, NIW had begun a major exercise to remove silt from the sewers in the Lower Ravenhill Road area, the main sewer in Ravenhill Road, from Ormeau Embankment to the Albertbridge Road, and all of the streets leading off this stretch of road, including Carrington Street. The work, which is scheduled for completion by the end of September 2009, should increase the capacity of the sewerage system to cope with the additional flows caused by heavy rainfall.

In addition, the section of the new Belfast Sewers Project which serves the Ravenhill Road on the country side of the Ormeau Embankment is due to be completed by the end of 2009. When operational, it will allow a greater volume of storm water to flow from the combined sewer system upstream of Carrington Street. This in turn will reduce the load on the sewers in and around Carrington Street and should reduce the risk of similar flooding occurring in the future.

NIW has further advised that following the most recent flooding it has revised the operation of the pumping regime in the area. This should increase the flow rate away from Carrington Street and reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding. NIW will continue to monitor the sewers in Carrington Street to ensure they remain clear and free flowing. As a precautionary measure, the pumping station and the sewer in Carrington Street were desilted on 20 and 21 October respectively. Further investigations of the sewer are planned to commence on 22 October. NIW's Director of Operations, David Dangerfield will write to you directly when the outcome is known.

Traffic Calming: Schools

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to increase traffic calming measures outside all schools. (AQO 253/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can assure the Member that the important issue of safer travel to schools, and road safety measures around schools, is fully recognised by my Department, which delivers the Travelwise Safer Routes to Schools initiative to encourage walking, cycling, greater use of public transport and car sharing, instead of the private car, for the school run.

All schools across the North are eligible to apply to participate in the Safer Routes to Schools programme and are prioritised using set criteria. As part of the package of measures, Roads Service provides warning signs with flashing amber lamps, carriageway markings and other road safety engineering measures to highlight the presence of schools to encourage motorists to drive appropriately.

My Department has spent over £2.3 million on the Safer Routes to Schools programme, at 147 schools, between 2004 and 2009.

Public Transport: People with Disabilities

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps his Department is taking to improve access to public transport for people with disabilities. (AQO 254/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department is taking forward improvements to the accessibility of public transport through the Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS). This strategy seeks to address the wide ranging barriers that impede use of the transport system by older people and people with disabilities and is being implemented through a series of action plans which contain measures to eliminate or reduce those barriers.

Public consultation on the most recent draft action plan for the period 2009-2012 has recently been completed and it is anticipated that this will be published towards the end of the year.

A8 Dual Carriageway

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on his Department's plans for the upgrade of the A8. (AQO 255/10)

Minister for Regional Development: On 5 August, I announced the selection of the preferred route, for the 14 kilometre section of the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageway, between Coleman's Corner roundabout and Ballyrickard Road.

The next stage of the project has commenced, which is the detailed development of the preferred route. This work will determine more precisely the amount of land required to construct the dual carriageway and its associated junctions with side roads.

Roads Service anticipates that the necessary Draft Statutory Orders will be published in early/mid 2011, followed by a Public Inquiry later that year.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development when he plans to introduce legislation for the Belfast Rapid Transit System. (AQO 256/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I plan to introduce legislation, which will provide my Department with the necessary powers to implement the Belfast Rapid Transit system, by June 2010, subject to the necessary approvals. I am currently seeking the Executive's approval to proceed to public consultation on the policy proposals.

Gateways to Tomorrow Conference

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the benefits of the recent 'Gateways to Tomorrow Conference: Boston - North West Ireland'. (AQO 257/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Gateways to Tomorrow Conference: Boston – North West Ireland, which I attended on 7-8 October, brought together a wide range of government, business, academic and community leaders from both sides of the Atlantic, with the express purpose of fostering new partnerships between Boston and the North West and attracting investment.

The Conference acknowledged the broader role played by the United States in helping us to sustain peace and economic growth based on equality and fairness. The huge support for the Conference in the States reflected that continuing commitment to mutually beneficial engagement.

Many of those attending from the United States already had strong links in the North West. The Chief Executive of Global medical packaging company, Perfecseal, already has an advanced operational base in Derry. Similarly, the strong delegation from here, which included the Chief Executive of ILEX, and the Chair of Derry Port and Harbour Commissioners, have been dedicated to establishing strong and productive international linkages. The Conference provided an opportunity for them to showcase their experience and achievements and, in doing so, to encourage other participants to forge similar partnerships.

For my part, in two major speeches to the Conference, I told the prestigious and influential audience how the Department for Regional Development was working with the Irish Government to ensure a collaborative approach to the important North West Region. I talked about the development of spatial planning frameworks and the substantial investment already made and planned in our roads, rail, ports and airports to help drive forward regeneration.

My message was loud and clear: - through intensive public investment we are building the necessary infrastructure which allows us to capitalise on our unique location as a transatlantic gateway situated on the edge of Europe. We are building towards economic recovery on this island and the North-West is facing outwards with confidence ready to do business.

From my discussions with those attending the Conference, I know that our message was well received. I have no doubt that, as the global economy recovers in the time ahead, the Conference will have helped to forge new relationships and links which will bear fruit in terms of jobs, new opportunities for investment, partnership and sharing of expertise in the years to come.

A5 Dual Carriageway

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will carry out a review of the proposed A5 route. (AQO 258/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The Preferred Route for the A5 Western Transport Corridor was selected using Roads Service's normal assessment criteria. Public consultation has also been a key element of the process since it commenced.

Consultation with land owners and comments on the detail of the Preferred Route is ongoing and has resulted in Roads Service and their project engineers, Mouchel, reviewing short lengths of the Preferred Route.

An Emerging Specimen Design will be presented to the public in summer 2010. The Statutory Orders will be published in late 2010 and will be examined at a public inquiry in 2011. The Public Inquiry will hear the Department's case, as well as, comments and objections from the public.

I am content that the process is fair and robust and do not propose to carry out a full review of the Preferred Route.

Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 967/10, if he can detail the precise date when the Period 6 figure for 2009/10, detailing the number of passengers using the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise service, will be made available. (AQW 1995/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have indicated that they have received information from Irish Rail. Accordingly I can advise that the total number of cross-border journeys for Period 6 for 2009/10 was 44,253.

Floods: South Belfast

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm whether residents affected by the recent floods in South Belfast (i) were informed of the availability of compensation claim forms; and (ii) if they received advice on the application process for compensation from NI Water. (AQW 2062/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the residents affected by the recent flooding in South Belfast who enquired about compensation were advised that they should contact the Waterline number 08457 440088 to request compensation claim forms and obtain information on the process. Local representatives were also advised of the position regarding compensation when they met with NIW staff.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NI Housing Executive: Travel Costs

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7298/09, to give a breakdown of the £2.46m travel costs of the NI Housing Executive, detailing (i) the mode of transport used; (ii) whether economy, first, or business class; (iii) the destination; and (iv) the reason for the journey. (AQW 335/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): This question refers to the Housing Executive's total budget for Travelling and Subsistence. Please note that the previous figure of £2.461m provided in AQW 7298/09 did not include associated subsistence and Learning & Development related travel and an amendment notice has been sent to Martina Anderson MLA, who tabled the original Question. The revised figure is £3,292,174 as detailed below.

It is not feasible to provide a breakdown of the expenditure in the full manner requested, as individual journey details are not held in the Housing Executive's Finance System. Extracting the information would involve manual examination of some 18,000 travel claims which would incur disproportionate cost.

A general breakdown of the above figure is as follows:

Nature of cost	£
Airfares	71,967
Trains	6,146
Bus/Rail/Taxi Fares	41,130
Car Parking	23,828
Mileage /Car	2,370,580
Secondment/ Relocation Mileage	426,694
Overnight Allowance	39,648
Subsistence	310,732
Other	1,449
Total	3,292,174

Incapacity Benefit Branch

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Incapacity Benefit Branch (IBB); (ii) whether IBB is fit for purpose; and (iii) how often it has attained its Key Performance Indicator targets. (AQW 1125/10)

Minister for Social Development:

- (i) & (ii) Incapacity Benefit Branch is responsible for the administration of Incapacity Benefit, Incapacity Benefit in Youth, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Allowance. The Branch achieved the Incapacity Benefit Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for financial accuracy within the accepted 1% tolerance in the 2007 year and achieved the target in the 2008 year. In 2009 the Branch continues to perform well against the PSA target, however, final figures are not yet available as monitoring for this year is not complete. Following the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance there is no longer a PSA target set for claim clearance times, however, the Branch met the PSA target in the previous 3 years. Incapacity Benefit Branch's performance against the challenging PSA targets demonstrates the Branch's effectiveness and supports the view that it is fit for purpose.
- (iii) The table below shows Incapacity Benefit Branch performance against the Public Service Agreement targets set for accuracy and claims clearance:

FINANCIAL ACCURACY

IB	2006	2007	2008	2009*
Accuracy Target	99%	99%	99%	99%
Achieved	97.7%	98.9%	99.1%	98.6%

*From April 08 – March 09

CLEARANCE TIMES

IB	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/09
Claims Clearance Target	23	22	22
Achieved	22.2	19.8	21.3

*From April 08 – March 09

Operational Matters of the Housing Executive

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 390/10, to clarify her remit in relation to the operational matters of the Housing Executive. (AQW 1294/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive was set up to carry out administrative, commercial, executive or regulatory functions on behalf of the government. It is regarded for policy and administrative purposes as a Non Departmental Public Body and operates at arms length from the Department in order that it can have a greater degree of independence for example in making decisions on grant funding to other bodies. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is legally incorporated with their own legal identity. They employ their own staff and are allocated their own budgets. I am responsible for appointments to the Board and am ultimately answerable for the overall performance of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and their continued existence. The Department is responsible for setting policy and procedure and ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to discharge them. I do not have responsibility for operational decisions within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I do not have responsibility for individual determinations relating to, for example, renovation grants or housing allocations.

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) if she intends to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion across her Department; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long she anticipates it will last. (AQW 1343/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development continues to keep its workforce planning needs under review and has no plans at present for a moratorium on recruitment and promotion.

Housing Executive: Major Improvement Schemes

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development when she expects the 850 major improvement schemes due to be carried out on NI Housing Executive dwellings this year to begin. (AQW 1438/10)

Minister for Social Development: I assume the 850 referred to may be the number of dwellings programmed for improvement. The Housing Executive has advised that in fact 72 Maintenance and Improvement schemes are in their 2009/10 programme. 55 have either started or have an imminent start date. The remaining 17 schemes remain currently programmed to start in this financial year but this is dependant on the availability of funding.

Flights: DSD Expenditure

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has spent on flights (i) for her; and (ii) her senior officials, in each year since 2007. (AQW 1482/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the (i) expenditure on flights for the minister and (ii) the expenditure on flights for the senior officials in Department for Social Development in each year since 2007.

Financial Year	2007/08	2008/09	1 April – 12 October 2009
Minister for Social Development	8431.08	9228.63	1791.12
Senior Staff (Grade 5 and above)	36417.69	46706.66	25981.82

Social Housing: Areas of High Social Need

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to abolish the policy of ring fencing new build social houses in areas of high social need in Derry, north Belfast, and west Belfast. (AQW 1489/10)

Minister for Social Development: In light of the inexorable growth in housing need, the Housing Executive has already taken steps to remove “ring fencing” and distribute the Social Housing Development Programme on the basis of housing stress. This distribution will be proportionate and also weighted to reflect the length of time applicants wait before being rehoused.

Strategic Business Review Team

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount spent by the Strategic Business Review team on (i) wages; (ii) legal services; (iii) consultancy fees; (iv) hospitality; and (v) travel expenses, in the financial year 2008/09. (AQW 1491/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below sets out the amount spent by the Strategic Business Review Team (now Customer First Project) on (i) wages; (ii) legal services; (iii) consultancy fees; (iv) hospitality; and (v) travel expenses, in the financial year 2008/09.

Type of Expenditure	Total Spend in Financial Year 2008/09
Wages	£609,000
Legal Services	Nil
Consultancy Fees	Nil
Hospitality	Nil
Travel Expenses	£3,000

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new heating systems have been installed to replace Economy 7, solid fuel or LPG heating systems, in each year of the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 1502/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of conversions installed since the Warm Homes Scheme commenced in 2001 until March 2009.

Conversion	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	Total
Economy 7 to Gas	174	114	29	28	27	39	50	20	481
Economy 7 to Oil	215	117	55	50	49	31	35	18	570
Solid Fuel to Oil	6	8	11	19	31	40	49	18	182
Solid Fuel to Gas	13	18	55	17	8	13	18	1	143
Total	408	257	150	114	115	123	152	57	1,376

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who applied for insulation measures under the Warm Homes Scheme also qualified for heating assistance but were subsequently turned down because of their existing heating system. (AQW 1504/10)

Minister for Social Development: Applicants for the Warm Homes Scheme, who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit for Warm Homes and are eligible for Warm Homes Plus, have the appropriate measures installed. Applicants are not eligible for Warm Homes Plus if they already have an existing oil or gas heating system.

Since the beginning of the new Warm Homes Scheme, on 1 July 2009, there have been a total of 1,398 applicants for the Warm Homes Scheme who:

- are eligible for Warm Homes; and
- also have a Warm Homes Plus qualifying benefit; but
- are not eligible for Warm Homes Plus because they already have an existing oil/gas heating system.

On-Street Drinking: Warning Notices

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to list all locations where ‘On Street Drinking’ warning notices have been erected; and (ii) if his Department intends to erect more notices in the Upper Falls area. (AQW 1523/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by district councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places. However, the erection of adequate signs notifying the effect of the bye laws is an operational matter for the relevant district council. The information requested may be obtained from Belfast City Council.

Social Housing Allocation

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the 1500 social houses being held by the NI Housing Executive for decanting purposes have been allocated to homeless people since her statement of 15 May 2009. (AQW 1531/10)

Minister for Social Development: At the 30 September 2009 the Housing Executive had 1035 vacant properties of which 161 were for decant purposes. The Housing Executive does not record how many of these have been allocated to homeless people.

On-Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in the Upper Falls area in the last year. (AQW 1534/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by district councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions. The relevant information may be obtained from Belfast City Council.

Employment and Support Allowance Branch

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what training staff in the Employment and Support Allowance Branch are given to allow them to advise customers on contribution based, and income based, Employment and Support Allowance. (AQW 1573/10)

Minister for Social Development: Training began in August 2008 to prepare staff for the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in October 2008 and has continued to date. Training has been developed to reflect the different job roles within the ESA Centre covering both contribution based and income based ESA.

Staff receive up to 36 days formal classroom training on benefit knowledge based on their individual experience and job role. This is supplemented by a period of consolidation on the job. 6,513 training days have been delivered to staff in the ESA Centre from August 2008 to October 2009 (inclusive).

Improvements to Dales Flats in Seymour Hill

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what health and safety improvements are planned for the Dales Flats in Seymour Hill; (ii) for the start and completion date of these improvements; and (iii) to outline the reasons for the delay in these improvements. (AQW 1581/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has developed a three phased programme of works to address health and safety items, which includes the provision of smoke ventilation, landlord lighting and booster pumps. The first two phases should commence this financial year – Phase 1 may commence in December 2009 and last 4 months and Phase 2 in January 2010 for 5 months. Due to the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget, it is unable to confirm details of its programmes beyond 2009/10 and cannot therefore confirm when Phase 3 will commence.

NI Housing Executive Houses: Lisburn and Dromore

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive houses are currently awaiting renovation or modernisation before being allocated to tenants in (i) Lisburn; and (ii) Dromore. (AQW 1585/10)

Minister for Social Development: At the end of September 2009 the position regarding vacant properties awaiting renovation or repair works was as follows:

(I) LISBURN

- 55 properties awaiting completion of Change of Tenancy Repairs.
- 4 properties vacant pending the outcome of an economic appraisal.
- 1 property requires new heating system to be installed before it can be relet.

(II) DROMORE

- 9 properties in Dromore were included in a major improvement scheme which is currently on site. This scheme is due to complete later this financial year.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many home improvement grants are currently suspended by the NI Housing Executive in each Parliamentary constituency. (AQW 1610/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the number of Grants cases cancelled since 15 May 2009 by Council area.

Council	Total
Antrim	1
Ards	4
Armagh	33
Ballymena	1
Ballymoney	1
Banbridge	23
Belfast	44
Carrickfergus	18
Castlereagh	3
Coleraine	1
Cookstown	70
Craigavon	39
Derry	67
Down	0
Dungannon	63
Fermanagh	70
Larne	15
Limavady	21
Lisburn	0
Magherafelt	41
Moyle	0
Newry & Mourne	76
Newtownabbey	23
North Down	6
Omagh	84
Strabane	51
Total	755

Volunteer Development Agency

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development if funding has been allocated by her Department to the Volunteer Development Agency for the merger of volunteer centres. (AQW 1659/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has agreed to fund the Volunteer Development Agency in their work with 11 volunteer centres towards merger and modernisation. These autonomous organisations have decided to come together to pool their resources and reduce duplication of activities.

Social Housing: Ballymena

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what social housing new builds are planned for the Ballymena Council area over the next three years. (AQW 1678/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the Social Housing Development Programme for the Ballymena Borough Council area for 2009/10.

Scheme	Dwellings
St. Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena	47
Garvaghy Avenue Phase 1, Portglenone	13
	60

The Housing Executive is currently formulating the new draft 3 year Social Housing Development Programme for 2010/11 – 2012/13 with a view to publishing it on their website in early 2010.

Newbuild Social Housing: Ballymoney

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what social housing new builds are planned for the Ballymoney Council area over the next three years. (AQW 1679/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is one scheme of five units in the Social Housing Development Programme for the Ballymoney Borough Council area in 2009/10. This scheme is at Garryduff Gardens, Ballymena Road, Ballymoney. The Housing Executive is currently formulating the new draft 3 year Social Housing Development Programme for 2010/11 – 2012/13 with a view to publishing it on their website in early 2010.

Newbuild Social Housing: Moyle

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what social housing new builds are planned for the Moyle Council area over the next three years. (AQW 1680/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is one scheme of seven units in the Social Housing Development Programme for the Moyle District Council area in 2009/10. This scheme is at Ramoan Road, Ballycastle. The Housing Executive is currently formulating the new draft 3 year Social Housing Development Programme for 2010/11 – 2012/13 with a view to publishing it on their website in early 2010.

Renovation Scheme: Rinmore Drive, Creggan

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the renovation scheme for homes in Rinmore Drive, Creggan in Derry. (AQW 1769/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 55 homes in Rinmore that have not yet been renovated by the Housing Executive due to the funding shortfall caused by the collapse of the land and property market.

Given the uncertainty over when the resources may become available to fund the improvement of these remaining homes, my officials have been working closely with the local community to identify other options that may facilitate the completion of this renovation scheme.

The potential for a stock transfer to a local housing association is currently being considered and a report into this has just been received from Savills, a leading Great Britain consultancy firm, which has experience of stock transfers in Great Britain.

Detailed proposals will be put to the residents in the coming weeks and I will be happy to share those with you at that time.

Development of the North-West Quarter of Belfast

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to the Minister's oral answer on 13 October on the sequencing of developments and its effects on the north-west quarter of Belfast, to detail (i) what developers she has met over the past year regarding the development of the north-west quarter; and (ii) on what specific legal advice her Department's policy on the regeneration of Belfast is based. (AQW 1805/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the past year I have met representatives from the Benmore Group to discuss its proposed development at Little Donegall Street/Upper Donegall Street located in the North West Quarter Part 2 area of Belfast City Centre. My Department's legal advice concerns the potential use of the Department's comprehensive development statutory powers in relation to the implementation of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Statement published in 2004 and related supplementary guidance.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Moratorium on Recruitment and Promotion: NI Assembly

Mr C Boylan asked the Assembly Commission (i) if it is intended to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion; and if so (ii) when it will commence; (iii) what, if any, exceptions will be made; and (iv) how long it is anticipated to last. (AQW 1273/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The Assembly Commission has no plans to introduce a moratorium on recruitment and promotion but will continue to monitor expenditure on recruitment and promotion activity.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 30 October 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Press and Public Relations Offices

Mr M Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the number of staff employed by each Department in their press and public relations offices in each of the last ten years; and (ii) for the overall cost in each year. (AQW 370/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of staff employed across the 11 departments in their press and public relations offices. These staff are not just involved in the press office work but provide a range of communication services including media relations, public relations, news releases, advertising, internal communications and web development and management.

The figures are not held centrally but have been provided by each department. Due to management information systems, a number of departments were unable to provide the required information for the 10 years requested. To ensure consistency across the departments, figures have been provided from 2003/04 to 2008/09.

The salary figures provided are approximate and are based on the latest information available within departments.

Year	Number of Staff (11 departments)	Salary Costs
2008/09	112.53 (38.53 admin)	£3,018,015
2007/08	115.19 (44.19 admin)	£3,198,924
2006/07	113.19 (46.19 admin)	£2,802,856
2005/06	108.19 (51.19 admin)	£2,879,399
2004/05	110.19 (52.19 admin)	£3,678,400
2003/04	102.19 (48.19 admin)	£2,631,407

Ryan Report: Findings and Recommendations

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what engagement has taken place between their Department and authorities in the Republic of Ireland in relation to (i) the findings; and (ii) recommendations, of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report). (AQW 1310/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: To date there has not been any engagement by our Department on the Ryan Report. However, we have committed to putting the issue of the Ryan report on the agenda of the next meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People for discussion.

The issue of child protection and the safeguarding of children is a key priority for all of us and an issue which impacts on the work of several departments in the devolved administration, as well as the Northern Ireland Office.

OFMDFM has recently published a major policy statement on Safeguarding Children which has brought together developments underway across the Executive, NIO and Court Service. It has helped us to identify gaps and where further initiatives are required

We share concerns about allegations of abuse against children and want to see full investigations of any specific incidents take place. We would strongly urge if anyone has evidence of abuses committed within this jurisdiction against them, if they have not already done so, to bring it to the attention of the PSNI for investigation.

A2 Broadbridge Dualling Project

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 301/10, for an update on funding from the Integrated Development Fund for the A2 Broadbridge dualling project. (AQW 1479/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The position is unchanged from the answer given to AQW 301/10. DRD, the lead Department for the Broadbridge project, has confirmed that the project commenced on 18 May 2009.

Homosexuality

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it is Executive policy to refer to homosexuality as 'a lifestyle choice'. (AQW 1548/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Executive does not have a policy on this issue.

Bain Report

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Bain report on the location of public sector jobs will be considered by the Executive. (AQW 1587/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Executive Meetings

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Executive meetings, in this calendar year to date, included discussions on the economic downturn. (AQW 1598/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. However, as previously stated in AQO 143/10, issues surrounding the downturn are a standing item on the agenda of Executive meetings. We can therefore assure the Member that up to and following the announcement of its package of economic measures in December 2008, the Executive has given due and continuing priority to the discussion of the economic downturn and of measures to alleviate it.

Complaints Against OFMDFM

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 928/10, (i) to provide a summary of the basis of the five complaints against the Department with the Information Commissioner's Office; and (ii) the anticipated timescale for resolution of these complaints. (AQW 1622/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since we responded to AQW 928/10, one of the five complaints has been resolved informally outside the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI). Indeed, three other Departments had the same complaint closed through informal resolution.

In three of the four outstanding cases, the applicants complained that OFMDFM had incorrectly applied exemptions to support a refusal to disclose information and, in the remaining case, it was alleged that the Department had 'failed to comply with the Act'.

In one of the four cases, the Department refused to disclose information on the basis that it constitutes personal information and, in the three other cases, refused to disclose information on the basis that it relates to the formulation of government policy. An internal departmental review was undertaken in respect of each of the complaints. The outcome of each review was that the Department had correctly applied exemptions, and that the information had been properly withheld.

Of the four cases, one is currently under active examination by the Information Commissioner's Office. Investigation has not yet commenced in respect of the other three. The Information Commissioner's Office has not provided the Department with any indication of when these cases will be opened or concluded.

Community Relations Council Funding

Mr M Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the amount of funding allocated by their Department to the Community Relations Council in each year since devolution was restored. (AQW 1692/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The amount of funding allocated to the Community Relations Council through grant-in-aid by the Community Relations Unit since devolution in May 2007, is as follows:

Financial year	Amount £
2007/08	3,286,782.00
2008/09	3,340,830.00
2009/10	3,547,000.00

Freedom to Practise Religion

Mr D McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they have taken to ensure that all church leaders feel free to practice their religion, without being subjected to opposition or protest. (AQW 1733/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The freedom to practice or manifest one's religious belief is enshrined in Article 9 of the Human Rights Act "Freedom of thought, conscience and religion". It states:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".

In order to raise awareness of these and other rights across the public sector, our department has developed a number of Human Rights publications and has featured these in a number of cross-departmental seminars. This guidance has been targeted primarily at those public servants developing policy or delivering public services to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities under the Human Rights Act. These are available under the Human Rights section of our departmental web-site: <http://www.ofmdfmini.gov.uk/index/equality/human-rights.htm>

Delay to Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when they intend to answer AQW 122/10; (ii) if the delay is acceptable; and (iii) to give reasons for the delay. (AQW 1741/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: AQW 122/10 was answered on 16 October 2009.

Strategic Investment Board: Recruitment

Mr F Molloy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain why there has been a delay in the recruitment of Non-Executive Directors to the Strategic Investment Board; and to indicate when these positions will be filled. (AQO 243/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: This issue has been under active consideration and we have decided to appoint a number of new non-executive directors to the Strategic Investment Board. Details of these appointments will be announced in due course.

Department of Justice: Location

Mr M Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the buildings the Department of Justice will occupy upon its establishment, including their locations. (AQW 2080/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The personnel of the Department of Justice would initially consist of the majority of staff currently working for the NIO and NI Court Service, and it is expected that they would be accommodated in buildings which they now occupy.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Deer Farms

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many deer farms there are in Northern Ireland and in which counties. (AQW 1617/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): In 2008, 15 farms were recorded in the June Agricultural and Horticultural Survey as having 10 or more deer. Of these, 8 farms were in County Down, the remaining 7 were distributed across other Counties.

NI Executive's European Office in Brussels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many times her Department has been in contact with the NI Executive's European Office in Brussels in the past two years; and to detail the reasons for this contact. (AQW 1620/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Executive's Brussels office is an important resource offering key support on European matters. My Department has posted a member of staff to the office who is dedicated to Agri-food, Veterinary, Fisheries and Rural Development issues. There has been daily contact between DARD staff based in the north of Ireland and the DARD staff member in Brussels over the last two years on issues ranging right across my Department's responsibilities.

I have commissioned a review of my Department's relationship with the EU institutions in order to further improve our ability to influence and input to European decisions and policy making,

Duplication of Funding: DARD Programmes

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she will ensure that there is no duplication of funding for projects from the Rural Development Programme and the Rural Childcare Programme. (AQW 1663/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My officials will ensure that information on Rural Childcare Programme projects is passed to the Local Action Groups assessing childcare project applications submitted under Axis 3 on the Rural Development Programme.

Additionally, DARD programmes adhere to strict audit guidelines and the payment of financial support is conditional, among other requirements, on receipt of original invoices to support claims. Any potential duplicate funding should be identified at that stage.

Rural Development Programme Funding

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she has taken to ensure that delays in funding issues with the present Rural Development Programme are not repeated with future European Funding. (AQW 1664/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Firstly, I would like to make clear that many of the measures within the present Rural Development Fund have been open and issuing letters of offer for funding for some time. For example, the Processing and Marketing Scheme opened in December last year and has so far issued letters of offer to the value of just over £5m. However, other measures, for example, Axis 3, which requires a bottom up, partnership approach to decision making, has taken a little longer to get off the ground but many Local Action Groups have been issuing letters of offer since the summer.

In relation to future European funding, an independent mid-term evaluation of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 will be undertaken in 2010. One of the issues the evaluators will consider is the effectiveness and efficiency of the Programme's implementation, including identifying successes and what could have been done better and recommending best practice for use in future Programmes. In addition to this, an independent ex-post evaluation of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 will be completed following the end of the Programme period. The evaluation will look at all aspects of the Programme's administration and will make recommendations on how any problems can be addressed for future Programmes. I will be examining carefully the outcomes of both evaluations to ensure that appropriate action is taken to continue to improve the delivery of future programmes.

Rural Development Programme Funding

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if displacement in relation to Rural Development Programme funding is limited to each individual Council cluster, with no effect on neighbouring clusters or the rest of Northern Ireland as a whole. (AQW 1665/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Displacement must be taken within the context of the specific project and the defined need of that project and therefore is different for every one. My department has issued operating rules and additional guidance on the completion of the economic appraisal within which the displacement issue is addressed. Additional mentoring has also been provided to lead council staff.

Rural Development Programme: Cost of Training Councillors

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of training councillors for Rural Development Programme initiatives, broken down by (i) building hire; (ii) mileage; (iii) time; (iv) hotels; and (v) hospitality expenses, for all councillors, civil servants and training staff. (AQW 1669/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date the cost to my Department for the training of Councillors for Rural Development Programme initiatives is broken down as follows:

(i) Building Hire	£105.00
(ii) Mileage	0
(iii) time	Councillors time is not paid by DARD
(iv) hotels	0
(v) hospitality	£384.58

Dog Licences

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people currently hold dog licences. (AQW 1676/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Dog licences are issued by the local Councils. The information provided to my Department includes the number of dog licences issued, but not the number of people who currently hold dog licences.

In 2008, 114,208 dog licences were issued here.

Local Action Groups: Funding

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what will happen to contracts set up through the present Local Action Groups funding after the full implementation of RPA. (AQW 1693/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Firstly can I clarify that contracts to deliver the Rural Development Programme Axis 3/4 were entered into with Joint Council Committee's who in turn put in place agreements with Local Action Groups. My officials have started work to explore the options for post RPA implementation of the programme, and have had informal discussions with those councils who represent local government on the transition committees. Recommendations upon which I will make my decision will be presented to me shortly. I would want as far as possible to maintain the rationale on which funds have been allocated and the continuity of the Programme.

Animal Welfare Act

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the projected costs related to the implementation of the proposed Animal Welfare Act. (AQW 1715/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 1972 provides the PSNI with enforcement powers in respect of cruelty and unnecessary suffering offences against any animal. The 1972 Act and the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2000 as amended, also provide a wide range of powers to my Department in respect of welfare offences pertaining to farmed animals. The current powers will be carried forward in the proposed new Welfare of Animals Bill and will have no additional financial implications.

The Welfare of Animals Bill will also provide new powers which will be mainly in respect of non-farmed animals.

Where any new licensing and registration enabling powers are being taken within the Bill, in line with Government policy the implementation of these should be done on a full cost recovery basis.

There are likely to be some additional costs associated with enforcement of the new powers but these are not expected to be significant. My Department will be meeting with officials from the PSNI, the Department of the Environment's Local Government Policy Division and Local Council representative bodies over the coming weeks to discuss the future implementation and enforcement of the new Welfare of Animals Bill provisions

Single Farm Payments

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many Single Farm Payment complaints have been received by her Department; and (ii) how many claimants have been fined for (a) over claiming; and (b) under claiming, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1767/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development introduced a department wide Complaints Procedure on 1 June 2006 to deal with customer complaints about quality of service. Up to the present a total of 25 complaints have been received in regard to Single Farm Payment Branch.

Adjustments and exclusions are applied under the Single Farm Payment Scheme in respect of an under declaration or an over declaration of land.

(a) In the 2006 scheme year, a total of 326 farm businesses had a reduced payment or an exclusion applied in respect of an over declaration of land. In the 2007 scheme year, the total was 426 and for the 2008 scheme year the total was 218.

(b) In the 2006 scheme year, a total of 158 farm businesses had a reduced payment or an exclusion applied in respect of an under declaration of land. In the 2007 scheme year the total was 128 and for the 2008 scheme year the total was 101.

Drainage Study: Dromore Road, Banbridge

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to give reasons for the delay in River Service's drainage study for the Dromore Road area of Banbridge. (AQW 1794/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As a result of the extreme flooding of August 2008 DARD Rivers Agency has seen a significant increase in workload in relation to immediate post flood investigations and information gathering, as well as detailed flood risk alleviation studies for the more complex cases. Whilst I fully understand and sympathise with the very real concerns of those affected by the flooding, my Department is making every effort to manage these studies within the resources that are available. The study of the Showgrounds Stream in the vicinity of Dromore Road, Banbridge is well underway and I am assured that the results will be available in spring 2010.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Camogie

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of camogie; and (ii) what funding has been allocated to the sport in the last two financial years. (AQW 1698/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): Neither my Department nor Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) retain information on how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of camogie. However, membership figures reported in November 2008 for the governing body, the Ulster Camogie Council, indicate 9,061 members.

In the last two financial years, SNI has made awards totalling £30,000 to the sport of camogie.

Archery

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of archery; and (ii) what funding has been allocated to the sport in the last two financial years. (AQW 1699/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Neither my Department nor Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) retain information on how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of archery. However, membership figures reported in November 2008 for the governing body, the Northern Ireland Archery Society, indicate 796 members.

In the last two financial years, SNI has made awards totalling £35,039 to the sport of archery.

Rowing

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of rowing; and (ii) what funding has been allocated to the sport in the last two financial years. (AQW 1761/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Neither my Department nor Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) retain information on how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of rowing. However, membership figures reported in November 2008 for the governing body, Rowing Ireland Ulster Branch, indicate 611 members.

In the last two financial years, SNI has made awards totalling £41,480 to the sport of rowing.

Shooting Sports

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people are estimated to participate in the shooting sports; and (ii) what funding has been allocated to shooting sports in the last two financial years. (AQW 1762/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Neither my Department nor Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) retain information on how many people are estimated to participate in the shooting sports. However, a new federated governing structure is being established for fullbore, smallbore and clay target shooting which will provide participation numbers in these disciplines.

In the last two financial years, SNI has made awards totalling £77,280 to the shooting sports.

Fencing

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of fencing; and (ii) what funding has been allocated to the sport in the last two financial years. (AQW 1763/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Neither my Department nor Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) retain information on how many people are estimated to participate in the sport of fencing. However, membership figures reported in November 2008 for the governing body, the Northern Ireland Fencing Union, indicate 305 members.

In the last two financial years, SNI has made awards totalling £38,046 to the sport of fencing. In addition to this, the Department's Events Unit supported this year's World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships with an award of £85k in 2008/09.

Reallocation of Funding for Maze Stadium

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 248/10, (i) if he is now in a position to reallocate the remaining £25.841m no longer required for the Maze stadium; and (ii) to detail the allocations he plans to make to (a) the Irish Football Association; (b) Ulster Rugby; and (c) the Gaelic Athletic Association. (AQW 1780/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: (i) As stated in AQW 248/10 it is proposed at this point in the year to reallocate the £25.841m of the Multi Sports Stadium budget as detailed in the attached table. This will, of course, be subject to the outcome of the September monitoring round.

Sport NI are also currently re-profiling their sports capital programme therefore the indicative allocations may be subject to further adjustment.

Project Title	2009/10
House of Sport	1,000
North Belfast Learning	21
2012 Sports Facilities / Elite	7,907
SCNI Capital	101
50 metre pool	654
Soccer Strategy	2,367

Project Title	2009/10
Tollymore	2,592
Sports Strategy Implementation	11,199
Multi Sports Stadium	(25,841)

(ii) There are no plans, in the current year, to make any of the reallocated funding available directly to the IFA, URFU or GAA.

DCAL Staff Travel Costs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much was spent by his Department on staff travel cost claims in the last financial year. (AQW 1875/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department spent a total of £177,502 on staff travel costs in 2008-09.

This figure includes expenditure on the reimbursement of claims submitted by staff in respect of travelling expenses and also includes amounts paid directly to booking agents for air, rail and sea travel and for accommodation costs for staff travelling on official business.

Receptions in Recognition of Sporting Achievements

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many receptions for sporting achievements due to be held in the next six months, have been sponsored by his Department; and (ii) to detail who will be receiving a reception and for what reason. (AQW 1896/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I hosted a joint reception with the DOE Minister Edwin Poots MLA in Parliament Buildings on 26th October 2009 to acknowledge the success of Colin Turkington in winning the 2009 British Touring Car Championship.

I have also agreed to host a reception for the Northern Ireland Olympic Skeet Shooting team to mark their recent achievement of winning the home international tournament in August 2009. A date has not yet been arranged for this event.

Evangelical Protestantism

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department has carried out any analysis of the need to fund a study of the history and values of evangelical Protestantism; and if he will work with funding bodies to encourage this. (AQW 1938/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has not carried out any analysis of the need to fund a study of the history and values of evangelical Protestantism.

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act my Department is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations.

My Department is open to working with relevant bodies to promote community relations in Northern Ireland, within the context of a shared and better future.

Blind and Partially-Sighted People

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps have been, or will be, taken by his Department to ensure that the same level of service is provided to blind and partially-sighted people as that provided to fully-sighted people. (AQW 1986/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department is committed to Promoting Social Inclusion and removing the barriers which exist that exclude people from full participation in the culture, arts and leisure sector.

DCAL has developed corporate guidance on producing information in accessible formats. In ensuring equality of opportunity in accessing information, the guidance refers specifically to people with sensory and learning disabilities and commits my Department to providing documents on request, in alternative formats. DCAL's internet site is also enabled with Browsealoud software. This software reads web pages aloud for people who have difficulty reading on line.

My Department is represented on the Accessibility & Inclusion Priority Action Group, chaired by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), tasked with taking forward some of the key components of the UK Vision Strategy. As a result of this engagement a number of key personnel from my department will undertake RNIB training during November in appropriate communication techniques for the blind and partially sighted population.

Evangelical Protestantism

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department has carried out any analysis of the need to protect the human rights of people who uphold the beliefs and values of evangelical Protestantism; and if he will work with funding bodies and government funded agencies to encourage this. (AQW 2009/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has not carried out any analysis of the need to protect the human rights of people who uphold the beliefs and values of evangelical Protestantism.

Under the Human Rights Act 1998 my Department is committed to ensuring that all areas of legislation, policy and administration practice comply with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Policy on Events at Parliament Buildings

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department has a policy on hosting events at Parliament Buildings; and, if so (i) when the policy was formulated: (ii) by which Minister; and (iii) to detail the policy in writing. (AQW 2091/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department does not have a formal policy specifically related to the hosting of events at Parliament Buildings. Through custom and practice the Department has occasionally hosted events in Parliament Buildings within protocols set by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. Events have been hosted either on the initiative of the DCAL Minister of the day, or in response to a request to host an event. Each proposed event is considered on its merits within the broad customs and practice of the Department to date.

Blind and Partially-Sighted People

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what provision is made by his Department to make documents accessible to blind and partially-sighted people. (AQW 2115/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The DCAL Equality Scheme sets out how my department proposes to fulfil its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. My department is committed under the scheme to ensure that the information and services that DCAL provides are made as accessible and equitable as possible.

To support this commitment my Department has developed a staff Guide to Making Information Accessible. The purpose of this Guide is to strive to achieve best practice in ensuring that DCAL business areas provide a diverse range of customers, stakeholders and citizens with accessible information as quickly and effectively as possible.

The Guide recognises the needs of blind or partially sighted people and commits to providing documents in a wide range of alternative formats such as large print, Braille and audio alternative formats.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Efficiency Savings: DE

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education what services in her Department have been affected by efficiency savings (i) in the last financial year; and (ii) in the first six months of this financial year.

(AQW 1404/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tá leagtha amach sa tábla seo thíos na réimsí caiteachais i mo Roinn a ndeachaigh na coigiltí éifeachtachta sna tréimhsí 2008-09 agus 2009-10 i bhfeidhm orthu.

The spending areas in my Department impacted by the efficiency savings in 2008-09 and 2009-10 are set out in the table below:

Spending Area
DE Administration
RPA – Establishment of ESA
Effective Workforce Management
MAGS 2
Classroom 2000
Earmarked Sums
Community Relations
ELB Teacher's and Non Teachers' Pay
Aggregated Schools Budget
Capital Efficiencies

Further details are contained in the Efficiency Delivery Plan published on the Department's website and can be accessed at the following link:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/de_edp_introduction_rv.pdf

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education (i) what discussions she has had with the Minister for Social Development and her Department regarding the transfer of Neighbourhood Renewal; (ii) when these discussions took place; and (iii) what discussions her Department has had with Neighbourhood Renewal Projects regarding future service provision.

(AQW 1537/10)

Minister of Education: Bhuaill oifigigh ó mo Roinn leis an Aire Forbartha Sóisialta ar 13 Bealtaine 2009, agus rinneadh plé ar an aistriú chuig na comhairlí áitiúla nua sa bhliain 2011.

My officials met with the Minister for Social Development on 13 May 2009, during which the transfer to new local councils in 2011 was discussed.

I am also considering correspondence from the Minister for Social Development and her Department regarding the issue of posts and services currently funded by DSD that have been assessed as being within the policy responsibility of the Department of Education. I have committed to meet with Minister Ritchie once I have had an opportunity to fully consider the issues raised.

DE and DSD officials continue to work closely regarding the transfer of education related Neighbourhood Renewal programmes including the streamlining of existing processes.

Neighbourhood Renewal projects are managed by DE and funds are transferred from DSD; there are presently no plans to change current management procedures for existing projects.

Expenditure on Translation into Irish and Ulster Scots

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on Irish and Ulster Scots translations in each of the last five financial years. (AQW 1590/10)

Minister of Education: Léiríonn an tábla seo thíos an méid airgid a chaith an Roinn Oideachais ar aistriúcháin Gaeilge agus Albainis Uladh i ngach bliain airgeadais le cúig bliana airgeadais anuas.

The table below details how much the Department of Education has spent on Irish and Ulster-Scots translations in each of the last five financial years.

Financial Year	Irish	Ulster Scots	Total
2004/2005	£12,621	Nil	£12,621
2005/2006	£6,202	Nil	£6,202
2006/2007	£4,136	£50	£4,186
2007/2008	£13,274	£108	£13,382
2008/2009	£47,062	£261	£47,323

In 2008 the Department recruited two Irish Language Staff Officers to facilitate its use of Irish. These officers have undertaken a range of duties including urgent translation work. The costs incurred in carrying out specific tasks are not separately calculated.

Integrated and Irish-Medium Education

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how much money her Department has spent on (i) Integrated education; and (ii) Irish medium education; (a) in total; and (b) per pupil, in 2007/08 and 2008/09. (AQW 1591/10)

Minister of Education: Léiríonn an tábla thíos an méid airgid a chaith an Roinn Oideachais ar Oideachas Imeachthas agus ar Ghaelscolaíocht sna blianta airgeadais 2007/08 agus 2008/09. Léiríonn an tábla an méid a caitheadh ar gach dalta, freisin.

The amount spent on Integrated Education and Irish Medium Education in the 2007/08 and the 2008/09 financial years by the Department of Education is shown in the table below. The table also contains the per pupil amount.

	Total Spend 2007/08 £000s	Per Pupil Amount (£) 2007/08	Total Spend 2008/09 £000s	Per Pupil Amount (£) 2007/08
Integrated Education	87,839	4,792	99,638	5,241
Irish Medium Education	11,007	4,346	12,551	4,798

Note: Information in relation to Irish-medium Units, attached to English-medium host schools has not been provided as it is not possible to disaggregate the funding of the Unit from the host school.

DE Taxi Hire Expenditure

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on (i) taxi hire; and (ii) private coach hire, in each Education and Library Board area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1616/10)

Minister of Education: Mionsonraítear sna táblaí thíos na méideanna a chaith na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ar thacsaithe agus ar chóistí príobháideacha a fháil ar cíós do na trí scoilbhliana 2006/07, 2007/08 agus 2008/09 ó na buiséid fhoriomlána iompair a sholáthraíonn an Roinn.

The following tables detail the amounts Education and Library Boards spent on taxi and private coach hire for the three school years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 from within overall transport budgets provided by the Department. This amount includes the annual cost of administrative support, and is broken down as follows:

EXPENDITURE ON TAXI HIRE

Year	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
2006/07	761,482	1,822,177	1,828,720	1,891,579	1,215,907
2007/08	885,834	1,643,059	1,451,667	1,972,757	1,200,206
2008/09	1,126,176	1,810,739	1,428,930	2,267,153	1,390,371
Total	2,773,492	5,275,975	4,709,317	6,131,489	3,806,484

EXPENDITURE ON PRIVATE COACH HIRE

Year	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
2006/07	444,054	1,923,972	567,971	1,996,555	1,128,407
2007/08	398,564	1,928,938	492,452	1,897,676	1,171,370
2008/09	488,069	2,249,887	436,403	1,882,770	1,365,665
Total	1,330,687	6,102,797	1,496,826	5,777,001	3,665,442

Private coach hire is used where neither Translink nor ELB services are available and where there are sufficient pupils to justify providing a route. Taxis are primarily employed where statements of special education needs specify such provision, but may also be provided where the number of pupils on a route is so small that the provision of a bus cannot be justified and pupils have no alternative means of transport.

Costs of School Buildings

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education, in relation to school buildings, to detail (i) the estimated costs; and (ii) the actual costs of (a) new builds; and (b) school extensions and improvements; and (iii) the stage of any ongoing project, in the North Down constituency, since 2007. (AQW 1623/10)

Minister of Education: Tugtar sonraí sna táblaí in Iarscríbhinní A agus B de mhórhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna agus de mhionhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna i dtoghcheantar Dhún Thuaidh, (i) atá á bpleanáil faoi láthair; (ii) ar cuireadh tús le hobair tógála orthu; agus (iii) ar cuireadh i gcrích iad ón bhliain 2007 i leith.

The tables at Annexes A and B provide details of major school capital projects and minor capital projects in the North Down constituency, which are (i) currently being planned; (ii) construction work is underway; and (iii) have been completed since 2007.

For those projects still in the planning stages it not possible to provide actual contract costs as they have not yet reached procurement stage.

ANNEX A**MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS**

School	Details of Project	Estimated Construction Cost £M	Approved Contract Cost £M	Current Position
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	New school on extended site	22.0	23.82	Completed May 2008
St Columbanus' College	New school on existing site	12.97	n/k	Pre-tender submission received 15 October 2009 – currently under consideration in Department.
Ballyholme Primary School	Extension & refurbishment	2.06	3.6	Completed 29 February 2008

School	Details of Project	Estimated Construction Cost £M	Approved Contract Cost £M	Current Position
Priory College	New school on new site	16.8 NB: These projects will be dealt with as one contract.	n/k	Outline sketch plans (Stage C) received 14 May 2009 – currently under consideration in Department.
Hollywood/Redburn Primary School & Hollywood Nursery School	Amalgamation in a new school. New nursery school on new site		n/k	Awaiting outline sketch plans (RIBA Stage C)
Bangor Grammar School	New school on new site	15.1	n/k	Final sketch plans (RIBA Stage D) approved 29 January 2008. Pre-tender submission awaited.
Towerview Primary School	New school and nursery unit	3.84	3.1	Completed 27 February 2009

ANNEX B

MINOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Contract Cost	Current Position
St Malachys Ps, Bangor	Toilet Refurb	£142,150.00	£135,484.00	Completed
Bangor Grammar	He Provision	£105,980.00	£97,801.00	Completed
Sullivan Upper	Toilet Refurb/ Drama/ Fire Alarm	£438,800.00	£300,000.00	Completed
Sullivan Upper	Air-Con Equipment C2k Room	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	Completed
Sullivan Upper	Disabled Access	£31,340.00	£11,340.00	Completed
St Columbanus College, Bangor	Refurb Of Toilets	£34,000.00	£37,744.00	Completed
St Columbanus College, Bangor	Security Fencing	£34,000.00	£26,000.00	Completed
Bangor Grammar	Upgrade Boiler House	£10,457.00	£10,457.00	Under Construction
Bangor Grammar	Disabled Ramp	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	Under Construction
Sullivan Upper	Dda Works	£220,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders
Sullivan Upper	Fire Risk Assessment	£186,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders
Sullivan Upper	Toilet Refurb & Radiator Replacement	£324,000.00	£392,849.86	Under Construction
Sullivan Upper	Re-Roof Sports Hall	£155,700.00	£121,803.30	Under Construction
Bangor Nursery	Extension & Dda Adaptations	£106,497.00	£113,971.00	Completed
Trinity Nursery	Security Fencing	£3,002.00	£3,002.00	Completed
Trinity Nursery	Roof	£70,350.00	£63,005.00	Completed
Ballyholme Primary	Specialist Choral Music Ceiling In Assembly Hall	£32,000.00	£36,529.00	Completed
Ballyholme Primary	Removal Of Surplus Temporary Classrooms	£13,144.00	£11,199.00	Completed
Bloomfield Road Primary	Boiler Plant	£96,814.00	£99,022.00	Completed

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Contract Cost	Current Position
Bloomfield Road Primary Smk	Kitchen Refurbishment	£102,368.00	£102,368.00	Under Construction
Clandeboyne Primary	New Boiler Plant	£109,253.00	£108,000.00	Completed
Clandeboyne Primary	Extension To Door Access Control System	£5,220.00	£6,674.00	Completed
Clandeboyne Primary	Additional Security Fencing	£13,088.00	£12,944.00	Completed
Crawfordsburn Primary	Staff & Pupil Toilet Refurbishment	£100,000.00	N/K	Under Consideration
Crawfordsburn Primary	Upgrade/Extend Cctv System	£3,500.00	£3,500.00	Completed
Crawfordsburn Primary	Improvements To Entranceway	£100,000.00	£138,348.00	Completed
Glencraig Integrated Primary	Mobile For Playgroup	£182,588.00	£197,323.00	Completed
Glencraig Integrated Primary	External Lighting	£5,370.00	£5,370.00	Completed
Glencraig Integrated Primary & Millisle Primary	Toilet Refurbishment (Combined Scheme With Millisle Primary)	£117,109.00	£131,591.00	Completed
Grange Park Primary	Natural Gas Water Heater	£6,390.00	£5,576.00	Completed
Hollywood Primary	Security Fencing	£3,532.00	£3,582.00	Completed
Hollywood Primary	Repairs To Existing Mobile Classrooms And Removal Of 2 Temporary Classrooms	£24,488.00	£27,561.00	Completed
Hollywood Primary	It Upgrade To Refurbished Mobile Classroom	£3,000.00	£2,313.00	Completed
Hollywood Primary	Staff Room Internal Refurbishment	£7,500.00	£8,537.00	Completed
Kilmaine Primary	Landscaping	£60,000.00	N/K	Tenders To Be Requested
Millisle Primary	Security Fencing	£7,499.00	£11,349.00	Completed
Millisle Primary	New Enclosed Soft Surface Play Area	£32,207.00	£31,119.00	Completed
Millisle Primary	Provision Of New Curtain Walling (Including Asbestos Removal)	£196,765.00	£242,183.00	Completed
Rathmore Primary	Improvements To Entrance & Dda Works	£179,092.00	£166,417.00	Completed
Rathmore Primary	Provision Of New Safety Surface To Nursery Unit	£9,902.00	£9,902.00	Completed
Rathmore Primary	Improvements To Toilet Facilities	£100,000.00	£100,000.00	Tenders To Be Invited Later In 2009/10
Rathmore Primary	Door Entry System	£4,430.00	£4,430.00	Completed
Rathmore Primary	Removal From Site Of 3 Mobile Classrooms	£7,758.00	£7,749.00	Completed
Rathmore Primary Smk	Gas Water Heater	£7,084.00	£7,084.00	Completed

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Contract Cost	Current Position
Saint Annes Primary	Cctv/Fencing/Roller Shutter, Etc	£6,515.00	£6,170.00	Completed
Saint Comgalls Primary	Cctv System	£6,923.00	£6,923.00	Completed
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	Provision Of Play Equipment	£16,019.00	£16,475.00	Completed
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	Pedestrian Link To Bangor Academy	£56,394.00	£56,394.00	Completed
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	New Boundary Fencing, Alterations To Car Park And Traffic Barrier	£60,210.00	£58,446.00	Completed
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	Alterations & Extension To Gym	£97,648.00	£96,685.00	Completed
Donaghadee High (Closed)	Refurbishment For Re-Location Of Killard House Special School	£300,000.00	£344,188.00	Completed
Donaghadee High (Closed)	New Vehicular Access And Car Park For Relocation Of Killard House	£300,000.00	£390,000.00	Under Construction
Bangor Academy And Sixth Form College	Enabling Works Associated With Ppp Contract	£304,845.00	£304,845.00	Completed
Bangor Academy And Sixth Form College	Demolition Of Former School Premises	£187,247.00	£187,247.00	Completed
Bangor Academy And Sixth Form College	Ramps And Signage	£4,000.00	£9,821.00	Completed
Priory College	Improvements To Home Economics Rooms	£98,326.00	£98,326.00	Completed
Glenlola Collegiate	Astro Turf Pitch	£96,232.00	£96,232.00	Completed
Glenlola Collegiate	Cold Lunch Accommodation	£100,000.00	£103,500.00	Completed
Glenlola Collegiate	Additional Classroom	£73,324.00	£78,195.00	Completed
Glenlola Collegiate	Valve Insulation Covers	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	Completed
Clifton Special	Supply And Installation Of Large Play Unit	£91,773.00	£91,773.00	Completed

Costs of School Buildings

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education, in relation to school buildings, to detail (i) the estimated costs; and (ii) the actual costs of (a) new builds; and (b) school extensions and improvements; and (iii) the stage of any ongoing project, in the South Down constituency, since 2007. (AQW 1624/10)

Minister of Education: Tugtar sonraí sna táblaí in Iarscríbhinní A agus B de mhórhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna agus de mhionhionscadail chaipitil scoileanna i dtoghcheantar Dhún Theas, (i) atá á bpleanáil faoi láthair; (ii) ar cuireadh tús le hobair tógála orthu; agus (iii) ar cuireadh i gcrích iad ón bhliain 2007 i leith.

The tables at Annexes A and B provide details of major school capital projects and minor capital projects in the South Down constituency, which are (i) currently being planned; (ii) construction work is underway; and (iii) have completed since 2007.

For those projects still in the planning stages, it is not possible to provide actual costs as they have not reached procurement stage.

ANNEX A

MAJOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

SCHOOL	Details of Project	Estimated Construction Cost £M	Approved Contract Cost £M	Current Position
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	New school on extended site	1.35	1.75	Completed August 2008
St. Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	New school on existing site	3.2	n/k	Awaiting Pre-Tender submission
The High School Ballynahinch	New school on existing site	8.9	n/k	Outline sketch plans under consideration (RIBA Stage C)
Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch	Extension + Refurbishment	11.6	13.7	Construction underway. Estimated completion date Summer 2010
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor	New school on Convent of Mercy PS site (Amalgamation of Convent of Mercy PS + St Mary's Boys PS)	3.7	n/k	Awaiting revised outline sketch plans (RIBA Stage C)
Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint	New school on a new site	3.2	n/k	Pre-Tender submission under consideration
St Clare's Abbey Primary School, Newry	New school on extended St Clare's site (Amalgamation of St Clare's Convent PS + St Colman's PS)	5.7	n/k	Scheme on hold. New Economic Appraisal being undertaken
St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel	New school on existing site	11.7	n/k	Awaiting Pre-Tender submission

ANNEX B

MINOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Cost	Current Position
St Patricks Ps, Hilltown	Replacement Mobile	£52,850.00	£37,900.00	Completed
St Colmans Ps, Annaclone	Car Parking Drop Off Lay -By	£60,000.00	£100,577.25	Completed
St Colmans Ps, Annaclone	Fencing & Gate	£5,600.00	£5,600.00	Completed
St Colman's Ps, Kilkeel	Cctv	£12,000.00	£12,000.00	Completed
St Colman's Ps, Kilkeel	Acoustic Adaptations	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	Completed
St Colman's Ps, Saval	Additional Accommodation For Special Needs	£78,173.00	£93,886.00	Completed
St Patricks Ps, Rathfirland	Extension To Fire Alarm System	£3,300.00	£2,730.00	Completed
St Patricks Ps, Rathfirland	Fencing & Gate	£2,750.00	£2,750.00	Completed
St Josephs Ps, Crossgar	Improvements To Playground & Front Entrance	£17,500.00	£17,500.00	Completed

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Cost	Current Position
St Marys Ps Saintfield	Provision Of External Lighting	£5,818.00	£5,818.00	Completed
St Marys Hs, Downpatrick	Extension To Gym For Provision Of Stage	£221,000.00	£254,158.48	Completed
St Colmcilles Hs Crossgar	Additional Accommodation For Special Needs	£69,137.00	£48,400.00	Completed
De La Salle, Hs Downpatrick	Provision Of Home Economics	£192,730.00	£205,465.14	Completed
Shimna College Newcastle	Fire Doors	£445,000.00	£297,750.00	Completed
Shimna College Newcastle	Language & Multi-Media Rooms	£100,000.00	£100,000.00	Completed
Shimna College Newcastle	Alterations Ro Fire Doors/ Security Lighting & Cctv	£38,575.00	£44,360.00	Completed
Shimna College Newcastle	Gas Upgrade	£29,155.00	£29,155.00	Completed
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Work To Heating Pipes	£10,500.00	£11,776.00	Completed
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Handrails For Stairs	£1,875.00	£2,565.00	Completed
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Leaking Roof	£4,312.00	£12,160.00	Completed
St Brigids Ps, Downpatrick	Playground Improvements	£7,000.00	£7,000.00	Completed
St Colmcilles Ps, Downpatrick	Fencing & Pathway	£3,000.00	£3,000.00	Completed
St Colmcilles Ps, Downpatrick	Internal Access	£4,444.80	£9,052.00	Completed
St Malachys Ps, Castlewellan	Playground Works	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	Completed
St Marys Ps, Newcastle	Ict Cabling	£2,700.00	£2,589.56	Completed
Cedar Integrated Crossgar	Upgrade Of Gas	£2,765.00	£2,765.00	Completed
Killowen Ps	Ramping For Disabled Pupils	£1,250.00	£1,250.00	Completed
Ballyholland Ps Newry	Acoustic Improvements Plus Vision Panels For Sen Room	£6,505.00	£6,505.00	Completed
Ballyholland Ps Newry	Cctv	£4,000.00	£4,000.00	Completed
Grange Ps, Newry	Cctv (Upgrade)	£4,000.00	£4,000.00	Completed
St Matthews Ps, Magheramayocastlewellan	Toilet Refurb/ Replacement	£89,700.00	£72,671.73	Completed
Holy Cross, Attical Kilkeel	Alterations To Lobby & Door Access	£34,000.00	£34,000.00	Completed
Holy Cross, Attical Kilkeel	Replacement Of Double Mobile With Toilets	£137,340.00	£137,340.00	Completed
St Patricks Ps, Mayobridge	Replacement Of Roller Shutter Door	£1,500.00	£1,380.00	Completed

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Cost	Current Position
St Pauls Ps, Cabra	Replacement Of Mobile Classroom	£50,850.00	£62,800.00	Completed
St Marys Ps, Rathfriland	Disabled Access To Entrances	£1,200.00	£1,200.00	Completed
St Marys Ps Dechomet	Toilet Refurbishment	£19,533.97	£19,533.97	Completed
Grange Ps Newry	Special Needs Toilet	£4,250.00	£4,250.00	Under Constuction
Grange Ps Newry	Playground	£4,250.00	£4,250.00	Under Construction
Holy Cross Ps Newry	Refurb Of Pupil Toilets	£25,000.00	£25,000.00	Under Construction
St Marys Ps, Rathfriland	Widening Entrance Gates And Additional Car Parking	£90,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Revised Proposals And Costs
St Marys Ps, Rathfriland	Single Teaching Mobile And Refurb Of Staffroom	£86,000.00	N/K	Select List Requested 30/09/09
St Marys Ps Dechomet	Principals Office	£45,000.00	N/K	Select List Requested 28/09/09
St Marys Ps Dechomet	Enriched Curriculum Storage	£2,700.00	£2,550.00	Under Construction
St Marys Ps, Glassdrumman	Disabled Ramps & Lift	£39,000.00	N/K	Select List Requested 28/09/09
St Colmans Ps, Annaclone	Extension To Staffroom & Additional Storage	£50,200.00	N/K	Select List Requested 30/09/09
St Colmans Ps, Annaclone	Additional Teaching Accommodation	£75,000.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 28/07/09
St Patricks Ps, Rathfriland	Toilet Refurb	£44,000.00	N/K	Select List Requested 28/09/09
St Columbas College, Killeel	Home Economics Refurb	£255,307.00	N/K	Awaiting Revised Proposals And Costs
St Marks Hs, Warrenpoint	Home Economics Refurb	£317,881.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 03/09/09
St Colmcilles Hs, Crossgar	Additional Car Parking Facilities	£13,000.00	£13,000.00	Under Construction
St Colmcilles Hs, Crossgar	Refurb Of Staffroom	£33,069.00	£17,025.00	Under Construction
St Malachys Hs, Castlewellan	Redesign Of Reception	£23,501.00	N/K	Quotations Requested 14/10/09
De La Salle, Hs Downpatrick	Replacement Windows & Concrete Repairs	£67,000.00	£67,000.00	Under Construction
Shimna College Newcastle	Home Economics Provision	£360,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders
Shimna College Newcastle	Replace Roof	£426,867.56	£433,867.00	Under Construction
St Patricks Gs, Downpatrick	C2k Cabling	£47,000.00	£47,000.00	Under Construction
St Clares Convent Ps, Newry	Electrical/ Heating Supply To Offices	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	Under Construction
Killowen Ps, Rostrevor	Additional Teaching Mobile	£75,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Cost	Current Position
Killowen Ps, Rostrevor	External Pe Store	£5,000.00,	N/K	Awaiting Tenders
Killowen Ps, Rostrevor	Resiting Electrical Meter Box	£15,000.00	£15,000.00	Under Construction
Killowen Ps, Rostrevor	Disabled Ramp/ Toilet	£36,250.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 07/09/09
Killowen Ps, Rostrevor	Ramping	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	Under Construction
Ballyholland Ps, Newry	Car Parking	£3,500.00	£4,721.00	Completed
Sacred Heart Ps Newcastle	Security Fencing	£5,269.00	£5,269.00	Under Construction
Sacred Heart Ps Newcastle	Additional Staff/Disabled Toilet & Extension to PE Store	£26,443.00	£26,443.00	Under Construction
St Colmcilles Ps, Crossgar	Car Parking Facilities	£13,000.00	£13,000.00	Under Construction
St Malachys Ps Castlewellan	Refurbish Staffroom/Staff Toilets	£92,636.50	N/K	Proposals And Costs Under Consideration
St Marys Ps, Newcastle	Toilet In Nursery Unit	£7,500.00	N/K	4 Quotes Requested 28/09/09
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche Castlewellan	Provision Of Replacement Mobiles	£561,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders
Cedar Integrated Ps Crossgar	Heating System	£13,900.00	N/K	Awaiting Revised Costs
St Colmcilles Hs, Crossgar	Home Economics Refurb	£345,000.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 03/08/09
St Colmcilles Hs, Crossgar	Refurb Changing Rooms	£89,000.00	N/K	Proposals And Costs Under Consideration
St Colmcilles Hs, Crossgar	Replacement Mobile Classrooms	£175,000.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 10/09/09
Convent Of Mercy Ps Downpatrick	Security Fencing	£26,000.00	£26,000.00	Under Construction
St Patricks Ps, Ballynahinch	Playground Extension & Car Park Conversion	£155,000.00	N/K	Tenders Requested 23/09/09
St Patricks Ps, Ballynahinch	Refurbish Girls And Staff Toilets	£161,309.50	N/K	Revised Proposals And Costs Requested
St Marys Ps, Saintfield	Extend Outdoor Play Area	£7,500.00	£7,500.00	Under Construction
St Marys Ps, Aughlisnafin	Boundary Wall & Ball Stop Fencing	£13,545.00	£13,545.00	Under Construction
St Macartans Ps Loughinisland	Footpath Around Pitch	£2,500.00	£2,500.00	Under Construction
St Josephs Ps, Killough	Upgrade Windows	£50,000.00	N/K	Awaiting Tenders From Seelb
St Josephs Ps, Killough	Various Security	£5,937.00	£5,937.00	Under Construction
St Marks Hs Warrenpoint	Car Parking	£65,000.00	£65,000.00	Under Construction
St Marks Hs Warrenpoint	Additional 4 Mobile Classrooms	£240,634.00	£242,344.00	Under Construction
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Fire Risk Assessment	£2,123.00	£2,130.00	Under Construction
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Leak In Pipe Work	£4,900.00	£4900.00	Under Construction
St Louis Gs, Kilkeel	Relocate Medical Room To Office	£18,000	N/K	Proposals And Costs Under Consideration

School	Details Of Project	Estimated Cost	Approved Cost	Current Position
Bronte Primary School Banbridge	Classroom Extension	£140,000.00	£130,500.00	Completed
Rathfriland High School	Provision Of Gym Mobile	£60,000.00	£88,330.38	Completed
Rathfriland High School	Provision Of Mobile Accommodation	£13,723.00	£14,639.44	Completed
Rathfriland High School	Provision Of Mobile Accommodation	£20,938.00	£20,938.00	Under Construction
Rathfriland High School	Modifications To Entrance Lobby	£150,000.00	N/K	Tenders Requested
Kilkeel High School	Two Classroom Home Economics Suite	£150,000.00	£188,450.00	Completed
Kilkeel Nursery School	Minor Works Including Dda Adaptations	£250,000.00	£237,900.00	Completed
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	2 Classroom Extension, Office Accommodation And Classroom Refurbishment	£200,000.00	£385,000.00	Completed
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	Provision Of Covered Play Area And Hygiene Room	£23,141.00	£23,141.00	Completed
Brackenagh West Ps Kilkeel	Provision Of Mobile Accommodation For Storage	£14,830.00	£14,830.00	Under Construction
Drumadonnell Primary School	Extensions And Alterations	£283,000.00	£228,000.00	Completed
Iveagh Ps Newry	Installation Of Chainlink Fence	£6,544.48	£6,544.48	Completed
Drumlins Integrated Ps Ballynahinch	September 2005 Accommodation	£145,470.90	£145,470.90	Completed
Drumlins Integrated Ps Ballynahinch	September 2007 Accommodation	£275,681.25	£275,681.25	Completed

School Principal Appointments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many School Principals in the South Eastern Education and Library Board were appointed by (i) Board Members through the Teaching Appointments Committee; and (ii) Board Commissioners, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1627/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na bPríomhoidí Scoile i mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt a cheap na Comhaltaí Boird tríd an Choiste um Cheapacháin Múinteoireachta i ngach bliain féilire le cúig bliana anuas:

The number of School Principals in the South Eastern Education and Library Board appointed by the Board members through the Teaching Appointments Committee in each of the last five (calendar) years is as follows:

2005	9
2006	11
2007	6
2008	7
2009 – to date	9*

* Figure does not include 1 Principal post for which pre-employment checks are currently ongoing and 2 Principal posts currently at the short listing stage.

- (ii) None. The South Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that the Board Commissioners have not taken over the functions of the Teaching Appointments Committee (TAC), and the TAC continues to operate as before.

Peripatetic Teachers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what funding has been made available for Peripatetic Teachers in primary schools, under the Primary Languages Scheme, in each language taught, in 2008/09 and 2009/10. (AQW 1635/10)

Minister of Education: The funding made available for my very successful Primary Languages Programme supports the management, recruitment and employment of peripatetic language tutors to work with primary schools across all three languages – Irish, Spanish and, more recently, Polish.

Níl miondealú ar chistiú de réir teanga ar fáil go héasca, ach is féidir liom an clár foriomlán cistiúcháin a dheimhniú do na blianta 2008-09 agus 2009-10. Caitheadh £324k san iomlán sa bhliain 2008-09 agus tá suas le £1m ar fáil sa bhliain 2009-10 chun tacaíocht a thabhairt don chlár tábhachtach seo. Faoi láthair, íoctar £20 san uair mar ráta le teagascóirí taistil agus déantar aisíocaíocht costais taistil leo ar na rátaí ceadaithe.

A breakdown of funding by language is not readily available but I can confirm the overall funding position for 2008-09 and 2009-10. A total of £342k was spent in 2008-09 and up to £1m is available in 2009-10 to support this important programme. Peripatetic tutors currently receive an hourly rate of £20 and reimbursement of travel costs at approved rates.

Homophobic Bullying

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education, in light of the decision of the Department of Education in the Republic of Ireland to issue guidance on homophobic bullying, to detail if she intends to introduce similar guidance. (AQW 1667/10)

Minister of Education: I strongly regard all bullying, including homophobic bullying, as completely unacceptable in both our classrooms and in our society. I noted, with interest, Minister Haughey's launch of the resource "Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Students in Post-Primary Schools: Guidance for Principals and School Leaders", earlier this month.

My Department's publication 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour' offers detailed guidance, practical initiatives and case studies to support schools to tackle bullying. The guidance specifically states that racist, homophobic, sectarian or other offensive name-calling is a form of bullying. This guidance is intended to stimulate discussion within a school around the issue of bullying and to encourage collective ownership of the issue and the actions to be taken to counter it. There are no plans to produce new guidance to deal specifically with the issue of homophobic bullying, as such guidance already exists and is available to schools.

Last year, I was pleased to provide the foreword to 'Leave it out – Developing anti-homophobic bullying practice in schools', which was produced by Save the Children, Youthnet and the Rainbow Project and distributed to all post-primary schools.

My Department continues to fund and participate in the local Anti-Bullying Forum which has established a number of working groups, one of which is specifically considering the issue of homophobic bullying. This Working Group produced a teacher fact sheet, which was distributed to all schools to coincide with the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) in May this year. In addition, the Working Group has put considerable effort into ensuring that the Anti-Bullying Forum's website (www.niabf.org.uk) offers advice and guidance on this issue. Through its membership of the British and Irish Anti-Bullying Forum, my Department also continues to build a shared expertise and develop a stronger focus to tackle the common problem of bullying for children.

Soláthraíonn Ciorclán 2001/15 de chuid mo Roinne treoir do scoileanna i dtaca le hOideachas Caidrimh agus Gnéasachta (RSE). Go háirithe, ba chóir go mbeadh polasaí ag scoileanna ar an dóigh a rachaidh siad i ngleic le RSE sa churacclam. Ba chóir go mbeadh ceangail shoiléire ag an pholasáí seo le polasaí tréadchúraim na scoile agus go leagfadh sé aidhmeanna an chlár teagaisc amach, mar fhorbairt ghaolta deimhneacha, mar ilchineálacht

agus mar mheas do dhaoine eile. Ba chóir go mbeadh an polasaí seo faoi réir comhairliúcháin le tuismitheoirí, agus ba chóir go mbeadh sé formhuinithe ag Bord Gobharnóirí na scoile.

My Department's Circular 2001/15 provides guidance to schools on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). In particular, schools need to have a policy on how they will address RSE in the curriculum, showing clear links with the school's pastoral care policy and setting out the aims of the teaching programme, such as developing positive relationships, diversity and respect for others. The policy should be the subject of consultation with parents and should be endorsed by the school's Board of Governors.

RSE guidance advises that teaching should at all times be appropriate to the maturity and level of understanding of the pupils, including their personal and emotional circumstances and issues should be dealt with in a broad and balanced way, free from sensationalism and personal bias.

Teaching Posts

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education how many newly qualified teachers have secured permanent teaching posts within Northern Ireland, in each of the last three academic years. (AQW 1670/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na múinteoirí nua-cháilithe a fuair postanna múinteoireachta buana i dtuaisceart na hÉireann i ngach bliain acadúil le trí bliana acadúla anuas.

The number of newly qualified teachers who have secured permanent teaching posts within the north of Ireland, in each of the last 3 academic years is as follows:

Year	Number of graduates	Number Permanently employed
2006/2007	807	353
2007/2008	808	262
2008/2009	725	178

School Exclusions

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many primary school exclusions involved "looked after" children in each of the last five years. (AQW 1717/10)

Minister of Education: Bailíonn an Roinn staitisticí i dtaca le fionraíocht agus le díbirt ó gach ceann de na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) ar bhonn bliantúil. Soláthraíonn scoileanna an t-eolas seo do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

The Department collects statistics on suspensions and expulsions from each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on an annual basis. This information is provided to ELBs by the schools in their area.

The information provided by schools does not contain the level of detail you require.

School Exclusions

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many secondary school exclusions involved "looked after" children in each of the last five years. (AQW 1718/10)

Minister of Education: Bailíonn an Roinn staitisticí i dtaca le fionraíocht agus le díbirt ó gach ceann de na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) ar bhonn bliantúil. Soláthraíonn scoileanna an t-eolas seo do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

The Department collects statistics on suspensions and expulsions from each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on an annual basis. This information is provided to ELBs by the schools in their area.

The information provided by schools does not contain the level of detail you require.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 1015/09, to provide an update on what functions currently undertaken in (i) Rathgael House; and (ii) Waterside House; will be transferred to the Education and Skills Authority. (AQW 1726/10)

Minister of Education: Tá liosta in Iarscríbhinn A de na feidhmeanna atá á ndéanamh (i) i dTeach Ráth Giall; agus (ii) i dTeach Thaobh an Uisce; a aistreofar chuig an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna ar 1 Eanáir 2010.

Annex A contains the list of functions currently undertaken in (i) Rathgael House; and (ii) Waterside House; which will transfer to the Education and Skills Authority on 1 January 2010.

ANNEX A

Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Rathgael House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
School Estate - Major Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational aspects of Approval of Capital Allocation (New Starts Programme) in conjunction with DFP. Capital Works Process. Operational aspects of Achieving Excellence in Construction policy framework. Financial monitoring of scheme expenditure profiles.
School Estate - Minor Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor works budget. Development of Schools Estate Policies for IME sector. Integrated Schools Programme. IME Schools Programme. Operational aspects of Policy initiatives.
School Estate – Finance & Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Allocation Process. Monitoring – Major/Minor works (Controlled & Voluntary Sectors). Energy Efficiency Scheme. Quarterly Creditors Process.
School Estate – Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational aspects of capital development. Capital grant recovery. Surplus Places.
Teacher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational aspects of Teacher Education Policy. Operational aspects of determination of intakes to Initial teacher education courses (supply & demand). Operational aspects of policy, approval funding & oversight of teachers' early and continuing professional development. Teaching Awards Trust – manage the regional & national nominations of teachers and other school-based staff. Funding and attendance at meetings of the NI Centre for information on Language Teaching (NICILT).
Curriculum/Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational aspects of development of Primary Sports Programme Policy, Funding & oversight of its implementation. Operational aspects of Casework & representation.

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Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Rathgael House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
Qualifications & ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational aspects of regulating qualifications. Dissolving Boundaries Project – Cross border funding for citizenship.
Business Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding of Business Education activities to specific organisations. Operational aspects of policy co-ordination of Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths.

Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Rathgael House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
14-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of development & monitoring of Specialist Schools Policy. • Operational aspects of policy on support arrangements for Entitlement Framework.
School Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of School Improvement Policy. • Operational aspects of Extended Schools Policy. • Operational aspects of Full Service Extended Schools Programmes. • Operational aspects of monitoring & evaluating Integrated Development Fund Projects. • Operational aspects of Neighbourhood Renewal.
Accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers Superannuation Scheme Accounts Section.
Teachers Negotiating & Pensions Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of Negotiating Machinery. • Operational aspects of Information Management.
Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of Sure Start Policy. • Operational aspects of core funding for NI Child Minding Association & Early Years Organisation. • Operational aspects of Early Years Fund. • Update of Childcare Choices website. • Operational aspects of Pre-school Education Expansion Programme. • Operational aspects of Policy related to Childminding.
Youth & Community Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of developing policy priorities for Youth & ongoing youth policy. • Operational aspects of the Capital Investment Strategy for Youth.
Integrated Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of the legislative duty to encourage and facilitate Integrated Education (IE) responsible for the development of policy in relation to IE.

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Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Rathgael House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
Schools Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of Voluntary Grammar GMI Schools Funding. • Monitoring/reporting of schools surplus/deficit position against delegated budgets including planned expenditure. • Revision of surplus/deficit monitoring mechanisms. • Preparation of financial information/briefing.
Schools Administration – Governance & School Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of School Policy Development & Implementation. • Operational aspects of School governance Policy.
Schools Administration – Services Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of School Food Policy. • Operational aspects of funding allocation. • Operational aspects of School Transport Policy. • Education Maintenance Allowance.
Special Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of Special Education Policy & contribution to cross Departmental policy developments. • Operational aspects of monitoring of earmarked funding & development of business cases.

Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Rathgael House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
Healthy Schools & Travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travellers – Operational aspects of policies to support schools & children. • Operational aspects of the development of Policy in relation to Newcomers. • Operational aspects of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO).
Pupil Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational aspects of the Child Protection Policy. • Operational aspects of the Schools Counselling Service. • Operational aspects of the development of the Child Protection – Unsuitable Persons Policy and regulation. • Operational aspects of the development of the Promoting Good Behaviour Policy, legislation & guidance. • Operational aspects of the development of the Children & Young People at Risk policy & legislation.

Functions currently undertaken in the Department of Education, Waterside House, which will be transferred to the Education & Skills Authority	
Teachers Pay & Pensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Function will transfer in its entirety.

School Maintenance Backlog: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the school maintenance backlog in the North Down constituency. (AQW 1745/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas figiúirí don riaráiste cothabhála do scoileanna i dtoghcheantar Dhún Thuaidh, de réir an chórais bhainistíochta eastát de chuid na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne:

According to the Education and Library Boards' estates management system the maintenance backlog in schools in the North Down constituency is as follows:

School	Maintenance Backlog (£)
Ballymagee Primary School	3,290
Ballyvester Primary School	9,170
Bangor Central Primary School	143,970
Bangor Nursery School	55,945
Bloomfield Primary School	343,855
Clandeboy Primary School	282,445
Clifton Special School	5,100
Crawfordsburn Primary School	20,450
Donaghadee Primary School	147,330
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	71,625
Grange Park Primary School	257,040
Hollywood Nursery School	8,075
Hollywood Primary School	233,069
Kilcooley Primary School	254,582
Millisle Primary School	152,615
Priory College	540,285

School	Maintenance Backlog (£)
Rathmore Primary School	367,630
Redburn Primary School	604,405
St Anne's Primary School	40,215
St Columbanus' College	696,745
St Comgall's Primary School	5,190
St Malachy's Primary School Bangor	211,558
St Patrick's Primary School Holywood	328,145
Trinity Nursery School	137,955

September Monitoring Round: DE Bids

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what bids her Department made in the September Monitoring round. (AQW 1746/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas na tairiscintí acmhainne a chuir an Roinn Oideachais isteach le linn Bhabhta Monatóireachta Mheán Fómhair 2009/10:

Resource bids submitted by the Department of Education in the 2009/10 September Monitoring Round were:

£10.0 million - Education & Library Board Access to End Year Flexibility

£10.2 million - Schools and Youth Maintenance

£1.7 million - Staffing Pressures

Appointment of School Principals

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many appointments of school principals were made by the South Eastern Education and Library Board in each of the last five years. (AQW 1759/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na bPríomhoidí Scoile a ceapadh i limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt i ngach bliain féilire le cúig bliana anuas.

The number of School Principals appointed in the South Eastern Education and Library Board in each of the last five years (calendar) is as follows:

2005	9
2006	11
2007	6
2008	7
2009 - to date	9*

* Figure does not include 1 Principal post for which pre-employment checks are currently ongoing and 2 Principal posts currently at the shortlisting stage.

DE Policy on Consultation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline her Department's policy or guidance on procedures for consultation with parents and local communities, in relation to proposals for change to education provision in a parish area, with particular reference to the provision of feed back to parents and local communities on (i) responses received; (ii) assessment of the options; and (iii) the reasons for the subsequent recommendations. (AQW 1773/10)

Minister of Education: A Development Proposal is required to support any proposed significant change in the size or nature of a school. Consultation is a key element of this statutory process, which is defined under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as amended (in relation to consultation) by Article 24 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003.

Is é an moltóir a bhíonn freagrach as comhairliúchán a dhéanamh le tuismitheoirí agus le páirtithe eile leasmhara agus ina dhiaidh sin leis an Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne ábhartha, a bhíonn freagrach as foilsíú an mholta. Nuair a bhíonn an Moladh Forbartha foilsithe, beidh deis ag na páirtithe leasmhara go léir tuairimí a thabhairt go díreach don Roinn Oideachais le linn thréimhse comhairliúcháin dhá mhí eile.

The responsibility for consultation with parents and other interested parties lies with the proposer and subsequently with the relevant Education and Library Board, which is responsible for publishing the proposal. Following publication of any Development Proposal, there is a further two-month consultation period during which all interested parties can forward comments directly to the Department of Education.

Guidance on the process is available from the Department's website in the booklet 'Development Proposals for Grant-Aided Schools'. This booklet contains detailed advice on good practice in relation to consultation and can be found at http://www.deni.gov.uk/dev_proposal_for_grant_aided_schools-3.pdf

Amalgamated Primary Schools: Capital Expenditure

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to list primary schools that have undergone amalgamation within the last 15 years and to detail how many of these schools (i) have had capital schemes completed; (ii) have been approved and are awaiting capital expenditure; and (iii) have been considered but have not yet been approved for a capital expenditure. (AQW 1774/10)

Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas i dtaca le líon na gcónasc bunscoile a tharla le cúig bliana déag anuas ar fáil go héasca agus bheadh costas díreireach i gceist leis an eolas seo a fháil. Tá sonraí ar chónaisc ón bhliain 2004 ar aghaidh le fáil, áfach, agus tá siad liostaithe thíos.

Information relating to primary school amalgamations for the last fifteen years is not readily available and would result in disproportionate cost. However details on amalgamations since 2004 are available and are listed below. Within that list:-

nine amalgamated primary schools have had major capital works schemes completed;

two amalgamated schools have been announced for major capital works funding and are awaiting capital expenditure; and

a proposed major capital works schemes for one amalgamated primary school is currently in the early stages of planning.

ELB Area	Schools Amalgamated	Date of Approval	New School Name
2003/4 School Year			
SELB	Ballygawley PS and Innismagh PS, Ballygawley	05/01/2004	Richmond PS, Ballygawley
2004/5 School Year			
BELB	St Catherine's PS, St Gall's PS and St John's PS, Belfast	31/08/2005	St Clare's Primary School, Belfast
SEELB	Clough PS, Downpatrick and Downshire PS, Dundrum	30/04/2005	Cumran Primary School, Clough
	Hillsborough PS and Newport PS, Hillsborough	31/08/2005	Downshire Primary School, Hillsborough
	Annaghmore PS and Tullyroan PS	31/08/2005	Orchard Primary School, Portadown
SELB	Dervaghroy PS, Hutton PS and Sixmilecross PS	28/02/2005	Cooley Primary School

ELB Area	Schools Amalgamated	Date of Approval	New School Name
2005/6 School Year			
SELB	St Marys' Boys PS and Convent of Mercy PS, Rostrevor	31/08/2006	St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor
2006/7 School Year			
NEELB	St Louis' PS, St Joseph's PS, St Mary's PS and All Saints, PS Ballymena (Parish of Kirkinriola)	31/08/2007	Two new schools - St Brigid's Primary School and St Colmcille's Primary School, Ballymena
SEELB	Crossgar PS and Drumaghlin PS	31/08/2007	Glasswater Primary School, Crossgar
SELB	St Joseph's, PS Poyntzpass and St James' PS, Tandragee	31/08/2007	St Joseph's and St James' Primary School, Poyntzpass
2007/8 School Year			
BELB	Sydenham Infants' PS and Strand PS, Belfast	31/08/2008	Victoria Park Primary School
NEELB	St Joseph's PS, Ahoghill and St Patrick's PS Aughercloney	31/03/2008	St Paul's Primary School, Ahoghill
SELB	Killyman PS and Tamnamore PS, Dungannon	31/08/2008	Killyman Primary School, Dungannon
WELB	Burnfoot PS and Largy PS, Limavady (note Dungiven PS closed 31/08/2007 as first phase of amalgamation)	31/08/2008	Drumrane Primary School, Dungiven

No amalgamations have taken place in the period 01/09/2008 to 31/09/2009.

Amalgamated Primary Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many of the primary schools that have been subject to amalgamation within the last 15 years have not been classified as Category 2 status. (AQW 1775/10)

Minister of Education: Níl an t-eolas i dtaca le líon na gcónasc bunscoile a tharla le cúig bliana déag anuas ar fáil go héasca agus bheadh costas díreireach i gceist leis an eolas seo a fháil. Ón bhliain 2004, níor rangáíodh trí chónasc, a raibh sé scoil páirteach iontu, mar stádas Catagóir 2.

Information relating to primary school amalgamations for the last fifteen years is not readily available and would result in disproportionate cost. Since 2004, three amalgamations, involving six schools, have not been classified as Category 2 status.

Integrated Status

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to list, by constituency, the schools which have current applications for integrated status. (AQW 1779/10)

Minister of Education: Faoi láthair, níl aon Mholtaí Forbartha ann atá foilsithe maidir le scoileanna nua imeasctha faoi chothabháil stáit a bhunú, nó maidir le stádas imeasctha rialaithe a fháil.

There are currently no published Development Proposals for the establishment of new grant-maintained integrated schools, or the acquisition of controlled integrated status.

Teaching Posts

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Education how many teachers, following completion of their Post Graduate Certificate in Education in Northern Ireland, did not obtain a permanent teaching post in a primary school in Northern Ireland, in each of the last three years. (AQO 300/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na múinteoirí a bhain Teastas Iarchéime san Oideachas amach i dtuaisceart na hÉireann nach bhfuair post buan múinteoireachta ar bhunscoil i dtuaisceart na hÉireann i ngach bliain le trí bliana anuas:

The number of teachers who completed Post Graduate Certificate in Education in the north of Ireland and did not obtain a permanent teaching post in a primary school in the north of Ireland, in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	Number
2006/2007	166
2007/2008	208
2008/2009	210

Working Beyond 65

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education how many staff in her Department have applied for permission to work beyond the age of 65; and how many of the requests have been granted, in each year since 2006. (AQW 1900/10)

Minister of Education: Ní bhfuair an Roinn Oideachais aon iarratas ag iarraidh cead a fháil le bheith ag obair thar 65 bliain d'aois ó 1 Deireadh Fómhair 2006 (nuair a tháinig na Rialúcháin um Chomhionannas Fostaíochta (Aois) (TÉ) 2006 i bhfeidhm) go 31 Lúnasa 2008. Ó Mheán Fómhair 2008 ar aghaidh, ní bheidh ar fhoireann na Státseirbhíse iarratas a chur isteach chun cead a fháil le bheith ag obair thar 65 bliain d'aois.

The Department of Education received no applications for permission to work beyond the age of 65 from 1 October 2006 (when the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006 came into force) to 31 August 2008. Since 1 September 2008, Civil Service staff no longer need to apply for permission to work beyond 65.

Secondary Schools: Outdoor Education Facilities

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of outdoor education facilities; and (ii) the number of places available for secondary school pupils in each facility. (AQW 1912/10)

Minister of Education: Ní bhíonn Ionaid Oideachais Allamuigh (OECanna) maoinithe ag an Roinn go díreach mar go maoiníonn an tSeirbhís don Óige i ngach limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne iad. Tá sé de dhualgas ar na Boird agus, in am trátha, ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna cinneadh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh a mbainisteofar soláthar oideachais allamuigh.

The Department does not directly fund Outdoor Education Centres (OECs), which are funded by the Youth Service within each Education and Library Board area. It is a matter for the Boards and, in due course, the Education and Skills Authority to decide how outdoor education provision is managed.

The Chief Executives of the Boards have provided the following information on Board-controlled outdoor education provision in their areas:

Board area	Facility Name	Places available for young people
BELB	Delamont OEC	47

Board area	Facility Name	Places available for young people
NEELB	Bushmills OEC	67
	Woodhall Centre	30
	Ballyhome Centre	32
	Derganagh House	32
SEELB	Ardnabannon OEC	100
	Killyleagh OEC	50
SELB	Killowen OEC	48
	Shannaghmore OEC	54
WELB	Corick Residential Centre	20
	Gortatole OEC	48
	Magilligan Field Studies Centre	32
	Ulster American Folk Park Residential Centre	46

The numbers of places shown refer to the number of residential spaces available. Although all spaces shown are available for secondary school pupils, they are also available for others who may wish to use the centre, including primary school pupils and youth organisations. As some groups use OECs on a day group basis, the number of pupils involved in activities in some Centres may at times be higher than the maximum residency numbers shown.

The Education and Library Boards currently have no plans to increase the number of places available in OECs within their areas in the immediate future. Any application to the Department to support an increase, for example, by way of capital works to extend residential capacity, would be subject to the same consideration and procedures as all Youth Service capital applications.

Secondary Schools: Outdoor Education Facilities

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education if she has any plans to extend the provision of outdoor education places for secondary school pupils. (AQW 1913/10)

Minister of Education: Ní bhíonn Ionaid Oideachais Allamuigh (OECanna) maoinithe ag an Roinn go díreach mar go maoiníonn an tSeirbhís don Óige i ngach limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne iad. Tá sé de dhualgas ar na Boird agus, in am trátha, ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna cinneadh a dhéanamh ar an dóigh a mbainisteofar soláthar oideachais allamuigh.

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	Killyleagh OEC	50

Board area	Facility Name	Places available for young people
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	Shannaghmore OEC	54
WELB	Corick Residential Centre	20
	Gortatole OEC	48
	Magilligan Field Studies Centre	32
	Ulster American Folk Park Residential Centre	46

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DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Varney II Report

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to implement the recommendations of the Varney II Report, 'The Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland'. (AQW 1550/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): Sir David Varney's review examined a range of issues including employment; skills; innovation; enterprise; public sector reform; and tax policy issues. The first two fall to my Department. All of the recommendations in relation to employment and skills have been considered in the drafting of the revised Skills Strategy – Success through Skills 2 – which is due to be published for public consultation in the near future. The Department is also aiming to increase the supply of students in Science; Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and has commissioned a feasibility study to provide a bursary or scholarship for students in these subjects.

In relation to innovation, and as recommended by Sir David, the Department, in conjunction with Invest NI, has "embedded a permanent third stream of finance" through the Higher Education Innovation Fund which provides the universities with core funding for their business and community facing activities. The initiative is now in its second round of support and involves funding of some £9m being provided by the two bodies between 2007/08 and 2010/11. It is currently being reviewed prior to the implementation of the third round of funding from Academic Year 2010/11.

Apprenticeships

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have enrolled in apprenticeships in the Lagan Valley constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 1595/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has supported 1,108 apprentices in the Lagan Valley area between 1 September 2006 and 31 August 2009. The data in Annex A lists numbers of apprentices in each of the last three years whose given address is within the Lagan Valley area. Although these apprentices reside within the Lagan Valley area, they may or may not have enrolled with Training Providers in the Lagan Valley area and may or may not be employed by companies in the Lagan Valley area.

ANNEX A

NUMBER OF ENROLMENTS FOR APPRENTICESHIPS PROGRAMMES IN THE LAGAN VALLEY AREA 1 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 31 AUGUST 2009

1 September 2006 – 31 August 2007	201
1 September 2007 – 31 August 2008	289
1 September 2008 – 31 August 2009	618
Total	1,108

Youth unemployment

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he is taking to address the high levels of youth unemployment. (AQW 1807/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has a range of opportunities to address the needs of young people who have left school. As part of this, the Department continues to offer a guarantee of a training place for 16 and 17 year olds, under its Training for Success and Programme-Led Apprenticeship programmes.

Training for Success is designed to enable young people to progress to higher level training, further education, or employment by providing training to address personal and social development needs, develop occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, Essential Skills training. TFS is available for those who have attained the minimum school leaving age, who are under 18 years of age and who are unemployed. This is extended up to the day before their 22nd birthday for those with a disability or up to the day before their 24th birthday for those leaving care. The Skills for Your Life strand of this programme specifically aims to address the personal and development needs of young people who have disengaged from learning and/or have significant barriers to participating in learning.

ApprenticeshipsNI continue to be a high value opportunity for young people, with the employer-led apprenticeship being the option of choice. However, you will be aware from my recent announcement of the purpose and value of **Programme-Led Apprenticeships**, which were introduced on 7th September 2009 as an intervention measure during recession. This will ensure that young people aged 16-17yrs (and up to 24 years for those requiring additional support) who wish to follow an apprenticeship, but who are unable to find employment, can do so.

In addition, my Department announced measures to secure the continuity of apprenticeship training throughout the current economic climate for young people who are employed as apprentices.

Contingency arrangements were introduced from 1 December 2008 for apprentices in the construction, motor vehicle and engineering sectors, to ensure they would be able to complete the technical element of their frameworks if made redundant.

A foster-employer initiative was introduced earlier this year to identify companies who would be prepared to employ redundant apprentices and complete their training.

Where an alternative employer cannot be found for those apprentices who are over 18, the Steps to Work initiative can offer placements with employers, of up to 52 weeks in the priority skills areas that are being affected by the economic downturn. More widely, as the Department's main adult programme, Steps to Work is available to anyone aged 18 or over who is not working or is working for less than 16 hours per week. A lone parent aged 16 or over can also avail of the programme.

Further Education Colleges provide a wide variety of professional, technical and academic courses for young people who leave school, and who do not wish to follow a training or apprenticeship route.

My Department is currently developing two small pilot schemes to test alternative approaches to supporting under 25 year olds who have been unemployed for 12 months or more. These proposals are currently going through an approval process.

My Department's Careers Advisers currently provide an impartial, all-age **Careers Information, Advice and Guidance** service to clients including unemployed young people. Provision of effective Careers Information,

Advice and Guidance for clients vulnerable to social exclusion, is a key action within “Preparing for Success” the Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy.

Careers staff, based in JobCentres, Jobs and Benefit Offices and Careers Offices, throughout Northern Ireland, endeavour to make contact with 16 and 17 year olds who are not in education, training or employment, to provide support with career decision making, with the ultimate aim of re-engagement.

University of Ulster

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an update on the University of Ulster’s commitment to develop science park facilities at the Coleraine and Magee campuses. (AQW 1830/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The University has advised me that it is currently in discussions with the Northern Ireland Science Park regarding options for the further development of such facilities in Coleraine and Londonderry.

Autism

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to develop a strategy for people with autism (i) to allow them to gain access to employment; (ii) to train Social Security and Jobs and Benefits staff to understand and meet the needs of people with autism; and (iii) to ensure that the new Employment and Support Allowance is not failing people with autism. (AQW 1859/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In responding to this question from Mr Butler, the Department for Employment and Learning has responsibility for delivering the Employment Service, mainly through its staff in the Jobs and Benefits Offices throughout Northern Ireland. The Department for Social Development, through its staff in the Social Security Agency has responsibility for administering the new Employment Support Allowance.

- (1) The Department for Employment and Learning is aware of the employment needs of all its customers with disabilities including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The Department administers the Pathways to Work programme which is an innovative approach to helping people with health conditions and disabilities including those with Autistic Syndrome Disorder. The programme is a work focused approach delivered by specially trained Advisers who help new claimants on Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance to consider their work options and provides the help and support they require to seek and obtain appropriate employment. This programme is also available on a voluntary basis to those already in receipt of Incapacity Benefit. Pathways to Work eligible customers may also volunteer to participate in the Department’s Steps to Work Programme.

The Department’s Disablement Advisory Service (DAS) provides a range of employment programmes to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, including Autistic Spectrum Disorder. These include Access to Work (NI), Workable (NI), New Deal for Disabled People, Job Introduction Scheme, Work Preparation Programme and Condition Management Programme.

With regard to the DAS programmes listed above, the particular programme that is appropriate for each individual is discussed and agreed with a Pathways Personal Adviser based in local Jobs and Benefits Offices/ Jobcentres across Northern Ireland.

- (2) All of the Pathways Advisers are trained in Disability Awareness and indeed, Autistic Syndrome Disorder is specifically covered as part of the training programme they undergo before commencing work as an Adviser. This training is delivered by Occupational Psychologists from the Occupational Psychology Service Team who, together with a team of Disability Programme Managers, provide ongoing advice, support and assistance to the Pathways Advisers.

For its part, the Social Security Agency delivers training to its frontline staff as part of a mandatory customer service training for all staff to help meet the needs of its wide range of customer groups. Additional training in dealing with people who have a disability is provided for staff working in areas such as the Disability and Carers Service and the Employment and Support Allowance Centre through Disability Action. The Agency cannot provide training for staff within Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices in how to deal with specific disabilities due to the prohibitive level of funding required to implement this.

(3) The Social Security Agency provides a range of channels for those who need to access Employment and Support Allowance these include a telephony service, clerical claim forms, face to face service for vulnerable customers who need assistance, as well as the opportunity for a nominated representative to be appointed to engage on behalf of a vulnerable customer.

In conclusion, DEL's employment programmes and services are delivered on a pan-disability basis and are open to people with a wide range of disabilities, including ASD. DEL will continue to monitor and evaluate programmes and services to ensure the continued provision of a valuable and professional service to all of the disabled clients who are seeking help to find and retain employment

Nurses: Recruitment and Training

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has consulted the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the recruitment, training and availability of nurses. (AQW 1914/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The recruitment, training and availability of nurses is solely the responsibility of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I have had no consultations with him on this issue.

Recruitment Employers' Confederation

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he last met representatives of the Recruitment Employers' Confederation in relation to NHS personnel requirements and associated issues. (AQW 1915/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Recruitment Employers' Confederation (REC) is the representative body for the UK's private recruitment and staffing industry. Whilst I have not met with REC myself, Departmental officials have regular meetings with REC representatives to discuss issues relating to compliance with the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

However, any meetings between Departmental officials and REC are only to discuss employment and recruitment compliance issues that relate to the private recruitment sector. Officials have not discussed NHS personnel requirements or associated issues with REC, as this would be outside the Department's remit.

Recruitment of Agency Staff

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he is aware of the difficulties faced by nursing agencies and recruitment organisations due to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust informing hospitals that agency staff can only be recruited from one specific agency. (AQW 1917/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department's only formal engagement with the private recruitment and employment sector is to inspect and monitor private recruitment agencies and businesses, and to investigate any complaints against agencies/businesses, in order to ensure their compliance with the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

I have not been made aware of the difficulties that you have raised. However, 'preferred provider contracts' would be a business decision for the individual public body concerned and it would be inappropriate for the Department to comment on any procurement practices other than its own.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Invest NI

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to funds, grants and financial assistance given to companies in which Invest NI board members have an interest in, to detail (i) total amount received; (ii) its purpose; and (iii) the companies which received the assistance, in each of the last five years. (AQW 400/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Due to the nature of Invest NI's operations and the composition of its Board members, it is inevitable that transactions will take place with companies and organisations in which Board members may have a beneficial or non-beneficial interest. Transactions with these related companies are conducted on an arms length basis and all financial assistance packages are subject to normal project and programme rules and internal appraisal procedures. Those cases involving the purchase of goods and services are subject to normal tendering processes, and the organisation's procurement policy which complies with DFP guidelines. All proposals and transactions are approved in line with the delegation policies established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

The total payments made to companies in the last five years in which Invest NI Board members have an interest, and which are disclosed in Invest NI's Annual Reports, are as follows: -

2004/5 - £5,536,451

2005/6 - £8,473,210

2006/7 - £10,884,693

2007/8 - £12,180,189

2008/9 - £16,752,339

The analysis by Board Member is included below.

Roy Crawford Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.12.04	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
Investment Belfast	79,380	8,991	80,574	2,570
Total	79,380	8,991	80,574	2,570
Non Beneficial Interest	0	0	0	0

Rosemary Peters-Gallagher Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.12.09	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £
Beneficial Interest						
Moore Stephens Chartered Accountants	-	-	277	-	-	-
University of Ulster	427,081	27,103	1,813,931	13,727	2,700,326	2,237
Institute of Directors	-	-	-	-	-	-
Institute of Chartered Accountants	-	-	-	-	-	9,229
Northern Bank	-	-	-	-	62,535	-
Total	427,081	27,103	1,814,208	13,727	2,762,862	11,466
Non Beneficial Interest	0	0	0	0	0	0

Rosemary Peters-Gallagher Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.09	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
Moore Stephens Chartered Accountants	-	-	-	5,875
University of Ulster	2,550,705	321,453	2,966,190	68,856
Institute of Directors	5,969	-	-	12,857
Institute of Chartered Accountants	-	5,793	-	2,190
Northern Bank	-	-	-	-
Total	2,556,674	327,246	2,966,190	89,778
Non Beneficial Interest	0	0	0	0

Alan McClure Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.07	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £
Beneficial Interest						
Guildhall Advisory Services Ltd	-	-	-	523	-	-
Alpha Environmental Systems	26,841	-	77,288	-	45,192	-
Ilex Urban Regeneration Ltd	-	100	-	-	-	-
Precision Industrial Services Ltd	36,729	93	45,089	222	2,000	-
NU Print Trimmings Ltd	56,336	-	73,118	-	147,690	-
Clear Water Technologies	316	-	-	-	-	-
Sepha Holdings Ltd	-	-	-	-	25,776	-
Guild House Advisory Services Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	1,601
Total	120,221	193	195,494	745	220,657	1,601
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-

Gilbert Little Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £
Beneficial Interest								
Aepona Ltd	115,180	2,983	-	-	-	-	450	479
Oaktime Trust (Tamaran Ltd)	-	-	-	7,907	-	-	-	-
Aepona Telecoms Ltd	-	-	233,910	-	170,700	-	-	-
Tamaran Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	8,002	-	8,224
Total	115,180	2,983	233,910	7,907	170,700	8,002	450	8,703
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Debra Jenkins-Devine Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.07	2004-5 Grants £	2005-6 Grants £
Beneficial Interest		
EXUS Energy Limited	152,318	6,239
Total	152,318	6,239
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Patrick Haren Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.09	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Services £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest							
NIE plc	-	287,070	-	296,907	505,248	206,830	2,366,761
SX3 (Service & Systems Solutions)	208,210	123,889	28,541	-	-	-	-
Total	208,210	410,959	28,541	296,907	505,248	206,830	2,366,761
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Rotha Johnston Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.09	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest							
BT Shareholding	-	-	-	-	69,534	322,047	146,559
NIO	-	-	1,576	-	-	-	1,387
Andor Technology	-	153,515	-	240,801	-	236,949	3,380
Cibo Ltd	94	228	-	-	-	-	-
Queens University Belfast	-	-	-	1,945,899	118,273	1,615,196	325,389
Total	94	153,743	1,576	2,186,700	187,807	2,174,192	476,715
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Bernie Hannigan Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
Diabetica Ltd	-	-	-	-
University of Ulster	417,280	36,904	1,813,931	13,727
Queen's University Belfast	1,285,563	52,390	3,478,039	21,013
Northern Ireland Science Park	307	-	-	-
Northern Ireland Science Park (Holdings)	-	-	-	-
UUSRP Ltd	-	9,826	-	5,634
UU Tech Ltd	-	-	-	-
Total	1,703,150	99,120	5,291,970	40,374
Non Beneficial Interest				

Bernie Hannigan Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £
UU Tech Ltd	-	-	-	-
UUSRP Ltd	-	-	-	-
Northern Ireland Science Park (Holdings)	-	-	-	-
Board for the Centre for Competitiveness	-	-	-	-
Queen's University	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-

Bernie Hannigan Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
Diabetica Ltd	-	-	-	-
University of Ulster	2,700,326	2,237	2,551,297	320,861
Queen's University Belfast	5,285,631	15,943	-	-
Northern Ireland Science Park	-	-	-	-
Northern Ireland Science Park (Holdings)	-	4,694	-	-
UUSRP Ltd	-	2,738	-	-
UU Tech Ltd	766		-	-
Total	7,986,724	25,612	2,551,297	320,861
Non Beneficial Interest				
UU Tech Ltd	-	-	3,450	16,912
UUSRP Ltd	-	-	-	8,966
Northern Ireland Science Park (Holdings)	-	-	20,025	6,061
Board for the Centre for Competitiveness	-	-	37,242	373,603
Queen's University	-	-	1,945,899	118,273
Total	-	-	2,006,617	523,815

Deborah Boyd Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2005-6 Grants £
Beneficial Interest	
Enterprising Womens Network (Armagh and Down)	8,178
Total	8,178
Non Beneficial Interest	-

Fabian Monds Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.12.05	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
Western Connect Ltd	10,379	3,721
Total	10,379	3,721
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Roy Adair Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest	-	-
Non Beneficial Interest		
Business In The Community	-	7,896
Prince's Trust	607,358	1,500
Total	607,358	9,396

David Dobbin Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
British Telecom NI Plc	322,047	146,559
Food From Britain	-	81,349
Medevol Limited	1,514	-
United Dairy Farmers Ltd	173,026	-
Dale Farm	47,540	3,030
Strategic Investment Board	-	-
Intertrade Ireland	-	21,267
Queens University of Belfast	1,615,196	325,389
The Princes Trust	607,358	1,500
Total	2,766,681	579,094
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Mark Ennis Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
Airtricity Holdings Ltd & Subsidiaries	-	591
Sensor Technologies & Devices Ltd	36,784	-
CBI	-	7,621
Creative Composites Ltd	17,105	1,697
Total	53,889	9,908
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Alan Lennon Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest	-
Non Beneficial Interest	
Business In The Community	7,896
Total	7,896

Gerry MacCormac Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
Business In The Community	-	7,896
Northern Ireland Science Park	14,125	36,405
Institute of Directors	-	12,857
Total	14,125	57,158
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Frank Hewitt Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
Northern Ireland Science Park	14,125	36,405
Total	14,125	36,405
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-

Tim Brundle Appointed: 1.4.08 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
University of Ulster	2,966,190	68,856
UUTECH Science Innovation Centre	4,225	53,800
Datactics	13,068	976
Causeway Data Communications Ltd	14,918	-
Sophia Search Ltd	36,204	-
Bombardier Aerospace/Short Bros	5,832,839	1,000
Cleaver Fulton Rankin Solicitors	-	39,616
Total	8,867,445	164,248
Non Beneficial Interest		
SISAF Limited	45,000	-
Total	45,000	-

Ed Vernon Appointed: 1.4.06 Retired: Still Serving	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest						
Institute of Directors	-	-	-	5,969	-	12,857
Queens University Foundation	5,285,631	15,943	1,945,899	118,273	1,615,196	325,389
BTW Shields	-	-	-	596,324	-	-
Total	5,285,631	15,943	1,945,899	720,565	1,615,196	338,246
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-

Bill McGinnis Appointed: 1.4.02 Retired: 31.3.08	2004-5 Grants £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £
Beneficial Interest							
The McAvoy Group	252,261	255,834	-	110,000	-	52,187	-
Management & Leadership Network (MLN)	-	-	-	-	-	15,000	-
Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)	-	-	325	-	385	-	3,821
Macom (Rep. Of Ireland)	325	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prince's Trust	-	-	-	788,942	-	285,654	1,500
UK Trade & Investment	-	-	-	-	360	-	14,868
Federal Electronic Security	-	-	-	-	-	7,000	-
Memsis	87,434	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	340,019	255,834	325	898,942	745	359,840	20,188
Non Beneficial Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Bryan Keating Appointed: 1.4.06 Retired: Still Serving	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
Axis Three Ltd	-	-	-	-
Andor Technologies	153,515	-	240,801	-
Datactics Ltd	9,600	-	1,999	-
Crescent Capital II	-	-	1,500,000	-
Mail Distiller	2,445	-	-	-
Omiino Ltd	-	-	-	-
Investment Belfast	47,625	375	-	-
School of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Queen's University, Belfast	5,285,631	15,943	-	-
Total	5,498,817	16,318	1,742,800	-
Non Beneficial Interest				
Investment Belfast	-	-	-	7,874

Bryan Keating Appointed: 1.4.06 Retired: Still Serving	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £
Northern Ireland Science Park	-	-	-	-
Sophia Search Ltd	-	-	-	-
Mail Distiller	-	-	-	36,867
Total	-	-	-	44,741

Bryan Keating Appointed: 1.4.06 Retired: Still Serving	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest		
Axis Three Ltd	41,564	918
Andor Technologies	236,949	3,380
Datactics Ltd	13,068	976
Crescent Capital II	750,000	-
Mail Distiller	-	-
Omiino Ltd	185,321	2,105
Investment Belfast	-	-
School of Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Queen's University, Belfast	-	-
Total	1,226,902	7,379
Non Beneficial Interest		
Investment Belfast	-	-
Northern Ireland Science Park	14,125	36,405
Sophia Search Ltd	25,674	10,530
Mail Distiller	-	-
Total	39,799	46,935

Stephen Kingon Appointed: 7.6.02 Retired: Still Serving	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £
Beneficial Interest						
PricewaterhouseCoopers	-	915,090	-	592,072	-	318,594
BT Ireland Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mivan Limited	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mivan (UK) Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stephen Kingon Associates	-	-	-	-	-	-
Anderson Spratt Holdings	-	-	-	-	-	-
Balcas Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	915,090	-	592,072	-	318,594
Non Beneficial Interest						
Business in the Community	17,141	15,065	69,304	51,937	-	-

Stephen Kingon Appointed: 7.6.02 Retired: Still Serving	2004-5 Grants £	2004-5 Services £	2005-6 Grants £	2005-6 Services £	2006-7 Grants £	2006-7 Services £
Centre for Competitiveness	437,541	306,536	227,266	343,574	-	460,740
Royal Institute for the Deaf	763	-	-	1,158	-	-
NI Chamber of Commerce	139,026	-	84,668	63,894	-	-
Threshold	-	-	-	-	-	-
Princes Trust	-	-	584,553	1,126	788,942	-
Total	594,472	321,600	965,790	461,689	788,942	460,740

Stephen Kingon Appointed: 7.6.02 Retired: Still Serving	2007-8 Grants £	2007-8 Services £	2008-9 Grants £	2008-9 Services £
Beneficial Interest				
PricewaterhouseCoopers	24,165	377,572	-	-
BT Ireland Ltd	-	69,534	322,047	146,559
Mivan Limited	-	-	13,358	-
Mivan (UK) Ltd	1,102	-	-	-
Stephen Kingon Associates	-	23,214	-	63,578
Anderson Spratt Holdings	-	-	1,275	-
Balcas Ltd	-	-	113,234	-
Total	25,267	470,320	449,913	210,138
Non Beneficial Interest				
Business in the Community	-	-	-	-
Centre for Competitiveness	37,242	373,603	-	322,087
Royal Institute for the Deaf	-	1,401	-	490
NI Chamber of Commerce	-	-	-	-
Threshold	-	-	-	48,115
Princes Trust	285,654	1,500	607,358	1,500
Total	322,896	376,504	607,358	372,192

Motorhome Tourism

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to enhance motorhome tourism. (AQW 1511/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Representatives of the motor home sector have been in contact with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and the Department of Enterprise Trade & Investment (DETI) directly and through elected representatives on a number of occasions during recent months. In addition the Enterprise, Trade & Investment (ETI) Committee has also requested information regarding motor home tourism.

Following discussions with representatives of the motor home sector it is understood that concerns relate mainly to access to vehicle parking and the provision of services specifically for motor home tourist known as 'aires de service'.

Councils have a key role to play in the provision of parking and services for both touring caravans and motor homes. In addition the provision of motor home facilities in Northern Ireland is governed by the Caravan Act (1963), all facilities for touring caravans or motor homes must conform to the requirements of this act.

To date two seminars for representatives of Councils have been hosted by NITB and DETI (September 2008 and May 2009 respectively) to explore opportunities and best practice models in servicing motor home users.

On 25th September NITB facilitated a meeting with a representative of the motor home sector with Fermanagh District Council to explore potential servicing opportunities in County Fermanagh.

Varney II Report

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to implement the recommendations of the Varney II Report, 'The Review of the Competitiveness of Northern Ireland'. (AQW 1552/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department submitted a detailed response to DFP on the recommendations contained in Sir David Varney's second report. In my response, I explained that DETI/Invest NI were already taking actions to address the majority of Varney's recommendations and this continues to be the case.

One of the Varney II recommendations was that a review of Invest NI should be conducted. This was one of the factors that led me to establish the Independent Review of Economic Policy, which was published on 29 September 2009.

On 5 October 2009, I launched a six-week period of consultation on the Independent Review's report to gather views from key stakeholders before taking further action on the report and its recommendations.

Recession

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what advice she has received on when Northern Ireland is likely to emerge from the current recession. (AQW 1593/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is clear that the Northern Ireland economy is still experiencing difficulties as a result of the global recession. Official statistics recently published by my Department on 14 October 2009, show that output has continued to fall in the production sector, with unemployment continuing to rise.

However, it is also important to note that recent trends have revealed a slowdown in the rate of decline. For example, the latest increase in the claimant count was the smallest increase for the last fifteen months. Also, while output levels for the service sector remained flat during quarter two, 2009, revised figures for the first quarter of the year registered growth for the first time in two years.

As my Department has lead responsibility for PSA 1, 'to improve Northern Ireland's manufacturing and private services productivity', I commissioned forecasts to regularly monitor the performance of the local economy. These forecasts are suggesting that the economy is expected to return to marginal growth in 2010.

Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many times has her Department been in contact with the Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels, in each of the last 2 years; and to detail the reasons for this contact. (AQW 1613/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Statistics are not compiled on the number of individual contacts between DETI staff and the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels (ONIEB), however there has been substantial engagement over the last 2 years on a range of matters, the most significant of which are identified below.

State Aid Issues - ONIEB has facilitated the Department in discussions with the European Commission on State Aid issues. Examples of positive outcomes enabled by this engagement include approval of a State Aid framework to allow support for the Bombardier C Series aircraft. ONIEB also was instrumental in obtaining Commission approval for the Exceptional Market Support Measure Regulation which provided hardship support to pig meat and beef processors and farmers following the dioxins contamination of animal feed incident in December 2008.

Access to EU Funding - ONIEB has worked closely with Invest NI on improving access to EU funding opportunities such as Framework Programme 7 which supports research & development initiatives. Invest NI's office in Brussels is co-located with ONEIB.

Barroso Taskforce - The Office plays a leading role in enabling the work of the Northern Ireland Barroso Taskforce aimed at increasing the range and quality of engagement between NI and the EU institutions with a view to supporting the creation of more growth and jobs. Within this context, ONIEB has facilitated a number of meetings between DETI and EU officials across a range of Directorates General including Employment & Social Affairs, Regional Policy, Competition, and Energy & Transport.

EU Policy Advice / Events – ONIEB has provided the Department with information on policy developments at EU level and kept us informed of relevant workshops and events. The Office has facilitated two visits when I visited Brussels to discuss energy matters and the dioxins incident as referred to above.

Energy Switching Infrastructure

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the current capacity level for energy switching infrastructure; (ii) if Northern Ireland has sufficient switching infrastructure to offer the same level of choice to domestic energy consumers as exists in England, Scotland and Wales; and if not (iii) the reasons why not; and (iv) what steps her Department is taking to address the infrastructure short fall. (AQW 1621/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) works alongside the energy companies in Northern Ireland to ensure that the arrangements for full customer switching are in place in the event that a licensed energy supplier elects to participate in the gas and electricity supply markets.

There are four elements to the question outlined above and these are addressed as follows:

Electricity

- (i) To date there has been a total of £39million investment in customer switching capacity in the electricity sector, with £24million of this in the domestic electricity sector and £15million in the non-domestic sector. This has given full unlimited switching capacity in the non-domestic sector and partial switching capacity in the domestic sector, i.e. 6,000 domestic customers per month can switch to a total customer switch limit of 125,000 customers at present.
- (ii) As detailed in (i) above the systems in Northern Ireland (NI) do not currently afford the same level of switching capability for domestic electricity customers as in GB where they have unlimited switching.
- (iii) NI does not have the same level of switching capacity as in GB as the NI electricity market was not open to full supply competition before November 2007. Therefore it was not justified for electricity companies to invest substantially in domestic switching capacity before this date.
- (iv) As evidenced in (i) above, the current switching system for electricity customers allows for substantial levels of switching and as there are now new suppliers in the market and with the prospect of these suppliers serving domestic customers, there are stronger incentives for investing in more comprehensive domestic switching systems. NIAUR is therefore currently working with the energy companies to ensure that the necessary switching infrastructure is in place to allow full effective switching for both domestic and non-domestic electricity customers. It is anticipated that a full system capable of unlimited switching capacity in the NI electricity market will be in place by March 2012.

Gas

- (i) The existing gas customer switching systems within the Greater Belfast licensed gas area are largely manual. The Belfast gas market has around 112,000 domestic gas consumers. The market has been fully open to supply competition since January 2007 and the current switching system is capable of switching up to 50 customers per week.
- (ii) The systems in Northern Ireland (NI) do not currently afford the same level of switching capability for domestic gas customers as in GB where they have unlimited switching, within a much larger customer base.
- (iii) A number of competitors hold gas supply licences in the Greater Belfast area, and a number of business customers have switched supplier. However, as yet, no new gas supply licence holders are actively

competing for business in the domestic gas market. Hence the switching systems have thus far not been developed to support anything more than moderate levels of domestic switching.

- (iv) In order to obtain an independent assessment, the Utility Regulator intends to engage consultants to determine the exact capabilities and limitations of the existing gas switching systems and an assessment of the costs of proposals. The Utility Regulator is currently discussing the optimal solution with Phoenix Natural Gas and potential suppliers with a view to reaching a consensus on the way forward.

The Department continues to take an active interest in the creation of conditions which ensure that opportunities exist for new energy suppliers to enter the respective supply markets, and that suitable arrangements are in place to allow customers to switch supplier, as new companies participate in the market.

Taxis: Tourism

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her plans for an enhanced role for taxi drivers in promoting tourism require formal regulation to ensure quality of service and to protect tourists from being overcharged for fares. (AQW 1666/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In Northern Ireland, regulation of the taxi industry is the responsibility of the Department of Environment (DOE).

Via a process of stakeholder engagement and brand implementation taxi drivers have been identified as having the potential to influence the visitor experience in relation to their stay in Northern Ireland. They are often the first point of contact for visitors and provide invaluable insights to inform visitor experiences.

In recent years, Northern Ireland has seen a significant increase in the number of people choosing to explore Northern Ireland by taxi. The taxi driver project identified and filled a gap in tourism training provision for taxi drivers in relation to customers and product knowledge.

The role of formal regulation and fares however sits firmly with the DOE- see link below.

<http://www.roadsafetytni.gov.uk/index/taxi.htm>

Economic Disadvantage

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of people in (i) each council area; and (ii) each constituency are living in economic disadvantage. (AQW 1731/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of 'economic disadvantage' are based on the income and employment domains of the 2005 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure. These domains are not mutually exclusive i.e. one person may be counted as both 'income deprived' and 'employment deprived' depending on their circumstances. It is therefore not possible to provide a single measure of the number living in 'economic disadvantage'.

For information, the tables below provide separate details of the proportion of the relevant population who are 'income deprived' and 'employment deprived' using the definitions in the 2005 measure. The 'income deprived' measure is based on the proportion of the total population in that particular area who are 'income deprived', while the 'employment deprived' measure is based on the proportion of the population aged 18 to retirement age who are 'employment deprived'.

(I) PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE 'INCOME DEPRIVED' OR 'EMPLOYMENT DEPRIVED' BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA.

District Council Area	% 'Income Deprived' ¹	% 'Employment Deprived' ²
Antrim	14.4%	12.5%
Ards	13.7%	12.1%
Armagh	18.7%	14.7%
Ballymena	15.0%	11.5%
Ballymoney	18.5%	14.0%

District Council Area	% 'Income Deprived' ¹	% 'Employment Deprived' ²
Banbridge	14.0%	12.9%
Belfast	30.6%	19.1%
Carrickfergus	13.4%	12.5%
Castlereagh	11.5%	11.1%
Coleraine	18.6%	13.2%
Cookstown	24.1%	17.1%
Craigavon	20.1%	16.6%
Derry	34.7%	21.9%
Down	17.8%	14.0%
Dungannon	24.5%	15.7%
Fermanagh	23.0%	14.7%
Larne	15.4%	13.5%
Limavady	22.9%	16.2%
Lisburn	18.1%	12.5%
Magherafelt	18.6%	13.7%
Moyle	23.9%	15.6%
Newry and Mourne	27.8%	17.6%
Newtownabbey	15.0%	12.0%
North Down	10.7%	9.8%
Omagh	23.0%	17.1%
Strabane	31.7%	22.5%

1 Proportion of the population in each area that are income deprived.

2 Proportion of females aged 18 to 59 and males aged 18 to 64 in each area that are employment deprived.

Note: Figures are not mutually exclusive i.e. one person may be counted as both 'income deprived' and 'employment deprived' depending on their circumstances.

Source: NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005

(II) PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE 'INCOME DEPRIVED' OR 'EMPLOYMENT DEPRIVED' BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY.

Parliamentary Constituency	% 'Income Deprived' ¹	% 'Employment Deprived' ²
Belfast East	19.2%	14.6%
Belfast North	36.5%	23.3%
Belfast South	15.9%	10.7%
Belfast West	46.0%	27.3%
East Antrim	14.0%	12.5%
East Londonderry	20.2%	14.3%
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	22.1%	14.7%
Foyle	34.7%	21.9%
Lagan Valley	12.2%	10.5%
Mid Ulster	23.1%	15.7%
Newry and Armagh	26.2%	17.2%
North Antrim	17.4%	12.8%
North Down	11.1%	10.0%
South Antrim	13.0%	11.5%
South Down	18.8%	14.4%
Strangford	12.8%	11.8%
Upper Bann	19.0%	16.1%
West Tyrone	26.8%	19.4%

1 Proportion of the population in each area that are income deprived.

2 Proportion of females aged 18 to 59 and males aged 18 to 64 in each area that are employment deprived.

Note: Figures are not mutually exclusive i.e. one person may be counted as both 'income deprived' and 'employment deprived' depending on their circumstances.

Source: NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2005

Recession

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of why Northern Ireland has been more adversely affected than other regions by the current recession. (AQW 1808/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is clear that the Northern Ireland economy is still experiencing difficulties as a result of the global downturn. Official statistics produced by my Department show that all sectors have faced significant challenges, with some being more affected than others. However, I do not believe that the impact of the recession has been greater on Northern Ireland than it has on the UK as a whole.

While it is clear that the private sector in Northern Ireland has experienced difficulties, as is the case in every region of the UK, it is also important to note that our decreased exposure to the financial sector has helped stabilise the local economy. Furthermore, the relatively large size of the public sector has also helped lessen the impact of the downturn locally.

This is borne out in forecasts commissioned by my Department. These indicate that while the local economy is expected to contract by 4.3% in 2009, output in the UK as a whole is expected to experience a larger fall. Furthermore, forecasts also suggest that Northern Ireland will return to marginal growth in 2010.

Bankruptcy Law

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department intends to take to reform the laws regarding bankruptcy. (AQW 1817/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department has no plans to materially amend the law applying to bankruptcy. By long-standing convention bankruptcy law in Northern Ireland is kept in parity with that applying in England and Wales. My Department is not aware of any plans to reform bankruptcy law in England and Wales.

There are plans to make certain minor adjustments to bankruptcy law in England and Wales, and if these go ahead my Department will take action to bring in corresponding provision for Northern Ireland. This would include replicating by Assembly Bill a planned Legislative Reform Order amending the primary legislation under which bankruptcies are administered to enable greater use to be made of electronic communications.

Work is already underway to make an amending piece of subordinate legislation corresponding to the Insolvency (Amendment) Rules 2009, which were brought into force in England and Wales on 6 April 2009 to enable better targeted publicity in insolvency proceedings, including bankruptcy.

The entire original Rules and subsequent amendments which apply in England and Wales are currently the subject of a consolidation exercise which is not due to be completed until 2011.

My Department's Insolvency Service is currently working on a Debt Relief Bill. Debt Relief will be an alternative to, rather than a reform of, bankruptcy. It will enable debtors who meet certain eligibility criteria, including a limit on total debt they can owe, to apply to the Official Receiver for a Debt Relief Order instead of petitioning the Court for bankruptcy.

Businesses Operating in Northern Ireland

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 1134/10 how many people are employed by (i) the 3,325 firms which have an owner from outside Northern Ireland; and (ii) the 67,465 firms which are locally owned. (AQW 1818/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Pursuant to AQW 1134/10, the latest data from the Inter-departmental Business Register¹ indicates that at September 2009, the 3,325 businesses categorised as having an owner² from outside Northern Ireland, were estimated to employ a total of 335,940 (45% of all employees³). The 67,465 locally owned businesses employed an estimated total of 412,525 (55% of all employees).

- 1 It should be noted that the business register only contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered or which operate a PAYE scheme. Therefore those smaller businesses which do not exceed the VAT threshold or are VAT exempt will be excluded from the figures.
- 2 Please note that each business on the register is defined as being locally owned unless a single outside investor holds a greater than 50% total shareholding. As a result the estimates provided in this answer are likely to underestimate the total number of businesses in Northern Ireland which may be partly owned by interests outside of Northern Ireland.
- 3 The business register is not the primary recommended source for employee estimates and is likely to provide an over-estimate of the total number of employees.

Businesses Operating in Northern Ireland

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 1134/10, of the 3,325 firms which had an owner from outside Northern Ireland how many employed (i) more than 1000 people; (ii) between 500 and 1000 people (iii) between 100 and 500 people; and (iv) under 100 people. (AQW 1820/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Pursuant to AQW 1134/10, table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of businesses with an owner from outside¹ Northern Ireland, by employee size category. This information has been sourced from the Inter-departmental Business Register² at September 2009.

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF “NOT LOCALLY” OWNED BUSINESSES BY EMPLOYEE SIZE CATEGORY, SEPT 2009

Employee Size category	Number of “not local owned” businesses ³	Percentage (%)
0 - 99	2,855	85.9%
100 - 499	360	10.8%
500 - 999	60	1.7%
1000+	55	1.6%
Total	3,325	100.0%

1. Please note that each business on the register is defined as being locally owned unless a single outside investor holds a greater than 50% total shareholding. As a result the estimates of business numbers provided in this answer are likely to underestimate the total number of businesses in Northern Ireland which may be partly owned by interests outside of Northern Ireland.
2. It should be noted that the business register only contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered or which operate a PAYE scheme. Therefore those smaller businesses which do not exceed the VAT threshold or are VAT exempt will be excluded from the figures.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

Businesses Operating in Northern Ireland

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 1134/10, how many of the 67,465 locally owned firms employed (i) more than 1000 people; (ii) between 500 and 1000 people; (iii) between 100 and 500; and (d) under 100 people. (AQW 1821/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Pursuant to AQW 1134/10, table 1 presents a breakdown of the number of locally owned businesses by employee size categories. This information is once again sourced from the Inter-departmental Business Register² at September 2009.

TABLE 1 - NUMBER OF LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESSES BY EMPLOYEE SIZE CATEGORY, SEPT 2009

Employee Size category	Number of locally owned businesses	Percentage (%)
0 - 99	67,185	99.6%
100 - 499	250	0.4%
500 - 999	20	0.0%
1000+	15	0.0%
Total	67,465	100%

1. Please note that each business on the register is defined as being locally owned unless a single outside investor holds a greater than 50% total shareholding. As a result the estimates provided in this answer are likely to include some businesses in Northern Ireland which may be partly owned by interests outside of Northern Ireland.
2. It should be noted that the business register only contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are VAT registered or which operate a PAYE scheme. Therefore those smaller businesses which do not exceed the VAT threshold or are VAT exempt will be excluded from the figures.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

NI Science Park Foundation

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm whether the NI Science Park Foundation agreed, at the time of its inception, to develop science park facilities at the University of Ulster’s Coleraine and Magee campuses; and to detail (ii) the amount of money set aside for this; and (iii) how much of this money has been taken up by the University. (AQW 1827/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It has always been the intention that the Northern Ireland Science Park (NISIP) would not be limited to its current Queen’s Island location; rather it would extend, in time, across Northern Ireland.

In 2003, within the Science Park's Phase 1 budget, £4.25 million was allocated for investment in the North West in association with the University of Ulster (UU). This was earmarked for the development of the Science Park at Magee and Coleraine, a total of 40,000 sq. ft.

The University of Ulster subsequently decided that it was unable to utilise the funding and it was returned to NISP in August 2005.

NISP recently renewed discussions with the University of Ulster on the potential for extending the Science Park to the North West and these discussions are on-going.

Go for It Programme

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all financial investments in new business enterprises as a direct result of the 'Go for it' programme, in each of the last three years, in the North Down area. (AQW 2098/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The 'Go For It' programme is a marketing campaign administered by Invest NI aimed at anyone interested in starting a business in Northern Ireland. The primary funding mechanism supporting new locally-owned businesses is the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start A Business Programme), delivered by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Table 1 below shows the number of Start A Business programme offers made in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) over the last 3 years. The amount of assistance offered has also been included.

TABLE 1 – ASSISTANCE OFFERED BY START A BUSINESS PROGRAMME IN NORTH DOWN PCA (2006/07 – 2008/09)

Year	No of Offers	Total Assistance (£)
2006/07	111	42,200
2007/08	91	33,000
2008/09	81	27,600
Total	283	102,800

Go for It Programme

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list (i) the businesses in the North Down area that were assisted under the 'Go for It' programme, in each of the last three years; and (ii) if these businesses are still trading. (AQW 2126/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between April 2006 and March 2009, 283 new start ups in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area were assisted through the Start a Business programme. This is broken down as 111 businesses supported in 2006 - 07, 91 in 2007 - 08 and 81 in 2008 - 09.

Of the businesses that started up in the constituency between 2006 and 2008, post start monitoring information held by Invest NI indicates that 67% are still trading. The information is not yet available for the majority of businesses who started up in 2008 - 09, as post start monitoring to ascertain their trading status is only commencing.

As the majority of those who participated on the programme were individuals, their details are subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act and I am therefore unable to provide you with a list identifying all those who received assistance during the period in question.

The primary vehicle supporting locally-owned businesses is the Enterprise Development Programmes, comprising both the Go for It and Growth programmes. These programmes are delivered by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Within the Enterprise Development Programmes, Go for It, which replaced the Start a Business programme in April this year, caters for pre-starts and start ups. It has been designed to offer a more flexible and enhanced continuum of support for prospective start ups and is promoted through an extensive marketing campaign. As the new programme has only been operational since April, it is too early to provide any meaningful information on trading status for those businesses assisted thus far.

Go for It Programme

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have been employed as a direct result of the 'Go for It' programme, in the last three years, in the North Down area. (AQW 2198/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI's primary mechanism for supporting locally-owned businesses is the Enterprise Development Programmes, comprising both the Go for It and Growth programmes. These programmes are delivered by Invest NI in partnership with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Within the Enterprise Development Programmes, Go for It, which replaced the Start a Business programme in April this year, caters for pre-starts and start ups. It has been designed to offer a more flexible and enhanced continuum of support for prospective start ups and is promoted through an extensive marketing campaign.

Table 1 below shows the number of offers made through the Start a Business programme in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) over the last 3 years and the number of jobs that these projects expect to create.

TABLE 1 –NUMBER OF JOBS EXPECTED TO BE CREATED BY ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN NORTH DOWN PCA (2006/07 – 2008/09)

Year	No of Offers	Number of Expected Jobs
2006/07	111	115
2007/08	91	95
2008/09	81	84
Total	283	294

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

PPS21

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the costs of the PPS21 Independent Working Group for non-farming rural dwellers. (AQW 1597/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The cost of the Independent Working Group is £19,446.67 with one expense claim outstanding. This is made up of £18,000 in fees and £1,446.67 in expenses.

Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many times has his Department been in contact with the Northern Ireland Executive's European Office in Brussels, in each of the last 2 years; and to detail the reasons for this contact. (AQW 1612/10)

Minister of the Environment: Due to my Department's responsibility for environmental issues, there is regular contact between my officials and those in the Executive's European Office. The majority of this contact involves the exchange of advice and guidance on European issues which affect my Department, although I am unable to reliably quantify the number of instances as no record is kept.

I can however confirm three specific cases in 2008 and three in 2009 where officials provided input in response to requests for information from the Office, in addition to a number of informal exchanges which took place earlier in 2009 with regard to the Barosso Task Force. I can also confirm that officials from my Department and the Department for Regional Development met with officials from the Office on 28 November 2008 in Belfast to discuss the working relationship between the Brussels Office and NI departments.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has responded to the EU Regulatory Statement on Genetically Modified Organisms. (AQW 1860/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is not aware of such a statement. However, the European Commission carries out periodic reviews of the EU regulatory framework for GMs in conjunction with Member States. My Department contributes to the UK response to such reviews when they fall within its remit.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has responded to the EU Commission Report on the socio-economic impacts of the release of Genetically Modified Organisms. (AQW 1861/10)

Minister of the Environment: This report is not due to be published until June 2010. The Commission wrote to Member States during the summer seeking input to the report, and my officials are working with colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales on the UK response to this request.

Staff Travel Costs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much was spent by his Department on staff travel cost claims in the last financial year. (AQW 1863/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has spent £1,806,052 on staff travel cost claims during the last financial year.

Local Government Reform

Mr G McHugh asked the Minister of the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to provide financial support for the cost of Local Government reform, in particular the inequitable rates differential on some rate payers due to the amalgamation of councils. (AQW 1872/10)

Minister of the Environment: The funding of Local Government reform, including the issue of the convergence of rates, is critical to the success of the programme and I will be addressing this with the Finance Minister, the rest of the Executive and with District Councils over the coming months.

Planning Appeals

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment whether applicants who are successful in appealing against planning decisions should have their costs refunded; and if so, what plans he has to address the anomaly which discriminates against these applicants. (AQW 1880/10)

Minister of the Environment: There is currently no mechanism available to applicants to enable them to recover costs incurred following a successful appeal against a planning decision.

In the consultation paper on Reform of the Planning System in Northern Ireland, my Department requested feedback on proposals to introduce a power that would allow the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to award costs where a party has been put to unnecessary expense and where the PAC has established that the other party has acted unreasonably. The consultation period ended on 2 October 2009. My Department is currently considering the responses received on the Reform Paper.

Road Safety Issues

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what progress he has made in the last year with his counterparts in the Republic of Ireland on road safety issues, such as, penalty points, driving disqualification and the harmonising of driving licences. (AQW 1886/10)

Minister of the Environment: Work to achieve the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, within the framework of the 1998 European Convention on Driving Disqualifications, is now nearing completion. Formal declarations by the UK and Ireland will shortly be made to the Secretary-General of the EU Council in accordance with Article 15.4 of the Convention, with a view to implementation of the new arrangements in early 2010. The UK and the Republic are the first two member states to take this pioneering step to put the Convention into practical effect.

Mutual recognition of penalty points is a more complex issue. However, a feasibility report on the matter has been completed, and my officials will be working with their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain on the required programme of work. The timeframe involved has yet to be determined.

Cooperation in the area of road safety advertising and publicity has continued. Some current advertisements, the costs of which have been shared, are being shown on both sides of the border. They include those involving consultant Gerry Lane, who talks about the impact of road traffic collisions from the point of view of the medical staff who have to deal with the outcomes, and about the effects of not wearing seatbelts correctly. Officials have also been sharing experience in the use of new technology for advertising and publicity purposes.

My officials are also considering the current proposals for lower drink drive limits, and liaising with the authorities in Dublin on whether there might be any scope for coordination.

On the issue of driving licences, there is no specific programme of harmonisation between the two jurisdictions. The framework of regulation for driver licensing is defined by EC directives and all member states are required to comply.

Proposed Wind Farm at Lisnamuck Road

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an update on planning application C/2008/0163/F for a proposed wind farm at Lisnamuck Road, Blackhill, Co. Londonderry. (AQW 1946/10)

Minister of the Environment: The planning application for 3 turbines at Lisnamuck Road, Blackhill is still under consideration. Planning Service has requested further environmental information under Regulation 15(1) of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland (1999) (as amended 2008).

When this information is received it will be advertised in the local press to enable further comment by interested parties. The information will be fully assessed before a final recommendation is made by Planning Service.

PPS14

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications in the Downpatrick office, deferred under PPS14 (i) were approved under PPS21; (ii) were further deferred; and (iii) were issued with a refusal. (AQW 1990/10)

Minister of the Environment: In Downpatrick Division 158 applications were deferred under draft PPS14. 43 have been approved and 110 remain deferred. One application has issued as a refusal and 4 have been withdrawn.

Recycling

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment how many councils (i) facilitate; and (ii) do not facilitate the recycling of glass products in household recycling bins; and (iii) what steps is he taking to ensure all local councils provide this service. (AQW 2021/10)

Minister of the Environment: Currently there are 8 District Councils who operate the “box” facility which collects domestic glass at the kerbside, whilst the remaining 18 Councils operate the “blue bin” facility which does not collect domestic glass. However, in all Council areas domestic glass can be taken to a local civic amenity site operated by the relevant District Council or a “bring” site such as those found at supermarket car parks. District Councils are the statutory authorities in Northern Ireland with responsibility for providing suitable receptacles and for collecting controlled wastes in their districts. It is not within the remit of my Department to mandate a standard regime.

Reorganisation of Local Councils

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment what is his Department's policy in relation to severance payments for Councillors who resign from local councils, as announced under the reorganisation of local councils. (AQW 2028/10)

Minister of the Environment: As I said in my Statement to the Assembly on 20 October 2009 about the Local Government Reform Programme, I am sympathetic to the idea of severance payments for retiring councillors. When my Department conducted a consultation on Severance Arrangements for Councillors (6 April to 31 May 2009) the majority of respondents were in favour of having a scheme as soon as possible, provided that arrangements were in place for the resultant vacancies to be filled by co-option.

As I stated in my response to an earlier question (AQW 1175/2010) I have been discussing a possible amendment to the current arrangements for filling casual vacancies in district councils with NIO Minister, Paul Goggins. He issued a public consultation on possible amendments on 23 October with a closing date for responses of 15 January 2010.

The primary legislation which would enable my Department to make a severance scheme, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, is currently at Committee stage. When that Bill has completed its passage through the Assembly my Department will be able to make regulations which set out the detail of the severance arrangements for councillors.

Blind and Partially-Sighted People

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what provision is made by his Department to make documents accessible to blind and partially-sighted people. (AQW 2045/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department, under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), submitted a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland which shows how it is fulfilling the duties provided in the DDA. The Department, in consultation with various representative groups from the disability sector, produced a 'Guide to Making Information Accessible' for staff which helps to ensure that information provided to the public is available in a range of formats which meet the needs of people with disabilities. This Guide is reviewed annually which includes consultation with those groups who represent blind and partially sighted people.

The Department includes on all its publications the statement that 'this document is available in alternative formats, please contact us to discuss your requirements'. The Department, on request, can produce documents in Braille, Digital Daisy and large print formats to meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people. It can also produce tactile maps, plans and diagrams.

The Departmental website is designed to meet central government standards covering both accessibility and presentation. In accessibility terms this means it complies with the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines.

Transfer of Planning Powers to Local Councils

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment if he can confirm that planning powers will be transferred to the new councils in 2011. (AQW 2060/10)

Minister of the Environment: In accordance with the Review of Public Administration decisions, I remain committed to transferring the relevant planning functions to the new district councils. The transfer of these planning functions is a key element of my wider programme of reform of the planning system.

There were delays in getting the planning reform proposals cleared by the Executive and published for consultation. This means that we are now outside best practice in terms of the timetable for delivering the legislative programme for planning reform, including the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils by 2011.

The size of the programme and the challenges that it brings should therefore not be underestimated. However, my officials remain committed to driving this work forward as quickly as possible to ensure we stay on course to deliver by the 2011 deadline.

Blind and Partially-Sighted People: Access to Services

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment what steps have been, or will be, taken by his Department to ensure that the same level of service is provided to blind and partially-sighted people as that provided to fully-sighted people. (AQW 2086/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Department, under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995), submitted a Disability Action Plan to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland which shows how it is fulfilling the duties provided in the DDA. The Department, in consultation with various representative groups from the disability sector, has produced a 'Guide to Making Information Accessible' for staff which helps to ensure that information provided to the public is available in a range of formats which meet the needs of people with disabilities. This guide is reviewed annually.

The Department includes on all its publications the statement 'this document is available in alternative formats; please contact us to discuss your requirements'. The Department, on request, can produce documents in Braille, Digital Daisy, audio and large print formats to meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people. It can also produce tactile maps, plans and diagrams. The Departmental website is designed to meet central government standards covering both accessibility and presentation. In accessibility terms this means it complies with the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) guidelines and offers Browsealoud service which converts text to speech.

Planning Service has made available an official to visit a visually impaired member of the public to explain the policy implication of a planning document to note any concerns raised and record any comments offered. Planning Service has undertaken public information days to help explain new policies in a draft Planning Policy Statement and has used workshops and other external arrangements to draw in the views of the public and the community sector including representatives of disability groups.

The Department also provides funding to Disability Action for the administration of two schemes: The Access Service which provides technical advice and information towards the creation of a built environment which is accessible to everyone; and Community Access Grants Scheme which helps to improve access to existing facilities provided by voluntary and community organisations for people with disabilities.

To ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to private hire vehicle services at no additional cost, the Department introduced the Disability Discrimination (Private Hire Vehicles) (Carrying of Guide Dogs etc) Regulations (NI) 2008 which requires licensed private hire vehicle drivers and operators to permit the carrying of an assistance dog without additional charge when it accompanies a disabled person. Legislation is currently being prepared which will place a legal duty on drivers of public service buses to assist people with disabilities, including the visually impaired, to board and alight from the bus.

NI Environment Agency has produced Mediascapes voice over scripts for several of its Parks. It hopes to launch these on the Mediascapes web-site in the near future to allow downloads from the site to GPS compatible mobile phones.

Grey Squirrel Population

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to prevent a rise in the grey squirrel population; and if his Department has any plans to protect the existing red squirrel population. (AQW 2209/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department recognises that the grey squirrel is a serious threat to the future survival of red squirrel populations in Northern Ireland.

In May 2008 the former Environment and Heritage Service and the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Republic of Ireland published the all-island Species Action Plan for the red squirrel, which stated several key objectives for conserving the red squirrel. A wide ranging cull of grey squirrels across Northern Ireland would not be practical and the plan recommends targeted culls of grey squirrels in areas close to red squirrel strongholds. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) supports and provides advice to private landowners and local squirrel groups who wish to undertake grey squirrel control. DARD's Forest Service routinely practices squirrel control on its lands for the protection of trees.

NIEA is currently working with Forest Service on a project to monitor incidences of squirrel pox disease in local squirrel populations and is presently engaged in discussions with scientists at Queens University regarding a research project on the subject.

NIEA has also been supporting protection of red squirrels through the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum. The purpose of the Forum is to take forward recommendations in the Red Squirrel Species Action Plan, to discuss and co-ordinate squirrel research, and to advise on best practice for red squirrel conservation activities in Northern Ireland.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Recycling of Grass Cuttings

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any departmental policy on the recycling of grass cuttings and how it is being implemented. (AQW 663/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): There is no formal departmental policy in place covering recycling of grass cuttings.

Recycling of Grass Cuttings

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much grass is currently recycled by Government Departments. (AQW 664/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Information on the total weight of grass recycled by Government Departments is not generally recorded however the following data is available:

At the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum approximately 50 tonnes of grass is recycled annually.

At the Ulster American Folk Park approximately 15 tonnes of grass is recycled annually.

Recycling of Grass Cuttings

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what use Departments make of the grass cuttings they produce. (AQW 665/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Departments make use of grass cuttings in a variety of ways which include:

Leaving the grass to bio-degrade on-site;

Recycling for composting;

Feeding of animals through independent contracts with local farmers.

HR Connect

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he will take to ensure that HR Connect will deliver prompt and accurate payment of Civil Service Equal Pay claims when a settlement is reached. (AQW 1274/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Discussions with NIPSA are continuing with the aim of securing a negotiated settlement to the civil service equal pay issue if possible.

In the event that a negotiated settlement is reached a number of arrangements will be needed for its implementation.

I have instructed my officials to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place.

Loss of Capital Receipts

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of the loss of capital receipts on each Department. (AQW 1386/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not in a position to comment on the impact of the loss of capital receipts on each department. Each Minister would have to assess their own position.

The Department of Finance and Personnel does not routinely receive any significant capital income and no capital receipts were assumed for the department in the current financial year when budgets were set as part of the Budget 2008-11 process.

The position in relation to the Workplace 2010 capital receipt, previously anticipated in the 2008/09 financial year, is set out in my answer to AQW 1388/10.

Car Parking Spaces for Public Sector Workers

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much each Department spent providing car parking spaces for public sector workers in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2009 to date. (AQW 1576/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The amount spent by Department by year on car parking spaces for public sector workers was as follows:

	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010 (to end September)
DEL	£11,280	£11,459	£4,855
DOE	£238,391	£276,366	£165,697
DSD	£203,563	£204,902	£73,147
DRD	£2,971	£1,920	£1,440
DCAL	£15,000	£15,000	£3,750
DETI	£416,000	£405,000	£186,000
DE	0	0	0
DFP*	£1,246,108	£976,775	£499,127
DARD	0	0	0
DHSSPS	0	0	0
OFMDFM	£30,684	£27,380	£1,889

* Includes spaces leased by DFP on behalf of other Departments.

Expenditure on Bicycle Parking Bays

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much each Department spent providing bicycle parking bays for public sector workers in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2009 to date. (AQW 1578/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Only the Department of Finance and Personnel has incurred expenditure in providing bicycle parking bays from 2007/2008 onward. This has been carried out as part of major capital works on buildings and the specific cost cannot be readily extracted.

Public Transport Usage for Public Sector Workers

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much each Department spent on public transport usage for public sector workers in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2009 to date. (AQW 1579/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is held by individual Departments.

The relevant figures for the Department of Finance and Personnel (including its agencies) for the financial years covering the period of the query are as follows:

2006/07	£399,499
2007/08	£430,168
2008/09	£374,461
2009/10 (to 30 September)	£154,040

The information is provided on the basis of financial years representing the basis of preparation of the Department's accounts.

Special European Programmes Body

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for her assessment on whether the Special European Programmes Body is adequately facilitating projects that encourage innovation and new business incubation. (AQW 1714/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is the Managing Authority for two EU Programmes—PEACE III and the INTERREG IVA Cross Border Programme. INTERREG IVA makes provision under its Enterprise theme to encourage innovation and competitiveness in enterprise and business development. The Programme has a budget of €256 million. All assisted projects must be cross border.

To date, the Enterprise theme has awarded some €7 million to projects that support innovation and a further €7 million worth of applications in this area is currently under assessment. There will be a further call for applications in the New Year. This level of support for innovation is in line with the original programme expectations and is considered adequate.

All applications for INTERREG IVA funding are assessed using agreed selection criteria, including value for money. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) is accountable for all resources allocated under the Enterprise theme and participates fully in the assessment of funding applications.

Cost of the Bain Report

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the costs associated with the production of the report by Sir George Bain on the Location of Public Sector Jobs; and the costs of maintaining the unit set up to deal with this issue since publication of the report. (AQW 1727/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The cost of the Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs was £205,500. This includes the fees and expenses for the independent members, and the salary costs of the DFP staff who supported the Review. It also takes account of research costs, and the expenditure incurred on public meetings, printing and publication of the report. Since the report was published, any administrative work relating to location has been undertaken by staff who are also engaged on other DFP duties.

Civil Service

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many vacancies there are in the Civil Service in the Derry City Council area, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) Government Department. (AQW 1728/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of vacancies in permanent Northern Ireland Civil Service posts, located in the Derry City Council area, in each of the eleven Northern Ireland Departments and their Agencies, is set out in the attached table.

**NICS VACANCIES IN THE DERRY CITY COUNCIL AREA, BROKEN DOWN BY GRADE AND GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) BASIS AT 15 OCTOBER 2009**

Dept	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	SO	DP	G7	G6	Other		Total
									No.	Grade	
DEL		2	6								8
DFP				1				1			2
DRD		0.7							1	Road Worker	4.7
									3	TG21	
DSD	1.6	1.3	2.4	0.2	0.2		2		10	SGB22	17.7
Totals	1.6	4	8.4	1.2	0.2		2	1	14		32.4

1 Technical Grade 2

2 Support Grade Band 2

Note: Departments not shown in the table had no vacancies

Civil Service Staff in Foyle Constituency

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Service staff are employed in the Foyle constituency at each location, broken down by Department. (AQW 1730/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information is provided in the attached table.

Foyle Constituency		
Department	Location	No of Staff
DARD	Crown Buildings Londonderry	28
	Orchard House	149
	Vets Office Foyle Meats Ltd	15
	Vets Office Wm Grant and Co Ltd	5
Total		197
DE	Waterside House	123
Total		123
DEL	Foyle Jobs and Benefits Office	84
	Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits Office	38
	Richmond Chambers	5
Total		127
DETI	Crown Buildings Londonderry	4
Total		4
DFP	Orchard House	51
	Waterside House	126
Total		177
DHSSPS	Waterside House	23
Total		23

Foyle Constituency		
Department	Location	No of Staff
DOE	Crown Buildings Lisnagelvin	4
	New Buildings Industrial Estate	28
	Orchard House	47
	Woodburn Environment Agency Depot	4
Total		83
DRD	Depot Crescent Road	62
	Orchard House	10
Total		72
DSD	28 Temple Road	214
	Carlisle House	347
	Crown Buildings Lisnagelvin	55
	Richmond Chambers	4
	Foyle Jobs and Benefits Office	161
	Orchard House	36
Total		817
OFMDFM	Orchard House	3
Total		3
Grand Total		1626

Notes:

Data source as at 19 October 2009.

Figures do not include those on career break.

Figures include permanent, casual, industrial and non-industrial staff.

Guidelines on Agency Staff and Mobile Worker Schemes

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has issued guidelines to other Departments on the use of agency staff and mobile worker schemes. (AQW 1734/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A User's Protocol for the NICS Provision of Temporary/Short term Workers has been issued to all Departments. Additional guidance has issued to Departments advising that the use of agency staff should be kept to a minimum and that such staff should only be used to meet short term business needs for a period not exceeding 51 weeks. Guidance has not issued in relation to mobile worker schemes.

Use of Agency Staff in the Health Service

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has had any discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding (i) the use of agency staff and agency staff training; and (ii) quality control, in respect of Health Service recruitment. (AQW 1735/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding (i) the use of agency staff and agency staff training; and (ii) quality control, in respect of Health Service recruitment.

Rates: Banbridge

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the regional domestic rates; and (ii) the regional commercial rates, paid in all postcode districts in Banbridge town, over the last five years.

(AQW 1736/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total rates paid for properties in the wards of Ballydown, Banbridge West, Edenderry, Fort, Seapatrick and The Cut for the last three years are shown in the table attached. The figures for previous years are not readily available due to the replacement of rating IT system.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	Notes
Domestic				
Receipts (£)				1
BT32 3	1,920,543	2,329,126	1,994,217	
BT32 4	2,317,064	2,103,338	2,200,135	
Unknown	13,835	11,453	14,061	
Total	4,251,442	4,443,917	4,208,412	2
Non-Domestic				
Receipts (£)				1
BT32 3	2,494,474	2,839,409	2,673,366	
BT32 4	1,122,518	1,831,673	2,336,461	
Unknown	33,646	23,017	25,264	
Total	3,650,638	4,694,099	5,035,092	2

Notes:

1. The rates shown above are those paid relating to properties in the wards listed above, split into post codes as requested. The figures are not the total rates paid by properties in the postcode sectors listed.
2. The split of receipts between domestic and non-domestic properties has been derived from the current valuation list, as the sector is not recorded on each individual receipt transaction. Properties that have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation have been included in 'non-domestic' receipts.

Individual receipts are not allocated between the district and regional components of each rates bill and as a result it is not possible to break receipts down into regional and district elements. In addition, receipts are received at a point in time and may not relate to the rating year in which they are received. An approximate estimate of the regional receipts could be obtained by applying the relevant proportion of the total poundage in each year. The poundages for Banbridge District Council are provided in the two tables below.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Domestic			
District Rate	159.90	0.300	0.312
Regional Rate	198.17	0.361	0.361
Total Rate	358.07	0.661	0.673
Non-Domestic			
District Rate	22.59	22.59	23.48
Regional Rate	28.17	29.10	29.89
Total Rate	50.76	51.69	53.37

Note: Domestic rates were based on Net Annual Values until 31 March 2007 and on 1 April 2007 changed to being based on capital values as part of the rating reforms. This is the reason for the significant change of domestic rate poundages between 2006- 07 and 2007- 08.

Rates: Portadown

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the regional domestic rates; and (ii) the regional commercial rates, paid in all postcode districts in Portadown town, over the last five years.

(AQW 1737/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total rates paid for properties in the wards of Annagh, Ballybay, Ballyoran, Bleary, Brownstown, Kernan, Cocrain, Edenderry, Killycomain and Tavanagh for the last three years are shown in the table attached. The figures for previous years are not readily available due to the replacement of the rating IT system.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	notes
DOMESTIC				
Receipts (£)				1
BT62 1	1,037,049	952,137	1,028,161	
BT62 3	1,778,923	1,597,949	1,691,091	
BT62 4	588,101	530,525	579,964	
BT63 5	3,703,603	3,554,690	3,663,146	
BT63 6	18,655	23,085	23,598	
BT64 1	45,864	38,476	40,846	
BT64 2	100,808	92,174	109,427	
BT64 3	109,888	99,395	109,939	
BT65 5	1,596	1,233	1,246	
BT66 6	8,581	8,860	8,536	
BT66 7	25,380	29,931	32,666	
BT66 8	30,869	34,850	34,567	
Unknown	26,403	24,780	33,394	
Total	7,475,720	6,988,085	7,356,582	
Non-Domestic				
Receipts (£)				1
BT62 1	1,836,459	1,910,462	1,956,061	
BT62 3	3,058,300	3,030,773	3,369,356	
BT62 4	337,697	366,394	398,215	
BT63 3	10,393	10,608	10,662	
BT63 5	3,407,503	3,975,271	4,110,072	
BT63 6	3,130	3,211	3,293	
BT64 1	523,692	881,140	796,791	
BT64 3	65,322	56,149	51,900	
BT66 4	35,345	54,730	61,144	
BT66 6	6,583	7,074	7,523	
BT66 7	21,217	22,142	22,709	
BT66 8	32,342	33,176	34,025	
BT67 0	1,490	12,570	35,670	
Unknown	436,492	231,879	434,026	
Total	9,775,964	10,595,580	11,291,447	2

Notes:

1. The rates shown above are those paid relating to properties in the wards listed above, split into post codes as requested. The figures are not the total

rates paid by properties in the postcode sectors listed.

2. The split of receipts between domestic and non-domestic properties has been derived from the current valuation list, as the sector is not recorded on each individual receipt transaction. Properties that have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation have been included in 'non-domestic' receipts.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest pound.

Individual receipts are not allocated between the district and regional components of each rates bill and as a result it is not possible to break receipts down into regional and district elements. In addition, receipts are received at a point in time and may not relate to the rating year in which they are received. An approximate estimate of the regional receipts could be obtained by applying the relevant proportion of the total poundage in each year. The poundages for Craigavon District Council are provided in the two tables below.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Domestic			
District Rate	163.65	0.3395	0.3474
Regional Rate	198.17	0.3608	0.3608
Total Rate	361.82	0.7003	0.7082
Non-Domestic			
District Rate	21.51	21.86	22.38
Regional Rate	28.17	29.10	29.89
Total Rate	49.68	50.96	52.27

Note: Domestic rates were based on Net Annual Values until 31 March 2007 and on 1 April 2007 changed to being based on capital values as part of the rating reforms. This is the reason for the significant change of domestic rate poundages between 2006- 07 and 2007- 08.

Flooding Incident Line

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the performance of Flooding Incident Line on 9 October 2009. (AQW 1740/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Flooding Incident Line performed very well on the 9 October, despite the level of rainfall being less than that required to trigger a flash flood warning. It received 53 calls between 11:00am and 21:30pm. The busiest period was between 17:00 and 18:00 where 28 of those calls were received. Of the 53 calls, 52 of them were answered while one was abandoned by the caller after 3 seconds.

During the busiest period, the average time to pick up a call was 30 seconds, during all other times calls were picked up on average within 3.5 seconds. Again during the business period, the longest waiting time was 2 minutes 55 seconds, but during all other times the longest waiting time was 15 seconds.

The 52 calls answered led to 42 incidents being logged and transferred to the appropriate agency; 7 for NI Water, 33 for Roads Service and 2 for Rivers Agency.

Multi-Annual Plan for the East Border Region

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he will approve the Multi-Annual Plan for the East Border Region. (AQW 1850/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The EBR MAP is a strategic document which sets out a broad development plan for the region under the INTERREG IV Programme. There is no requirement for the Minister for Finance and Personnel to approve it. Individual projects within the plan will be considered and approved by the Special EU Programmes Body as soon as possible after they are presented.

Special EU Programmes Body

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the Special EU Programmes Body will announce the projects successful for funding under the £20 million 'Environmental' call which closed on 10 July 2009. (AQW 1851/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The 21 applications received under the INTERREG IVA Environment Sub-Theme are currently being examined by the Special EU Programmes Body's Joint Technical Secretariat. Initial advice on the technical aspects of the applications is currently being sought from relevant Departments North and South. It is expected that these applications will be brought to the Programme's Steering Committee from March 2010 onwards. All applicants will be notified of the outcome when the Steering Committee has agreed its final decision.

Interreg IVA

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the reasons for the delay in approving the project plans submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body by East Border Region Ltd under Interreg IVA. (AQW 1881/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is no delay in the approval of the projects submitted by East Border Region Ltd. All of the projects submitted by East Border are currently progressing through the agreed selection process.

Project proposals submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) are assessed by the INTERREG IVA Steering Committees against the agreed INTERREG IVA selection criteria. Projects must also undergo an appropriate level of economic appraisal and be reviewed by the relevant accountable government department. Final approval follows the completion of these agreed assessment procedures.

Each of the East Border Region's projects is at a different stage in this process. SEUPB is awaiting further information from the Region on its Enterprise project proposals and for some of its Cross Border Collaboration theme projects. SEUPB are currently examining the economic appraisal of themes proposed by East Border Region for Tourism.

Bain Report: Cost of Implementation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total potential cost of implementation of the Bain report on the re-location of public sector jobs. (AQW 1890/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In recent correspondence I have alluded to potential costs of around £40 million to relocate 3,000 – 4,000 public sector jobs as part of a pilot exercise. This is based on the indicative cost model contained in Appendix E of Professor Bain's report, full details of which can be found at http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/final_report-location-of-jobs.

Partially-Sighted and Blind People: Access to Documents

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what provision is made by his Department to make documents accessible to partially sighted and blind people. (AQW 1922/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: All of my Department's publications are available in alternative formats, including Braille and large print, upon request.

Civil Servants

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many civil servants have been dismissed due to inefficiency of performance; and how many have appealed the decision, in each of the last three financial years. (AQW 2063/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is provided in the table attached. The overall figures presented include NI government departments and their Executive Agencies.

	06/07	07/08	08/09	Total across all years
Number of Staff dismissed	3	3	1	7
Number of Staff appeals	0	0	0	0

Married Partners Not Born in the UK or Ireland

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of (i) men; and (ii) women who have married partners not born in the UK or Ireland from (a) EU; and (b) non-EU countries, in each of the last 10 years, including the nationality of the marriage partner. (AQW 2092/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of marriages by bride's / groom's country of birth and groom's / bride's nationality is given in the tables below for registration years 2005 to 2008P. Prior to this marriage registration information on country of birth/nationality was not captured electronically.

^P Provisional data

TABLE 1A: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY GROOM'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND BRIDE'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2005

Bride's Nationality	All Countries	Groom's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,140	7,738	119	283
British or Irish	7,864	7,578	87	199
Other EU National ¹	91	26	20	45
Non-EU National	185	134	12	39

TABLE 1B: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY BRIDE'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND GROOM'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2005

Groom's Nationality	All Countries	Bride's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,140	7,759	119	262
British or Irish	7,841	7,573	62	206
Other EU National ¹	95	60	20	15
Non-EU National	204	126	37	41

TABLE 2A: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY GROOM'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND BRIDE'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2006

Bride's Nationality	All Countries	Groom's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,259	7,874	146	239
British or Irish	7,982	7,690	84	208
Other EU National ¹	103	45	51	7
Non-EU National	174	139	11	24

TABLE 2B: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY BRIDE'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND GROOM'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2006

Groom's Nationality	All Countries	Bride's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,259	7,866	135	258
British or Irish	7,994	7,696	78	220
Other EU National ¹	120	55	52	13
Non-EU National	145	115	5	25

TABLE 3A: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY GROOM'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND BRIDE'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2007

Bride's Nationality	All Countries	Groom's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,687	8,299	155	233
British or Irish	8,380	8,117	76	187
Other EU National ¹	121	36	68	17
Non-EU National	186	146	11	29

TABLE 3B: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY BRIDE'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND GROOM'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2007

Groom's Nationality	All Countries	Bride's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,687	8,268	150	269
British or Irish	8,410	8,114	66	230
Other EU National ¹	137	53	71	13
Non-EU National	140	101	13	26

TABLE 4A: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY GROOM'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND BRIDE'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2008^P

Bride's Nationality	All Countries	Groom's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,510	8,112	153	245
British or Irish	8,201	7,925	78	198
Other EU National ¹	146	68	65	13
Non-EU National	163	119	10	34

TABLE 4B: NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BY BRIDE'S COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND GROOM'S NATIONALITY, REGISTRATION YEAR 2008^P

Groom's Nationality	All Countries	Bride's Country of Birth		
		UK or Ireland	Other EU Countries ¹	Non-EU Countries
All Nationalities	8,510	8,082	175	253
British or Irish	8,229	7,916	102	211
Other EU National ¹	131	55	63	13
Non-EU National	150	111	10	29

¹ EU countries relates to the 2009 definition of the EU27 which includes Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

^P Provisional data

Special EU Programmes Body

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will engage in discussions with the Special EU Programmes Body and seek to gain an extension to the deadline of 31 December 2009 for N+2 applications to ensure community groups across North Down do not lose out on funding. (AQW 2141/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Annual spending targets for EU Programmes (N+2 targets) are an EU regulatory requirement. Under the N+2 regulation, all Programmes are required to achieve an agreed level of expenditure each year. Any shortfall between actual expenditure and the annual spending target is deducted from the Programme. The PEACE III Programme has a target €19.8 million for 2009.

Although this target applies at Programme level, all PEACE III projects are expected to contribute to its achievement. However, provided that the overall Programme target is achieved, no resource should be lost at either Programme or project level.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the PEACE III Managing Authority, currently forecasts that the 2009 targets will be achieved with no resource lost to the Programme. SEUPB advises, however, that achieving the target will be challenging and that there are no grounds for complacency. All projects must make every effort to achieve their respective targets.

Rates

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many houses, thought to be unoccupied, were in fact occupied and not paying rates in each of the last three financial years. (AQW 2145/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The position with regard to unoccupied property changes daily and has done so over the past three years. Land & Property Services (LPS) is responsible for maintaining accurate records of vacant properties and, in doing so, relies on information from a number of sources including local councils as well as owners and occupiers.

The very significant rating reforms and associated IT replacement programme meant that vacancies were not examined as comprehensively as they should have been in 2006 and 2007, and therefore it is not possible to provide details broken down by financial year. However, since 2008, LPS has been working closely with local councils to inspect all properties recorded as vacant, as well as properties where no bills had issued because of difficulty collecting occupancy information. As a result, some 63,000 properties have been inspected and 11,057 bills have been issued, with a total value of £23.5 million.

Cross-Border Local Authority Partnerships

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline when the projects approved under INTERREG IVA for the cross-border local authority partnerships will be in a position to begin spending. (AQW 2162/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Projects submitted under the INTERREG IVA Programme may begin spending immediately following the acceptance of a Letter of Offer. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), Programme Managing Authority, issues Letters of Offer as soon as project proposals have successfully passed through the Programme's agreed approval procedures. These include assessment against the INTERREG IVA selection criteria (e.g. value for money). The first such letters of offer are expected to issue during November.

Health Service Recruitment

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he last met with the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the essential use of agency staff, quality control and agency staff training in respect of Health Service recruitment. (AQW 2177/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not had any meetings with the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the essential use of agency staff, quality control and agency staff training in respect of Health Service recruitment.

Peace III Funding

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he will take to ensure that Peace III funding is not clawed back by the Special EU Programmes Body due to applicants missing the N+2 deadlines because of delays caused by administration and bureaucracy. (AQW 2178/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The PEACE III N+2 expenditure target applies at Programme level. If the target is met, there will be no cut in the Programme budget and, therefore, no need to review individual project budgets.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the PEACE III Managing Authority, is currently forecasting that the 2009 N+2 target will be achieved. However, achieving the target will depend upon all projects working to achieve their individual expenditure targets.

Interreg IVA

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, as is the case with Project Kelvin, if projects approved under INTERREG IVA will be in a position to spend, and therefore not become subject to decommitment of funds. (AQW 2183/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: All projects approved under INTERREG IVA are in a position to spend money in line with their letter of offer agreements.

The European Commission's N+2 spending target applies across the INTERREG IVA Programme as a whole. Failure to meet the target results in a decommitment of resource from the Programme. Depending on the significance of this it may require individual project allocations to be re-examined.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) as INTERREG IVA Managing Authority closely monitors spending at individual project level and liaises with projects on spending forecasts. On the basis of current forecasts, INTERREG IVA will achieve its N+2 target in 2009 and no resource will therefore be lost through decommitment. However, this will depend upon project forecasts being achieved.

Civil Service Equal Pay Claim

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the negotiations on the Civil Service Equal Pay Claim and to indicate the likely timetable for a settlement offer and back payment to the staff concerned. (AQW 2211/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Officials are engaged with NIPSA with the aim of achieving a negotiated settlement to the equal pay claims, if possible.

I am determined to seek a resolution to this matter as soon as possible. However, as I have previously pointed out, this issue is complex and there is a lot of work to be done before it can be concluded. It is for this reason that I am unable to give a timescale.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

European Centre for Connected Health

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to clarify why, in the current economic climate, his Department is duplicating the national Telecare/Telehealth trial through the European Centre for Connected Health in Belfast; and to detail (a) the spending on this centre to date; (b) the future funding to be allocated; and (c) the current funding ring-fenced for the centre. (AQW 1490/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): We are not duplicating the English 'whole system demonstrator' projects.

The spend on the centre's running costs in 2008/09 was £380k and programme expenditure in that year was £2.4m. A total of £3.1m has been allocated for 2009/10. Funding allocations for 2010/11 and subsequent years have not yet been finalised.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has not yet reopened the Musgrave Ward in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, after it was closed for refurbishment last year. (AQW 1494/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While Musgrave Ward has been closed since 1 September 2008 the majority of its bed complement has been retained by opening extra beds in other wards.

Immediate contingency plans for pandemic flu mean that Musgrave Ward has been identified for possible use during the next three months if required.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Staff Reduction

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust plans to cover the work of the maintenance staff who have been offered redundancy. (AQW 1496/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Trust conducted a thorough review of its Estates Department and concluded that services could be provided with a reduced number of staff. As a result some staff were offered the opportunity of early retirement.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Staff Reduction

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to ensure patient services do not suffer as a result of Belfast Health and Social Care Trust cutting half of its dietitian posts. (AQW 1497/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Trust has assured me that it has not cut half of its Nutrition and Dietetics posts. As part of the trust's in-year savings plan two locum and two temporary posts were terminated. However all permanent posts are unaffected.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Ward Closures

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with the possibility of further ward closures in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, what plans are in place to cope with the pressures of increasing birth rates and seasonal illnesses. (AQW 1500/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Trust's latest contingency proposals are still under consideration and there are no specific plans for ward closures.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were anticipated in pre-agreed contracts for the Belfast Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (c) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1505/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were conducted in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1506/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below details the number of clinical biochemistry and immunoassay tests conducted in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years. It should be noted that the Trust came into existence on 1 April 2007; data for the previous years include legacy trust figures.

Year	Clinical Biochemistry	Immunoassay
2004/05	8,887,082	512,911
2005/06	9,441,551	557,499
2006/07	10,135,948	610,761
2007/08	10,479,827	629,557
2008/09	13,774,888	684,680

* Information provided by Belfast HSC Trust

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the anticipated contracted cost was for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only), in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1507/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the actual contractual spend was for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only), in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1508/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Ambulance Calls

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if all Ambulance emergency phone calls are recorded. (AQW 1514/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service's Regional Emergency Medical Dispatch Centre records all emergency phone calls unless technical faults prevent this being done or business contingency plans are invoked so that mobile phones must be used instead of land lines.

Card Before You Leave Initiative

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Card Before You Leave initiative. (AQW 1515/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Board and the five Trusts in Northern Ireland have recently taken steps to ensure that the Card Before You Leave scheme is in place throughout every acute psychiatric admission unit and each major Accident and Emergency Department

in Northern Ireland. This will ensure that all people who wish to have a next day mental health assessment following attendance at A+E for a mental health problem will receive it.

Health and Social Care Trusts' Spend on Taxis

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount spent on taxis by each Health and Social Care Trust, since the beginning of the last financial year. (AQW 1516/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not held centrally.

Tele-Medicine

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any plans to expand the use of tele-medicine across Northern Ireland. (AQW 1517/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A number of remote Telemonitoring pilots are underway in each of the five HSC Trust areas and in 2009/10 approximately 2,500 patients will have been in receipt of a remote telemonitoring service through the pilots.

The European Centre for Connected Health, which is now part of the Public Health Agency, has been working with HSC Trusts to develop and implement a service which will, provisionally, by 2011, enable 5,000 people with chronic disease across Northern Ireland to have benefitted from a remote telemonitoring service.

Foster Homes in Larne

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are currently living in foster homes in Larne. (AQW 1518/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed that the question relates to children in foster care placements in Larne. The information is not available in the format requested.

Health Service Employees

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of Health Service employed doctors, surgeons and consultants are permitted to work privately. (AQW 1528/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All employed Doctors, Surgeons and Consultants are permitted to work privately.

Under the terms and conditions of the new nationally agreed contracts full time practitioners are contracted to work 40 hours, or more, each week for the HSC.

Thereafter a practitioner may undertake private professional services for other organisations provided that this does not result in detriment to HSC patients or services or diminish the public resources that are available for the HSC.

Where a conflict of interest arises, HSC commitments must take precedence over private work.

Health Service Employees

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service employed doctors, surgeons and consultants also currently work in the private sector. (AQW 1529/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health Service Employees

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been paid to Health Service employed doctors, surgeons and consultants to perform private treatments, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1530/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Diabetes

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Health and Social Care Trusts have any plans to introduce a managed clinical network for diabetes. (AQW 1536/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A regional paediatric diabetes clinical network is in place and the Western HSC Trust has also introduced a managed clinical network for adults with diabetes. There are no current plans for other adult networks at this time.

The development of further networks will be a matter for the HSC Board to take forward in conjunction with the relevant Trusts.

Care Providers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to address the duplication of testing by primary and secondary care providers. (AQW 1539/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is entirely a matter for clinicians to decide the nature and number of diagnostics tests that should be carried out on individual patients.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development and her Department regarding the transfer of Neighbourhood Renewal; and when these discussions took place; and (ii) what discussions his Department has had with Neighbourhood Renewal projects regarding future service provision. (AQW 1540/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The transfer of the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal to the new local Councils in May 2011 was discussed at a meeting of the Ministerial Group on Neighbourhood Renewal on the 13th of May 2009, attended by representatives of other Departments, including DHSSPS, and Local Government; and
- (ii) there is ongoing work between DSD Development Offices, the Health and Social Care sector and local Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships on the future delivery of services needed in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Accident and Emergency: Mater Hospital

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for the future of the Accident and Emergency Department in the Mater Hospital, north Belfast. (AQW 1541/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to make changes to the Accident and Emergency service at the Mater Hospital.

Company Cars: DHSSPS

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any of his departmental staff, or staff on the Regional Health and Social Care Board, have 'company' cars. (AQW 1569/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Neither Departmental staff nor staff members of the Health and Social Care Board have ‘company’ cars.

Taxi Hire: DHSSPS

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any of his departmental staff, or staff on the Regional Health and Social Care Board, use taxi services for work purposes. (AQW 1570/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Departmental staff have access to the centralised DFP car pool for use for work purposes. On occasions when this service is fully booked or unavailable, staff have access to a DFP central framework contract with taxi service.

Ambulances: Target Response Times

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances serving the Lagan Valley area (i) met; and (ii) failed to meet their target times, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1600/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not measure response time performance for individual ambulances or on the basis of parliamentary constituencies. However during the last five financial years NIAS performance data was collected for Health and Social Services Board areas. Lagan Valley fell within the former Eastern Board area and the table below shows performance for responses to Category A life-threatening calls within the 8 minute target.

Year	EHSSB
2004/05*	56%
2005/06	60.8%
2006/07	66.5%
2007/08	72.7%
2008/09	77%

Note: In 2004/05, NIAS’s target was to respond to 50% of all 999 calls in 8 minutes by Board area.

Generic Drugs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if patients who cannot use generic drugs will be allowed to continue on their current branded medication at their GP’s request. (AQW 1608/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer Mr Easton to the answer to AQW 5736/09 on 13 March 2009.

Ravara House Staff and Carers Christmas Party

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has cancelled the Ravara House staff and carers Christmas party. (AQW 1609/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The SEHSCT have not cancelled the Ravara House staff and Carers Christmas Party.

Ambulances: Ards Peninsula

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider the provision of an out-station for the Ards Peninsula to help ambulances meet response time targets. (AQW 1618/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The location of ambulance service deployment points and the activation of emergency resources is entirely a matter for the ambulance service.

It should be noted that NIAS performance for the South Eastern Commissioning Group area which includes the Ards Peninsula was 71.7% against a target of 65% for week ended 11 October 2009. NIAS continues to work with local communities and commissioners to explore initiatives to improve Category A response within the area, such as deployment of rapid response vehicles and complementary response models such as first and co-response

Reduction in Use of Agency Nurses

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that the reduction in the use of agency nurses will not affect front-line services and patient care standards. (AQW 1629/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All HSC trusts are implementing initiatives to ensure the delivery of their required efficiency savings under CSR07. In several trusts these initiatives involve, in the short term, controls on the use of overtime and agency staff; however no trust has implemented a complete ban on the use of agency nursing staff.

All trusts must implement their efficiency savings whilst ensuring that they have the right number and skill levels of doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals in place at the right time to provide the right service to all those who require health and social services. Approval of the trusts' efficiency proposals was conditional on assurances that the quality of services for patients and clients will be maintained or improved.

Private or Independent Clinics

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been referred to private or independent clinics from each Health and Social Care Trust in the past twelve months. (AQW 1631/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of patients that received either (i) inpatient treatment or (ii) a first outpatient appointment in the independent sector, following referral from each Health and Social Care Trust during 2008/09, is contained in the table below.

Health and Social Care Trust	Number of patients receiving inpatient treatment	Number of patients that attended a first outpatient appointment
Belfast	4,037	8,544
Northern	1,828	8,539
Southern	3,171	3,210
South Eastern	2,890	10,051
Western	5,086	8,509
Total Northern Ireland	17,012	38,853

Source: HSC Trusts

These figures may contain an element of multiple counting. For example, one patient may have received a first outpatient appointment, and then subsequent inpatient treatment, in the independent sector during 2008/09.

The requirement placed on Trusts to deliver against waiting times targets remains as does the option of engaging with the independent sector to help address any shortfalls in health service capacity which are identified.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many administrative staff the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has recruited in the last twelve months. (AQW 1632/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) recruited 15 administrative staff in the last twelve months, including vacancies.

Rapid Response Vehicles and Ambulances

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain if separate control desks for rapid response vehicles and ambulances are a duplication. (AQW 1633/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The activation and control of all medical emergency response vehicles is entirely the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. I have been assured that the present control arrangements, which have contributed significantly to improved emergency response times, is not a duplication and is consistent with best practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Report on Paediatric Services

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when will he release the report on paediatric services by Helen Cross. (AQW 1634/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not aware of the report referred to by Mr Easton. Professor Cross has not been commissioned by my Department to produce any such report.

Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with (i) anorexia nervosa; and (ii) bulimia nervosa, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1636/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people, who have been diagnosed with (i) anorexia nervosa; and (ii) bulimia nervosa, in each of the last three years is not available.

Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what help his Department offers to (i) people diagnosed with (a) anorexia nervosa; and (b) bulimia nervosa; and (ii) their families. (AQW 1638/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Eating Disorders Service, based at Woodstock Lodge, in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provides a Regional Eating Disorder Care Network across the whole of Northern Ireland. The service deals with the management of complex cases and specialised medical and dietetics support. Its Specialist Outpatient Service aims to make sure that people with eating disorders receive the most appropriate clinical help when they need it most.

My Department also provides funding of £25k per annum to the Eating Disorders Association Northern Ireland which provides further support to both the sufferers of these disorders, and their carers.

In addition, DHSSPS funding of £0.5m was made available from April 2007 to augment Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services with specialist Eating Disorder staff, in line with Bamford Review recommendations. These staff are in ongoing liaison with the Regional Adult Eating Disorder Service.

I am committed to the development of specialist eating disorder services and have secured an additional £1 million over the CSR period to enhance access to these services. I have also agreed to the development of in-patient capacity for those with complex needs. Inpatient care will be supported by specialist community based staff on an in-reach basis.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new cases of (i) HIV; (ii) chlamydia; (iii) gonorrhoea; (iv) syphilis; (v) genital warts; (vi) genital herpes; and (vii) AIDS were

diagnosed in people aged (a) 16 and under; (b) 17 to 19 years old; (c) 20 to 25 years old; and (d) over 25, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1639/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data relating to the number of new cases identified can be found at the following links:

For HIV and AIDS cases: http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1204186174726

For the five main STI conditions: <http://www.cdscni.org.uk/surveillance/STI/KC60.htm>

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what estimate his Department has made of the number of unreported cases of sexually transmitted infections. (AQW 1640/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the estimated number of unreported cases of sexually transmitted infections is not available

Healthcare Facilities: Ballygowan, Killinchy and Comber

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans there are in his Department's Capital Development Programme to improve healthcare facilities in the Ballygowan, Killinchy and Comber areas. (AQW 1645/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I have stated previously I have been allocated less than £700m capital for the current CSR period against a need currently estimated at almost £1.1bn. The resources available to me have been further constrained by the unavoidable costs of dealing with the Swine Flu pandemic.

The South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust has not formally advised the Department of any plans to improve healthcare facilities in the Ballygowan, Killinchy or Comber areas.

Nurses

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses are qualified to prescribe medicines independently in each Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 1646/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table sets out the number of nurse independent prescribers as provided by HSC Trusts.

TABLE 1: QUALIFIED NURSE INDEPENDENT PRESCRIBERS BY HSC TRUST.

	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
SHSCT	N/A	14	27	35	39	39
SEHSCT	11	23	31	37	45	45
NHSCT	N/A	8	17	25	34	43
BHSCT	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	33*
WHSCT	4	5	7	11	19	26

* Belfast Trust information does not include community nursing staff and data for previous years is not available.

Nursing Resource Requirements

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he last met with representatives of the Nurse Agency sector or Recruitment Employers' Confederation on nursing resource requirements; and to outline any issues discussed. (AQW 1648/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not met with the nurse agency sector or the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, who I understand are a representative body for the UK's private recruitment and staffing industry. The employment of agency nurses is an operational matter for the Health and Social Care Trusts and my Department has no direct involvement in this.

Nursing Service Resource Support

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role he envisages for the Nurse Agency sector in providing critical front line nursing service resource support. (AQW 1652/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recognise the role played by the nursing agency sector in supplementing the provision of front line nursing service support to meet short term capacity demands. Trusts have policies in place to govern the use of agency nursing staff and endeavour to use internal nurse bank arrangements when possible to ensure continuity of care.

Agency Nurses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what guidance, if any, he has issued to Health and Social Care Trusts on using bank or agency nurses. (AQW 1653/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have asked Trusts to examine Agency spend carefully and explore other measures to address the need to use agencies. All HSC Trusts have confirmed that nursing bank arrangements are in place, and that the use of bank staff is considered before engaging agency staff.

Agency Nurses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to list the level of usage of bank and agency nurses by Health and Social Care Trusts for each of the last three years; and (ii) what assessment he has made of their impact on patient care and services. (AQW 1655/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table sets out the level of usage of bank and agency nurses as a percentage of the total nursing spend by Trust. Information is not available as yet for 2008/2009.

Trust	2006/2007 % of Total nursing staff costs	2007/2008 % of Total nursing staff costs
Belfast	5%	5%
Northern	1%	9%
Southern	2%	3%
South Eastern	3%	3%
Western	1%	1%
Total	3%	4%

I am assured that Trusts are committed to providing excellent service to all patients and clients within their catchment areas. There is a need to balance the provision of high quality services within tight financial constraints. During periods of temporary staff shortage it may be necessary to use agency staff to provide short term cover for essential services when there is no other viable alternative.

Trusts have been asked to examine reliance upon agency staff and the Department will continue to monitor expenditure closely.

Agency Nurses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the costs to Health and Social Care Trusts of using bank and agency nurses, and (ii) if he is satisfied that all overheads, on-costs and under-use are fully accounted for. (AQW 1656/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the use of Agency staff is published on a bi-annual basis on the departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm

Expenditure on bank staff for 2007/2008 was £9.3m and is collected annually through Trust financial returns.

The accounting for overheads, on-costs and under-use is determined by HSC Trusts, in accordance with guidance issued by the Department.

Food Standards Agency

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland is involved in the Food Standards Agency surveys on consumer attitudes to GM food; and, if so, who they propose to consult on this issue. (AQW 1658/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In an effort to progress a number of related recommendations in the 'Food Matters' Strategy, the FSA agreed to lead a dialogue with the public on the subject of GM food. An independent steering group is currently being established to oversee the governance of this project.

Officials from the Food Standards Agency's office in Belfast have indicated to me that they are willing to provide you with further information on this issue, or to meet with you to discuss this matter and other issues of mutual interest.

Ulster Hospital

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many elderly patients sustained injuries as a result of falls from beds at the Ulster Hospital in the last year; (ii) whether this represents an increase or decrease from the previous three years; and (iii) what measures are being taken to prevent these falls. (AQW 1661/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2008/09 there were 16 falls from beds resulting in injury to elderly patients at the Ulster Hospital. This compares with 17 in 2007/08 and 16 in 2006/07. Information prior to April 2006 is not available.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is developing a falls and osteoporosis strategy which will be implemented across the Trust. Work is ongoing with patients in hospital, in nursing homes and in the community aimed at the prevention of falls. The 'Transforming Care at the Bedside' (TCAB) programme aims to improve safety and quality, as well as person-centred practice. One aspect of TCAB in the Ulster Hospital has been to reduce falls through better risk assessment, closer observations, working with patients and families, educating staff and carefully assessing the environment.

Agency Nurses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is satisfied that front-line services will be protected without the use of agency nurses in Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 1662/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All HSC trusts are implementing initiatives to ensure the delivery of their required efficiency savings under CSR07. In several trusts these initiatives involve, in the short term, controls on the use of overtime and agency staff; however no trust has implemented a complete ban on the use of agency nursing staff.

All trusts must implement their efficiency savings whilst ensuring that they have the right number and skill levels of doctors, nurses, social workers and other professionals in place at the right time to provide the right service to all those who require health and social services.

Agency Nurses

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role he envisages for the Nurse Agency sector in providing critical front-line nursing service resource support. (AQW 1681/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the response I gave to AQW 1652/10

Agency Nurses

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what guidance, if any, he has issued to Health and Social Care Trusts on using bank or agency nurses. (AQW 1682/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 1653/10.

Agency Nurses

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost, including staff, administrative and overhead costs, of using bank nurses compared to using full time nurses and agency nurses. (AQW 1683/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Bank nurses are paid the same hourly rate under Agenda for Change as nursing staff working in substantive posts.

Trusts have contracts with agencies on a regional basis and follow the Trust protocol for employing agency nurses.

Agency hourly rates vary between agencies, and also differ according to nursing qualification (eg nurse, specialist nurse, midwife) and hours worked (eg day, night, and weekend).

Agency Nurses

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has undertaken any review of the costs of hiring bank and agency nurses; and, if so, what conclusions were reached. (AQW 1685/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of an ongoing programme of Value for Money audits, I have commissioned a review of the Use of Temporary Staff in the HSC to be undertaken during 2009/10.

Nursing Banks

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the role of nursing banks; (ii) how bank staff nurses are recruited, inducted, trained, allocated and developed; (iii) how many nursing banks are in operation in each Health and Social Care Trust; (iv) how many qualified staff nurses are on each bank database; and (v) if there is any overlap. (AQW 1686/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The management of nursing banks is a matter for Health and Social Care Trusts individually, therefore the information requested is not held centrally

Staff, Bank and Agency Nurses

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline, with respect to full-time, bank and agency nurses, workforce requirements for each of the Health and Social Care Trusts for the next twelve months ; and (ii) if he will review the cost modelling deployed by the Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of staff, bank and agency nurses. (AQW 1687/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As bank and agency staff are used primarily to provide flexibility in the workforce to cover short-term vacancies which can occur as a result of illness, maternity leave, or for key posts during the recruitment process, it is not possible to detail the annual workforce requirements.

Trusts are currently reducing their dependence on agency staff by developing “in-house” nurse banks and reducing vacancy levels.

Agency Nurses

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has consulted with HM Revenue and Customs on the legalities of agencies serving the Health and Social Care Trusts using ‘Mobile Workers’ for agency nurses. (AQW 1689/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have not consulted with HM Revenue and Customs on this matter.

Unused Medication

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of unused medication across Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. (AQW 1690/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected routinely.

Reducing Waste in Drug Costs

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment on the effectiveness of his Department’s initiatives in reducing waste in drug costs. (AQW 1691/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has carried out an assessment on the effectiveness of its initiatives, particularly through the Pharmaceutical Clinical Effectiveness Programme. As a result, it is estimated that since 2005 it has realised the £55 million savings as identified in the Appleby report, and continues to generate further efficiencies

Cost of Translating and Publishing Material in Ulster Scots and Irish

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to his Department of translating and publishing all material in both Ulster Scots and Irish, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 1694/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The figures below record the costs for Ulster-Scots and Irish translations of publications, press releases, speeches and advertisements.

Year	Ulster Scots	Irish
2000-01	NIL	£61,261
2001-02	NIL	£119,823
2002-03	£3,475	£89,153
2003-04	NIL	£29,306
2004-05	NIL	£9,592
2005-06	NIL	£8,974
2006-07	NIL	£14,092
2007-08	£49	£3,678
2008-09	£467	£894
2009-10	NIL	NIL

Cardiovascular Health and Well-Being

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for an update on the service framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing published in June 2009 and; (ii) to outline a time frame for the review of this framework. (AQW 1695/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing was published for implementation in June 2009.

A review of the Cardiovascular Service Framework is expected to be undertaken in 2012/13.

Sudden Cardiac Death

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) the average waiting time for family members of the victims of Sudden Cardiac Death to be referred for specialist assessment; and (ii) how many family members of victims were referred for these tests in each of the trust areas in (a)2007; (b) 2008; and (c) 2009. (AQW 1697/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The assessment of family members of the victims of Sudden Cardiac Death is provided on a regional basis at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

The average waiting time for family members of the victims of Sudden Cardiac Death that were referred for specialist assessment is not available.

The number of new referrals relating to Sudden Cardiac Death received by the Belfast HSC Trust during (a) 2007; (b) 2008; and (c) 2009 (up to 30th September 2009) are contained in the table below.

2007	2008	2009 ¹
52	67	52

HPV vaccine

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many girls have received the HPV vaccine since its introduction; and how many have refused it. (AQW 1700/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Data are not yet available for the routine programme or catch-up programme that started this year. For the first year of the routine HPV immunisation programme, latest figures available show how many 12-13 year old girls received or refused the vaccine by the end of June 2009.

NUMBER OF GIRLS WHO RECEIVED OR REFUSED HPV VACCINATION IN 2008-2009

Programme	No. eligible	Received			Refused		
		Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3	Dose 1	Dose 2	Dose 3
Routine (12-13-year-olds)	11,413	10,157	10,075	9,904	754	766	775
Extension * (17-18-year-olds)	12,646	6,834	6,130	4,457	Data cannot be captured.		

* These figures show the number of doses for which the Child Health System received a return. It cannot be guaranteed that this accounts for every girl in this cohort who received the vaccine as some forms may not have been returned.

For the HPV programme for 17-18 year olds, girls were encouraged to make an appointment with their GP if they wished to be vaccinated. Reliable information on refusals does not exist.

Agency and Bank Nursing Staff

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to conduct a comparison of the costs of employing agency and bank nursing staff. (AQW 1702/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of an ongoing programme of Value for Money audits, I have commissioned a review of the Use of Temporary Staff in the HSC.

Pharmaceutical List

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average time-scale from application until a decision is made re inclusion on the pharmaceutical list. (AQW 1704/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The average time taken for an application to join the pharmaceutical list, from the point at which the application is submitted to the Board until a decision is reached by the Board is 4 months.

This time period will change where the decision is appealed.

Community Pharmacies

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the new contract for community pharmacies will be completed. (AQW 1705/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It was agreed that the new pharmacy contract would be implemented on a phased basis, and that position remains. Whilst I am keen to see rapid progress made, I am committed to ensuring patients get the best pharmaceutical service possible. It would be premature to set timescales for completion.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many specialist nurses are trained in Inflammatory Bowel Disease. (AQW 1706/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is one (0.33 WTE) specialist nurse based in the Northern Trust that is employed specifically to deal with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) and this nurse also facilitates a patient forum for IBD.

Many nurses have received training as part of a wider course, such as Stoma Therapy or would have undertaken a specialist IBD course.

Ards Hospital

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any plans he has to further develop services at Ards Hospital. (AQW 1712/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust are currently undertaking a high level planning exercise to consider the options available for the redevelopment of the Ards Hospital site, including provision of a new health and care centre.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were anticipated in pre-agreed contracts for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1721/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were conducted in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1722/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the anticipated contracted cost for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only), in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1723/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the actual contractual spend for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only), in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1724/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

September Monitoring Round: DHSSPS Bids

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail what bids his Department made in the September Monitoring Round. (AQW 1739/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department made the following bids in the September Monitoring Round:

No.	Description	Revenue	Capital
1	First Call on Available Resources	20.0	
2	Pandemic Flu	51.3	6.5
3	Regional Decontamination Strategy		1.3
Total Dhssps		71.3	7.8

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are currently employed by the Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority. (AQW 1742/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 30 September 2009, 135 staff were employed by, RQIA with a WTE (Whole Time Equivalent) of 129.10.

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Ravara House residential home in Bangor is accepting new residents. (AQW 1744/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Ravara House continues to accept clients who require respite or intermediate care.

Asthma

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently diagnosed with asthma. (AQW 1751/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total number of GP-registered patients recorded on the asthma disease register of the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, as at 31 March 2009 is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF PATIENTS ON THE ASTHMA DISEASE REGISTER.

	Number of patients on Asthma Register ¹
As at 31 March 2009	104,527

Source: Payment Calculation and Analysis System (PCAS).

1 The QOF asthma register is defined as those patients with asthma, excluding patients with asthma who have been prescribed no asthma-related drugs in the previous 12 months.

Asthma

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many asthma clinics currently operate in Northern Ireland. (AQW 1752/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of asthma clinics currently operating in Northern Ireland is not available.

Asthma

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people diagnosed with asthma currently attend an asthma clinic. (AQW 1753/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people diagnosed with asthma that currently attend an asthma clinic is not available.

Press Officers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many press officers are currently employed in his Department. (AQW 1754/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently six Information Officers employed within the Department. There are also two Assistant Information Officers.

Information Officer staff are on loan from the OFMDFM Executive Information Service to the Department.

Administrative Staff in Trusts

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of administrative staff currently employed in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1757/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found on the DHSSPS website at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

Medical Staff in Trusts

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of medical staff currently employed in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 1758/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found on the DHSSPS website at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

DATIX System

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 964/2010, to list of all types of incidents recorded by the DATIX system. (AQW 1768/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The main categories under which data is recorded by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) in the Datix Common Classification System for Incidents in Healthcare are shown in the table below.

Type	Explanation
STAFF	Staff Incident
THIRD	Third Party Incident
CLINIC	Clinical Incident
SERVIC	Service Disruption
ASSET	Asset-Vehicle-Equipment
ENVIRN	Environmental Incident

A number of sub-categories is then used to more accurately describe a particular incident as follows:

Type	Nature	Explanation
COSHH	BACTER	Bacterial
COSHH	BIOLOG	Biological
VEHICL	BREAK	Breakdown
DRUG	BROKE	Unused -damaged/broken
COSHH	CHEMIC	Chemical including Drugs
VEHICL	CLEAN	Cleaning
ORGAN	COMMUN	Communications problem
TREAT	DAE	Delay at A&E
ASSET BUILD	DAMAGE	Damage
VEHICL	DRIVO	Driving Offence
CONTCT	ELECT	Electricity
DRUG	EXPIRE	Unsealed-Expired
BUILD VEHICL	FIRE	Fire (actual)
BUILD	FIREFA	Fire (false alarm)
ASSET	FRAUD	Fraud or Theft
SLIP	HEIGHT	From Height
CONTCT	HOT	Hot or Cold Surface
DRUG	INAPP	Inappropriate Use
EQUIP	INCORR	Incorrect Item Used

Type	Nature	Explanation
EQUIP	INCUSE	Item Incorrectly Used
ASSET	LOSS	Loss
EQUIP	MALFUN	Equipment malfunctioning or damaged
MANUAL	MHOTH	Handling of equipment, supplies etc
MANUAL	MHPAT	Moving a patient using a handling aid
MANUAL	MHPATN	Moving a patient without a handling aid
CONTCT	MOVING	Falling or Moving Object
SHARP	NEEDLE	Needle Stick
SHARP	NONNEE	Non-needle Stick
TREAT	NOTRET	No Treatment Given
ASAULT	PHYS	Physical Assault without a weapon
ASAULT	PHYSWW	Physical Assault with a weapon
HARRAS	RACIAL	Racial
COSHH	RADIA	Radiation
HARRAS	RELIG	Religious or Political
VEHICL	RTC	Road Traffic Collision
SLIP	SAMLVL	Same Level
ORGAN	SECUR	Security Problem
HARRAS	SEXUAL	Sexual
ORGAN	STAFF	Staffing Problem
CONTCT	STATOB	Stationary Object
EQUIP DRUG	UNAVAL	Item Unavailable
BUILD VEHICL	VANDAL	Vandalism
ASAULT	VERB	Verbal Assault
TREAT	WRDEL	Wrong Delivery Method
TREAT	WRDOSE	Wrong Dose Given
TREAT	WRDRUG	Wrong Drug Given
ERGO	WSETUP	Workstation Set Up

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service does not use the Datix system.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the actual contractual spend for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only) in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1789/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were anticipated in pre-agreed contracts for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1790/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) clinical chemistry; and (ii) immunoassay tests were conducted in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1791/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Clinical Chemistry and Immunoassay Tests

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the anticipated contracted cost for (i) clinical chemistry tests (analysers and consumables only); and (ii) immunoassay tests (analysers and consumables only) in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in (a) 2004/5; (b) 2005/6; (c) 2006/7; (d) 2007/8; and (e) 2008/9. (AQW 1792/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available.

Hospital Staff Uniforms

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policies he has put in place to ensure that staff change out of their uniforms before leaving hospital sites. (AQW 1798/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is clear guidance for staff who are waiting access to new changing facilities and for staff who are required to wear a uniform as part of their role, that they should have it covered completely when travelling.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on implementation of the 53 recommendations made by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority in August 2008. (AQW 1799/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Trusts have lead responsibility for implementing 30 of the 53 recommendations. All Trusts have included actions to address the RQIA recommendations in their corporate action plans to reduce the risks of healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs).

The other 23 recommendations that require a regional approach are being taken forward by my Department and the region-wide Health and Social Care organisations. 11 of these recommendations have now been implemented and work on implementation of the other recommendations is continuing.

Limavady Ambulance Station

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Limavady Ambulance station has only one emergency ambulance on station at any given time. (AQW 1849/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) currently has one 24/7 emergency ambulance deployed at Limavady ambulance station. However, it is important to realise that NIAS deploys its emergency response resources using a dynamic tactical deployment plan to

ensure that the nearest resource responds to any emergency call. This means that the response to an emergency call in the Limavady area might not necessarily be provided by the A&E ambulance crew based in Limavady.

Business Services Organisation

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the creation of the Business Services Organisation (BSO), (i) to outline the rationale behind the decision to relocate Belfast jobs to Armagh, and Armagh jobs to Belfast; (ii) to explain why staff are being told they will have to move to Belfast when they were originally informed that the BSO would be located outside Belfast; and (iii) if any analysis has been carried out to determine the financial impact that relocation will have on staff in terms of additional child care, travel, and parking costs. (AQW 1918/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision has been taken on the re-location of jobs within the BSO.

Swine Flu

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the procedure for informing schools of swine flu incidents; and to explain there was a failure to notify Foyle View Special School in Londonderry. (AQW 1945/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 2nd July we moved from active containment of swine flu to treatment of cases. Since then the procedure for informing schools of swine flu incidents is that the GP or hospital doctor who makes a diagnosis of swine flu, either clinically on basis of symptoms or confirmed on the results of a swab, informs the patient. Parents of children in special schools have been advised to tell the school if their child has been diagnosed with swine flu.

The Department of Education and the Public Health Agency have issued guidance on what to do if children develop swine flu.

There was no failure to notify Foyle View Special School. The parents of a child from Foyle View Special School who was recently admitted to Altnagelvin with swine flu informed the school of the diagnosis promptly. The school contacted the Public Health Agency early on Monday 12th October and within 3 hours appropriate public health action had been taken. All pupils received letters that day to take to their GPs to receive antiviral prophylaxis. In addition, all pupils were given information about the signs and symptoms of swine flu and parents advised to contact their GP and keep their child off school if symptomatic.

I have apologised to the parents of the child who died first for the delay in informing them that she had confirmed swine flu. As the appropriate public health actions had already been taken in Foyle View, earlier notification to the school of this case would not have changed the management. I have asked the Chief Medical Officer to determine what happened and to learn lessons for the future. A number of urgent actions have already been taken including the issuing of further guidance to health care professionals on the follow-up and communication of positive swine flu results to patients.

NICE Guidelines

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline his Department's policy on the application of NICE guidelines; and (ii) if they apply in all situations or if clinicians are permitted to use their expertise when making a decision on the prescribing of an individual drug. (AQW 1993/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: NICE guidance does not automatically apply in Northern Ireland. My Department established links with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (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.

There are several different types of NICE guidance. Technology appraisals typically assess new drug therapies for their cost effectiveness. The Health and Social Care service providers are generally expected to put plans in place within three months to facilitate the implementation of these guidelines once endorsed by my Department. NICE clinical guidelines and public health guidelines, on the other hand, are typically advisory good practice

documents covering a wide range of issues relating to the management of a disease or medical condition. They are regarded as developmental standards designed to encourage and support moves to better practice that HSC organisations are expected to achieve over time.

NICE guidance does not override or replace the individual responsibility of health professionals in making decisions and determining the appropriateness of the guidance in specific or individual circumstances.

Business Services Organisation

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that no realignment of the Business Services Organisation, based at Tower Hill in Armagh, will be implemented until a public consultation is carried out on the proposals. (AQW 2133/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The BSO has recently submitted to the Department a draft consultation paper on the proposed realignment and location of those legacy Board functions which became part of its organisation on 1 April 2009. I have now agreed that the BSO can proceed to consult on the proposals outlined in this paper.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Translink

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has issued any guidance to Translink bus drivers to encourage them to switch off engines when buses are idle. (AQW 1604/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been advised that each Translink driver is issued with instructions that state:

“Running of Engines – Unless instructed otherwise, engines must be switched off at bus stands, in bus stations, when stopped in built up areas, at turning points and in open parking areas, so that nuisance is minimised. Unnecessary revving of engines must similarly be avoided”

Bus Drivers

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what ongoing training bus drivers receive to maintain standards, safety and customer focus; and for each area of training, is it (a) mandatory; or (b) optional; (ii) how often the training is offered; and (iii) the percentage of bus drivers who have completed training in the last 12 months. (AQW 1628/10)

Minister for Regional Development: A Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (Driver CPC) was introduced for bus and coach drivers, who wish to drive in a professional capacity, on 10 September 2008. It has been developed as a requirement of the EU Directive 2003/59, which is designed to confirm and expand on the existing knowledge and skills of each driver.

From the date of introduction new drivers, who wish to drive professionally, must undertake and successfully complete the Initial Driver CPC Qualification i.e. four module tests made up of theory, case study, practical and demonstration type tests.

Drivers who held a full bus, coach or lorry licence prior to the introduction of Driver CPC must undertake 35 hours training every five years if they want to continue driving professionally.

This training will ensure that drivers continue to operate in a safe, courteous and fuel efficient manner and will also enable drivers to keep up-to-date with ever changing regulations and benefit from training throughout their whole career.

Management of this scheme is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

In relation to Translink I can confirm that all Translink drivers receive a minimum of one day's vocational training per year. This training is compulsory and focuses on areas such as equality awareness, safe and economic driving, and disability awareness. 98.5% of staff completed this training in the last 12 months.

In addition, between June 2008 and June 2009 almost 100% of bus drivers and inspectors received training on improving customer service.

Review of Public Administration

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he is taking, as part of the Review of Public Administration, to ensure there is an adequately resourced and joined-up system in place between his Department, the NI Housing Executive and Councils for the mowing of urban lawns, lanes, roads and pavements. (AQW 1641/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As this issue falls mainly within the Department for Regional Development's responsibility, it has been passed to me to reply.

I should explain that the objective of my Department's Roads Service, in grass cutting operations, is to prevent overgrowth onto carriageways and footway surfaces, and the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs. Grass cutting is carried out for road safety reasons, and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes.

In March 2008, the Executive announced that a number of public realm functions would transfer to the new Councils in May 2011, as part of the Review of Public Administration. The list of 11 functions identified for transfer included grass cutting/weed spraying.

However, following a period of discussions with officials from Roads Service and Local Government, Local Government recommended that responsibility for grass cutting and weed spraying should be retained within my Department's Roads Service. In making their decision not to accept the function, Local Government recognised that grass cutting schedules are intrinsically linked to road safety and, therefore, should remain integral to that process within Roads Service. It was also recognised that Councils would still have the ability to enhance grass cutting and weed spraying schedules to improve the amenity of the area, should they so desire. Local Government appreciated that weed spraying is also important in protecting the fabric of the road structure, and that it should, therefore, rest with whoever is responsible for road maintenance.

The decision to retain responsibility for weed spraying and grass cutting within Roads Service was endorsed by the Executive Sub-Committee in September 2009.

Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of the Environment has advised that in relation to the local government reform programme, Transition Committees have been established to plan and prepare key activities to ensure that the 11 new Councils will be in a position to take full executive responsibility for services from the changeover date in 2011.

Part of the Transition Committees' role is to recommend how the existing systems and activities currently delivered by Councils will move forward. This will include providing for continuity of service delivery throughout the transition period.

Sustrans Route in Templepatrick

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many complaints his Department received in relation to the planned Sustrans route in Templepatrick; and for his assessment of the decision to abandon the project. (AQW 1642/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Templepatrick Primary School was one of 18 schools selected for funding by a Department of Agriculture and Rural Development initiative, to improve routes to rural schools. The initiative, administered by Sustrans and supported by Roads Service, included engineering measures to improve infrastructure near the schools.

Proposals for Templepatrick included upgrading footways and introducing traffic calming measures on the Lylehill Road. Local consultation, on two occasions, resulted in 2 objections each time, from different members of the community.

A number of factors, including objections received, reluctance of objectors to withdraw, lack of commitment from some of the main stakeholders, and time constraints on the delivery of the overall project, led to the traffic

calming element of the scheme being withdrawn and work being focussed on improving footway links. The school has subsequently been selected as one of three pilot sites for mandatory 20mph speed limits during periods when pupils are going to and from school. Outside these times, signs, which have been recently become operational, react to the approach speed of vehicles to give an additional warning message to drivers exceeding the normal speed limit.

St Bride's Street Pay and Display Car Park, Carrickfergus

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue was raised from the St Bride's Street car park, Carrickfergus through 'Pay and Display' during each of the last five years. (AQW 1651/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current parking enforcement and car park management contract with NSL Services Group (formerly NCP) commenced at the end of October 2006. In the period since then, to 30 September 2009, the amount of revenue from the Pay and Display machines in the St Brides Street car-park in Carrickfergus is as follows:-

Year	Amount
November 2006-March 2007	£12,300
April 2007-March 2008	£34,300
April 2008-March 2009	£33,200
April 2009-September 2009	£16,800

I should explain that Value Added Tax is payable but has not been deducted from these amounts.

Prior to the parking enforcement and car park management contract with NSL the amount of revenue from the Pay and Display machines in the St Brides Street car park in Carrickfergus was as follows:-

Year	Amount
April 2004-March 2005	£66,371
April 2005-March 2006	£48,649
April 2006-end of October 2006	£10,725

I should explain that Value Added Tax has been deducted from these amounts.

All revenue generated from car parking charges, along with income from parking penalty charge notices, is used to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government. I would point out that the cost of managing our off-street car parks and enforcing the on-street parking restrictions exceeds the total revenue received.

A2 Road Widening Scheme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding has been allocated to the Greenisland A2 road widening scheme for each of the next three years. (AQW 1654/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that development of the A2 Shore Road, Greenisland scheme is progressing, however, it is not possible, at this time, to make scheme specific financial allocations for the next three years.

As I am sure you are aware, the current Budget period extends to March 2010, and I am not in a position to set detailed spending plans in advance of my Departmental budget for 2010/11 being confirmed and the publication of my Business Plan for that year.

Roads Service and NI Water

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what work is planned by Roads Service and NI Water, in the South Antrim constituency, in October 2009. (AQW 1660/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not hold information on schemes on a constituency basis. However, information on completed and proposed schemes can be found in the Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised it plans to carry out the following capital works in the South Antrim Constituency during October 2009:-

- Bellahill, Ballycarry – Replacement of watermain;
- Whiteabbey Lower – Replacement of watermain;
- Moyra Road, Brookfield, Doagh – Foul sewer extension;
- Joymount Drainage Area Plan - Replacement of existing Shaftesbury Pumping Station with combined storage pump. New and upgraded storm pipework and desilting work;
- Newtownabbey, Manse Road, Camross Park – Combined Sewer Overflow cleaning and repairs to storm system; and
- Various Locations - Upgrading of small Wastewater Treatment Works.

This work is in addition to the day-to-day maintenance and repair required to the water and sewerage network.

Signed: Date:

AQW 1660/10

BACKGROUND

- Thomas Burns has tabled similar Written Assembly Questions regarding work being carried out in February, March, April, May, July, August, October, November December 2008, January, March, April, May, June, July, August and September 2009 (Ref: AQW 3648/08, AQW 4629/08, AQW 5337/08, AQW 6669/08, AQW 8845/08, AQW 1516/09, AQW 2139/09, AQW 3154/09, AQW 3698/09, AQW 5983/09, AQW 6874/09, AQW 7339/09, AQW 8292/09, AQW 8637/09 and AQW 569/10).

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- Anne Armstrong
- Michaela Smyth

Road Resurfacing Schemes: Strangford

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any road resurfacing schemes scheduled for the Strangford constituency in 2009/10 and 2010/11. (AQW 1674/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service provides information on completed and proposed schemes in the Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Public Transport in North Antrim

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken to meet the public transport needs of residents in North Antrim in each year since devolution was restored. (AQW 1677/10)

Minister for Regional Development: It is not possible to provide the information requested on a year by year basis.

However, following a review of Ulsterbus services in 2007, Translink have introduced a number of changes and improvements in the North Antrim area. These include:

- a revised network with enhanced frequencies and extended operating hours in Ballymena,
- service improvements on key routes,
- improvements to passenger waiting facilities,
- the introduction of modern, informative bus stops and increased the provision of timetable information along the main network corridors and in urban centres.

Additionally, since May 2007, my Department has provided capital funding of almost £76m towards the purchase of new buses and the upgrade of bus stations, workshops and garages. This investment will benefit passengers across the region, including those in North Antrim.

In relation to rail services, I would point out that when I came into office in May 2007, I lifted the restrictions on investment in the railway line north of Ballymena and this has resulted in a number of projects being carried out to improve railway services in the North Antrim area. The projects include:

- The Ballymena to Coleraine Tracklife Extension project. Work on this started in November 2008 and most of it has now been completed in Autumn 2009 with costs of just over £12m.
- Renewal of Killagan Passing Loop located on the line between Ballymena and Ballymoney. Work started in March 2009 and was completed by July 2009 with costs of £317,000.
- Bridge replacement, refurbishment and waterproofing work on the line between Antrim and Coleraine. These projects cost £1.6m and were completed in July 09.
- The roof at Ballymoney station was replaced in June 2009 at a cost of £408,000.
- During 2008, work was carried out at all the stations and halts in North Antrim as part of a £17 million investment package to upgrade stations and halts across the rail network, in order to deliver a better rail service and comply with disability legislation. There will also be additional work carried out at Ballymena between November and December 2009 to the subway at the railway station.

In March 2009 I signed a contract for £105m for the purchase of 20 new trains, two of which will be used to increase frequency of services on the Belfast to Derry line. The first of the new trains will enter passenger service in 2011.

The investment in the railway network has greatly improved services on the Belfast to Derry line and helped to meet the transport needs of the residents of North Antrim.

Furthermore, my Department has, through the Rural Transport Fund, provided financial support to Translink to enable it to provide services on seven rural bus routes which are deemed uneconomic but socially necessary in the North Antrim area

The Rural Transport Fund has also provided financial support to North Antrim Community Transport based in Ballycastle and Causeway Area Rural Transport based in Coleraine to provide transport services for rural

dwellers in the Ballymena, Ballymoney, Moyle and Coleraine District Council areas. In addition, Door-to-Door transport services for people who find it difficult or impossible to use conventional public transport have been introduced in the Ballymena and Ballymoney.

Finally, the award of the contract to Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd to provide the Rathlin Island Ferry Service (from July 2008) has seen the introduction of a second passenger only vessel on the route. In conjunction with an enhanced timetable the service now offers earlier, faster and more frequent sailings enhancing access to and from Rathlin.

Bus Services

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent by his Department in each year since devolution was restored on (i) improving bus services; (ii) providing, improving or maintaining bus lay-bys and shelters; (iii) establishing new conventional bus services linking isolated communities to villages and towns; and (iv) developing innovative demand response services for residents in (a) Ballymena; (b) Ballymoney; and (c) Moyle District Council areas. (AQW 1684/10)

Minister for Regional Development: It is not possible to provide all of the information in the format requested.

(i) Improving bus services

Since I came into office in May 2007, my Department has provided capital funding of almost £76m towards the purchase of new buses and the upgrade of bus stations, workshops and garages. This investment will benefit passengers across the region, including those in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Districts.

(ii) Providing, improving or maintaining bus lay-bys and shelters

In relation to the amount spent by my Department's Roads Service on providing, improving or maintaining bus lay-bys, in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle District Council areas, the table below details such expenditure in the 2007/08 and 2008/09 financial years.

Bus Lay-Bys			
Year	Ballymena	Ballymoney	Moyle
2007/08	£13,330	£16,060	£2,800
2008/09	£1,440	£13,020	Nil
Total	£14,770	£29,080	£2,800

With regard to the provision of bus shelters, in January 2001, Roads Service and most District Councils, entered into a 15-year contract with Adshel (the bus shelter provider) for the provision of approximately 1500 bus shelters throughout various council areas across the North, including Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle District Councils.

The provision and the maintenance of these shelters are funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to Roads Service. The contract covers the vast majority of bus shelters in the North, however, Roads Service has no information on the costs incurred by Adshel in carrying out their contractual commitments.

(iii) Establishing new conventional bus services linking isolated communities to villages and towns

My Department under the auspices of the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) has provided financial support to Translink to enable it to provide services on seven new routes in the North Antrim area, which includes Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Districts. The amount of support from 2007 to March 2009 has been £329,565

The RTF has also provided financial support to North Antrim Community Transport based in Ballycastle and Causeway Area Rural Transport based in Coleraine to provide services in the Ballymena, Ballymoney, Moyle and Coleraine District Council areas. They provide services in response to the needs of both their individual and group members in these areas. The total amount of support they have received from April 2007 to March 2009 has been £522,640

(iv) Developing innovative demand responsive services for residents

My Department supports the delivery of Door-to-Door transport services in all urban areas with a population of more than ten thousand people. These services provide accessible local transport for those people who find it difficult or impossible to use mainstream public transport.

Door-to-Door Transport was introduced in Ballymena and Ballymoney in April 2007 and since then, until March 2009, the amount of funding provided has been £542,206.15. There are no urban areas within the Moyle District Council area with a population in excess of ten thousand.

Narrow Water Bridge Project

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will inform the Irish Government of his intention to commit to the Narrow Water Bridge project, if and when his co-operation is sought. (AQW 1688/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would advise the Member that Narrow Water Bridge proposal is being taken forward by Louth County Council and my Department has no direct involvement in this project, nor has been asked for any commitment to contribute funds to this scheme.

I would, nevertheless, assure the Member that, when requested, I and my officials will continue to co-operate with our counterparts in the South, as they continue to develop and take forward this project.

Traffic Calming Measures: Strangford

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has any future plans to install traffic calming measures in the Strangford constituency. (AQW 1707/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not hold information on schemes on a constituency basis. However, information on completed and proposed traffic calming schemes can be found in the Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) NI Water's annual budget; and (ii) a breakdown of expenditure since its inception on 01 April 2007. (AQW 1709/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The annually approved revenue and capital expenditure budgets for Northern Ireland Water (NIW) since its inception on 1 April 2007 are detailed below in Table 1. The breakdown of its actual revenue and capital expenditure costs for the same period are detailed below in Table 2:

TABLE 1 - ANNUAL EXPENDITURE BUDGET

	2007/08 (£000's)	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)
Revenue Budget			
Income Budget	303,432	339,504	364,309
Operating Expenditure Budget	298,177	340,310	364,104
Net Revenue Budget	5,254	(806)	205
Capital Expenditure Budget	270,076	279,970	252,552

TABLE 2 - BREAKDOWN OF EXPENDITURE (TO 31 AUGUST 2009)

	2007/08 (£000's)	2008/09 (£000's)	5 months to 31 August 09 (£000's)
Revenue costs			
Staff Costs	57,055	61,980	24,558
Operating costs	129,102	148,540	62,763
Depreciation and amortisation	47,674	51,648	24,968
Interest	7,085	20,119	10,202
Deferred Tax	15,756	13,762	7,504
Dividend	33,956	35,006	15,012
Total Operating Expenditure	290,628	331,055	145,007
Total Capital Expenditure	252,246	276,215	91,408

Please note the following;

- The figures relating to the breakdown of expenditure shown in Table 2 above are extracted from:-
 - 2007/08 - NIW Statutory Accounts, which have been subject to external audit.
 - 2008/09 - NIW Statutory Accounts (except for the dividend which was not included in the Statutory Accounts as it was not proposed before the year end) which have been subject to external audit.
 - 5 months to 31 August 2009 - unaudited management accounts.

Consultants: DRD Expenditure

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development in relation to Roads Service's spending on consultancy firms and individual consultants, to detail (i) how much has been spent; (ii) all consultancy firms and individual consultants used; and (iii) how much each received in payment, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1710/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Expenditure by my Department's Roads Service's on consultancy firms and individual consultants in each financial year from 2004/2005 is set out in the table below. The information relates to external consultants as defined in the Department of Finance and Personnel's guidance on the Use of Consultants.

Roads Service Expenditure on External Consultants (£)					
Consultancy Firm / Consultants Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
AV Brown	0	0	37,000	0	0
Buchanans	0	0	19,599	0	0
Carplus	0	0	6,477	0	0
Colin Buchanan & Partners	276,360	62,080	42,040	23,829	15,393
Denton Wilde Sapte	492,820	680,323	310,109	513,054	72,259
Guy Spencer	0	7,525	2,475	0	0
Helm	0	22,000	0	0	0
Helm/WRC	30,953	0	0	0	0
Ian Brown	0	0	20,519	10,115	0
Jacobs Babbie	630,282	455,193	164,420	22,497	119,078
KPMG	294,721	342,519	229,343	172,098	33,312

Roads Service Expenditure on External Consultants (£)					
Consultancy Firm / Consultants Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Lloyds	11,400	4,749	1,918	5,234	0
MVA Consulting	1,760	2,000	0	2,000	0
MWM Associates	19,300	0	0	0	0
PWC	11,310	0	0	0	0
SGS UK	0	0	0	4,178	6,592
Stuart Read – SPA	41,000	43,190	22,036	0	0
Sustrans	25,000	25,000	0	0	0
Tribal Consulting	26,350	38,250	0	0	0
Willis	9,850	11,225	8,945	4,363	1,665
Total	1,871,106	1,694,054	864,881	757,368	248,299

Consultants: DRD Expenditure

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development in relation to his Department's spending on consultancy firms and individual consultants, to detail (i) how much has been spent; (ii) all consultancy firms and individual consultants used; and (iii) how much each received in payment, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1711/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's expenditure on consultancy firms and individual consultants is set out in the table below. The information provided, excludes Roads Service which will be addressed in the response to AQW 1710/10, and relates to external consultants as defined in the Department of Finance and Personnel's guidance on the Use of Consultants.

DRD Expenditure on External Consultants (excluding Roads Service) £					
Consultancy Firm / Consultant Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
About Face		38,030			
Adjust Procurement Solutions		19,119	11,594		
Advance Coaching					1,800
Anderson Spratt Group			2,750		
Ashburn Consulting	23,702	15,025			
Atkins			67,000	340,205	12,964
AVIA Solutions	34,430				
Babtie Group Ltd	37,341	4,000			
BDO		2,000	101,834		
Bickerdike Allen			10,280		
Bill Morrison					3,431
Black & Veatch		11,000	10,798		
Blythe Bridges Marine Consultants Ltd					3,456

DRD Expenditure on External Consultants (excluding Roads Service) £					
Consultancy Firm / Consultant Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Booz Allen Hamilton Ltd			38,950		
BRC Partnership					1,323
Brian Acheson			3,000		
Bunnyfoot University		2,875			
CAL		5,455			
Capita			30,897		
Capita Resourcing Ltd			48,472		
Capita/Veredus/C. Brown	76,111				
Carson McDowell	25,412				
CEC Europe Resourcing			10,120		
Clas Consultants		45,000			
CLN Solutions		15,560			
Colin Brown			5,351		
Community Technical Aid			13,825		
Consortium - Engineering Consultants			519,032		
Construction Cons Services			11,000		
CPCR Ltd					15,899
Database Audit			2,150		
Deloitte	68,225	19,780	2,495,425	489,611	10,808
DLA Piper Ruddick Gray Cary UK LLP		285,500	30,857		
DS&A		17,000			
Dundas & Wilson			387,282		
E-Change Training		6,428	11,264		
Entec (UK) Ltd					33,514
Ernst & Young			79,838		
Experian Ltd					44,834
Ferguson & McIlveen		80,000			
FGS McClure Watters					81,500
Fujitsu		7,000	36,288		
Furlong			73,450		
GAD		2,218	224,947		

DRD Expenditure on External Consultants (excluding Roads Service) £					
Consultancy Firm / Consultant Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
George Alexander			27,846		
Goldblatt McGuigan				7,100	
Goodchild Associates			4,982		
Government Actuaries Department			648		
Halcrow	2,381		197,164		
Hedra Consortium		65,424	132,838		
Helm	137,000	575,000	91,388		
Herbert Smith	1,327,349	944,366	1,639,450	148,928	9,883
HMRI	13,950	3,320			
Hugh Russell Associates			15,000		
ICS Computing			2,300		
ICS Consultancy		14,000	37,746		
Infre		32,000			
Interim Management/ Goodchild Associates	11,163				
J. Barnett		210			
Jacobs Babbie		20,838	105,814		
John Comber	27,073				
John Fauell			8,390		
John Hunter					1,800
John Smith			15,254		
K2i		26,700			
KPMG	2,000	12,400	21,960	5,000	13,384
Libby Gawith		7,236			
Lyle Bailie			598,128		
Margaret Elliott		2,310			
McAdam Design		10,000	35,436		
McGrigor Donald	41,985	64,592	64,392	48,878	59,661
MDS Transmodal (appointed by OFMDFM)	9,240				
Mercer		17,819			
Metering Technology			1,082		
Microsoft	9,000	60,000	29,710		
Mott MacDonald		69,000			
Mouchel Parkman	580,000				
Mulholland and Doherty			28,748		

DRD Expenditure on External Consultants (excluding Roads Service) £					
Consultancy Firm / Consultant Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
MVA Consultancy			913		
Nera UK Ltd		8,959			
Neueda					20,000
Newell & Budge			4,550	22,800	
NICS Consortium (MS/BIC/HP)	195,000				
Northgate Information Solutions		3,300			
OFWAT		3,931	1,767		
Oxford Economics Ltd					43,773
PDQ Solutions				1,674	
Peter Fleming					3,978
Professor Brian Graham	291				
Professor Callum Thomas		7,869	4,035		
Professor Julian Hine		766			
Promise			10,000		
PWC	2,509,323	4,152,066	7,275,822	5,475	49,220
PWC, Capita			155,196		
Roger Tyms & Partners			28,179		
Rowsell Wright Ltd					19,110
RP and DJ Cleland		9,000			
S Hazelett	26,205				
Sacker & Partners		21,321			
Saltire Management	1,462	3,243	7,511	12,039	4,000
Sopra Group Limited					54,250
South Staffordshire Water		10,000	7,200		
Stakeholder Communications			9,840		
TAS Partnership Ltd		8,885	24,970		31,564
Trinity Horne			30,000		
TTC			12,550		
UBS Consortium	410,000	63,311			
Veredus Executive Resourcing		106,958			
Veredus Interrim Management		3,280			
Weber Shandwick			177,775		

DRD Expenditure on External Consultants (excluding Roads Service) £					
Consultancy Firm / Consultant Name	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Wilfred Hamilton					12,993
Wragge & Co		3,389	11,787		
WRC			26,707		
WS Atkins		11,000			
Total	5,568,643	6,918,483	15,073,482	1,081,710	533,145

Review of Structural Maintenance Funding

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how much the Review of Structural Maintenance Funding has cost his Department to date. (AQW 1716/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Departments Roads Service has advised that the costs associated with the Review of Structural Maintenance Funding are expected to be approximately £4,500. This figure includes Professor Snaith's fee, expenses and some nominal printing costs, however, it excludes staff costs associated in providing Professor Snaith with the necessary data.

Translink Tenders

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the names of businesses who recently tendered for (i) Fuel Installation, inspection and Maintenance – Lot 1 Bus; and (ii) Fuel Installation, Inspection and Maintenance – Lot 2 Rail at Translink, broken down by the lowest to the highest tender value. (AQW 1720/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink is a Centre of Procurement Expertise and the procurement of fuel is an operational matter for them.

Translink has stated that the businesses who recently tendered were as follows

(i) Fuel Installation, inspection and Maintenance – Lot 1 Bus

- (1) Pumps and Fuel Installations Limited (Successful Bidder)
- (2) Tokheim UK Limited
- (3) MM Building Services Limited

(ii) Fuel Installation, Inspection and Maintenance – Lot 2 Rail

- (1) Pumps and Fuel Installations Limited (Successful Bidder)
- (2) Tokheim UK Limited
- (3) MM Building Services Limited

Translink has said that tenderers were requested to provide a breakdown of costs and rates, and consider that tender values which incorporates the bidder's technical solution to the contract is commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

Roads Service

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what work Roads Service has planned for the Glenravel area in 2009/10 and 2010/11. (AQW 1747/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I refer the member to my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils where information on completed and proposed roads schemes can be found. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Roads Service

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what work Roads Service has completed; and (ii) how much his Department has spent on work, in the Glenravel area since devolution. (AQW 1748/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I refer the member to my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils where information and costs on completed and proposed roads schemes can be found. Current and previous reports can be accessed from the Roads Service and Department for Regional Development's internet sites at the following web addresses:

http://www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-searchall.htm>

Roads Service is currently compiling their Autumn Reports to Councils.

Cullybackey Road

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service intends to upgrade the footpath on the Cullybackey Road in Ballymena, before leaving the 30mph zone, to ensure that it is a suitable width for all users. (AQW 1750/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that local officials plan to carry out an assessment of the existing footpath, located on the Cullybackey Road, Ballymena between the 30mph signs and the Woodtown Road junction.

I have asked the Divisional Roads Manager, Mr Jim Beattie, to write to you when the results of this assessment become available.

Metro Bus Services

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the extension of Metro bus services in the Mallusk area as part of the wider Mayfield development plan. (AQW 1786/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised me that Metro services were extended on 5 October 2009 to the Blackrock Development via Mayfield Link in accordance with the Concept Masterplan for the overall Mayfield Development.

Translink

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many requests for refunds were made to Translink for weekly and monthly tickets for Enterprise train journeys following the collapse of the Malahide railway viaduct; (ii) how Translink handled these requests; and (iii) what compensation commuters were offered. (AQW 2150/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that following the collapse of the Malahide bridge, only one passenger with a monthly ticket and no passengers with weekly tickets requested refunds. In addition Translink have received 36 return tickets and 60 web-based ticket cancellation requests. Refunds were issued in accordance with the Passenger's Charter. All tickets were fully refunded but no additional compensation was paid.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Joint Carers Review

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development when the Joint Carers Review between her Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, will be published. (AQW 1441/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The report on the joint review with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety of support for carers is expected to be published shortly.

NI Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people in the Antrim Borough Council area on the NI Housing Executive waiting list for housing, in each month since September 2008.

(AQW 1453/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the Housing Executive publishes social housing waiting list information on a quarterly basis. The number of people on the waiting list in Antrim Borough Council area since September 2008 is as follows:-

September 2008	December 2008	March 2009	June 2009
1051	1004	991	997

Figures for September 2009 are not available at present.

NI Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people in the Newtownabbey Borough Council area on the NI Housing Executive waiting list for housing, in each month since September 2008.

(AQW 1456/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the Housing Executive publishes social housing waiting list information on a quarterly basis. The number of people on the waiting list in Newtownabbey Borough Council area since September 2008 is as follows:-

September 2008	December 2008	March 2009	June 2009
1808	1785	1726	1703

Figures for September 2009 are not available at present.

NI Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people on the NI Housing Executive waiting list who are deemed to be in housing stress, broken down by religious background, in each of the last 5 years

(AQW 1501/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of people on the Housing Executive's waiting list who are deemed to be in housing stress, broken down by religious background, as at 31 March in each of the last five years.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Catholic	6,885	7,693	8,693	9,204	8,631
Other	796	921	1,033	1,303	1,580
Protestant	6,490	7,445	8,559	8,918	7,662

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Undisclosed	1,348	1,159	1,417	1,933	2,605
Total	15,519	17,218	19,702	21,358	20,478

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in total have (i) applied to; and (ii) been rejected for, the Warm Homes Scheme for (a) heating; (b) insulation; and (c) both heating and insulation. (AQW 1503/10)

Minister for Social Development: Since the beginning of the new Warm Homes Scheme on 1 July 2009, there have been 10,398 initial contacts with the scheme managers. Approximately 6,800 people have made contact with the two scheme managers and have been deemed ineligible for help under the scheme. It is not possible to characterise these unsuccessful enquiries as applications for insulation, heating or combined measures.

NI Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people from (i) a Protestant; and (ii) a Roman Catholic background are currently on the NI Housing Executive housing waiting list. (AQW 1513/10)

Minister for Social Development: At the 30 June 2009 there were 15,260 people from a Protestant background and 14,671 people from a Catholic background on the Housing Executive's waiting list.

Homeless People

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are registered as homeless with the NI Housing Executive in Carrickfergus. (AQW 1519/10)

Minister for Social Development: During the first six months of this year 99 households were registered as homeless with the NI Housing Executive in Carrickfergus.

NI Housing Executive

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes the NI Housing Executive has sold in each year since 2005. (AQW 1556/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of house sales to Housing Executive tenants through its House Sales Scheme since 2005 were as follows:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
2522	2201	808	54

NI Housing Executive: Vacant Houses

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive houses have been vacant for more than (i) one year; and (ii) six months. (AQW 1583/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of Housing Executive houses that have been vacant for more than one year is 820 and the number vacant for more than six months is 256.

NI Housing Executive: Vacant Houses

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive houses have been vacant in each District Electoral Area within the Lisburn Council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1584/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The table below details the number of Housing Executive houses that have been vacant in each of the last five years within the Lisburn District offices that cover the Lisburn Council area.

ANTRIM STREET OFFICE

Year	Total
2004/05	205
2005/06	158
2006/07	96
2007/08	70
2008/09	81

DAIRYFARM OFFICE

Year	Total
2004/05	35
2005/06	26
2006/07	24
2007/08	11
2008/09	24

Community and Voluntary Groups in Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the Lagan Valley constituency over the next year.

(AQW 1601/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of funding planned for community and voluntary groups in the Lagan Valley constituency over the next year are as follows:

	2009-2010
Community Investment Fund	144,998
Community Support Programme	393,574
Local Community Fund	30,872
NIHE Community Funding	40,293
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding ¹	677,173
Volunteer Bureau Initiative	188,391
Women's Centres Childcare Fund	157,429
Areas at Risk Programme	68,886
Total	1,701,616

The services/facilities provided through these projects are within the Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Area which includes the Poleglass, Twinbrook, Kilwee and Lagmore estates. Part of the Lagmore estate is within the Lagan Valley Parliamentary Constituency whilst the remaining estates are within the West Belfast Parliamentary

Constituency. As the projects target the whole of the Colin area it is not possible, nor appropriate, to aggregate out projects that solely target the Lagan Valley Parliamentary Constituency area of the Lagmore estate.

Community and Voluntary Groups

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all funding given by her Department to community and voluntary groups in the Lagan Valley constituency in each of the last three years. (AQW 1602/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of funding given to community and voluntary groups in the Lagan Valley constituency, in each of the last three years, are as follows:

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Community Investment Fund	103,762	158,357	159,016
Community Support Programme	328,254	449,696	458,334
Local Community Fund	59,788	62,526	62,526
NIHE Community Funding	0	24,500	44,302
Neighbourhood Renewal Funding ²	592,225	1,141,287	1,667,403
Volunteer Bureau Initiative	161,851	166,145	164,135
Children & Young Peoples Fund	30,850	0	0
Women's Centres Childcare Fund	0	144,692	135,914
Total	1,276,730	2,147,203	2,691,630

The services/facilities provided through these projects are within the Colin Neighbourhood Renewal Area which includes the Poleglass, Twinbrook, Kilwee and Lagmore estates. Part of the Lagmore estate is within the Lagan Valley Parliamentary Constituency whilst the remaining estates are within the West Belfast Parliamentary Constituency. As the projects target the whole of the Colin area it is not possible, nor appropriate, to aggregate out projects that solely target the Lagan Valley Parliamentary Constituency area of the Lagmore estate.

NI Executive's European Office in Brussels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many times her Department has been in contact with the NI Executive's European Office in Brussels in the past two years; and to detail the reasons for this contact. (AQW 1619/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is in regular contact with the NI Executive's European Office in Brussels in order to keep updated with EU Policies/Guidance and on various issues relating to former, current and future EU Programmes. Contact is either by telephone, email, letter, or in person. It is not possible to provide details of each and every contact during the past two years.

NI Housing Executive Allocations: North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been allocated by the NI Housing Executive in the North Down area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1625/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is unable to provide a breakdown by house type. The number of dwellings allocated by the Housing Executive in the North Down area in each of the last three years is as follows:-

2007	2008	2009
160	158	187

Housing Associations

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been allocated by housing associations in the North Down area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1626/10)

Minister for Social Development: Housing Associations allocate houses using the Housing Executive Common Waiting List. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations records Housing Associations' allocations by postcode and these are shown in the table below for the last three years. All the postcodes in the table include the North Down area, but the postcodes do not correlate exactly to Parliamentary Constituencies or District Council areas, and these figures include data for other areas.

Postcode	06/07	07/08	08/09 (Provisional)
BT18	0	0	0
BT19	2	4	11
BT20	0	2	1
BT21	0	0	2
BT22	7	16	5

NI Housing Executive: Improvement Work

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive properties have been identified as requiring 'Multi-Element Improvement' work in each district office area. (AQW 1643/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of Housing Executive properties requiring multi element improvements by District Office area.

District Office	Dwellings
East Belfast	28
North Belfast	111
Shankill	13
South Belfast	222
West Belfast	145
Antrim	210
Ballycastle	16
Ballymena	497
Ballymoney	28
Carrickfergus	114
Coleraine	423
Larne	147
Newtownabbey 1	404
Newtownabbey 2	115
North East Region	26
Armagh	112
Banbridge	41
Dungannon	63
Lurgan/Brownlow	136
Newry	184

District Office	Dwellings
Portadown	64
Bangor	224
Castlereagh	141
Lisburn Antrim Street	160
Newtownards	250
Collon Terrace	176
Cookstown	34
Limavady	253
Magherafelt	36
Omagh	35
Strabane	83
Waterloo Place	198
Waterside	65

Housing Executive Properties: Asbestos

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive properties require asbestos removal in each district office area. (AQW 1644/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive asbestos management strategy includes a five year plan for the survey of its properties to identify the presence of Asbestos Containing Materials and the production and implementation of plans to manage this. The Housing Executive is currently unable to confirm the numbers of its properties which require asbestos removal as their survey is still ongoing. However, up to May 2009 approximately 2,000 properties had asbestos removed.

NI Housing Executive Schemes

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the schemes to be delivered by the NI Housing Executive in the Newtownabbey area in (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11. (AQW 1647/10)

Minister for Social Development: In relation to (i) Table 1 details those schemes within the Housing Executive's programme of planned improvement and maintenance works which are currently onsite and Table 2 details the Social Housing Development Programme for 2009/10. A further External Cyclical Maintenance scheme is planned for this financial year at Abbeyville/ Rathfern/Glenville to include works to 227 dwellings at a cost of some £585k.

TABLE 1 –IMPROVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE SCHEMES CURRENTLY ONSITE IN NEWTOWNABBEY AREA

Scheme	Units	£k
Monkstown/Glenvarna External Cyclical Maintenance	354	656
Rathcoole/Avonlea Kitchen Replacement	61	179
Glencoole House Multi Element improvement	72	2674
Ballyclare Kitchen Replacement	77	295
Rathcoole Close Kitchen Replacement (completed)	44	188

TABLE 2 - NEWTOWNABBEY BOROUGH COUNCIL SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2009/10

Association	Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Fold	Dunanney Avenue, Rathcoole	37	General Needs
SHAC	466 Shore Road, Newtownabbey	10	General Needs

In relation to (ii) funding for the Housing Executive's programmes of activity has reduced significantly as a consequence of the economic downturn. Currently the Housing Executive is unable to confirm details of its programmes beyond 2009/10. The Housing Executive will review its programmes of activity when the budgets have been confirmed, as the delivery of these is dependent on the availability of funding in any given year.

The Decent Homes Standard

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) private; and (ii) social houses in rural areas do not meet the decent homes standard, in each parliamentary constituency. (AQW 1673/10)

Minister for Social Development: In relation to (i) the information for private housing is not available in the format requested. In relation to (ii) the table below details the number of social houses in rural areas that do not meet the decent homes standard, by parliamentary constituency.

Parliamentary Constituency	Dwellings
East Antrim	85
East Londonderry	250
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	235
Foyle	82
Lagan Valley	181
Mid Ulster	394
Newry And Armagh	321
North Antrim	488
North Down	53
South Antrim	47
South Down	389
Strangford	309
Upper Bann	173
West Tyrone	454

NI Housing Executive Properties

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many NI Housing Executive properties in (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey, are currently awaiting renovation or modernisation before being allocated to tenants. (AQW 1675/10)

Minister for Social Development: Properties in Carrickfergus, Larne, and Newtownabbey which are awaiting renovation or modernisation before being allocated to tenants are shown below by Housing Executive District Office.

Carrickfergus	Larne	Newtownabbey 1	Newtownabbey 2
20	0	41	14

June Monitoring Round

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how the additional £20m received from the June Monitoring Round has been used. (AQW 1701/10)

Minister for Social Development: The additional £20 million received in the June Monitoring Round was required to meet existing commitments in relation to Private Sector Grants. £15 million was allocated to Private Sector Grants and £5 million to Disabled Adaptations. The additional funding allocated will only allow the Housing Executive to meet commitments for Private Sector Grant applications that have already received formal approval and to fund the statutory grant approvals this year. Therefore new non mandatory grant applications are not being accepted at this time.

The mandatory grants - Disabled Facilities Grants, which provide adaptations to enable disabled people to remain in their homes; and Repairs Grants, approved on foot of Statutory Notices, will continue to operate normally.

Housing Benefit Transactions

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the number of Housing Benefit transactions broken down by new claims and claimants who have had a change of circumstances, for each month to date in 2009/10; and (ii) how these figures compares with the same period in 2008/09. (AQW 1719/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below provides the information about Housing Benefit new claims and changes of circumstances for the periods April – September 2008 and April – September 2009.

	New Claims		Changes of Circumstances	
	2008	2009	2008	2009
April	2854	4535	14073	12380
May	3439	6162	11315	14319
June	3471	5585	12588	15822
July	2977	5598	11645	13497
August	3065	4720	7476	13422
September	3650	4744	13035	16626
Total	19456	31344	70132	86066

Dunclug Action Plan

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the targets or objectives of the Dunclug Action Plan that are yet to be realised. (AQW 1732/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are twenty two actions within the Dunclug Action Plan. Seven actions have been completed and a further eleven are currently being implemented. Progress on two projects has been delayed. These are the NIHE estate strategy and the upgrading of street lighting and footways. It is hoped that funding will be available to complete NIHE environmental works within this financial year. The street lighting and footways project will be completed in conjunction with the NIHE environmental works. Two actions have not commenced. These are: the piloting of Police Community Support Officers, which can not be delivered due to a shortfall within PSNI budget and the implementation of CCTV within the estate which the Partnership has decided to review at a later date.

Disabled Facilities for NI Housing Executive Tenants

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many applications have there been for disabled facilities for NI Housing Executive tenants; and (ii) how much money was allocated for this purpose, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1764/10)

Minister for Social Development: The number of adaptations for disabled facilities for Housing Executive tenants and the amount of expenditure for these adaptations in each of the last three years is as follows:

	Number of Adaptations	Total Expenditure
2006/07	7498	£14m
2007/08	6416	£16.4m
2008/09	5602	£16.9m

The Housing Executive allocates resources for disabled facilities in response to demand and in line with need.

NI Housing Executive: Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been allocated for disabled facilities for NI Housing Executive tenants in the Ards area for the current financial year; and how this compares to the previous two years. (AQW 1765/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's disabled facilities grants are demand led and available resources are allocated on an area basis in line with need. The amount of expenditure on disabled facilities grants for Housing Executive tenants in the Ards Council area for the current financial year is £565k up to 30 September 2009.

The amount of expenditure in the previous two years was as follows:

2007/08	2008/09
£946k	£845k

Multi Element Improvement Scheme

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Multi Element Improvement Scheme in the Rinmore area of Derry; and when a final decision is likely to be made. (AQW 1770/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 55 homes in Rinmore that have not been renovated by the Housing Executive due to the funding shortfall caused by the collapse of the land and property market.

Given the uncertainty over when resources may become available to fund the improvement of these remaining homes, my officials have been working closely with the local community to identify other options that may facilitate the completion of this renovation scheme.

The potential for a stock transfer to a local housing association is currently being considered and a report into this has just been received from Savils, a leading consultancy firm, which has expertise of stock transfers in Great Britain.

Detailed proposals will be put to the residents in the coming weeks and I will be happy to share those with you at that time.

Jobseeker's Allowance and Incapacity Benefit

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been switched from Job Seeker's Allowance to Incapacity Benefit in each of the last five years. (AQW 1784/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available. Entitlement to specific benefit is dependent on the individual's circumstances and the Agency does not switch customers from Jobseekers Allowance to Incapacity Benefit.

Housing Executive Private Grant Cases

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown, by constituency, of the 124 Private Grant cases put before the Exceptional Circumstances Committee of the Housing Executive. (AQW 1795/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. A breakdown of the 124 cases is difficult to provide as it relates to the number of cases at an earlier date. The table below provides updated details as at 16 October 2009 of the grant cases referred to the Housing Executive's Exceptional Circumstances Committee by Grants Office.

Grants Office	Referrals
Ballyclare	14
Ballymena	27
Belfast	36
Craigavon	33
Derry	18
Dundonald	11
Fermanagh	59
Lisburn	16
Newry	36
Omagh	15
Total	265

NI Housing Executive: Exceptional Circumstances Committee

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown, by constituency, of the 96 Private Grant cases approved by the Exceptional Circumstances Committee of the NI Housing Executive; and to outline why these cases were approved. (AQW 1796/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. A breakdown of the 96 cases is difficult to provide as it relates to the number of cases at an earlier date. The table below provides updated details as at 16 October 2009 of the grant cases approved by the Housing Executive's Exceptional Circumstances Committee by Grants Office.

Grants Office	Grant aid approved
Ballyclare	10
Ballymena	16
Belfast	12
Craigavon	23
Derry	8
Dundonald	5
Fermanagh	28
Lisburn	5
Newry	17
Omagh	11
Total	135

These cases were approved as the grant applicant has submitted all the documentation necessary to comply with Article 36 of the Housing (N.I.) Order 2003 (documents complete stage) and they were considered by the Exceptional Circumstances Committee to meet one or more of the following criteria:

- a) Is the application for a discretionary grant (Renovation or Home Repairs Assistance) being processed simultaneously with an application for a Disabled Facilities Grant and are the works under the Renovation/Home Repairs application necessary to enable the adaptation works to proceed?
- b) Is there an imminent and significant health and safety risk?
- c) Is there a serious risk from the structural stability of the property?
- d) Any there any other circumstances which the Grants Manager considers to be exceptional?

On-Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in Donaghadee in the last year. (AQW 1800/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information may be obtained from North Down Borough Council.

On-Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in Millisle in the last year. (AQW 1801/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information may be obtained from North Down Borough Council.

On-Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in Holywood in the last year. (AQW 1802/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information may be obtained from North Down Borough Council.

On-Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in Bangor in the last year. (AQW 1803/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information may be obtained from North Down Borough Council.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to list projects that received funding from the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme in the East Antrim constituency, in each year since the introduction of the programme. (AQW 1811/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive delivers neighbourhood renewal funding through the DSD Small Pockets of Deprivation programme to three areas in the East Antrim constituency – Greenisland estate, Sunnylands estate in Carrickfergus, and Larne town centre area. The programme started in 2006/07 and continues into the 2009/10 financial year.

Please see the funded project details below.

2006/07	
Larne	
Dixon Park Residents Association	£33,987
Riverdale Residents Association	£1,400
Larne Borough Council	£77,723
Sunnylands	
Sunnylands Nursery School	£1,305
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£5650
Greenisland	
Greenisland Youth Club	£2,084
Greenisland Library	£2,249
Carrickfergus Borough Council	£14,890
Greenisland Community Council	£27,270

2007/08	
Larne	
Riverdale and District Community Association	£1,348
Tullygarley Community Development Group	£335
Larne Borough Council	£10,000
Sunnylands	
NORSUN	£13,006
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£1,200
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£2,955
Greenisland	
Alphabet Playgroup, Greenisland	£10,285
Alphabet Playgroup, Greenisland	£1,840
Greenisland Scouts	£31,186
Greenisland Cultural Society	£2,555
Greenisland Community Council	£3,901

2008/09	
Larne	
Riverdale and District Community Association	£1,140

2008/09	
Larne	
Sunnylands	
Carrickfergus Borough Council	£75,000
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£3,500
Greenisland	
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£14,999

2009/10	
Larne	
No project applications this year.	
Sunnylands	
Carrickfergus YMCA	£26,312
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£5,000
Carrickfergus Boxing Club	
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£28,695
Greenisland	
Greenisland Youth Club	£1,200

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what budget has been set aside for the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme for 2009/10; and what plans she has for the future of the programme. (AQW 1812/10)

Minister for Social Development: Funding of the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme will continue until 31 March 2010 with funding of £640,000 allocated for 2009/10. An independent evaluation report of the first three years of the Programme (up to 31 March 2009) received by my Department is currently under consideration. I will make a decision on the future of the Programme before the end of this year.

Staff Travel Claims: DSD

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development the cost to her Department of staff travel claims in the last financial year. (AQW 1825/10)

Minister for Social Development: As reported in the Resource Account for the year ended 31 March 2009, the total cost to my Department for staff travel claims in the financial year 2008-2009 was £2.539m.

Charity Commission

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the work carried out to date by the Charity Commission. (AQW 1840/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) was established on 1 June 2009 and I have been pleased with the progress made to date in preparing for the establishment of a new regulatory framework for local charities. The Board has held four meetings to date and minutes of these meetings are available on the CCNI interim website (www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)

The primary legislation in the Charities Act will be enacted in a phased approach through a series of Commencement Orders. Two such Orders have been made to establish the Commission, to allow for consultation on public benefit and to enable the establishment of a Charity Tribunal. Two further Commencement Orders

are planned before the end of 2010. These will provide for the introduction of a register of charities, introduce a designated religious status for faith-based charities, allow the Commission to use its investigatory powers and introduce the requirement for charity accounts, reports and returns.

The Commission has launched consultation on its draft public benefit guidance. This guidance is essential to allow charity trustees to prepare for registration and application of the public benefit test in 2010. The Commission has held six public road show events across Northern Ireland and a further event is planned for Belfast in early November. These events have provided a useful opportunity to discuss the public benefit requirements and to raise awareness of the wider regulatory requirements. The consultation will run to 27 November 2009.

Whilst the Commission is staffed by a Secretariat on loan from DSD, it has been working with the Department to initiate its own staff recruitment process. It is envisaged that a Chief Executive will be appointed by Spring 2010 with other key staff appointments to follow.

Social Housing Waiting List

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the waiting list for social housing in each constituency. (AQW 1888/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the Social Housing Waiting List by Housing Executive District Office at 30th September 2009.

District	Housing Applicants
Antrim	976
Armagh	728
Ballycastle	353
Ballymena	1486
Ballymoney	448
Banbridge	664
Bangor	1926
Belfast East	2229
Belfast North	2417
Belfast South	2007
Belfast West	2361
Carrickfergus	1007
Castlereagh	1373
Coleraine	1203
Cookstown	399
Waterloo Place	870
Waterside	859
Collon Tce	784
Downpatrick	1273
Dungannon	909
Fermanagh	845
Larne	523
Limavady	502

District	Housing Applicants
Lisburn	1933
Dairy Farm	629
Lurgan	1107
Magherafelt	471
Newry	1856
Newtownabbey 1	790
Newtownabbey 2	902
Newtownards	1652
Omagh	589
Portadown	683
Shankill	863
Strabane	479

NI Housing Executive: Disability Living Adaptations

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to explain what will happen to the 170 major extensions and replacements such as showers, heating and lifts which were to be undertaken on NI Housing Executive homes under the Disability Living Adaptations and which have now been suspended. (AQW 1889/10)

Minister for Social Development: No adaptations have been suspended and the Housing Executive is expecting to deliver its programme of proposed schemes. Some restriction was placed on the provision of extensions at the start of this year, but additional funding has been provided and the Housing Executive anticipates that 170 extensions will start in 2009/10.

Homeless People

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development how many applicants were accepted as statutorily homeless by the NI Housing Executive in each of the last five years. (AQW 1906/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the numbers of applicants accepted by the Housing Executive as statutorily homeless in each financial year during the period 2004/05 – 2008/09.

Year	Accepted as statutorily Homeless
2004/2005	8470
2005/2006	9749
2006/2007	9744
2007/2008	9234
2008/2009	8934

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development if she will review the current Warm Homes Scheme with a view to expanding the areas of work that can be undertaken in any replacement or new scheme. (AQW 1940/10)

Minister for Social Development: Following the publication of a Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the Warm Homes Scheme in June 2008 and a subsequent Public Accounts Committee hearing, a number of

changes were made to the scheme. The new Warm Homes Scheme became operational on 1 July and reflects the comments made by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. With the award of any new contract there is inevitably a settling in period and a review of the scheme will be undertaken after one year to ensure that it is fulfilling its objectives.

Disability Living Allowance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many people currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance are (i) alcohol dependent; and (ii) drug addicted, in each constituency. (AQW 1960/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. Data is published on a Northern Ireland wide basis on what is known as the main disabling conditions for DLA recipients at www.charitycommissionni.org.uk. However, it cannot be deduced from these figures how many customers are in receipt of DLA due to dependency upon alcohol or addiction to drugs. Entitlement to this benefit is not dependent on a diagnosis or medical condition but relies instead on the care and/or mobility needs arising.

Homeless People

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are registered as homeless with the NI Housing Executive in (i) the Lisburn office region; and (ii) the Dairy Farm office area. (AQW 1983/10)

Minister for Social Development: From April 2009 to September 2009 319 households were registered as homeless with the Housing Executive's Lisburn District Office and 129 with the Dairyfarm District Office.

On Street Drinking

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been prosecuted for 'on street drinking' in (i) Lisburn; (ii) Dunmurry; (iii) Moira; (iv) Hillsborough; and (v) Dromore, in the last year. (AQW 1992/10)

Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information in relation to (i) Lisburn (ii) Dunmurry (iii) Moira and (iv) Hillsborough may be obtained from Lisburn City Council. The relevant information in relation to Dromore may be obtained from Banbridge District Council.

Houses of Multiple Occupation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many houses of multiple occupation are there in (a) Fermanagh; and (b) south Tyrone; (ii) how many people are estimated to live in these houses; and (iii) how many of these houses do not meet required standards. (AQW 1994/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, in the Fermanagh District Council area there are currently 57 Houses of Multiple Occupation on the Housing Executive's database, with an estimated number of occupants of 220. Thirteen of these properties are recorded as being compliant with the required standards. The remaining 44 properties have yet to be inspected.

In the Dungannon and South Tyrone District Council area there are currently 102 Houses of Multiple Occupation on the Housing Executive's database with an estimated number of occupants of 400. Thirty-eight properties are recorded as being compliant with the required standards. The remaining 64 properties have yet to be inspected.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the process for appointment to the list of GPs, Legally Qualified Members, and Occupational Therapists for Appeal Tribunals. (AQW 2069/10)

Minister for Social Development: Appeal tribunals are independent judicial bodies composed of members taken from a panel appointed by the Lord Chancellor. In the circumstances, the Member may wish to write directly to the President of Appeal Tribunals at 6th floor, Cleaver House, 3 Donegall Square North, Belfast, BT1 5GA for a response.

Appeal Tribunal

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how much each (i) GP; (ii) Occupational Therapist; (iii) Legally Qualified Member; and (iv) Chairperson, is paid per day for attending an Appeal Tribunal. (AQW 2073/10)

Minister for Social Development: The current fees payable to tribunal members is detailed below

	Fee per day
Legal Member	407
Medical Member	302
Member with experience of disability	192

The Legally Qualified Member will take the role of Chairperson where there is more than one member on the panel. No additional fees is payable for this role.

Cost of Appeals

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the average cost of an appeal, from the appeal being launched to being concluded, for (i) Disability Living Allowance; (ii) Employment and Support Allowance; and (iii) Incapacity Benefit. (AQW 2075/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is provided in the table below

	Disability Living Allowance	Employment and Support Allowance	Incapacity Benefit
Average cost of an Appeal	£554	£553	£517

Appeal Tribunal

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development for the average cost of holding an Appeals Tribunal; and if the cost varies in different constituencies. (AQW 2078/10)

Minister for Social Development: In 2008/09 the average cost of a hearing including all administrative expenses was £283. Costs do not vary in different constituencies.

Lone Parent Regulations

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development if there will be an evaluation or review of the impact to date of the Lone Parent Regulations before the next phase, affecting lone parents whose youngest child is 10, is implemented. (AQW 2081/10)

Minister for Social Development: I do not have any plans to carry out an evaluation of the impact of the Lone Parents regulations in Northern Ireland before the next Phase is implemented. This is due to happen from 26 October 2009.

Lone Parent Regulations

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development, since the introduction of the Lone Parent Regulations in October 2008, how many (i) lone parents have been transferred to Jobseekers Allowance; and (ii) lone parents in total are now in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance as a result of the legislation. (AQW 2083/10)

Minister for Social Development: It is estimated that 1,098 lone parents, with a youngest child aged 12 or over, have ceased claiming Income Support and subsequently claimed Jobseekers Allowance. It is not possible to identify how many lone parents in total are currently in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance as a direct result of the new legislation.

Lone Parent Regulations

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development how many lone parents have secured employment since the Lone Parent Regulations were introduced by (i) transferring from Job Seekers Allowance to work; and (ii) transferring from Income Support to work. (AQW 2084/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department does not record the information requested.

Benefit Disallowance

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many appeals relating to benefit disallowance have been lodged to date in 2009; (ii) how many of these appeals have been heard and a decision reached; and (iii) how many have been successful. (AQW 2100/10)

Minister for Social Development: (i) There have been 9,651 appeals received by The Appeals Service during the period 1 January 2009 to 21 October 2009; (ii) a Tribunal has heard and reached a decision on 5,228 of these appeals; and (iii) of the appeals determined at hearing 1,608 have been successful.

Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) Programme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to explain the decision to inform Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme areas in Newtownards that there will be no funding for new projects; (ii) if this decision affects all other SPOD areas; and (iii) how it affects funding for exiting and ongoing projects. (AQW 2106/10)

Minister for Social Development: There is currently a deadline of 30 September for the submission of project funding applications with regards to the Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme. This was in place this year (and last year) and had to be implemented to allow appropriate time for consideration and processing of the submissions and to ensure the most effective use of the available funding for proposed regeneration projects.

This deadline applies across all of the areas included within the Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) Programme (including Newtownards) and does not affect projects that have already been approved for funding.

Lone Parent Regulations

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development how many lone parents claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (i) have had their benefits sanctioned; (ii) by how much; and (iii) for how long, since the introduction of the Lone Parent Regulations in October 2008. (AQW 2107/10)

Minister for Social Development: No benefit sanctions have been imposed on Lone Parents since the new Lone Parent Regulations were introduced.

NI Housing Executive Waiting List

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the North Down area are currently on the NI Housing Executive waiting list. (AQW 2149/10)

Minister for Social Development: At 30 September 2009 there were 1926 applicants on the social housing waiting list for the Housing Executive's Bangor District Office which covers the North Down Borough Council area.

Harassment or Bullying of DSD Staff

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many allegations of harassment or bullying have been reported by staff in her Department in each of the last five years. (AQW 2174/10)

Minister for Social Development: Details of allegations of harassment or bullying that have been reported by staff within the Department are outlined below.

Year	No of Harassment Complaints	No of Bullying Complaints	Total
2004	21	14	35
2005	9	34	43
2006	14	37	51
2007	9	25	34
2008	8	13	21
Total	61	123	184

West Green Flats, Hollywood

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development if she has received an evaluation of the future of the West Green flats in Hollywood, and if so, when. (AQW 2207/10)

Minister for Social Development: Following a meeting between my officials and their counterparts from the Housing Executive in August, the issue of the West Green flats in Hollywood continues to be the subject of wider consideration.

The flats themselves, if demolished, are in an area of open space that could pave the way for a much larger re-development scheme than originally envisaged. However, this would be dependent on planning approval, given the potential loss of open space in the area. The future of the flats will therefore be determined by the ability to develop in the vicinity and I expect more detail on this potential in the next 6 to 8 weeks.

Our plans, whilst still under consideration, are quite innovative and go much further than the demolition of the flats themselves and I would be happy to have my officials discuss this thinking with you to assure you of our progress and plans for the redevelopment of the wider area.

Statutory Retirement Age

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development to list all the statistics she has available in her Department in relation to the employment of persons over statutory retirement age. (AQW 2216/10)

Minister for Social Development: The latest available Households below average income publication, for 2006/07, includes the numbers of pensioners where one or more within the family/household unit are working. The figure published for the number of pensioners working is 37,900.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Roadshows

Miss M McIlveen asked the Assembly Commission what is the anticipated budget for the establishment and running of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. (AQW 1836/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The Assembly Commission is in the process of considering options for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. This process is due to be completed by the end of this calendar year, and the Commission will subsequently announce its plans and associated budget.

Assembly Roadshows

Miss M McIlveen asked the Assembly Commission what is the total cost to date of the 2009 Assembly Roadshows. (AQW 1839/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The total cost to date of the 2009 Assembly Roadshows is £39,243.98. This figure includes the total print costs and advertising costs.

Assembly Roadshows

Miss M McIlveen asked the Assembly Commission how many (i) MLAs; (ii) Assembly staff; and (iii) members of the public have attended each of the 2009 Assembly Roadshows. (AQW 1841/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): In total 458 members of the public have attended the Assembly Roadshows between September 2009 and 21 October 2009.

The average number of staff attending on any one night is 10. Staff perform a number of important duties including conference set up and dismantle, assisting the public and panel members, press and photography and supporting the Q and A session. A number of these staff attended in their own time and at no additional cost to the Assembly.

With the exception of East Belfast, each roadshow has comprised a panel of 5 MLAs. In Portadown, 1 MLA from the area attended as a member of the audience. In Bangor 2 MLAs from the local area attended as members of the audience.

A more detailed breakdown of attendance at each roadshow is contained in the table below.

Attendance at Autumn Assembly Roadshow 2009						
Constituency	Location	Dates	Public	Staff	MLAs	Total
East Belfast	The Park Avenue Hotel	Tues 22 Sept	90	10	1	101
South Belfast	Chinese Welfare Centre	Wed 23 Sept	89	10	5	104
North Belfast	NICVA	Thurs 30 Sept	31	9	5	45
West Belfast	Farset International	Tues 1 Oct	30	9	5	44
Upper Bann	Millennium Court Arts Centre, Portadown	Tues 6 Oct	61	10	6	77
Mid Ulster	Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre, Cookstown	Wed 14 Oct	32	10	5	47
North Down	The Marine Court, Bangor	Thurs 15 Oct	106	10	7	123

Attendance at Autumn Assembly Roadshow 2009						
Constituency	Location	Dates	Public	Staff	MLAs	Total
East Antrim	Clarion Hotel, Carrickfergus	Wed 21 Oct	24	9	5	33

Assembly Roadshows

Miss M McIlveen asked the Assembly Commission how much has been paid for the compere at each of the 2009 Assembly Roadshows. (AQW 1842/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): The fee to compere the Autumn Roadshows is £200 per night plus expenses.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

University of Ulster

The following question for written answer (AQW 1129/10) was asked by Ms M Anderson and a holding reply (not published) was issued by the Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):

To ask the Minister for Employment and Learning if his department has provided or approved any financial support for the University of Ulster for its proposed development of the Magee campus.

The substantive answer to the question was issued by the Minister on 12 October 2009 and is as follows:

My Department has provided financial support to the University of Ulster for teaching and learning and for research amounting to £90.6m in 2009/10. In the current academic year, the University is being funded for 12,658 full-time undergraduate student places. The distribution of its funding and these places across its various campuses is a matter for the University itself.

The Department has not been asked for financial support for capital infrastructure development at Magee.

ENVIRONMENT

Taxis Act

In Bound Volume 43, page WA214, replace the answer to question (AQW 638/10) asked by Mr Donaldson with:

Subject to the Assembly's normal legislative procedures, it is expected that the first Commencement Order for the Taxis Act will be made by the end of October 2009.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Ministerial receptions: DCAL

Bound Volume 44, page WA273, replace the answer to question (AQO 270/10) asked by Mr P Ramsey with:

Since taking up office on 1st of July I have hosted 5 receptions:

- vi. On 10 July I welcomed delegates of worldwide Imperial Orange Councils to Stormont. Delegates attended from across the globe for the 43rd Triennial Conference;
- vii. On 22 July 2009 I joined with competitors and guests at a reception in Stormont to send my best wishes to the Northern Ireland Team travelling to the 2009 World Police and Fire Games in Vancouver;
- viii. I hosted a reception in the Marriott Pinnacle Hotel, Downtown Vancouver on Friday 31 July for the Northern Ireland Team competing in the 2009 World Police and Fire Games in Vancouver;
- ix. On 27 July 2009 I welcomed competitors in the 5th World Dwarf Games to Belfast. I met with the President of the Dwarf Athletic Association UK (DAAUK) and competitors from across the world taking part in the Games, a major international event in the Paralympic calendar; and
- x. On 10 August 2009 I hosted a reception for Tony McCoy at Parliament Buildings where family and friends joined with the horse racing fraternity in celebrating his achievements.

ENVIRONMENT

Recruitment and Promotion

In Bound Volume 44, page WA312, replace the answer to question (AQW 1395/10) asked by Mr Boylan with:

Due to financial pressures in the Department arising mainly from a significant reduction in planning fee income, action has been taken to restrict expenditure on staffing in the Department. This includes restrictions on filling vacant posts through recruitment and promotion and these have been in place since the start of September. Exceptions to these restrictions will be considered in areas such as those funded from sources outside the NI Departmental Expenditure Limit and where it is considered that vacancies need to be filled because of the urgency or priority of the work associated with specific posts. These arrangements will be kept under review in the light of the Departments overall financial position, but I anticipate they will remain in place for at least the rest of this financial year.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

NI Housing Executive: Travel Costs

In Bound Volume 44, page WA368, replace the answer to question (AQW 335/10) asked by Mr Savage with:

This question refers to the Housing Executive's total budget for Travelling and Subsistence. Please note that the previous figure of £2.461m provided in AQW 7298/09 did not include associated subsistence and Learning & Development related travel and an amendment notice has been sent to Martina Anderson MLA, who tabled the original Question. The revised figure is £3,292,174 as detailed below.

It is not feasible to provide a breakdown of the expenditure in the full manner requested, as individual journey details are not held in the Housing Executive's Finance System. Extracting the information would involve manual examination of some 18,000 travel claims which would incur disproportionate cost.

A general breakdown of the above figure is as follows:

Nature of cost	£
Airfares	71,967
Trains	6,146
Bus/Rail/Taxi Fares	41,130
Car Parking	23,828
Mileage /Car	2,370,580
Secondment/ Relocation Mileage	426,694
Overnight Allowance	39,648
Subsistence	310,732
Other	1,449
Total	3,292,174

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