



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT

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Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	Mr Gerry Kelly
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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 1 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Murder of Kieran Doherty

Mr Speaker: Mr Mark Durkan has sought leave to make a statement on a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I shall call Mr Durkan to speak for up to three minutes on the subject. I will then call representatives from each of the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will each have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. 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 is concluded. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Mr Durkan: Last week, the Real IRA murdered a young man, Kieran Doherty, in Derry. Mr Speaker, the House has always used the facility that you have granted today to show its unity and determined purpose in rejecting those who seek to use violence in the name of any cause in our society. It is important that all parties use this opportunity to reinforce the strong, united condemnation that has come from right across the community in Kieran Doherty's home city. It is important that we reject the pretensions of those who believe that they can act as judge, jury and executioner over anyone, who believe that they can arrogate the right to determine life and death for anyone, who pretend that they can act in the name of our country, and who pretend that they are pursuing some pure cause with those deadly means.

The Real IRA not only murdered Kieran Doherty, it murdered him in a ruthless, callous and brutal manner. That organisation has sought to say various things about and against that young man, and his family has asked me and other elected representatives to place on record their utter rejection of the allegations and insinuations that

have been made against their son, brother and partner.

Mr Doherty's family also want us to record their total rejection of what the Real IRA has done and claims to stand for, and to raise the very genuine concerns that they have about the latter months of Kieran's life, when they say that he was being subjected to particular harassment, pursuit and pressure by MI5 agents. They have serious questions about how much those people know about the circumstances of Kieran's death and how much their involvement may have conditioned his death. Those questions will have to be pursued through other channels on other occasions, but it is right and proper that those questions are raised, out of respect for a grieving family and the community in Derry that stands in solidarity with them.

Mr Campbell: Mr Kieran Doherty was murdered by the Real IRA in Londonderry last week. Whatever involvement Mr Doherty may or may not have had in any paramilitary organisation confers no legitimacy whatsoever on his killers. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this time.

That type of killing is all too reminiscent of the activities carried out by the Provisional IRA during its 30 years of violence. The same area of Londonderry was used in similar circumstances in the early days of the Troubles, when two innocent Protestant civilians, one of whom I knew, were murdered in very much the same fashion. It was wrong then and it is wrong now.

Some have talked as though the security services were as responsible as those who carried out the murder. However, the Assembly must be absolutely clear that the blame lies with those who put two bullets into Mr Doherty's head.

Considerable reference has been made to incidents such as this dragging us back to the bad old days. However, that can only happen if, in the wider community, we allow those who

carry out those atrocities to get away with it. Information is vital and it must be given to the police so that the guilty can be caught. It is only when the guilty are in a place where they cannot carry out those activities and are unable to carry them out again that we will remain in the place where we are at the moment, and, hopefully, these days will be a dim, distant and painful past.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I begin by offering my deepest sympathy to Kieran's partner, Mairead, and the Doherty, Millar and Coyle families who are mourning the loss of their son, partner and brother, Kieran Doherty.

On behalf of Sinn Féin, I totally and absolutely condemn the murder of this young Derry father, and I appeal to anyone with information about the murder to come forward and assist the investigation. Having spoken to Kieran's family over the weekend, I know that they want justice to be sought for Kieran's murder. They have asked me, Martin McGuinness, Mark Durkan and others to refute the allegations that have been made against Kieran, and they are seeking answers to the linkage between the group that calls itself the Real IRA and MI5.

There is widespread revulsion in Derry at the murder of this young Derry man. I attended his wake over the weekend and the removal this morning with my colleague Raymond McCartney, and people were asking questions about the rationale and motivation of Kieran's killers.

It is generally believed that the organisation is not only infiltrated by MI5 but by criminals, and their activities are anathema to Irish republicans. Even those who gave tacit support in the past, small in number as they are, now accept that. However, today our thoughts should be with Mairead and the wider family circle.

I was called to the scene after the murder, and I want to ensure that people know that we extend our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of the victim, and to the wider Derry community, as they come to terms with this very sad loss. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr B McCrea: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I convey, in the strongest possible terms, our condolences to the family of Kieran Doherty. There is considerable merit in Mr Durkan's call for the House to show unanimity of purpose, and I was heartened to hear the position

adopted by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, among others.

The people of Northern Ireland have a choice. They can either look forward to the rule of law and order and to peaceful co-existence or risk going back to the bad old days. It is perhaps unfortunate — I apologise in advance — that politics should come into what is such a tragic event, but such events take place against a backdrop of certain political events. Those Members who are looking forward to being Minister for justice should not underestimate the challenges that tragic events are likely to place on the House. They should seek to build consensus and to deal with matters in a way that suits all the people.

Of those who use such activities in Londonderry for political aims, in order to advocate some particular stance, I ask what sort of country they want us to live in. Is it the sort of country where there is summary justice, a most brutal murder, and people are given no chance to defend themselves? That is surely no form of political nirvana.

Finally, there has been some discussion about the role of the security forces and the PSNI in what happened. PSNI officers belong to probably the most overseen force in the entire world. The benefit of having the Policing Board and other institutions is that allegations that have been made will be investigated and, I am quite sure, will not be substantiated. The way forward for Northern Ireland — I hope that Mr Doherty's death plays some part in our achieving this — is to adhere to the rule of law and order. Only then can we make any progress.

Dr Farry: My party is grateful for the opportunity to comment on this most tragic of incidents. It is, first, a loss of life: that of Kieran Doherty's life in Derry. It is a loss to his family and his partner, to whom he was about to be married. A child who is about to be born has lost its father. It was a most brutal murder and is as far away as possible that one can conceive from the concept of justice in this society.

Mr Doherty was an innocent man, and the record will reflect that, but even if the allegations had any legitimacy, there is only one police service in this society. There is only one prosecution service, only one judicial system and only one rule of law. We have worked to bring this society to that point over the past number of years, and it is where this society

needs to stay. The Assembly needs to express that message very clearly. There is no scope for any individual or organisation to assume the roles of judge, jury and executioner. There is no concept of internal housekeeping, if there ever was. There can be no concept of an individual's being treated as a pawn in some wider game. We have to respect every individual and his or her human rights, and there is no more important human right than the right to life, which has clearly been violated in this case.

It is important that the Assembly sends a united political message and does not play into the hands of those who are seeking to bring this society back.

12.15 pm

Ministerial Statement

Public Expenditure: February Monitoring 2009-2010

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding the outcome of the February monitoring round, following the Executive meeting on Thursday 25 February 2009.

It is the fourth and final monitoring round of the 2009-2010 financial year. The need to manage the overall financial position to protect the integrity of the Executive and the Northern Ireland block by ensuring that we do not over-spend against the amounts available to us has been our priority throughout the year and remains so.

As Members will be aware, given the constraints of the spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) and the simple logistical challenge of processing additional spend at this late stage in the year, the February monitoring round does not usually give rise to significant allocations. It is for that reason that we continually emphasise to Departments the importance of identifying and surrendering reduced requirements as early as possible in the year.

Therefore, it is extremely disappointing that Departments have declared reduced requirements of £19.3 million of current expenditure and £11.9 million of capital investment in the February monitoring round, with some Departments surrendering material amounts. Although some of those easements undoubtedly arose because of factors outside of the Departments' control, it appears that some of them could have surrendered money earlier in the year if they had displayed better financial management and forecasting.

In addition, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has surrendered a further £16.2 million of current expenditure from the swine flu funding that was made available to it in September 2009. Combined with the £4 million that that

Department surrendered in the December monitoring round, it has surrendered a total of £20.2 million out of an allocation of £27.9 million. Again, it is disappointing that that easement has been identified so late in the financial year. Members may recall that the original allocation was made to DHSSPS on the basis that any funding that was not required would be returned to the contributing Departments. Therefore, it is even more concerning that that funding is being returned at such a late stage in the year, meaning that instead of donor Departments being able to use the resources in question, there is a risk of losing the funding, at least in the short run, to our Treasury-controlled end-year flexibility (EYF) stock. Indeed, donor Departments have confirmed that out of the total easement of £16.2 million, they will be able to spend only £2.7 million by the end of the year.

The £2.7 million will be returned to the Departments that indicated that they will be able to spend it this year. However, to ensure fairness for all Departments, who responded so positively to the DHSSPS call for swine flu funding, the Executive have agreed that the balance of £13.4 million should be retained by DHSSPS this year and be transferred from DHSSPS to the contributing Departments in the June monitoring round in 2010-11. As well as ensuring that Departments that contributed to swine flu funding are not being penalised unfairly, that approach will allow DHSSPS to address a pressure that it has identified in the area of elective care.

The Executive have also agreed to make allocations to Departments for the funding that is required for the equal pay claim. Members will recall that headroom was incorporated in the spring Supplementary Estimates for that purpose. The formal proposal that was made to NIPSA gave rise to a liability that must be provided for in the departmental resource accounts in 2009-2010, and, therefore, Budget cover is required. However, changes in the treatment of provisions under the Treasury's alignment (clear line of sight) project mean that any provisions that are taken up in 2009-2010 will, in effect, cause a double hit on our departmental expenditure limits.

In light of that, I sought and secured additional non-cash departmental expenditure limit cover this year from the Treasury. However, the cost of that will have to be addressed within

our departmental expenditure limit when the payments are made, and that has been factored into the review of the 2010-11 spending plans.

The agreed settlement can be divided into two distinct areas: the lump sum settlements and the arrears of pay resulting from the claim. The payment of the lump sum settlements is dependent on individual agreement from claimants, and it, therefore, may take a while to process. However, it is possible to process the arrears element separately, which will speed up the payments, but a near cash departmental expenditure limit cover of £29.7 million will be required in 2009-2010 to do so. To facilitate that and to offset that pressure, the Executive agreed to use £26.5 million of Barnett consequentials from the 2009 Budget. That will allow those payments to be processed in March 2010, and the residual £3.2 million will be addressed from the reduced requirements that are surrendered in this round.

I now turn to the bids that Departments have submitted in this round. As I mentioned earlier, the capacity to make allocations in the February round is restricted by the spring Supplementary Estimates as well as the ability to spend additional allocations so late in the year. However, as Members will recall, a limited amount of headroom was built into the SSEs to facilitate allocations should resources become available. The £9.2 million current expenditure bids that Departments submitted in the February monitoring round reflect the headroom that is incorporated into the SSEs.

Given the relatively high level of reduced requirements surrendered in this round, the Executive agreed to meet all the current expenditure bids that were submitted. Thus, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) receives £2.3 million to address the pressure arising from the EU's disallowance of area aids for the claim for single farm payments from 2004-06, and the £5 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is the final instalment of its £20 million first call on available resources, which was agreed as part of the Budget 2008-2011 settlement. The Department for Social Development (DSD) receives £1 million for the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme. Members may recall that, on 10 September 2009, the Executive agreed to additional flexibilities to allow the Minister for Social Development to

manage pressures arising from that scheme, and that £1 million reflects the residual pressure that remains unaddressed. Finally, £0.1 million goes to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for the provision of early retirement.

Departments did not submit any capital investment bids in this round. However, given the availability of £5.5 million of capital investment, my officials revisited the matter with them. As a result, I am pleased to announce a capital allocation of £5.5 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. That funding will allow the Department to address a range of priority needs across the trusts, including equipment, medical devices, vehicles, specialised services, IT and estates. The details of those allocations, the return of swine flu contributions and the equal pay allocations are included in table 4, which is attached to my statement.

In addition to the changes already outlined, and to facilitate sound financial management in Departments, the Executive have also allowed Departments to move resources across spending areas. That is permitted when the movement is reflective of a proactive management decision that is taken to enable the Department concerned to manage emerging pressures within its existing baselines. Departments are to be commended for their actions to address their pressures in that way.

It has also been necessary, due largely to technical issues, to reclassify some amounts between different categories of expenditure. Details of those changes are also provided in the tables that are attached to my statement. The consequence of those actions is that the Executive conclude the February monitoring round with an overcommitment of £8.3 million for current expenditure and no overcommitment for capital investment. Given the low level of underspend that Departments returned last year, that represents a realistic and sensible position with which to conclude the year. However, I emphasise the importance of each and every Department taking action to ensure that its spending does not exceed the levels that the Executive agreed.

An overspend by one Department could put the Northern Ireland block grant at risk. Although we must aim to minimise underspend and to maximise the use of available resources, that

should not be done at the expense of proper financial controls.

In conclusion, I remind the House that the purpose of the in-year monitoring process is to help the Executive to make the most of the resources at their disposal. Although some may say otherwise, that is exactly what the Executive have achieved in 2009-2010. In the more constrained financial position facing us this year, the Executive have, through the in-year monitoring process, addressed significant pressures, including those that arose from the deferral of domestic water charging and the shortfall in capital receipts, as well as making significant additional allocations to Departments. In addition, we are concluding the final monitoring round of the year with a realistic level of overcommitment that will protect the integrity of the block grant. Therefore, I commend the February monitoring position to the Assembly.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He indicated that he was extremely disappointed at the late declaration of reduced requirements by some Departments. It seems that scope still exists for improving the financial management and forecasting of those Departments.

What pre-emptive steps can be taken to ensure that reduced requirements are declared at the earliest opportunity? Has the Minister given any further thought to establishing incentives or sanctions for Departments in that regard?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I re-emphasise my disappointment that four Departments gave over 50% of their total reduced requirements for the year in the February monitoring round. There are constant checks with Departments to try to ensure that they are managing their budgets. However, we have to rely on Departments and Ministers to come forward with information. If my officials and I were to delve into every line of a Department's budget, there would be uproar about us trying to run Departments.

Co-operation between Departments and my Department, and between Ministers and me, is required. For example, in the last week of January, the Health Department was telling us that it would have £5 million of money for swine flu to give back, a figure that rose to £16.5 million

by the first week in February. There is work to be done in the Department in that regard.

The Chairperson asked what sanctions can be imposed on Ministers, and I suppose that the sanctions are twofold. Such issues are debated in the Executive, and Ministers who consistently show that they are not managing budgets well will find it more difficult to persuade Executive colleagues that additional moneys should be given to them, especially if, at the end of the year, they are responsible for money that could have been allocated elsewhere and spent better in the middle of the year. Where there are overspends or severe underspends, we could consider imposing penalties on the Departments involved, especially when money is lost as a result of an underspend.

Mr Weir: I welcome the statement, particularly the reference to the ability to process arrears for equal pay claims.

I share the Chairperson's concerns about the scale of the late declarations of underspend by a range of Departments. I am particularly concerned by the amount of money that the Health Department had to hand back, especially the money for swine flu, which contrasts sharply with what the Department was saying only a short time ago. What discussions has the Minister had with the Health Department about the amount of money that it handed back due to the swine flu situation?

12.30 pm

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That question is perhaps linked to the Committee Chairman's question. The level of underspend or the amount of money that was given back as a reduced requirement could have been substantially higher had it not been for my officials' work with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. We must not forget that, in June and July 2009, I was pilloried because the Health Minister demanded £77 million to tackle swine flu. As a result of probing by my officials, that figure was reduced to £64.7 million and, eventually, to £45 million. Therefore, work at an early stage ensured that we did not take a pile of extra money from Departments. In fact, we took the minimum amount. However, when approximately £27 million is allocated, it is disappointing that £20.2 million is given back at the end of the year.

As I said in response to a previous question, we did not simply sit back and wait for the DHSSPS to outline a figure. My officials asked questions and, in the final week of January 2010, were told that £5 million would be returned. However, in the first week of February, they were told that the final figure was £16.2 million. We discussed the matter at the Executive, and, oddly enough, I was told that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) had told the Minister that the threat had been downgraded in December 2009. However, we did not discover until February 2010 that £16.2 million was to be handed back.

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

Ministers must manage their budgets, but they must also be team players. Money that is not spent from one budget could be spent in plenty of other areas. Therefore, Ministers cannot act as if money belongs to their Department only and that that is the end of the story. They must recognise that there are implications: if that £16.2 million had been available in the December monitoring round, the Minister of Education could have spent it all.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister accept that this monitoring round suggests that he will reduce the overcommitment and increase the level of unspent resources? He mentioned "team players": does he accept my party's view that the Executive are dysfunctional?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Some Departments, rather than the whole Executive, might be regarded as dysfunctional. It does not help them to function well when Ministers play lone games such as those that I described.

The Member asked about the level of overcommitment. I do not know whether he read the statement: we have reduced the level of overcommitment in light of experience. Last year, the Executive spent 99.7% of their budget as opposed to the 97% that they spent two years previously. Therefore, Departments are, by and large, managing their expenditure better. There is no point in having a huge level of overcommitment. In fact, we would be mad to have a huge level of overcommitment, given that we know that Departments have been spending almost 100% of their budgets. We must not forget that the Treasury will penalise us severely if we spend more than has been allocated.

The end-year result has not been the only guiding line. If we look at Departments' anticipated

spending compared with their actual spend, we can see that the December figures show that, two years ago, the difference was approximately 2.9% whereas it had decreased to approximately 0.8% last year. Therefore, planned spending and actual spending have been coming closer and closer together. The level of underspend has been reduced for good, sound, prudent reasons in the light of that kind of experience. I would have been far more open to criticism had I simply thrown out a huge amount of overspend only to find that, by encouraging Departments to keep on spending because the overspend facility existed, we finished up in jeopardy with the Treasury.

Mr O'Loan: There have to be concerns about the financing of the swine flu issue, and I am sure that the Health Committee will take that up. However, I want to ask the Minister about the equal pay issue. His explanation was complex. Will he confirm that the revised pay scales for all grades will be in place and that payments will be made, including those for the related short period of arrears, in March pay packets? Furthermore, have any of the lump sum back payments been made in this financial year, and, if they are to run into next year, when does he expect them to be paid? Will he accept that that is an urgent matter?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We expect the back pay to be paid by the end of this month, and we provided for that. The lump sums issue is complex because all 13,000 people affected have to be interviewed. We took steps to put a structure in place once we knew that we were moving towards a settlement. I cannot give a total commitment as to when the lump sum issue will be resolved, but, as I have said in the House before, the Treasury allowed us money that my predecessor had negotiated for. I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and we are being allowed to carry over that money to next year. However, I doubt that we would be allowed to carry it over for a further year.

I do not want to stretch the issue out for a year, however, and all the indications are that we should be able to pay the lump sums by August 2010 or in late summer. I am always reluctant to give the Member an exact date, because I am sure that, if I miss it by a day, he will skewer me in the House. I assure him that we will seek to pay those lump sums as quickly as possible, because it is not in our interests to do otherwise. In September 2009, I promised to

resolve the situation by Christmas, and we did so, with the agreement of the unions.

Dr Farry: The Minister mentioned the use of £26.5 million in Barnett consequentials from the 2009 Budget to offset the equal pay claim. Will he reflect on the fact that those moneys were generated at a UK level for additional projects that we are not going to be able to carry out in Northern Ireland, and, although we have devolution here, does he recognise that that is a missed opportunity?

What lessons has the Minister learned from the swine flu episode about how the Executive respond to an in-year crisis, particularly when that crisis is not as severe as was first predicted? That excludes the lesson about taking what the Health Minister says with a pinch of salt.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member has asked a very odd question. He usually, at least, sees the logic of the direction in which he takes an argument, even if he continues to pursue it. The Member has spoken eloquently about devolution on a number of occasions in the House. With devolution, we get to choose how we spend the money that is allocated to us. We are not simply told by Westminster that, because the money is spent on certain purposes in England, it should be spent on the same purposes in Northern Ireland. As the Member rightly pointed out, there is a consequence through the Barnett formula to money being spent in England. That money comes to Northern Ireland for us to make a decision on how to spend it.

Given that we have efficiencies to make next year, we asked Departments to bring forward to this year any projects on which they wanted to spend money next year, including those that they thought might be in jeopardy as a result of the efficiency savings of around £122 million that had to be made. We asked Departments to do that because we got money from the Barnett consequentials, and, as a result, any projects that they listed could be worked on. No such projects were forthcoming. When we knew that that was the case and when we knew that we would have this pressure and that we would have to address it this year, we decided to use the Barnett consequential money for such projects. However, that was not the first choice; the decision was made only after Departments indicated that they could not bring projects forward from the next financial year into this year.

Therefore, we have decided to allocate that funding.

For example, the money for the equal pay settlement would have had to come from somewhere, so using the Barnett consequential money to meet that pressure means that we have avoided making cuts or reductions or taking money from Departments in other ways.

I learned some lessons from the swine flu episode. Whenever Ministers are faced with a crisis, they should scrutinise any advice that they are given as rigorously as possible to ensure that they are not overreacting. If they overreact, there is a financial consequence.

The pressures that existed in September 2009 meant that we had a fairly difficult monitoring round. In fact, the demands that swine flu was making of other Departments meant that it took some time to get the September monitoring round through. Members should not forget that, had it not been for the caution that my officials exercised, we might have been taking much more from Departments, given that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety wanted £77 million at that time. If there is a lesson to be learned, it is not just that I took the best scientific advice — how often have I heard that phrase —

Mr B McCrea: No science here.

Mr Ford: *[Interruption.]*

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Perhaps Mr McGimpsey, the Health Minister, should learn from me that one should not only listen to advice but scrutinise and question it before coming to a conclusion. It is always good to question some of the scientific evidence that is offered, regardless of whether it is on swine flu or on climate change.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should stand up to make my remarks. I remind Members not to make remarks from a seated position and not to ignore rulings from the Chair.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the additional funding and support in the monitoring round for the SPED scheme. That is a good example of the Executive taking decisive action to address a community concern that unfortunately exists because of some of the circumstances that are prevalent in our society.

It appears from the Minister's statement that around half the total that is needed for the equal pay settlement and arrears affects the Department for Social Development. Some £77 million has been allocated to that Department in 2009-2010. It is likely that what is happening with the grades that are affected by the equal pay settlement will have an obvious, ongoing and disproportionate detrimental effect on that Department. Given that, will the Minister outline what discussions have been had with that Department to see whether there can be some flexibility in helping to ease what will obviously be a very high pressure in the years to come?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not sure what the Member means by "some flexibility". I suspect that that is a veiled request to pay the Department for Social Development's bill for the ongoing equal pay costs. If the Member looks at the situation in percentage terms, he will see that the number of AAs and AOs in the Department of Finance and Personnel equates to about the same or slightly less than the percentage pressure that the Department for Social Development faces. I do not know the figures off the top of my head, but the percentage pressures are similar. I accept that some Departments are hit harder than others. Indeed, that is why the Executive have dealt with the lump sum element collectively. Departments will have running costs as they go forward, and they will have to finance those from their own budgets.

12.45 pm

The Member should reflect on the logic of his question. How long should the ongoing cost of the equal pay settlement to the Department for Social Development be carried by other Departments: for ever, for two years or for five years? Furthermore, if that cost were carried by other Departments, what incentive would the Minister for Social Development, who I am sure runs her Department extremely well — I have to say that anyway, because she is sitting in the Chamber — have to ask for a change in her staffing structure or a different method of delivery? If the costs were underwritten by other Departments, why should she worry?

There is a case for saying that a Department should not carry an unfair burden in respect of the lump sum, but that issue goes back years, and current Ministers had no responsibility for creating it. It simply does not make sense to

say that we should carry the cost just because one Department is hit more severely than others. What would be the threshold? Should we bear the costs only of the Department that is hit hardest? Should we also carry the expense for a Department that incurs a cost that is just 2% or 3% lower? The Member's question raises a pile of other questions. Departments have staff structures that can be changed over time, but Ministers must manage those staff structures within their own budget.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Many Members share his disappointment and frustration at the late declarations. The Minister reiterated that, to facilitate sound financial management within Departments, the Executive allow Departments to move resources across spending areas if that movement is reflective of a proactive management decision that is taken to enable Departments to manage emerging pressures within their existing baselines. He has brought that position to the attention of the House on a number of occasions, but it raises a few questions. If that flexibility exists, should it not have helped to minimise the level of Departments' late declaration of reduced requirements? Did any Departments that were eligible to avail themselves of that flexibility not do so? If not, why not? How much will be surrendered to the end-year flexibility stocks?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We will not know how much has been surrendered until the end of the financial year. I emphasised in my statement that Departments must ensure that they manage their spending in a way that avoids a great deal of money being handed back and put into the end-year flexibility pot. It is up to Ministers to consider their spending. We are close to the end of the year, and I hope that Departments bore all that in mind when assessing their reduced requirements, bids and so on. I hope that, if Departments envisaged any gaps in their spending until the end of the year, they declared reduced requirements.

The Member asked why such flexibility would not have enabled the avoidance of late declarations. He knows that there can be flexibility only when proactive management is used to address a problem and Ministers have looked ahead and acknowledged that there will be an underspend in one area but an overspend in another. There are limits to where such movements can take

place: for example, one cannot move resources from capital to current expenditure.

It is not just a case of identifying a reduced requirement; one must also justify moving the money. That must be done for the better management of Departments, and Ministers must show that they have anticipated a problem. If the Member looks at the list of allocations that have been made, he will find that we have allowed a bit of flexibility, which is detailed on, I think, table 3. When Ministers have come forward with justifiable arguments, some movement has been allowed. However, this is not just an excuse for moving money around the Department. It is not enough for a Minister to find, at the last minute, that there is a bit of money to spare and ask to move it. The Minister must show that he or she has thought ahead and is managing problems. A Minister who wishes to build in flexibility to his or her budget by planning ahead will find that the Department of Finance and Personnel is happy to allow for those reallocations.

Mr B McCrea: I am drawn to the part of the statement on Civil Service back pay. It mentions something called "near cash DEL cover" of £29.7 million. I am not sure what is meant by "near cash".

The Minister of Finance and Personnel appears to believe that all science is bunkum. Will he join his colleague, Mr Jim Wells, Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in commending the Minister of Health on the way that he has tackled swine flu? It is better to be prepared than to lose lives. Does the Minister of Finance and Personnel agree?

What of the £26.5 million of Barnett consequential? That sum will largely come from the Department of Health and the Department of Education, two Departments that are underfunded in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. Is that not a reduction in expenditure that could properly have gone to those Departments?

Finally, if the Minister is dealing with the departmental expenditure limits for this year, how will that be reflected in the 2010-11 spending plans? The statement says that that has been factored in, but, presumably, it has not yet been finalised.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister can choose which question he wishes to answer.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Members are allowed one question, but the Member always takes the liberty of asking several, and I am happy to answer them all.

The Member did not listen to my statement; I hope he listens more attentively to my answers. I have never suggested that all science is bunkum. From listening to what Mr McCrea has said in the past, I realise that, perhaps, he does not bring all his critical faculties to bear on such matters. All that I have said to him and to the House is that, when faced with scientific information, people should use their critical faculties and interrogate it. They should ask whether all the assumptions that have been made are reasonable and whether experience shows that, when siren voices are raised, their predictions come to pass. There is a list of examples of scientists with vested interests who have raised issues and made them look like the most important matters in the world. Millions or billions of pounds were spent on the millennium bug that was supposed to hit computer systems in 2000, yet nothing at all happened. I am simply saying that, before people arrive at conclusions, they should interrogate the evidence. It is clear that the fears that were raised about swine flu were disproportionate. There has been speculation in the press as to why some scientists told that story in the way that they did. I am sure that the Member read some of those stories. All that I am saying is that it sometimes pays to be critical.

The Executive should take credit for the way in which they responded to swine flu. When the Health Minister raised the issue, every Minister in the Executive agreed to their budget being reduced to allow resources to be made available. That is where I am critical: Ministers were willing to allow their budgets to be reduced, and, as soon as it became apparent that the money was not needed, Ministers were entitled to expect the money to be returned, so that they could spend it in the appropriate year. I am saying not that swine flu was not handled properly but that Ministers, who were willing to play their part and be team players, expected reciprocation.

The Member does not understand the Barnett consequential. They were not the result of money being taken from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education. The Barnett consequential was sourced from budget

decisions that were made for other parts of the United Kingdom. They were realised from money that was introduced in England for a boiler scrappage scheme. We decided not to use the money for that purpose. Most of the money was not a result of reductions for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education; it came from a range of areas. The Executive took a collective decision about how those Barnett consequential were and are being used. The decision was agreed by the Member's party leader and the Health Minister. Before the Member makes criticisms, perhaps he ought to think about how that collective decision was made.

The Executive will consider allocations of Barnett money next year in the monitoring rounds. The Member cannot expect me to be prescriptive at this stage because the Executive will make decisions as the Budget unfolds.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the Minister will agree that the monitoring round will be of cold comfort to those who are in need of mental health services, care support, acute or A&E services at Downe Hospital or the many people who require older people's services. Will the Minister provide details about the £16.2 million for swine flu that was returned to the pot? Is that £16.2 million underspend due to savings in the GP service and the administration of vaccines?

Earlier today, on a number of occasions, the Minister referred to the opportunity that Departments had for bids. Is he aware of whether the trusts had an opportunity to bid for extra funding during the monitoring round? Will he provide any details of those?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The trusts do not have the opportunity to bid directly to the Executive; they do that through the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I suspect that the £5.5 million capital allocation was due to the trusts indicating to the Minister that they needed vehicles, maintenance, IT and so forth. The money was allocated to the Health Minister on that basis.

The Member said that mentally handicapped people and others would take little comfort from the statement. There were no bids from the Minister in that regard, but he made a bid for funds for elective surgery.

That £16.2 million, or the £13.4 million that he is allowed to retain for this year, will be used to deal with those pressures and the demand on those services.

1.00 pm

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has explained that the £16.2 million that was returned was not needed because there was a low level of viral spread, which was associated with lower clinical hospitalisation and fatality rates and led to lower costs for replenishing stock levels, activating surge services, delivering communication and media campaigns, and distributing drugs. Those are the areas in which that £16.2 million was not spent. Given that SAGE indicated in December that the level of threat was significantly lower, I contend that some underspends could have been anticipated a bit sooner than the first week in February.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his statement. Given that the Executive are committed to restarting the construction industry, kick-starting it where possible, does he share my concern that £5.5 million of capital investment moneys was not bid for? In my constituency, particularly the Lurgan area, a number of school estate projects have not got the go-ahead. Will the Minister reassure me that the money is there for school newbuilds?

In relation to the Minister's comment that Ministers must better manage their spending, one looks in particular at the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), which have made a huge return in the current monitoring round. Has the Minister discussed with those Ministers how they might better manage their Departments?

Will the Minister also advise whether he has had any discussions about planning reform? We know that sometimes big projects are held back because of concerns about whether they will get through the planning system.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: First, in respect of whether the capital moneys returned could have been used for newbuild, we are near the end of the financial year in which that money must be spent. With a month left in this financial year, the money was not going to be spent on a school project. That is why the money has gone to health and social care trusts

to buy vehicles and medical and IT equipment and to pay for some work on buildings. All of that can be done fairly quickly and before the end of the financial year.

The Member has highlighted an important point: the sooner that reduced requirements are known, the more scope that there is and the greater the number of projects that there are to which money can be allocated. The number and kind of projects become very limited as we come closer to the end of the financial year, which emphasises a point that I made earlier.

Departments, including OFMDFM and DEL, have handed back money. I do not want to criticise where no criticism is due. If the Member looks at the table appended to my statement, which shows the money handed back by each Department, she will see that in some cases Departments might not have been expected to know any sooner that the money would be given back. For example, animal health in DARD is demand led, and, therefore, the Department cannot know whether anything will happen until the end of the year. However, quite a few of the returns are to do with staffing or with long-planned-for projects that Departments knew would not be delivered. Those are the kinds of areas that I will tell Ministers to take earlier account of. For instance, £100,000 was set aside for an older person's commissioner. It must have been known at an early stage that that was not going to happen. Why could that money not have been declared earlier? The message to Ministers is that they should look and anticipate rather than wait until the last minute.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I was disappointed that he was unable to find additional funding for roads maintenance, particularly in light of their deterioration and the proliferation of potholes due to the recent severe weather. However, when referring to the Barnett consequentials, the Minister pointed out that they included funding for a boiler scrappage scheme similar to the one in England and Wales. He also said that that money had been used to pay for the equal pay scheme. Does that mean that funding will not be available for a boiler scrappage scheme here?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Anyone who has driven on the roads, even the main roads, will have seen the wear and tear caused by the winter conditions, and they will agree

that structural maintenance is greatly needed. However, in the December monitoring round, an additional £15 million was allocated to the Department for Regional Development for roads maintenance. How quickly can money be spent? Having been given the £15 million in December, could the Department have spent more? There was no bid for the money, as far as I know — I hope that I am not wrong in that. There is only a month until the end of the financial year; could the money have been spent on top of the £15 million that was given in December? There is a capacity problem in identifying where work needs to be done and then getting tenders out in time. That must be borne in mind before making a decision to allocate money. There is no point in allocating money only to find that it is returned at the end of the year. That does not benefit anybody.

No decision has been taken to introduce a boiler scrappage scheme in Northern Ireland. Of course, using the Barnett consequential does not preclude a bid being made through the normal process. However, every year in Northern Ireland, an enormous amount of money — for which, I am sure, the Social Development Minister is very grateful — is spent on the warm homes scheme, which, for some people, includes the installation of a new boiler or even a whole central heating system. It is not that we do not have a mechanism or, indeed, resources allocated towards better ways to heat people's homes, help them to reduce their costs and — an issue that is dear to the Member's heart, but not so much to mine — reduce their CO₂ emissions.

Executive Committee Business

Housing (Amendment) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Social Development to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List, which details the order for consideration. There is one amendment, so there will be a single debate on that amendment. The amendment replaces the reference to the education and skills authority with “education and library boards”.

Clause 1 (Homelessness)

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): I beg to move the following amendment: In page 2, line 2, leave out subparagraph (d) and insert: “(d) education and library boards;”

Clause 1 makes provision for certain bodies to take the Housing Executive's homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions. One of the bodies mentioned in clause 1 is the education and skills authority, which was expected to have been introduced in the Education Bill. Given that the Housing (Amendment) Bill will complete its passage through the Assembly before the Education Bill becomes law, it is necessary to make a technical amendment to ensure that clause 1 only refers to bodies that actually exist when the Housing (Amendment) Bill receives Royal Assent. Should the Education Bill progress, I assure Members that the Housing (Amendment) Bill will be amended to ensure that any body or bodies that replace the education and library boards will be required to take the homelessness strategy into account when exercising their functions.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social

Development (Mr Hamilton): On behalf of the Committee, I shall make a few remarks as part of the further consideration of the Housing (Amendment) Bill. As the Minister said, the Bill includes a list of Departments and organisations that are required to take the homelessness strategy into account in the exercise of their functions. Quite properly, the Bill recognises the

important role for education in advising and warning students of the problem of homelessness. The Bill, as drafted, refers to the anticipated replacement organisation for the education and library boards. However, given the delay in the passage of the Education Bill, the Committee agreed that it is logical and appropriate to amend the Housing (Amendment) Bill to remove reference to the education and skills authority.

As the Minister outlined, as and when the Education Bill is passed, it will include an amendment to reinstate the reference to the education and skills authority in what is expected by then to be the Housing (Amendment) Act. Given that, the Committee agreed that it supports the Minister's amendment.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will elaborate on the Chairperson's remarks. I missed the debate several weeks ago, and most of the issues were covered in it, but I want to take this opportunity to thank Peter McCallion and his staff for their excellent work in keeping us right. I also thank the departmental officials. There was a lot of discussion, and there was some difference of opinion, but it was resolved during discussions at Committee Stage.

Simon spoke about the authorities that will need to take into consideration a homelessness strategy. The Department was somewhat concerned about including additional authorities, but we were able to include local government, for example, so it was worthwhile. I also thank the Minister.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Members — all two of them — who contributed to the debate. I appreciate the very constructive way in which the Social Development Committee and Members in general have helped to progress the Bill. I am particularly pleased by the high level of consensus that we have managed to achieve, and I welcome Members' support for the amendment.

Question, that the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been selected, there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill today, but Members will be able to have a debate at Final Stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is therefore concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I am going to take up residence here today.

I beg to move

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

The Order under section 84 of the Land Registration (Northern Ireland) Act 1970 seeks to adjust the fees charged by Land Registry, Registry of Deeds and the Statutory Charges Register, so that the fees cover the cost of registration activity in line with the requirements of the Act. The fees set down in the Order will replace those currently in force under the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

Members will wish to note that the statutory rule is brief and includes increases and reductions in specific fee levels, all of which, in accordance with statutory regulations, have been endorsed by the Land Registry Rules Committee, which is chaired by a High Court judge and includes representatives from the Bar Council and the Law Society of Northern Ireland.

1.15 pm

The Order sets out fees for land registration transactions and includes increases and reductions in specific fee levels. The most significant point to note is that registration fees, in most instances, are increased where an application is submitted in paper format only. Reduced fees equal to or lower than those levied by the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 may be obtained when the applicant chooses to submit the application electronically. In such applications where the application relates to a sale of property in the average price range, savings generally equate to 20% less than paper-only submissions. For example, for a property worth £150,000 the 2007 Order set a fee of £300. Under the current Order, the proposed fee for such a property is £330 if the application is lodged in paper format and £270 if lodged in electronic format. For a property worth £200,000, the 2007 Order set the fee at £450. Under the proposed Order, the fee for such a property is £495 if the application is lodged in paper format and £405 if lodged electronically.

The e-registration system, which enables solicitors to make applications online, contains validation processes. They assist in ensuring that applications are complete before they are submitted. That improves the quality of the applications and reduces the processing time in Land Registry. Solicitors have been, and continue to be, trained by staff of the Land and Property Services on the e-registration system. The reduced fees for electronic submissions reflect the reduced cost for the registry of dealing with the electronic applications and will act as an incentive for solicitors to use that system. The e-registration system fits well with the continuing progress made by the Department to increase use of online channels.

Leases now attract fees directly relating to the value of a property, bringing them into line with the other transactions for valuable consideration. The fees are based on the actual value of the estate on the date at which the lease is lodged for registration. Other changes include an increase from £3 to £3.50 to view a register map, folio or statutory charge sheet entry; and a £1 fee increase for charges relating to the provision of any map and documents.

There is also a new fee relating to an application that requires the registrar to rule on the matter. The Registrar of Titles has a quasi-judicial role, and, over the past three years, there has been a growing number of hearings requiring consideration and adjudication. Hearings are held three days each week, and dates are filled until June 2010. I am advised that hearings can be lengthy and complex; that they require a significant amount of preparatory work by registry staff; and that the demand for hearings shows no signs of abating. The registry has not charged for hearings previously, but with the continuing increase in demand, the cost of hearings cannot continue to be borne by other fee-bearing applications. That would raise issues around the cross-subsidising of services.

Although I consider that any fee increase should be avoided where possible, I am content that the Order strikes a fair balance and is particularly encouraging in the area of fee reductions for applications lodged in electronic format.

In line with the convention of giving the legal profession three months' notice of the implementation of new fees, I propose that the Order comes into effect on 1 June 2010. My Executive colleagues and members of the

Committee for Finance and Personnel were advised of my intention to make the statutory rule. No comments were received on the proposed introduction. The Committee was content with the statutory rule. I therefore recommend the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee has been advised that section 84 of the Land Registration Act 1970 prescribes that fees taken in respect of the purposes of that Act should, so far as is practicable, cover the operating costs of Land Registry, which is now part of the Land and Property Services (LPS).

During an evidence session on 20 January 2010 on the review of the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) spending plans for 2010-11, departmental officials advised the Committee that LPS was not quite recovering the full costs of its registration functions. That was said to be mainly because of the economic downturn. Although steps had been taken to minimise costs, for example, by reducing staffing levels, officials confirmed that a new fees Order would be necessary to realise additional income.

The policy proposals that are contained in the statutory rule, which were considered by the Committee on 20 January 2010, did not specify the fees that would be chargeable under the Order. In its consideration of the proposals, however, the Committee noted that the principal changes applied when an application was submitted solely on paper, and that, as the Minister explained, a reduction in fees can be obtained when an application is submitted electronically. It is hoped that that will encourage the legal profession to submit applications electronically and will, ultimately, lead to the development of full electronic registration.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule at its meeting on 17 February 2010, together with the accompanying report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Land Registry (Fees) Order 2010 be affirmed by the Assembly. Therefore, I support the motion.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am pleased with the consensus of support across the Assembly for the regulations. Or, perhaps the lack of contributions signals the indifference

of the Assembly. I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel and its Chairperson, Jennifer McCann, for the positive manner in which they dealt with the statutory rule.

The Chairperson said that she hoped that the 10% fee reduction for applications that are submitted electronically would encourage people to use that mechanism. As well as the cost reduction, it results in significant benefits, such as the reduced time that is taken in dealing with registrations. Furthermore, it reduces the possibility of delays due to mistakes in completing paper applications. I am a technophobe on such matters but, apparently, when completing the forms electronically, it is impossible to proceed to the next stage if any information is missing. That has resulted in only a 2% rejection rate for electronically submitted applications, as opposed to a 25% rejection rate for paper applications. That could be because people forget to include a page in the envelope or they forget to sign the form, which results in rejections, and which, in turn, involves a staff cost.

One of our aims is to make the operation much more efficient. The staffing level in the registry section has been reduced by 74 over the past two years. Therefore, the extra 10% that will have to be paid by those submitting paper applications is not being used to simply finance an arm of government that is not aiming for efficiency savings. Costs have been reduced by 34% and there has been a reduction of 74 members of staff. The electronic version helps to achieve efficiency savings.

I thank the Assembly for its support and I thank the Committee for the work that it did on the issue. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

Private Members' Business

Bill of Rights

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. 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.

Ms Anderson: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern that the British Government's proposals for a bill of rights ignores the advice from both the Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights Commission that social and economic protections must be central to any bill of rights; and further calls for the introduction of a robust, enforceable bill of rights that will provide rights-based protection for all our people.

Éirím chun tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the motion. Sinn Féin worked hard to secure a commitment to a bill of rights for the Six Counties in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. It believed then, and it believes now, that as a remedy and as a preventative, a strong, inclusive and effective bill of rights is essential to secure a just and lasting peace based on equality, respect and protection for all.

For more than a decade since that provision was won, getting the right bill of rights has been the priority. Therefore, Sinn Féin has engaged robustly and in good faith with the British and Irish Governments and other parties, including the Human Rights Commission, the Bill of Rights Forum, a broad spectrum of civic society groups and international and other legal experts, with a view to reaching an agreement on the form, scope and content of a bill. Sinn Féin has also sought and received support for a bill of rights from friends of the Irish peace process in America, South Africa and elsewhere.

Therefore, the depth of Sinn Féin's disappointment with the proposals contained in the NIO consultation on a bill of rights, published more than a decade later, cannot be overstated. It is with great regret that Sinn Féin must totally reject that document as it is not an acceptable way

forward. Not only has the British Government disregarded the carefully considered position of Sinn Féin as expressed in numerous submissions before and since 1998 and as set out in the greatest detail in the final report of the Bill of Rights Forum, they have also disregarded the clear majority view of the members of that forum and the international and other legal experts who advised and guided that process. They have also disregarded the carefully considered advice that the Human Rights Commission provided as required under the Good Friday Agreement; they have disregarded the consensus view expressed by the Human Rights Consortium, which represents 140 civic society groups across the North; and they have ignored the widespread cross-community support for a strong and broad bill of rights reflected repeatedly in polls and surveys.

However, Sinn Féin does not reject the NIO consultation document lightly. In taking its decision, the party emphasised the grave charges by the Human Rights Commission that the document does not represent a genuine effort; that it demonstrates a lack of understanding of the purpose and function of a bill of rights; that it fails to take appropriate account of international human rights standards; that it appears to suggest lowering existing human rights standards; and, finally, that it misrepresents the commission's advice on the matter. Sinn Féin shares that analysis and agrees with that criticism.

Sinn Féin also endorses the view of the leading human rights academic and former adviser to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Professor Chris McCrudden, who warned that the NIO proposal for a bill of rights could do more harm than good. In describing the proposal as:

"positively dangerous in some of its implications",

Professor McCrudden warned that such an approach would lead to a significant blunting of existing equality law in the North.

A useful rule of thumb in assessing proposed changes to public policy is that new proposals should, at the very least, do no harm. Only then should we assess whether they are likely to improve things. The NIO proposals fail both tests. They seek to redraft the existing equality provisions and, therefore, should be binned immediately.

Sinn Féin will not, under any circumstances, tolerate any move that undermines the existing

provisions on the promotion of the bill of rights. Hence, the motion calls for:

"the introduction of a robust, enforceable bill of rights that will provide rights-based protection for all our people."

Therefore, we cannot accept the amendment to the motion.

The equality duty placed on public authorities was an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement and should not be undermined. The section 75 duty on the public sector should not be weakened under any proposed bill of rights. Sinn Féin is clear that any such attempt or proposal will be regarded as a fundamental change to the Good Friday Agreement and will be rejected as such.

1.30 pm

That process must not be misused by anyone — I remind Members of Mr Durkan's reference to the need to remove the "ugly scaffolding" — to undermine the hard-won rights that we have. Sinn Féin will not allow the Good Friday Agreement to be renegotiated downwards through a bill of rights.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. There is too much noise coming from some Benches, and I cannot hear what the Member is saying. The Member may continue.

Ms Anderson: Thank you. The promises and responsibilities for the bill of rights should build on existing protections rather than undermine them. There is an onus on the British Government to take seriously the response of the broadest coalition of civic society groups, which has assessed its proposals as "pitifully limited," "unacceptable" and "disrespectful", without "any meaningful depth or scope" and, therefore, "unworthy of consideration". Sinn Féin agrees with all those points.

Sinn Féin cannot and will not accept any proposed bill of rights that totally excludes economic and social rights protection; hence the need for the last sentence of the motion. Structural socio-economic discriminations and inequalities were contributing factors to the conflict here, not least in employment and housing, and there remain problems today with the social housing that is required by Catholics in north Belfast.

The routine violation of civic, political, economic and social rights, gerrymandering, the right to housing and jobs, internment, and the long-term suspension of many rights under emergency provisions were all major factors in exacerbating and prolonging the conflict. The British Government oversaw that regime and they have systematically failed to tackle the structural inequalities at the heart of the Six Counties ever since. Indeed, that sentiment is still evident in the institutional resistance to the equality and human rights element of the Good Friday Agreement during the last decade. It is precisely that past that should compel those of us who are intent on building a better future based on equality and rights to continue our demands for legally enforceable economic and social rights that go beyond the current inadequate protections to be enshrined in any new bill of rights. I ask the Members who tabled the amendment to reflect on that.

The inclusion of those rights in a bill of rights is totally legitimate, is provided for under the Good Friday Agreement, is entirely feasible — as shown by examples in other democratic jurisdictions — and, in the final analysis, is not optional. Current protections are definitely not adequate to redress conflict legal human rights issues, much less underwrite a better, shared and equal future. Therefore, a fundamentally different document to the one that has been provided by the NIO is now needed.

Based on the understanding that the Human Rights Commission's advice represents the floor and not the ceiling of what is required in an acceptable bill of rights, a new document must and can be produced in a very short time. By doing so, it will meet the test established to achieve the six "gains" identified by the Human Rights Consortium. It must also address and redress all the human rights legal issues that result from the civil, political, economic, social and cultural circumstances of the conflict. It cannot result in lesser rights than those already provided for by domestic legislation, the Good Friday Agreement, the European Convention on Human Rights, or any other international human rights treaty to which the British and Irish Governments are a party. If it is to be of any value, it must provide at least equal and, preferably, greater rights guarantees.

The Bill of Rights Forum did not fail in its mandate, despite a long delay in producing its advice, and the Human Rights Commission did

not fail in or exceed its mandate. However, it appears that the British Government have failed to listen with respect and to genuinely engage and consult the people of the Six Counties and the available expertise on the matter.

A lowest common denominator approach is simply not acceptable 12 years on from the Good Friday Agreement. There can be no veto on the fundamental rights of any section of the people of the Six Counties ever again. Those days are gone. I ask Members to support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move the following amendment: Insert after the fourth “rights”

“; calls on the British Government to expand the current consultation on a bill of rights to include consultation on the full range of recommendations of the Human Rights Commission”.

The amendment attempts to expand the area in which the British Government are purportedly consulting the people on a bill of rights. It highlights the inadequacy of the consultation document, which has gutted the advice that not only the Human Rights Commission but the Bill of Rights Forum gave. That forum met for almost a year, concluding its deliberations in March 2008, and expressed wide-ranging support for an extensive bill of rights for Northern Ireland.

First, I will make a number of fairly fundamental points. The consultation document that the British Government issued is inadequate, because it minimises the bill of rights. It is also inadequate and wrong in so far as it devalues the bill of rights and reduces its free-standing nature. The development of a bill of rights was a commitment that the British and Irish Governments and the parties to the Good Friday Agreement gave in April 1998 — it is not part of a process that the British Government initiated throughout the UK. It preceded anything on which the British Government embarked to deal with rights and responsibilities in the UK. It is a free-standing issue. As such, it must be separated from any process that is taking place in the UK. Although the process in the UK may be beneficial for the people of the UK, and for the people of Britain in particular, in my view and that of the SDLP, it is a wrong-headed approach, because the British and Irish Governments gave a free-standing commitment, and the bill of rights must be pursued on the basis of that commitment.

The bill of rights that the British Government envisage emanating from their consultation and from their consideration of the Human Rights Commission's advice is quite inadequate. It is restrictive and does not include social and economic rights, which we believe to be part and parcel of contemporary legal rights throughout the world. The Bill of Rights Forum or the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has not invented those rights; rather, they are part and parcel of an international, universalist approach to rights, which is the building of rights not just on the basis of civil and political rights but on the basis of economic and social rights. That phenomenon developed organically from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, and it is of great value to all of us here.

The British Government emphasise at many points throughout their document that the bill of rights should be predicated on the “particular circumstances of Northern Ireland”. Of course, that is what is stated in the Good Friday Agreement, but the Good Friday Agreement does not state that the bill of rights should be based on the particular circumstances of “Northern Ireland alone”. That particular phrase is so elastic that it does not confine rights to purely political and civil rights. It goes well beyond that, and Members should bear that in mind.

If one considers the minimalist approach that the British Government have taken on rights here in Northern Ireland — an approach that has really been confined to political and civil rights — one will see that those rights are in fact restrictive in themselves. For example, it includes the right to vote freely and be elected in genuine periodic elections held by secret ballot and subject to reasonable restrictions. It could include the general principle that the electoral system should provide that both main communities be fairly represented. The Human Rights Commission's advice refers specifically to proportional representation. The British Government's phraseology does not include a reference to proportional representation. In fact, it could exclude proportional representation. It is important to bear that in mind and to see how minimalist and restrictive the British Government's approach is to that area of rights.

People here often talk about rights as if they were abstract concepts that are better left to lawyers, courts or academics. In fact, the issue is germane to our political problems and to

our political history. The House of Commons (Method of Voting and Redistribution of Seats) Act (Northern Ireland) 1929 was significant because, under the Act, the unionist-dominated Parliament of Northern Ireland voted to abolish proportional representation. It did so to extend its power and to exercise almost total control over the Northern Ireland Parliament. In the subsequent general election of 1929, the Ulster Unionist Party gained an additional five seats and reduced and weakened the representation of independent unionists and the Labour Party in Northern Ireland.

That was the intention, but if proportional representation had been enshrined in a bill of rights, the Ulster Unionist Party could not have done that. The whole purpose of a bill of rights is to enshrine and entrench rights so that the rights that people now enjoy cannot be removed by the political caprices of Governments, Parliaments or Assemblies.

It is reasonable to argue that rights must be entrenched. In their consultation document, the British Government have lost the spirit of the approach to a bill of rights, which is to entrench rights to safeguard against the events of the past. As we know, the Troubles in Northern Ireland were initiated as a result of extensive and structural discrimination in employment and housing. One of the biggest issues was housing. We all know what happened in Caledon, where Austin Currie got involved in a sit-in protest at a house and highlighted the widespread discrimination in housing.

If Members say that social and economic rights do not count, we must ask what the civil rights movement was all about. It was a right and proper reaction against discrimination, and if we are to prevent discrimination in the future, we should be entrenching economic and social rights. That is the essence of the Human Rights Commission's advice.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr A Maginness: That is the spirit and the vein in which the issue should be approached, and the British Government's approach is totally wrong in that respect.

1.45 pm

Mr Bell: I think that there has been both forensic and good analysis of the Northern Ireland Human

Rights Commission's advice. Some of that advice has been found wanting in some areas because it is beyond the commission's remit and has been correctly left out, and the areas in which the rights apply to the whole of the United Kingdom have been put into their correct and proper place.

I listened carefully to the Members who proposed the motion and the amendment, and I am concerned by what they said. Martina Anderson set out a list reasons why the Troubles and human rights abuses came about. However, does she accept that terrorism has been the single greatest denier of human rights? Her little list seemed to miss out the fact that in west Belfast, a single mother of 10, who was unarmed, was taken away, brutalised, tortured and her body disappeared. Those are not convenient issues that can be easily looked over. I say to the Sinn Féin Member who proposed the motion that when she points the finger at other people for denying human rights, she must remember that three fingers are pointing back at her. Whenever you murder single defenceless mothers, whenever you take bodies and booby trap them, and whenever you shoot judges, you are denying people the ultimate human right — the right to life.

The British Government's approach has essentially been the correct one. We cannot have a situation where democracy is diluted and where the voting system is made subservient to some form of unelected court. Churchill was essentially correct when he said:

"Democracy is the worst form of Government except all those others".

The democratic system must not be diluted or made the plaything of special interest groups. Is it not the case that when the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's advice, from which Lady Trimble and I dissented, was examined, it was found wanting? Is it not also the case that when that advice was weighed against what the commission was asked to do, it was shown to be deficient? We find ourselves here as the result of that situation. To be fair, the Bill of Rights Forum, under the distinguished chairmanship of Chris Sidoti, allowed opposing points of view to be heard in the debate and included in the final document. Adopting that approach would have been far better and would have led to a better consensus.

I know the chief commissioner, and I have many friends on the Human Rights Commission whom I believe to be very sincere people. I will, therefore, not get involved in any personal attacks. That said, we could create a metaphor for the commission's advice: a child who reaches for a bottle of tablets, believing them to be sweets, ingests them and suffers fatal consequences. The child might have been sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. In the same way, I have no doubt that advice from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was sincere, but it was sincerely wrong. We should do better by looking for a consensus approach.

The critical issue for most people is that most of the human rights that are in the bill are already judicable and in the system. I do not think that we should get into a situation where we try to reinvent the wheel or redraw the Troubles while ignoring the roles that others have played.

The Democratic Unionist Party will bow to nobody in its defence of human rights. We stand in the British tradition of the Magna Carta and in the British tradition of William of Orange and the Bill of Rights. We also stand in the British tradition of the mother of Parliaments, which has enshrined democratic rights and freedoms here. The Member who proposed the amendment talked about proportional representation, yet his sister party in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party, will not accept proportional representation for Westminster. I think that that stance exposes those parties.

I again invite the Member who moved the motion to state clearly that there can be no amnesty for those who took, brutalised and tortured a mother of 10 and denied her the human right to life. The Member must stand over that, accept that those are grave and grotesque human rights abuses and be conscious of them when lecturing others.

Mr Elliott: Following on from Mr Bell's comments, I must say that it sometimes beggars belief that some people in the Chamber can stand up and talk about human rights when people in this society, maybe colleagues of theirs, butchered human beings.

There are a couple of clear indications that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's recommendations for a bill of rights for Northern Ireland will not be enacted. In the first instance,

there is not a majority in the House who consider the proposals to be adequate.

No one should be under any illusion about the importance that the Ulster Unionist Party places on human rights. Members of my party have been instrumental in the advancement of rights and equality in Northern Ireland. We believe in a society where citizens are equal under the law, and we believe that equality should be underpinned by rights and responsibilities. However, we also believe in parliamentary democracy and that decisions about the allocation of scarce resources should be taken by the people, through their elected representatives. We do not believe that those decisions should be made through a judicial interpretation of a set of socio-economic rights, because that is not democracy. Unlike the commission, we accept the concept of a scarcity of resources and regard its wish list to be totally unachievable.

I was quite interested to hear Mr Maginness, in proposing his amendment, say that the abolition of proportional representation in 1929 had increased unionist representation. My understanding is that the number of nationalist seats increased by four after the 1929 election. Does that not drive a horse and cart through his argument?

Mr A Maginness: The Nationalist Party won one extra seat, but the aim of the abolition of proportional representation was to eliminate independent unionists and the Labour Party in Northern Ireland, and that was successful.

Mr Elliott: So, the Member accepts that the abolition of proportional representation increased nationalist representation, which is what I was trying to say.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the national Government are determined to kill off the proposals for a bill of rights. Their consultation document points out several times that the commission has exceeded its brief, which was to identify Northern Ireland-specific rights. The Government also share our concerns about socio-economic rights, and one section of their consultation document, 'A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: Next Steps', is worth highlighting:

"The national debate is also the right context in which to consider both the opportunities and the risks in attempting to establish legally enforceable economic and social rights – including

the challenge of establishing with precision what such rights would actually mean in practice; the considerable danger that the courts could be drawn into resource allocation decisions for which they do not have any democratic mandate and which cannot take account of broader public policy considerations – including, crucially, affordability; and the need for the democratically elected and accountable Government and Executive to retain full responsibility for the prioritisation of expenditure. The Government believes that these issues are common across the UK and should therefore best be addressed at national level rather than solely in relation to Northern Ireland.”

I cannot disagree with any of that, and I doubt that anyone on this side of the House would either.

The Government issued that document in November last year and set the closing date as the start of March this year. That is a particularly long time. However, they have extended the deadline to the end of March, and a cynic might suggest that that was an attempt to kick the proposals under the carpet, which is where they truly belong.

People in Northern Ireland need a bill of rights; they need a charter to protect them from the state and from discrimination by others. However, they have the European Convention on Human Rights, which has been protecting people across Europe for 60 years, and they have the UK Human Rights Act 1998, which enacts the provisions of the convention in the United Kingdom. The 1998 Belfast Agreement, which we have heard much about, mandated the commission to identify those rights that are not in the convention but that are specific to Northern Ireland. However, it dreamed up a set of new rights that were not in the charter but were not specific to Northern Ireland either. Therefore, the commission has wasted a lot of time and resources in pursuing what appears to many people to be primarily a political agenda. We have wasted an opportunity to examine in detail rights issues that are unique to Northern Ireland and to our past. Instead, the commission has created political division. It has failed to respect its Belfast Agreement mandate and to examine Northern Ireland's specific rights adequately. My party accepts the thrust of the Government consultation but not the motion or the amendment.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a survivor of the Bill of Rights Forum.

My party recognises that the creation of a bill of rights is a central aspect of the Good Friday Agreement. Moreover, people in this society have been striving for a bill of rights for many years. Although we continue to support the creation of a bill of rights for Northern Ireland, we have had, and continue to have, concerns about the process that has been adopted and the proposed content of the various bills that have been submitted. We have particular concerns about the liberal aspects, the aspects that seek to entrench sectarian divisions rather than overcome them, the aspects that deny the wide range of choices of identity and diversity in this society, and the efforts to, in effect, block the establishment of a shared future.

We would be in a much better place today had things been done differently over the past decade. Both unionist parties took far too long to engage with the process. However, when they decided to engage, the two nationalist parties and elements of civil society continued to pursue a one-sided, blinkered agenda. No attempts were made to compromise and to agree on a shared basis on which to move forward. There is now no time left in this session of Parliament, and it is uncertain how the incoming Government will approach the issue.

I recognise the difficult situation whereby the Northern Ireland Office has issued a consultation document that even I recognise takes a very minimalist approach, and it will not be sufficient to address this aspect of the process. However, equally, the Human Rights Commission, the Bill of Rights Forum and civil society have made totally unrealistic demands that will never be acceptable. Although we understand many people's frustrations, it is important to recognise where we are and how we got here. The Northern Ireland Office, through its consultation document, missed the opportunity to allow the public to comment on a much wider range of options. The consultation document is too narrow and, in that sense, the SDLP amendment makes some sense. However, I am unsure why it rules out the last clause in the Sinn Féin motion, which seems to be at the heart of what the SDLP is seeking.

My party can support the principle of social and economic rights, which are at the heart of today's debate. Indeed, I recognise that the European Convention on Human Rights and the resulting Human Rights Act are deficient in that respect. However, there is a distinction between

social and economic rights that are based around access and treatment and trying to legislate for a particular outcome through rights. Some matters should be left to democratic legislators.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

It must also be borne in mind that some aspects cannot be addressed on a discrete Northern Ireland basis. For example, although social security is technically a devolved matter, there is no point putting in place special rights for Northern Ireland in that area given that a common UK-wide regime exists. If we become out of step with the rest of the UK, we may face severe financial consequences. What is happening in the rest of the UK and on the island of Ireland must also be taken into account. Although a separate bill of rights for Northern Ireland is still possible, the content needs to be discussed. Indeed, specific Northern Ireland aspects could be included in a wider UK bill.

That said, those who seek the deployment of social and economic rights in Northern Ireland on a special basis still have a major intellectual and political argument to win. I fully appreciate the particular context in which our social and economic problems have arisen, but there are similar outcomes elsewhere on these islands. In certain places, the situation may be even more severe than it is in Northern Ireland. Any British Government will find it difficult to argue why special measures should be in place in Northern Ireland if the same measures are not in place in the rest of the UK, particularly if those measures have financial consequences. Fundamentally, whatever happens, there should be no regression from the Human Rights Act 1998. That comment applies particularly to any incoming Conservative Government.

2.00 pm

Mr Spratt: We are all aware that, when the Bill of Rights Forum completed its work in 2008, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission gave its recommendations to the Government on a proposed bill of rights for Northern Ireland. First, it has to be said that it is fundamental to democracy that people have the opportunity to vote on human rights issues and that decisions not be left to unelected judges. However, the intention was that those rights should:

"reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland".

Some of the Bill of Rights Forum's proposals, such as those on equality, representation and participation in public life clearly relate to Northern Ireland, as do those on identity, culture and language, sectarianism and segregation, victims and the legacy of the conflict, and criminal justice. However, my party made it clear during the Bill of Rights Forum's deliberations that its recommendations were too wide and were outside the remit of the Belfast Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Many countries have a bill of rights built into their constitution. Although the United Kingdom does not have a written constitution, it is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, which was agreed in 1950. The convention is a binding international agreement, and the rights contained in it are fully enshrined in UK law. It is also important to note that the UK is a signatory to a number of human rights conventions, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Human Rights Act 1998 already enshrines in domestic law the protections of the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition, existing legislation provides rights in a range of areas. Freedom of information legislation, for example, provides a statutory right of access to recorded information that many public authorities hold. The wider debate in the UK highlights the fact that rights do not have to be confined to a bill of rights. The Prime Minister has announced proposals that include the establishment of new, enforceable rights for hospital patients and improved entitlements to education for young children.

As I said earlier, the Human Rights Commission has proposed rights in a wide range of areas. Many of those rights are the subject of active consideration in the debate on a national bill of rights. In fact, more than half of the rights that have been proposed in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's advice to the Government are equally relevant to the people of England, Scotland and Wales. Those include the right to marriage or civil partnership, to education, to freedom of movement, to civil and administrative justice, to health, to work

and to an adequate standard of living, as well as environmental rights and social security rights. In that context, my party believes that it is difficult to justify a separate bill of rights for Northern Ireland. Ensuring health and employment rights, as well as other economic and social rights, is hugely important to everyone in the United Kingdom and should be addressed in the national debate on a bill of rights.

The intention of having a bill of rights for Northern Ireland would be to reflect our particular circumstances. I believe that much of the advice given to the Government does not exclusively relate to Northern Ireland. Therefore, this side of the House cannot support the motion or the amendment.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion tabled by my party colleagues, and I commend them for securing the debate. After consultation and further consultation, negotiations and further, extended consultation, we have decided to accept the SDLP amendment. Stephen Farry made the point that he believed that the last line of the motion was the most important line for us as a party. The amendment does not remove the last line of the motion; it just extends and expands on it. I wanted to clarify that without sending it out to further consultation in the course of the debate.

Sinn Féin supports the introduction of a robust and enforceable bill of rights that will provide rights-based protection for all people in the North. We talk about consultation and about what our Executive Ministers are doing, but it is also important to recognise that the British Government are consulting on a proposed bill of rights and that that should be welcomed. However, we also need to highlight the fact that they seem to be ignoring advice from the Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights Commission on the social and economic aspects and on the protections in a bill of rights. Jonathan Bell made a good comment: he said that most of the rights are already here in the system. I want to focus on some of the social justice issues and leave the bigger politics to one side.

The bill of rights has significance for children and young people. We need it not only to secure a future free from discrimination for our children and young people; the rights of everyone in our community need to be respected. We talk about

the age and vulnerability of some of our young people on a weekly basis in this Assembly. We talk about abuse, discrimination and how we as a society need to be proactive. We have talked about 52,000 young people who are not in education, employment or training; that is the kind of social justice issue that the bill of rights would impact on.

A small percentage of children and young people are involved in crime and criminality. Some children and young people are in the care system, through no fault of their own. We should be able to change that and give everybody a future or a chance to have a secure future. That is what a bill of rights should do. There is also the issue of provision and resources for children and young people. Disappointingly, we heard in the statement from the Minister of Finance and Personnel this morning that money had been handed back.

We spend 30% less on family and childcare services here than is spent in England and Wales. We only spend around £80 a head on Sure Start. Jim Shannon has mentioned Sure Start numerous times. We are talking about giving children and young people a better start in life, yet, at the age children are at when they benefit from Sure Start, we spend £80 each on them, whereas in England they spend £600. The issue of the bill of rights and social justice needs to be looked at. We need to leave the bigger politics behind. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Following extensive consultation, the Human Rights Commission opted for a strong rights-based approach on the issue of the bill of rights. It is about individual rights, family rights, community rights and society's rights. Although we will accept the SDLP's amendment, I plead with other Members: let us try and deal with this as a social justice matter. Let us not try and get caught up with the politics of it. We are talking about social and economic rights and issues. We are talking about creating better communities and a better society for individuals and families.

Mr Weir: Like Stephen Farry, I declare an interest as a survivor of the Bill of Rights Forum. Indeed, to use common parlance, I am not sure which term — victim or survivor — is more appropriate. Nevertheless, I come at the issue having had a year's experience on the Bill of Rights Forum.

The DUP does not have a brief for a particular set of proposals. The NIO consultation is closer to our way of thinking than either the Bill of Rights Forum or the Human Rights Commission, but we do not have any emotional attachment to one particular set of proposals.

The proposer of the motion mentioned the need to learn lessons, albeit from a very different angle. Our criticism of the Bill of Rights Forum in particular but also the Human Rights Commission is that they did not learn lessons. Although the Bill of Rights Forum acted with more latitude, both groups pressed ahead with a report that clearly did not have political buy-in across the board. There was no buy-in from the Ulster Unionist Party, the Democratic Unionist Party or, even, the Alliance Party on some issues.

Our society has learned painful lessons about vetoes down through history. A majority that is opposed by the other community cannot simply impose its will on that minority. The lesson that a majority cannot impose its will on a minority and that we need both communities to buy in is equally relevant to a bill of rights process. We need something that has both unionist and nationalist buy-in. If it is wrong for a unionist majority to impose something on a nationalist minority, it is even more wrong for a nationalist minority to impose its will on a unionist majority.

Both the Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights Commission produced expansive proposals. The Bill of Rights Forum rode out a whole stable of hobby horses on the matter, and, to some extent, the Human Rights Commission did the same. The wish lists of everyone in our society with a vested interest were included. Although the Human Rights Commission shied away from some of the more controversial ideas of the Bill of Rights Forum, it largely repeated the same mistake.

There are three things that need to be taken into account. My party has no buy-in to the Belfast Agreement; we are not supporters of or signatories to it. However, I agree with Tom Elliott of the Ulster Unionist Party that the remit —

Mr Kennedy: You negotiated it.

Mr Weir: Yes, and then I washed my hands of it.

It is clear even to those who take a doctrinaire approach and support the Belfast Agreement that the proposals put forward by both the Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights

Commission drive a coach and horses through the remit that was laid out in the Belfast Agreement. That remit was to identify a scope for a bill of rights, but both groups identified a full bill of rights.

We must realise that we are not in a vacuum. The European Convention on Human Rights has been signed up to and incorporated into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998. Indeed, Northern Ireland, in particular, has a plethora of legislation that allows checks and balances. Mr Alban Maginness dragged us back to the 1920s and referred to the iniquities of the House of Commons (Method of Voting and Redistribution of Seats) Act (Northern Ireland) 1929. I prefer to focus on this century and do not want to dwell on the 1920s. Anyway, under the current rules of the Assembly's operation, such legislation could never come about. He is dragging up ghosts from the past, but there are protections in place.

There has been mention of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. To me, that means something that is peculiar to Donaghadee and does not apply to Darlington, Dundee or Dublin. Similarly, social justice, social housing and children's rights have been mentioned. However, there is a need for social housing in Colchester, Coats Bridge and Cork as well as north Belfast. These things are not unique to Northern Ireland.

The principal problem is that the proposals interfere with political decisions. Mention is also made of social housing.

2.15 pm

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

Mr Weir: A balance of resources will always have to be maintained. The proposals are wrong because they take power away from democratically elected politicians and give it to unelected judges.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Unfortunately, other duties meant that I was unable to hear Members' speeches or the tone of what is an important debate.

Under the Belfast Agreement, the remit of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is to advise the Secretary of State on:

"the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights, to reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland".

It must also take account of the United Kingdom's Human Rights Act 1998. The Ulster Unionist Party has long held the view that the Belfast Agreement did not ask the NIHRC to draft a comprehensive bill of rights. Monica McWilliams and the commissioners, with the honourable exception of Mrs Daphne Trimble and Jonathan Bell, who is now a Member of the House, got it completely wrong and far exceeded their remit.

The consultation document produced by the Northern Ireland Office, to which the advertising campaign refers, is a stunning rejection of the proposals made by a majority of the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Not a single Government in western Europe would have accepted such flawed proposals for a region of their country. The entire process has been divisive and a waste of time and resources.

It is inconceivable that any part of any state should have a comprehensively different set of human rights to another. If that were the case, the fundamental constitutional integrity of the state would be significantly undermined, and people in different regions would have a markedly different set of rights under the law from citizens elsewhere in that state. That would be an intolerable position, and it would lead to major difficulties and problems in law.

If a maximalist interpretation were to extend a bill of rights to cover areas of social and economic policy, not only would that be a major derogation of the rights of the Assembly and the sovereignty of Parliament, it would create a new super-legislative authority above and beyond the Assembly and Parliament. That new authority, based on a bill of rights that delves deep into social and economic policy, would be anchored in and interpreted by the courts, which would thereby obtain a power over and above that of the Assembly and Parliament. Fundamentally, however, the Assembly and Parliament are charged with making our legislation.

A situation in which a court can potentially override the power of both an Assembly and Parliament has not existed in this country since at least the seventeenth century. Not only would that be a step back in time, it would be a step back from democracy. Any weakening of the

competence and authority of democratically elected legislators would undermine democracy. That is not only a dangerous road; it is one that constitutional and historical experience teaches us to avoid.

It is nonsense to say that an Assembly or Parliament should create a bill of rights that significantly curtails its powers and authority. To do so would betray the sacred trust given to us by the people to be their first line of protection and the democratic agents of change that society demands. We oppose the motion for all those reasons. This divisive debate needs to be set aside, and we need get on with reducing poverty and inequality by boosting our economy and making the correct policy decisions to give children and families the best chance of achieving.

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

Mr Kennedy: That is where the battle must be fought and won.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the proposer of the motion for bringing it to the Assembly. The NIO document is a shadow of the recommendations produced by the Human Rights Commission. For Members who spoke earlier to imply that the commission exceeded its mandate was totally unjust and unfair. At no time did the commission receive correspondence from the British Government stating that it had exceeded its mandate. It is only in recent weeks and months that the British Government, bowing, I suggest, to unionist pressure, have proposed a hotchpotch of a bill of rights. The results of a recent survey conducted by the Human Rights Consortium make nonsense of the notion that only nationalist and republican parties support a bill of rights. The survey found that over 80% of the community and many of the Churches support a bill of rights for Northern Ireland.

It was entirely disingenuous of Members who spoke earlier to suggest that the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland do not warrant a bill of rights. It is only in the past year or two that a bill of rights has been looked at by the UK Government. Martina Anderson and Alban Maginness talked about the discrimination of the past and how that led to the conflict. For the record and in case anyone suspects otherwise, the SDLP never promoted violence as a means to tackle unionist discrimination. We always protected the first basic right of anyone, which

is the right to life. That was our cry 40 years ago, and it remains so today. I will not go down that route on this occasion because this debate is too important to have points made at Sinn Féin's expense. In the NIO consultation —

Ms S Ramsey: *[Interruption.]*

Mrs D Kelly: I am very generous to you. In the — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: The document from the British Government suggests that they will consider with the Executive:

“a general principle of inclusive and equitable representation at a local government level”.

Where will we get that? Could that deny power sharing across local councils? The document also states that the Government will consider with the Executive the requirement that:

“the membership of public bodies should, as far as practicable, be representative of the community in Northern Ireland.”

In addition, the Government propose to:

“Consider with the Executive extending the existing duty on public authorities around promoting good relations, so that public authorities would also have regard to the need to promote a spirit of tolerance, dialogue and mutual respect; and to the need to respect the identity and ethos of the two main communities.”

The document also states that the Government will consider with the Executive:

“whether there are additional language protections that could be included.”

As we know from the Hillsborough agreement, very little agreement has been produced by the Executive on those issues. What we have seen has been a carve-up and the denial of legislation that was promised in the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement on the Irish language.

Furthermore, the Government propose to consider with the Executive:

“provision to ensure the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict are addressed.”

The Executive will not agree a definition of the word “victim” never mind how to address the needs of victims in a comprehensive manner.

The bill of rights that Westminster was to have produced is putting into the hot boiling pot of the Executive the very factors that led to the need for the Hillsborough agreement and all sorts of working parties. Those matters should be in a bill of rights.

I do not see how anyone in this Chamber or in our community could fear that a bill of rights would not address social and economic rights. We know that many communities across the North continue to suffer high levels of social deprivation. In the current recession, that suffering has only increased, so why would we not consider how to address the needs of people whom all Members say they represent and care about. Why should that not be progressively realised? The proposed bill of rights does not say —

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

Mrs D Kelly: I will finish by saying that the proposals are a progressive realisation of those rights, which should not put the House in fear of its ability to deliver.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. When we return to the debate after Question Time, Mr Simon Hamilton will be the next Member to speak.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Executive: Minister of Justice

1. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the equality implications of the expansion of the Executive to include the new Justice Minister. (AQO 835/10)

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness):

Events of recent days demonstrate the importance of transferring policing and justice powers. I have already stated my determination that those behind incidents such as last week's mindless bomb attack in Newry, the murder of Kieran Doherty in Derry and the weekend disturbances in Craigavon will not undermine the progress that we have made. Those people, who are anti-peace and anti-justice, are acting against the democratically expressed wishes of all the people of Ireland, and, apart from their futile acts, they have nothing to offer society. We will continue on the road to deliver a better future. Such attacks unite us and serve only to strengthen our resolve.

In its report of January 2009 on the arrangements for the devolution of policing and justice matters, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee recommended that there should be an additional Department to exercise powers in relation to policing and justice matters. The Committee also recommended an appointment process for the Minister in charge of that Department, which would operate until 1 May 2012. The process should be one in which nominations are invited from Members, and the successful candidate would require the support of the majority of Members present and voting, including a majority of designated nationalists and a majority of designated unionists.

On 20 January 2009, the Assembly approved a motion endorsing the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's report. The Department of Justice Bill, which was scrutinised in great detail by the Assembly in the latter part of last year, gave legislative authority to the single

Justice Department and to the arrangements for appointing the Minister. In our view, those are sensible arrangements that are appropriate for the initial stage in the devolution of policing and justice responsibilities, and they are subject to review by the Assembly before May 2012.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer.

Does the deputy First Minister agree that the way forward, for a matter with which we have been dealing for a number of years, is to bring about fairness, inclusivity and equality in all walks of life? Are the deputy First Minister and the First Minister concerned that the appointment of an Alliance Party Justice Minister, which he and the DUP support, would create further political imbalance in the Executive and would result in us having to face a huge range of equality and inclusivity issues?

The deputy First Minister: I thank the Member for his question. However, I do not think that the First Minister and I ever outlined a preference between ourselves as to which party would take up the position of Minister of Justice. That is a matter for the Assembly on 12 April. As we move forward, it is important to reflect on the reality that the institutions of which we are a part must be based on fairness and equality, and I, among many others in the House, subscribe to that.

I am heartened by the reaction to the agreement that was forged at Hillsborough, which has been welcomed by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown; the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen; the Minister for Foreign Affairs and all the opposition leaders in Leinster House; the Conservative Party and David Cameron; Barack Obama, the President of the United States; Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State; and the European Union. I just wish that it was welcomed by the SDLP.

Mr Kennedy: I am sure that the deputy First Minister would wish to welcome to the Chamber as observers Councillor Winston Bennett and his colleagues and officials from Cavan County Council. That is another welcome.

On the substantive issue, if the Justice Minister is appointed without using the d'Hondt system, what are the implications for the operation of the d'Hondt system in other cross-community appointments, including that of the deputy First

Minister, and would it point the way to using a different format for ministerial appointments?

The deputy First Minister: We have repeatedly outlined our view of all that. We have made it absolutely crystal clear that we are talking about a temporary arrangement until 2012. As Ian Paisley said to me in our initial meetings, it is preferable to have our own Ministers in charge of all the Departments. If I were to go down the route that has been suggested by some parties in the Assembly by using d'Hondt, I could guarantee that the transfer of policing and justice powers from London to our Administration would not happen in the lifetime of the Assembly. That would be totally and absolutely unacceptable.

We are trying to deal with an important issue. The devolution of policing and justice powers is critical to our society, and the public would prefer a Minister from here to deal with the issue. In respect of the implications of what we are doing, we all know that if d'Hondt were run again from the beginning, there would probably be a major reallocation of all ministerial Departments in the Executive. Would people thank us for doing that one year before the next Assembly elections? I do not think so.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat. Given the fact that all parties support the transfer of policing and justice powers and that the agreement reached is temporary and time-limited, does the deputy First Minister expect all parties, despite some of the current grumbings, to support the arrangement arrived at in Hillsborough and give effect to the transfer of policing and justice powers?

The deputy First Minister: I also welcome our friends from County Cavan. Their visit is a clear signal of how the situation has changed in the Building. Over the past couple of years, representatives have travelled here from all over the island of Ireland, and they are always welcome.

Next Tuesday, when the First Minister and I move the motion on the transfer of policing and justice powers in the Assembly, naturally, I would like unanimous support. If that were to happen, it would reflect the overwhelming support of the community and, indeed, throughout the island of Ireland for the progress that was made at Hillsborough.

We all understand that the agreement at Hillsborough is not about the transfer of policing and justice powers only. It deals with other critical matters, such as how we put in place the new improved framework for dealing with the contentious issues of parades, protests, and so forth. We put together three working parties, which are dealing with ways to improve the performance of the Executive; we did that in an inclusive fashion. Therefore, when the Question on the motion is put next week, there will be a high expectation among supporters of all parties in the Assembly that they will join the mood that has been created by the agreement at Hillsborough and move forward decisively.

The best response to the people who planted the bomb in Newry, to the people who killed Kieran Doherty and to the people who were involved in disturbances at the weekend is that we continue to show that we are united, are moving forward, will not be deflected, diverted, threatened or intimidated by anybody, but will abide by the will of the people of the North and of the entire island.

Mr Spratt: Despite some of the sound bites from the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party, does the deputy First Minister agree that both parties were fully consulted at all stages, including consultations with the Assembly and Executive Review Committee?

The deputy First Minister: I agree with those comments. I pay tribute to Mr Spratt and the Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, Raymond McCartney, for the positive contribution that they, and all the Committee's members, including those from the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, made to the work of the Committee. We are dealing with important business; it is about instilling into our community hope and optimism so that we can move forward, albeit we come from different political persuasions and backgrounds. It is important that we do that in a way that delivers substantive change for people on the ground, makes their lives better, and allows them to reach their full potential against a backdrop of difficult economic circumstances. The inclusive way in which the Assembly and Executive Review Committee works and the ongoing consultations between the First Minister and myself and the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister shows that that is the only way to go.

We are determined to continue with that work, but it will work only if people want to be included. This is about inclusion, and it is about us being big enough to ensure that everybody is included. That also imposes a responsibility on others to be included and to make their positive contribution to what has been an important couple of weeks in respect of driving forward to ensure the fulfilment of the agreements that we have made.

Victims' Commissioner

2. **Mr Lunn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a new victims and survivors' commissioner will be appointed. (AQO 836/10)

The deputy First Minister: We received Michael Nesbitt's resignation from the Commission for Victims and Survivors on 17 February 2010. Members will recall that we framed the legislation that was introduced to establish the Victims' Commission in such a way as to allow for flexibility in its make-up. We did that because we knew that there was a significant backlog of work to be addressed and because we know that the needs of victims and survivors change over time. We will, therefore, take time to consider how the Commission can best take forward its work programme.

I thank Mr Nesbitt for his contribution to the work of the Victims' Commission, and I wish him well in the future.

Mr Lunn: I am not clear as to whether that means that a replacement will be appointed. In the event that there is, can we expect an open and transparent selection process that is based on ability and qualifications, or will it be a case of going through the motions and appointing an Ulster Unionist?

The deputy First Minister: The Member takes a cynical view of how we deal with such important matters. At the beginning of the process in 2008, four individuals were identified as having the skills and knowledge base to address the backlog of work in the victims and survivors' sector. We will give careful consideration to the matter of the number of commissioners, in light of the work required within their corporate and business plan. We will consider the views of the existing commissioners, but, at this time, it is too early to come to any conclusions. The First Minister and I will consider all options, but we

will not be appointing a new commissioner at this time.

Mr Shannon: In his response, the deputy First Minister referred to the commissioner, but the issues for a great many Members are the needs of the victims and survivors. Can the deputy First Minister assure the House that the Victims' Commission will continue to look after the victims and survivors and ensure that their concerns and need for help are fully looked after, because we do not want to see any hold-up in the process?

The deputy First Minister: On a number of occasions, the First Minister and I have made it clear that that is a top priority for us. We have a responsibility to ensure that people who have been victims of the conflict are respectfully dealt with in a way that allows them to move forward. Life has been difficult for all of them.

Over the course of the past week, we have seen another victim: we have seen a young man killed in the city that I come from. We live in a small world. I knew his grandfather, Vinny Coyle, who was prominent in the civil rights movement in Derry city, and his grandmother, Vincent Coyle's wife. I know his grandmother on the other side, Mrs Doherty. I also know his bride-to-be, God bless her; her heart is aching. She has her wedding dress in her house, and she had expected to be married in three months' time. I have known her father and mother, Teddy and Betty Miller, for 40 years. I know Kieran's father, Aidan Coyle. I know all those people, so I know that their hearts are broken. I know that their hearts have been broken by people who claim to be acting in the interests of Ireland. Well, God help us, because they do not act in the interest of Ireland but in their own interests.

2.45 pm

As my colleague Martina Anderson said in the House earlier, those people describe themselves as an army. It is not an army that we are dealing with but a gang. It is a gang of people who are opposed to peace, who are opposed to justice and who are opposed to political progress. It is a gang of people who believe that it is a legitimate political objective to destroy all the good work that many of us in the House have been engaged in, with the assistance of others, over the past 15 years. We have had enough victims. The groups that are out there are mostly on the so-called republican side. Our message to them is clear:

give us a break, go away and get a life, get off people's backs and recognise that they are going absolutely nowhere. A central feature of their strategy was to divide the First Minister and me; the DUP and Sinn Féin; the Ulster Unionist Party and Sinn Féin; the SDLP and the DUP; and to bring the institutions down.

We are approaching the first anniversary of the murders of two soldiers, the murder of Stephen Carroll and the murder of Kevin McDaid in Coleraine. The greatest response to those groups now is the response that we gave at that time. The way in which we stood together sent a powerful message to the world. We are going to have to do that again in the aftermath of the latest ridiculous acts, which were carried out by people who represent absolutely no one in our society.

We say to them: give us a break, we want no more victims, we want you to go away, stop your activities, give us the opportunity to move forward, and if you have the intelligence and the ability, you can continue to oppose politically what we are doing, but the use of violence has had its day in the North and on the island of Ireland. We are moving forward. We will not be diverted. Instead of each act that they carry out making us weaker, it will make us stronger, and stronger than ever before. No matter what they do, we will continue to move forward together.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire.

Will the deputy First Minister outline the Executive's achievements in delivering a strategy for victims and survivors of the conflict? I ask that question mindful of the failure of the previous Executive to address the needs of victims and survivors substantively.

The deputy First Minister: As we all know, the strategy for victims and survivors was published in December 2009. It is a 10-year strategy that represents our commitment to the victims and survivors of the conflict and shows how we plan to provide help and support for victims and survivors over the coming years. The strategy is built around the Commission for Victims and Survivors, the forum for victims and survivors and a new victims and survivors' service. The Commission for Victims and Survivors was established in June 2008 to promote awareness of the interests of victims and survivors. In September 2009, the commission established the forum for victims and survivors, which

will run in pilot form until June 2010. The forum proper will be established following an evaluation of the pilot. The forum's aim is to improve government's awareness of victims and survivors' issues. It is representative of victims and survivors and includes representation from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.

Draft proposals on a new victims and survivors' service went out for consultation in August 2009. We are discussing the next steps in the process in light of the responses to that consultation. The new service will be the focal point for funding work with victims and survivors and will provide that funding to the sector on the basis of assessed and agreed need.

We do not underestimate the size of the task involved in establishing the service. We fully understand the complexities and sensitivities that are involved. However, we stress that it is our intention to establish the service as soon as is practicably possible. That will remain our focus.

An unprecedented £36 million has been allocated to support work with victims and survivors during the spending period 2008-2011. That is more than double the amount that was allocated to the work in the previous spending round.

Parades

3. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why two of the authors of the interim Ashdown review of parading are in attendance at the parades working group; and whether they can confirm that no decision will be taken regarding disputed parades without the agreement of residents' groups. (AQO 837/10)

The deputy First Minister: As part of the agreement reached at Hillsborough Castle on 5 February 2010, the First Minister and I agreed to set up a co-chaired working group comprising six members appointed by us who had experience of dealing with parading issues. The group's remit was to bring forward agreed outcomes and proposals that it believed to be capable of achieving cross-community support for the new and improved framework.

On 8 February 2010, the First Minister and I confirmed that the members of the working group would be the Rt Hon Jeffrey Donaldson, Nelson McCausland, Stephen Moutray, Gerry Kelly, Michelle Gildernew and John O'Dowd.

The working group appointed two advisers, the Rev Mervyn Gibson and Sean Murray, who have attended meetings of the working group to offer advice, if required. The Member will be aware that the working group has been involved in a period of intense work to progress the task at hand, which included a series of meetings with elected representatives and a range of stakeholders, including representatives of the residents' groups.

The working group was tasked with making a report to Ministers, but it is acknowledged that finding a resolution to parading issues will require the consideration of the views of all stakeholders, including residents. I am pleased to confirm that the working group presented its report on the agreed outcomes to the First Minister and me, and work is progressing further, in line with the timetable set out in the Hillsborough agreement.

As I laid out in the agreement, future work will include full consultation on a draft parades Bill, with further consultation through the Assembly Committee in September. We realise that it is essential that any work on parading maximises public support, and we are committed to extensive consultation on, and scrutiny of, any Bill.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the deputy First Minister have any concerns about the fact that two of the main authors of the Ashdown review are involved in the parades working group, given that their deliberations resulted in a recommendation that the Parades Commission be abolished? Is he not concerned that the working group's report will not be presented to the Executive or the House? I listened carefully to what the deputy First Minister said, and he talked only about the draft legislation going out for consultation. Will the working group's report not see the light of day? Will it be seen only by Sinn Féin and the DUP?

The deputy First Minister: There is general agreement in society, and general agreement at a political level — apart from the reservations expressed by the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party — that it is challenging to attempt to put in place a new agreed framework to try to create circumstances that will see all the controversy that has existed around contentious parades resolved. That work is important. It is looking at an agreed way forward with a new and improved framework. I am open to correction, but I think that I heard one or two members of the SDLP

say in radio interviews over the past couple of weeks that they agreed that it was important to try to bring about an agreed framework. We are involved in a noble cause, and we have taken on board the concerns expressed.

However, we all know how government works. The First Minister and I made it clear from the beginning that when the working party came forward with its report, we would send it to the legislative draftsmen, who would put the legislation in place. We made it clear that the draft legislation would then come back for public consultation over a 12-week period and would be subject to extensive debate and discussion in the Assembly, in which all parties would be involved. The public would also be aware of the situation. Trying to score cheap political points does nothing to address the major task of ensuring that we move forward in a way that delivers outcomes and results that will make life better for the people whom we all represent.

Mr Storey: Will the deputy First Minister explain why two of his colleagues were in the village of Dunloy in my constituency yesterday, where there was a commemoration to two IRA members at which there was a display of paramilitary paraphernalia? The Dunloy Fallen Comrades Republican Flute band, which had the picture of two Armalite rifles on the side of its drum, was also present.

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question

Mr Storey: Those are the very things that we are, rightly, being told are unacceptable in loyalist parades. Is it not the height of hypocrisy for the two Members who are sitting behind the Minister to have been present in Dunloy yesterday, where Orangemen have been denied their right to march for nine years, because of the intransigence of republicans?

The deputy First Minister: I was not in Dunloy yesterday, so I do not know —

Mr Storey: I do.

The deputy First Minister: The Member may well know, but I do not know what occurred there. The Member has made his point and people will reflect on that. However, the important thing is that we have put in place a process that will establish a new agreed framework for moving forward. The duty and responsibility of

every Member of the House is to contribute to that in a way that lessens tensions in society.

Some Members will recall a time not so long ago when I was in the Diamond area of the walled city of Derry and heard that approximately 250 people were sitting in protest on the streets of Dunloy. That was on 12 July, and I do not normally travel anywhere on that date, just in case I meet people on the road who would not want to meet me. However, on that occasion, I got into a car on my own and drove straight to Dunloy, through Coleraine, and spoke to citizens in Dunloy who behaved very responsibly and sensibly and took my advice. The outcome on that day at least, whatever the outcome on other occasions, was one that everyone could live with.

As we go forward, we must be positive and constructive and work with the agreements that we have put in place. Those are agreed processes between the parties in the House — at least, the two major parties in the House — and it is our duty and responsibility to make them work in a way that delivers for everyone.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that although some progress has been made on the issue of contentious parades through the establishment of the Parades Commission, there is further room for improvement, particularly in securing local agreements and inclusive dialogue, to ensure that the outstanding parading issues are resolved?

The deputy First Minister: First of all, I wish the Member a happy birthday. I was given a figure for her age earlier, but I am afraid to repeat it in case I get a clap around the ear. *[Laughter.]*

We all know that the Hillsborough agreement outlines our commitment to a new and improved framework that is fashioned by all stakeholders and that maximises cross-community support. I do not think that anyone can object to any of it. It is about local people providing solutions and respecting the rights of those who parade and those who live in areas through which others seek to parade. That includes the right for everyone to be free from sectarian harassment, and it recognises that, at times, there are competing rights. It is about transparency, openness, fairness and independent decision-making. We recognise that any improved regulatory framework must be capable of maximising cross-community support.

We have an agreed way forward. There is work for us to do to deliver that by December of this year, and, with good heart and spirit from everyone, we are well up for that task.

3.00 pm

Environment

Community Planning

1. **Dr Farry** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the development of a community planning system. (AQO 850/10)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

Proposals for the legislative framework for council-led community planning are included in my proposals for the local government reorganisation Bill, which are before the Executive for clearance.

The strategic leadership board that I chair has endorsed a community planning foundation programme to be taken forward by the transition committees. That programme will ensure that the new councils are prepared for the introduction of the statutory duty in May 2011.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for that response. In the light of the vote that will be taken next week in the Assembly on the devolution of policing and justice, will he give his full consideration to ensuring that, whatever model of community planning comes forward under that legislation, it will encompass the criminal justice agencies from day one, so that we can ensure that there will be a holistic approach to community planning that can address issues such as levels of offending and reasons for offending in communities?

The Minister of the Environment: Community planning needs to be holistic and incorporate all of the various arms of government, so that the public can have an input and influence at that level through the community planning exercise. Irrespective of whether policing and justice is devolved, it is important that the community has the opportunity to make its views and opinions heard through that process.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that, if they want in, they must continually rise in their place.

Mr Dallat: Mr Speaker, I apologise for my indiscretion. Will the Minister tell the House what

he sees as the principal issues in a community planning scheme and how they should relate to other government Departments?

The Minister of the Environment: Community planning will provide a framework whereby councils, government Departments, statutory bodies and other relevant agencies and sectors can work together to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of an area based on effective engagement with the community. Effective community planning will improve the connection between regional, local and neighbourhood issues and priorities through partnership working and by making best use of all available resources to deliver improved outcomes for all our citizens.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister confirm that his Department will fund the community planning system, or does he propose that the costs will be borne by local government?

The Minister of the Environment: I want to ensure that we have a more efficient and cost-effective local government administration. Therefore, if everyone works with me in ensuring that we deliver that, ratepayers will save money and will not be asked to pay more.

Greenhouse Gases: Hydrogen

2. **Ms Anderson** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has explored the use of hydrogen as an alternative to fossil fuels, in light of the Programme for Government commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2025. (AQO 851/10)

The Minister of the Environment: Although energy policy is the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I understand that many companies are working to develop technologies that might effectively exploit the potential of hydrogen energy for transport. Although hydrogen that is prepared without using fossil fuel inputs produces no carbon dioxide emissions when used as a transport fuel, there are a number of drawbacks. Those include its low energy content per unit volume; high tankage weights; issues of handling, storage, transportation and filling of vehicles; the large investment in infrastructure that would be required to fuel vehicles; and the inefficiency of production processes. I cannot say whether hydrogen will become a suitable alternative to fossil fuels in the long run.

The Committee on Climate Change, which provides independent advice to the Government, suggested in its December 2008 report that electric cars combined with the decarbonisation of electricity generation could lead to dramatic reductions in emissions from cars and light vans. However, it is not only hydrogen- or electric-powered vehicles that can reduce emissions from transport. When I visited the Lotus factory last month, I saw at first hand the groundbreaking research project into a new engine concept that is being developed in partnership with Queen's University and Jaguar. The engine is designed to maximise the benefit from the use of biofuels in relation to thermal efficiency, fuel economy and reduced emissions. I believe that we need to consider all of those initiatives and their potential to reduce transport emissions, which account for nearly 30% of Northern Ireland's total carbon dioxide emissions.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. I thank the Minister for that answer. Is he aware of the University of Ulster's proposals to create a hydrogen highway across Ireland, between Belfast, Derry and Donegal, along similar lines to projects in other European countries? Is he prepared to discuss that with the University of Ulster and, if there is any merit in it, perhaps to discuss it further with his Executive colleagues, although it is obviously at an early stage?

The Minister of the Environment: I am always happy to discuss such matters, particularly with research bodies such as universities. They can make realistic proposals that can deliver a reduction in the amount of carbon that goes into the atmosphere. All of those proposals must stack up in the real world, and the question is whether they can be sold to the private sector. I am certainly happy to work with those organisations, which are investigating other outcomes that may be positive.

Mr Ford: I am certainly interested to hear of the Minister's commitment to supporting research, but many solutions to reducing carbon output are available already. In light of the commitment to reduce carbon output by 25% by 2025, what action is he taking with his colleagues the Minister of Enterprise, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister for Regional Development to deal with the massive use of energy by their Departments?

The Minister of the Environment: My Department works closely with colleagues in the Department

of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in particular to deliver the strategic energy framework. There are huge opportunities in Northern Ireland to identify renewable energy sources, including wind, wave, tidal and energy from waste. There are numerous opportunities. In conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel, we are seeking to make the government estate carbon neutral by 2015. The Executive are committed to reducing the amount of carbon that goes into the atmosphere.

Mr Beggs: The Minister highlighted the virtues of the modern electric car and its potential. What have he and his colleagues done to ensure that Northern Ireland has an infrastructure that is capable of supporting such a vehicle, which is already being developed in many cities throughout the United Kingdom?

The Minister of the Environment: Electric cars are beneficial only if carbon neutral electricity is being used in them. There is little point in using an electric car if the energy that is used in that car has been produced from oil, coal or gas. They only work well if they are used in conjunction with renewable energies, so we are working to drive up the amount of renewable energy that we use. We are also looking at the potential for Belfast to bid to be one of the six UK cities to plug in electric cars. That would create an opportunity for Northern Ireland to further develop the electric car industry.

The real benefit of an electric car is that it can be plugged in at night and, because that energy is being produced at night, it has a carbon neutral effect. Ultimately, the way forward for transportation in the United Kingdom will be that many more electric cars will use renewable energy and will not have the damaging impact on the environment that combustible engines have.

Road Safety

3. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of the Environment if any initiatives are being planned or implemented to promote safety on our rural roads. (AQO 852/10)

The Minister of the Environment: One of my Department's key responsibilities is to work towards further reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads, and a key part of that is improving road safety on rural roads. If we are to make a real difference

in casualty reduction, we will have to tackle the rural nature of our road safety problems. Road safety education officers, who operate across Northern Ireland, and the Department's high-impact advertising campaigns help us to achieve those aims.

In addition, a new funding model will operate from the 2010-11 financial year, enabling the Department to engage more fully with the voluntary and community sector and ensure that it, in turn, engages more effectively with local communities in the promotion of road safety. That will replace the previous system of direct funding solely to the Road Safety Council and the road safety committees. It is designed to direct funding to individuals or groups in rural and urban areas to better address road safety issues at a local level. It will also enable the Department to expand its geographical cover for road safety activities and events throughout Northern Ireland.

Shortly, I will consult on the development of a new road safety strategy for Northern Ireland, and I will make a statement to the House in the next few weeks. The new strategy will be introduced before the end of 2010, two years ahead of the expiry of the existing strategy. My officials have already engaged with road safety partners and other interested parties in developing over 170 possible measures to improve safety on our roads. The measures proposed in the consultation paper, all of which have undergone a high-level rural impact assessment, will also address the behaviours that contribute to the numerous deaths and serious injuries on rural roads.

Mr Bell: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he acknowledge the concerns that exist in many of the rural parts of my Strangford constituency, as evidenced recently by a massive turnout at a district policing partnership meeting in Kircubbin that centred solely on the issue of road safety? Will he outline any progress that has been made on improving road safety in rural areas?

The Minister of the Environment: Towards the end of last year, I challenged the PSNI to put more resources into rural roads; they subsequently agreed to reduce motorway coverage by 30% and transfer that to rural roads. That is a positive move, because the vast majority of road deaths — between 70% and 80% — occur on rural roads. Rural roads need to be targeted more, and people must be made aware that they are

more likely to be caught now than formerly when driving at excessive speeds or driving dangerously. There needs to be a substantial concentration of police resources on rural roads. People's attitudes to driving on rural roads and to the consequences of excessive speed need to change, because that is where the deaths are taking place.

Mr Kinahan: Has the Minister had or will he have a meeting with the Minister for Regional Development to discuss how much has been spent on rural roads to ensure that they remain as safe as possible?

The Minister of the Environment: I know that officials will tell me that drivers, not roads, are responsible for road deaths. Nonetheless, deaths are much more prevalent on certain roads; accidents and road deaths are less likely on motorways and better-quality roads. We cannot, therefore, totally isolate or separate the two. The Executive have introduced an investment strategy to upgrade roads on which there have been a significant number of deaths. Roads such as the Dungannon to Ballygawley Road, the Newry bypass and the A8 between Larne and Belfast, where many incidents have taken place, are being upgraded, and I warmly welcome that.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister said that rural roads contribute to accidents. Does he agree that there should be discussions with Roads Service about the deteriorating condition of rural roads, which has been caused by flooding, and the presence of potholes, sunken manholes and service manhole covers? Has the Minister had any recent discussions with Conor Murphy to ensure that there is further investment to address that?

Mr Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr McCarthy: Poor road conditions contribute to serious road accidents.

The Minister of the Environment: The Member has given a fairly brutal analysis of Roads Service's performance. He should raise the matter with the Minister for Regional Development himself.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. I welcome the news that the Minister is bringing forward a road safety strategy. Does he agree that the GAA's Live to Play initiative should be rolled out with other

sporting organisations, because they have direct contact with many young drivers and that that would complement the Minister's work?

The Minister of the Environment: Live to Play is a terrific initiative; it is forward-looking and gets the message across to many young people. I know that the GAA has lost some of its young players to road accidents, so sporting organisations and schools can help us to address that. There is a range of bodies that reach people in areas where big government can never get to. We can do with all the assistance that we can get. The money that has been set aside for road safety will enable local organisations to tap into such campaigns now.

3.15 pm

Planning Applications

4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment if he has ever asked the Planning Service to defer final approval of a planning application for a sporting facility that had already been passed by a local council. (AQO 853/10)

The Minister of the Environment: If an MLA or an MP asks for a meeting about a planning application after a council consultation, it is standard practice for the decision notice to be held to allow that meeting to take place. That has been normal practice for many years, under direct rule and the devolved administrations.

I am aware of only one application for a sporting facility on which approval has been deferred at my request, following the local council's agreement with my Department's opinion. That application was for a GAA pitch on land adjacent to 69 Burrenbridge Road, Bryansford. The application was presented to the local council as an approval and was agreed at its meeting on 26 October 2009. The issuing of the decision was held back to allow me to meet Jim Wells MLA. That meeting has taken place, and the application remains under consideration.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. There would be concern if MLAs could hold up planning applications in the way that that application has been held up. The application was for a GAA facility in Bryansford, and the Minister ordered senior planning staff not to issue an approval notice, because of the opinion of Jim Wells.

By treating the GAA differently from other planning applicants because of Jim Wells's discriminatory views, has he left his Department open to legal challenge? Has he set a dangerous precedent, because he has clearly brought both his office and his Department into disrepute by allowing the GAA application to be singled out?

The Minister of the Environment: I totally refute the suggestion that anybody has brought anything into disrepute. Mr McKay may wish to know that members of his party have had applications deferred after councils have consulted on them. So, I am not offering something to a member of the DUP that has not been offered to members of any other party. Members of those parties know who I am referring to, because they have done it; they were entitled to do it, and that has been the policy for many years.

We were just talking about road safety. The proposal is for a fairly large facility, which will open onto a C-class road, and the PSNI's traffic branch has submitted a very critical report and analysis of the road safety issues with the application. Therefore, the application is not particularly straightforward, and the issues that Mr Wells raised were planning ones, not political ones.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be aware of the discussions and the ongoing press speculation about Knock Golf Club. Will the Minister tell the House whether he is happy that all aspects of that application have been dealt with appropriately? Have all political parties on the local council concerned agreed to the application?

The Minister of the Environment: It is interesting that the Member should ask about that. *[Laughter.]* That application has been the subject of a lot of press interest, which was largely motivated by individuals who are out to get other politicians. Those people are not interested in the welfare of those who live around Knock, the people who belong to Knock Golf Club, the people who use the Ulster Hospital, or the Dundonald community.

Interestingly, a meeting took place on Wednesday 5 March 2008. That meeting was attended, on the political side, by Councillor Robin Newton, Councillor Máire Hendron, Councillor Jim Rodgers, who was the Lord Mayor of Belfast at the time, and Councillor Mary Muldoon. Paragraph 2 of the Department's minutes of that meeting states:

"Each of the councillors and politicians then spoke in support of the application. As before, they pointed out that there had been no local opposition to the proposal other than the Dundonald Greenbelt Association and that there is widespread political and community support."

I also have a letter from John Simpson of the Ulster Hospital, which sets out very clearly why his organisation supported the application and how it would have benefitted. If anybody wishes for that letter to be made public, I will make it public. In fact, I will ask for a copy of that letter to be placed in the Library, so that it is on the public record. Nothing wrong has been done in respect of that application, and for Mr Dallat and others to attack my Department's officials in the way that they have is morally corrupt.

Mr P J Bradley: In light of the Bryansford situation, has the Minister given any consideration to the guidelines that councillors and MLAs should follow when making representations on behalf of applicants or complainants?

The Minister of the Environment: It is very clear: representations on planning issues should be about planning matters, not about social concerns. In that case, the planning issues that an individual Member raised with me related to roads; road safety; access between the Bryansford Road and the Burrenbridge Road; bus usage of those roads; parking for those vehicles; and the proposed access from the chapel car park to the GAA grounds. Therefore, a range of definitive and qualitative issues were raised for further assessment.

Mr McClarty: Will the Minister outline the legislative power through which he can intervene in an individual planning application and whether he has ever used it? Does he agree that it can be confusing for planners if, on one day, the Minister is discussing an issue with them and, on the next day, is lobbying them as a councillor?

The Minister of the Environment: Regardless of whether I am a councillor, I lobby on behalf of my constituents as an effective MLA. I make no apology for working on behalf of my constituents; perhaps other Members want to apologise for not working on behalf of their constituents. The Member might be aware of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which gives the power over all planning decisions to the Minister, who subsequently delegates that power to divisional planning offices. Therefore,

I am responsible for every planning decision in Northern Ireland.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the current position on PPS 21, particularly in relation to non-farming rural dwellers. (AQO 854/10)

The Minister of the Environment: I circulated PPS 21 for Executive clearance in December 2009 and will publish it when I receive that clearance. The planning policy statement has been finalised and takes account of the outcome of the public consultation, operational experience, Planning Appeals Commission decisions and the report of the independent working group on non-farming rural dwellers.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister; I know of his personal interest in the matter. Does he agree that the existing PPS 21 provides little opportunity for non-farming families unless they have a replacement or an infill site? Moreover, does he agree that much more creativity is required to provide housing in rural areas and to factor in environmentally sensitive aspects to ensure that the majority of people —

Mr Speaker: The Member should ask his question.

Mr McGlone: — in rural areas have access to housing in their areas.

The Minister of the Environment: I hope that Mr McGlone and his colleagues will inform me if they know an easy solution. We have established an independent working group, which has reported. It is an important issue, and we need to continue to work on it. Some helpful issues have been included in the proposals for the final PPS 21. Nonetheless, some issues are outstanding. Therefore, we will continue to work to find out whether we can drill down and identify what can be done. It is important that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) are fully engaged in the process, because DRD is responsible for the regional development strategy and DARD is responsible for rural affairs. Those two Departments have a key role to play to deliver on the issue.

Mr Shannon: Wearing my other hat, I declare an interest as a member of Ards Borough Council.

Several applications are deferred every month under PPS 21. Indeed, next Tuesday, several applications will come before the council, 44 of which are scheduled for refusal, and half of those are under PPS 21. Will the Minister confirm whether all applications that have been deferred under PPS 21 and that will be deferred in the future, including those at next week's council meeting, will return to councils before a decision is issued?

The Minister of the Environment: The answer is yes. My Department has been considering how it will respond, because around 2,500 applications have been deferred thus far.

Each divisional planning office has been looking at how it will deal with those applications. We hope to be able to deal with the vast majority of applications within six months of PPS 21 being finalised. I hope to soon put PPS 21 to the House; thereafter, decisions will flow from that, which will be beneficial.

Mr B Wilson: The Minister's response is disappointing. As I predicted, PPS 21 has been totally ineffective. I look at how it has affected north Down. For example, prior to PPS 14, there was only a very small number of single dwellings in the countryside, but now we are getting a massive number of planning applications. PPS 21 has not only affected rural areas, it has affected urban areas such as north Down. Will the Minister review what is happening in those areas?

The Minister of the Environment: PPS 21 cannot affect an urban area because it is a rural planning policy. The Member seems to want a policy that differentiates between certain areas in Northern Ireland. There will be no differentiation between any areas of Northern Ireland. The policy will apply across Northern Ireland, and its benefits will apply to all the people of Northern Ireland. Brian Wilson may propose that we discriminate against the rural dwellers of north Down but I am not going there; I will not discriminate against the community in north Down.

Planning Policy Statements

6. **Mr Armstrong** asked the Minister of the Environment when he expects the full range of planning policy statements to be available. (AQO 855/10)

The Minister of the Environment: Subject to Executive Committee agreement, a fit-for-purpose suite of planning policy statements (PPS) required to meet the public service agreement target will be available by the end of March 2011. In addition, a revised PPS 1 will be completed in tandem with the planning reform legislation.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister agree that while the full suite of policies is unavailable, planners are unable to make judgements that take all matters into consideration? Does he also agree that, in light of the Public Accounts Committee's recent report, his Department's Planning Service is essentially not fit for purpose, because it is taking up to 71 months to develop the new planning policy statements?

The Minister of the Environment: Obviously, if a full suite of policies is not available, other considerations have to be taken into account and those circumstances make it slightly more difficult for planning officers.

Mr Gallagher: Is the Minister confident that the new planning policy statements will be strong and robust? Furthermore, will he assure us that they will not be conveniently set aside by councils? For example, according to what we have read in the papers, Castlereagh Borough Council has set aside planning policy statements.

The Minister of the Environment: If Mr Gallagher has some evidence relating to Castlereagh Borough Council ignoring planning policies, he should produce it. We cannot have sweeping statements in the House that are made on the basis of trial by the press or other media. That is pathetic, and it is completely out of order.

Mr Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Was it in order during question 4 for a Member from the DUP Benches, from a sedentary position, to accuse another Member of being sectarian?

Mr Speaker: I will come back to the Member. Let me check the Hansard report.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it appropriate for Mr Dallat, from a sedentary position, to shout at the Minister to resign? One would have thought that the Deputy Speaker,

who has already made a mistake this morning, should have known better.

Mr Speaker: That issue was raised a number of months ago, when I clearly indicated to all sides of the House that speaking or shouting from a sedentary position is wrong. Some Members feel that by doing that, their remarks just might not be picked up by Hansard. I can assure Members that, on occasion, such remarks are picked up by Hansard. Nevertheless, I warn the entire House that we should not, as far as possible, get to a position in which Members are trying to speak from a seated position.

3.30 pm

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that, during Question Time, we follow the principle of trying to get answers that are as full and as frank as possible. However, I noted that during questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister today we managed to get through all of three questions. I bring that to your attention, Mr Speaker, and ask you to look at it so that Members who take the trouble to table questions could be shown some courtesy and respect. An effort should be made to answer their questions. Rather than ending up with having just three questions answered, perhaps in the future we could devise some ways of ensuring that more questions are answered in the House.

Mr Speaker: I appreciate what Lord Morrow is saying. The issue has been spoken of in the House on many occasions. Lord Morrow is the Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures, so it may be useful for his Committee to look at the issue to see whether it would be at all possible to put a time limit on Ministers' replies to questions. Perhaps that would be the way forward. I always encourage the House to look at issues such as this, and I always encourage Ministers, as far as possible, to come to their answer as soon as they can. I believe that the issue could be resolved, and I believe that the Committee on Procedures could deal with it.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, I heard what you said, Mr Speaker, and I am certain that the Committee on Procedures would be quite prepared to look at the matter. Unfortunately, however, it cannot do so on its own. It can do so only with the co-operation of Ministers and others. It is an important issue, and, as the Chairperson of that Committee, I have no problems in looking into it.

Mr Speaker: I thank Lord Morrow for his point of order. I encourage his Committee to look at the matter. As Speaker, I assure you that I will give the Committee on Procedures all the help that it needs to look at the matter. It has concerned me and exercised my mind for quite a while.

Mr K Robinson: Lord Morrow raised the point of order that I was going to raise, but thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Bill of Rights

Debate resumed on amendment to motion.

That this Assembly expresses concern that the British Government's proposals for a bill of rights ignores the advice from both the Bill of Rights Forum and the Human Rights Commission that social and economic protections must be central to any bill of rights; and further calls for the introduction of a robust, enforceable bill of rights that will provide rights-based protection for all our people. — [Ms Anderson.]

Which amendment was:

Insert after the fourth "rights"

"calls on the British Government to expand the current consultation on a bill of rights to include consultation on the full range of recommendations of the Human Rights Commission". — [Mr A Maginness.]

Mr Hamilton: I am not sure why so many Members want to leave the Chamber. The debate started so long ago that I cannot remember what I am angry about any more. However, I will try my best. I will get myself worked up into a lather by the time that I have finished speaking.

The patience of unionists with the development of a bill of rights for Northern Ireland is wearing very thin and has been tested to its limits. At every stage in the process of developing a possible bill of rights for Northern Ireland and every time that unionists have urged caution, they have been ignored. Every time that unionists have argued for a minimalist approach, they have been ignored. Every time that we have argued that the only remit that should be adhered to is that in which the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland exist, we have been ignored. Our good faith in engaging in the process has been thrown back in our faces.

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

It is not as though unionists have not engaged. Perhaps we are coming from different perspectives and perhaps when we think of particular circumstances we have one view and others have a different view, but I do not think that anyone could stand up in all good conscience and say that unionists have not attempted in good faith to engage in the

process of developing a possible bill of rights. That is what we have tried to do, and I hope and believe that my contribution and those of others at different stages in the process could be judged against that. Every time that we have tried to engage in the process, that good faith has been thrown back in our faces. I think particularly of the Bill of Rights Forum, which I was put on to for some crime that I committed. I suffered some infringement of my rights in having to be on the forum.

Mr Shannon: That is why the Member is angry.

Mr Hamilton: Mr Shannon is right: that is probably why I am angry and probably why I am getting het up about it.

That forum produced a raft of rights that went far beyond its remit. It produced wacko ideas, such as raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18, which was something that was never going to float in Northern Ireland. It involved civic society to the extent that the mutual backscratching was such that one person's hobby horse was included after another person's hobby horse had been voted for. Unionists warned about the unacceptability of the Bill of Rights Forum's proposals. Few decisions were achieved with consensus across the parties represented on that forum, but all the warnings were ignored.

Unionist warnings were also ignored by the Human Rights Commission when it produced its advice. A coach and horses was driven through the remit, and it was not endorsed by the two commissioners who were clearly from a unionist background. I have to say, in some ways, thank God for the NIO and its response. I did not think that I would ever say that, but thank goodness that the NIO saw that the proposals and advice of the Human Rights Commission were ludicrous, crazy and out of step with what would be acceptable in Northern Ireland. The NIO has produced —

Mr Weir: The Member referred to unionists being ignored throughout the process. The SDLP had no Members in the Chamber for a while, so it seems that we were being ignored yet again. A Member suggested earlier that there was a massive public groundswell regarding a bill of rights. Mr Hamilton is an experienced Member and has been involved in politics for many years. In his many years of canvassing, has anyone ever raised the issue of a bill of rights with him on the doorstep?

Mr Hamilton: No one has raised the issue with me. Indeed, many of the issues that we get het up about in the Stormont bubble are not those that concern the general public in Northern Ireland. We would do well to remember that.

Like others, I have serious concerns about aspects of the advice that was given by the Human Rights Commission. We have debated at length in the Chamber and around the Building the issues of potential rights tourists and judges making laws. I feel very dear about that matter. Having got powers back to the Assembly to make our own laws and decisions, it would be perilous to start handing powers away to judges to decide who receives what resources and when. Only lawyers win in those circumstances. There are a couple of lawyers in the House, and maybe they would be happy with that. However, our Government, Departments and Ministers would be in court regularly to fight spurious cases and arguments that were put against them.

The idea of having a separate bill of rights that goes far beyond any other region of the United Kingdom is costly and absolutely crazy. Despite what campaigns on the side of buses and on billboards may claim, no one in Northern Ireland is having their rights denied to them. As Mr Weir said, many rights in this country go far beyond those in place elsewhere in the United Kingdom, the European Union and beyond. Some people want to create some sort of human rights nirvana that goes far beyond what is realisable, realistic and practical in this country.

I have heard much harking back to age-old arguments about rights in this country. However, those arguments do not stack up any longer, and they are not realistic any longer. Those who are calling for an expansive, maximalist bill of rights for Northern Ireland would do well to stop ignoring the views expressed consistently by unionists in all forums, including the Assembly. If they want to progress any sort of bill of rights for Northern Ireland, they would do well to remember those concerns.

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

Mr Hamilton: They would do well to start listening to unionists.

Mr Bresland: As a democrat, I believe strongly in human rights. I believe in civil and religious liberty for all in our society. That has always been my position, and, in my role as a public

representative, I will continue to do all that is in my power to ensure that civil liberties are maintained for everyone, irrespective of creed, colour or class.

In recent years, especially since the Belfast Agreement was signed in 1998, an entire human rights industry has developed. That industry has taken on a life of its own, and those who are part of it are determined to ensure that it keeps growing. They are doing very well out of it, because it costs millions of pounds. I have no problem with money being spent if it is spent wisely and for the good of society. However, the human rights industry is an appalling waste of taxpayers' money.

It is not often that I feel that I can praise the Northern Ireland Office, but I am glad that it has resisted the pressure to promote the sort of bill of rights that Monica McWilliams and the Human Rights Commission want us to have. I go further than the Northern Ireland Office by arguing strongly that we do not need a bill of rights at all. Northern Ireland already has far too many layers of human rights legislation, directives and quangos. We should cut back on rather than expand the number of layers.

Most worrying of all is the fact that those who are keen to blow the human rights trumpet are not interested in human rights for everyone. Sinn Féin and the SDLP tabled the motion and the amendment respectively. In the House, both parties argued that Nelson McCausland should have no right of conscience as a Minister of the Executive. In the face of that outrageous challenge to human rights from Members opposite, the silence from Monica McWilliams was deafening. When challenged, she failed to explain why she did nothing to deal with the attack on civil and religious liberty by Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Green Party. Is it any wonder that those in my party and people across Ulster who are evangelical and Protestant have no confidence in the sincerity of the party opposite or in those who promote the human rights agenda outside the Chamber?

We do not need a bill of rights; it would not deliver a fairer society. A bill of rights would mean that all rights would be equal but some would be more equal than others. I am also concerned that the obsession with rights means that there is little or no interest in responsibilities. There must be a balance between rights and responsibilities.

In short, I regard the proposed bill of rights as a threat to civil and religious liberties, and I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mr Shannon: On several occasions, I have spoken in the Chamber about a bill of rights for Northern Ireland. In so far as the bill of rights has not changed, neither has my opinion of it, and I will illustrate why. A few weeks ago, a Christian gentleman came into my office. He was confused about whether, as a Christian, he should support the bill of rights by signing and returning a letter that had been sent to him. As a Christian, he believes that the right to partake in activities, the right of his church to charity status and other similar rights are being attacked. He wondered whether the bill of rights would offer his church some protection. In other words, having seen all those attacks on his church and his beliefs, he wondered about the intention of a bill of rights. However, the bill of rights, as it stands and as it is perceived, would disadvantage that gentleman.

Unfortunately, Dolores Kelly is not in the Chamber at present. She said that she could not understand why there is confusion. There is confusion because people from the evangelical churches wonder what is going on. The Christian gentleman was unaware of our concern that the recommendation of the Human Rights Commission, which is that the Government respond to the conclusions of a UN Committee on Discrimination against Women, could provide a back door to the legalisation of abortion. Although the Human Rights Commission does not recommend a right to abortion, it fails to recommend that the unborn child's right to life be included in the bill of rights. That is one of several grey areas in the bill. I told the gentleman about that concern and left him to decide, based on all the information before him, whether he should sign the letter. Many people face the same problem. It is a serious issue but one that Dolores Kelly has not acknowledged. People are bombarded with media advertising that cites some but not all of the facts, and they rely on Members to bring to life the real issues.

The fact at thair ir a clatter o' consairns aboot this bill an' at bes fer wie I an' mae pairty es a whole ir sarious gled at the Norlin Airlan Ofaice hes rejected sae monie o' the socio-economic richts. Thae issues ir richtly yins at shud bae decided i this chammer bae elected representatives. Hit bes fundamental tae democracy at the people vote tae hae thair

notions represented on a range of these issues and hit shudnae bae left tae unelected judges tae decide.

There are many concerns about the bill, and that is why I and my party as a whole welcome the Northern Ireland Office's rejection of many of the socio-economic rights that are included therein. Those issues should be decided in this Chamber by elected representatives. It is fundamental to democracy that the people vote to have their views represented on a range of such issues. They should not be left for unelected judges to decide.

3.45 pm

Evangelical Alliance Northern Ireland said that the bill of rights should steer away from overly detailed and restrictive legislation. Its national director, Stephen Cave, said:

"Responsibility towards others, alongside the protection of rights, is critical to a Christian understanding of a free and healthy society. But if the emphasis is too strongly on individual rights, there is the potential to fracture rather than reconcile, and we feel this is the danger with this report. A focus on shared responsibilities, on the other hand, would have the potential to transform society through hope, imagination and active citizenship. There are undoubtedly positive proposals within the final report, for example on the issue of human trafficking."

I agree that some of the proposals are good. Mr Cave added:

"However, we believe this, along with many other proposals, would be better dealt with in the context of the Northern Ireland Assembly."

Our representatives on the forum made it clear that the recommendations were much too wide and went outside the remit that was established in the Belfast Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That also applied to the vast majority of recommendations from the Human Rights Commission. Most of the recommended rights in the report from the commission were not specific to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, which was the remit given to the commissioner. I have spoken at length about that issue during previous debates, and my remarks are recorded in Hansard.

The bill is supposed to reference rights that are not already catered for. It is not supposed to simply rehash legislation without the democratic process that should accompany any change of

legislation for the key objectives of very narrow interest groups, as opposed to the majority of people in the Province. That is the key issue for a great many of us who speak on the matter.

The DUP still has concerns about some of the recommendations in the consultation document and will respond in detail to that consultation process in due course. Suffice it to say that the concerns raised in the Chamber during past discussions on the bill of rights have not been addressed to a satisfactory degree. We will continue to ensure that any bill of rights is fit for the purpose for which it is designed —

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

Mr Shannon: It must not be a means to chip away at the moral fabric of the society that makes Northern Ireland the country and nation that it is today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I do not know how many times I have to remind Members not to use electronic equipment in the Chamber. It seems that it is the usual suspects. There is interference in the sound system, which affects Hansard's recording of the debates. Please switch off your electronic equipment.

Mr Attwood: At the beginning of this debate, Martina Anderson rightly referred to the comments of Chris McCrudden, who was one of the best friends of rights and rights protections in the North over the past 30 years. I am sure that Chris McCrudden would want to very strongly identify with the comments that I made in this Chamber previously when I quoted Frank Wright, who was a lecturer at Queen's University but, unfortunately, is now dead. Many years ago, Frank Wright wrote:

"when conflicts are fully developed, they revolve around issues of law, order and justice".

He applied that thesis to the North. He said that, at any time, the conflict in the North revolved around issues of law, order and justice.

Out of that analysis came acceptance in the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed by the people of Ireland, that issues of law, order and justice had to be addressed in order to resolve the conflict. Over and above its political dimensions, one had to get right issues of human rights, equality and policing and justice. That is why the Good Friday Agreement established mechanisms to deal

with policing and justice, rights and equality. That confirmed that there were particular circumstances in Northern Ireland that required particular measures and laws. That is where the whole bill of rights issue comes from, and from where the quotation about the "particular circumstances of Northern Ireland" is sourced. Until John Reid, the then Secretary of State, raised an issue about what those words meant, nobody disagreed with them. Nobody challenged that "particular circumstances" in Northern Ireland should be interpreted narrowly. Everyone accepted that they should be interpreted to fit the circumstances that existed in Northern Ireland. I find it disingenuous of the unionist parties today and recently to rely on that clause to mean one thing when it was quite clearly intended to mean another.

I do not understand the Alliance Party's view. What reassurance is it to people in Northern Ireland that the Alliance Party today said that it is totally unrealistic for the Human Rights Commission and others to argue for an expansive bill of rights? What a withering put-down of the rights constituency in Northern Ireland. What a withering statement of intent from those with pretensions to become Justice Minister.

At the heart of the debate, there is an inconsistency in the approach adopted by the DUP. On one hand, Simon Hamilton argues for a minimalist approach. He further argues that no one in Northern Ireland is having their rights denied to them. If that is the case, why does his party, rightfully, put a proposal for a charter for the rights of victims into the Hillsborough arrangements? How do Simon Hamilton and the DUP reconcile today what happened to the Devlin family last week, when they said that their rights had been denied by the Public Prosecution Service?

More critically, there is a tension between Simon Hamilton and Jimmy Spratt, because Mr Spratt said, rightly, that rights are hugely important. He went further by saying that 50% of what the Human Rights Commission proposed would apply to people in Britain. He did not discount that 50%. He did not say that it was wrong. He did not say that that 50% should not be there. He said that it applied equally to people in Britain. The DUP cannot have it both ways. It cannot say that it wants a minimalist approach and that no rights are denied to anybody in Northern Ireland, while Jimmy Spratt

says, cautiously rather than expansively, but, nonetheless, I acknowledge it —

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that that is not true of the whole of the unionist, Protestant population, given that 80% of the people surveyed by the Human Rights Consortium agreed that a bill of rights was needed?

Mr Attwood: That is a good point of evidence, and what Jimmy Spratt said in the debate is a good point of reference. I say to Jimmy Spratt and the DUP that 100% of what the Human Rights Commission said applies, rather than 50%. Nonetheless, is it not better today to create certainty and avoid doubt? Given how the Tories and Labour are beginning to unpick the Human Rights Commission, is it not better today to start afresh? Is it not better to take Jimmy Spratt's stance and to start to implement the 50% of recommendations? If we do not do so, we will end up with much less than 50%. I want to legislate for 100% of the HRC's recommendations, but the DUP has a responsibility to act on its words.

I welcome the support of Members who spoke in favour of the motion and the amendment. I agree with Danny Kennedy that what the Secretary of State has done is a stunning rejection of the Human Rights Commission's proposals. Much more than that, it is a stunning act of high-handedness by the Secretary of State in adopting that attitude.

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

Mr Attwood: The Secretary of State should withdraw the consultation and start afresh.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of my party, I call for Members to support the motion and the SDLP's very acceptable amendment. I thank the SDLP for tabling the amendment, which undoubtedly adds to the substance of the motion in that it calls for a more expansive discussion. All Members who have spoken in the debate should seek to maximise the rights of the people we collectively represent.

I was going to refer to some of Danny Kennedy's remarks from earlier in the debate, but I suggest that the Member has insulted the House this afternoon. He admitted entering the Chamber without having listened to any

Member's contribution. Speaking from a script, Mr Kennedy went on to describe the debate as divisive, and he has not turned up for the remainder of the debate. That is why I believe that Mr Kennedy's conduct insults the House. I entirely understand that he may be away on other business, but he could have had a colleague address the matter that he addressed so scantily.

Like Mr Attwood, I am disappointed in the Alliance Party saying, through Stephen Farry, that it is unable to support the entire motion or the amendment. I understand that Alliance Party Members may abstain in the vote and that the Alliance Party supports the concept if not necessarily the detail of what is proposed. Nevertheless, I will be disappointed if the Alliance Party does not feel able to subscribe to the aim of maximising the rights of people whom we all, including the Alliance Party, represent.

A number of Members, albeit flippantly, referred to themselves as survivors of the Bill of Rights Forum. Given that it concluded its business in March 2008, those Members have had two years' respite. However, we are still waiting for a substantive move forward. Indeed, due to the delay caused by the NIO, we are still involved in a consultation process. I was a member of the Bill of Rights Forum's criminal justice and victims working group, and, although it was a fairly intensive period of discussions, I found those discussions to be very educational. The working group was inclusive, involving representatives from a number of parties and sectors — including the DUP, although it was not an elected member — and it took oral and written submissions from various organisations.

Although unionist political parties are colder to and less embracing of the concept of rights, I subscribe to the view, as a result of direct experience, that unionist people from wider civic society want the maximum number of rights to be enshrined in law, so that we can all benefit from them. I appeal to the unionist parties. Members have reflected on the past 30 or 40 years or however long they wish to go back. I ask other parties to consider this point: no matter what your perspective is on the past 30, 40 or even 100 years, surely the lessons from and our collective experiences of the conflict and disturbances underwrite the need to maximise everybody's rights. Regardless of whether we are talking about the right to life or to a decent quality of life, surely we want to ensure that

people have those rights and that they are enshrined in law.

I dare say that there are Members in the Chamber who represent victims of the conflict and people who have been bereaved as a result of it, but there are also people in this city, living not too far from here, who must use outside toilets and do not have running water in their home. If Members were to knock on those people's doors and ask them whether they should have rights, I imagine that they would respond with a resounding yes. Indeed, they would probably ask us what the heck we have been doing and why they are not able to avail themselves of those rights already.

A number of unionist colleagues spoke about taking a minimalist approach to rights. I do not understand what that means, although I suspect it means that people should have as few rights as possible. Most Members are extremely diligent on behalf of their constituents, so surely none of them can convince me or themselves that they can advance their constituents' causes if there are fewer rights. Most of us, as elected representatives, argue for our constituents on the basis that they have a right to a home etc. Therefore, I urge Members to reconsider why they are advocating a minimalist approach to rights.

Other Members argued why we should reject the NIO's proposition, which has been issued for consultation. Let us remind ourselves that the call for a bill of rights emerged from the St Andrews Agreement, which parties subscribed to and thought was a very good idea. The outworking of that agreement was a substantive and brilliant piece of work. Not everybody has to agree with everything that was put forward, but neither did the Human Rights Commission have to accept everything from the Bill of Rights Forum.

There were some changes to the Human Rights Commission's final submission, and people can select which submissions or recommendations they wish to support more or less. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity for all of us to say collectively that we need to maximise the rights of all our people, because, whether we like it or not, a lot of what happened for many years was wrapped up in whether or not there was a denial of rights or whether people felt that they had no justice or no recourse to justice.

4.00 pm

As I said earlier, I do not want to take issue with people's perspectives on the past 30 or 40 years or, indeed, the past 100 years. I am simply making the point that that experience should drive us to maximise rights on behalf of all people, because that is one sure way to ensure that we will have no question of any return and no justification of any return to the days of conflict. No citizen here, young or old, no matter what their political beliefs may be, would have their rights denied, because their rights would be enshrined from here on in.

I urge Members to consider that the extended deadline for the consultation on the NIO's recommendations gives us an opportunity to reject those recommendations as minimalist. They have been described as being pitifully limited, unacceptable and disrespectful. I would argue that the NIO's contribution to the debate has been disrespectful, because people from right across our society — young and old, from different Churches and backgrounds, secular and otherwise, and from different sectors, ethnic minorities and so on — have made massive contributions to the debate. However, the NIO has belatedly and very begrudgingly sought to reduce the rights that people have already secured over the decades; indeed, many of us suspect that it would seek to reduce those rights further.

Therefore, I urge people to reconsider the notion of seeking to minimise the rights to which people should be entitled and to push instead for maximum rights. I believe that, if we were to knock on the doors of the people whom we represent, they would call on us to maximise their rights. Representatives from every sector — trade unions, the Churches and so on — have been very quick and vociferous in calling on us to maximise the rights of the citizens whom we all collectively represent. The Assembly can come together in unanimity to support the maximising of people's rights. That would be an important legacy for Members of this particular Assembly.

In order to secure and copper-fasten a just peace and to build on the promise and hopes of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement, we should reject the NIO consultation proposals and support the need to ensure that we maximise the rights of all the citizens whom we represent.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 46; Noes 42.

AYES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Ms Lo, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr A Maginness and Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Shannon and Mr Weir.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 42; Noes 46.

AYES

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy,

Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McDevitt and Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W 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, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Shannon and Mr Weir.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly negatived.

Police: 50:50 Recruitment Policy

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours 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. Two amendments have been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the renewal for one final year of 50:50 recruitment to the police in Northern Ireland; looks forward to the next substantial recruitment competition when, for the first time in a decade, Protestant applicants will face no barriers on the grounds of perceived religious affiliation in the process of being considered for a career in the police.

The motion is timely and important, given the fact that it has now been a decade throughout which a sizeable section of our community has been discriminated against on grounds of religion when applying for posts with the police in Northern Ireland. One good thing that can be said is that, when the Westminster Government extended the 50:50 recruitment process, they did so for one final year.

That makes it no less important that we should look forward to the elimination of that discriminatory practice, which has occurred over the past 10 years. We should prepare for the time when every applicant can apply and expect to be treated solely on his or her merits.

4.30 pm

The DUP has pointed out the recruitment problems of the past, and we will do so in the future because many thousands of people are affected. I am grateful to my colleague the Member for South Belfast Mr Spratt for assisting me with figures on applicants for the past number of years. In the past five years alone, over 40,000 people have applied to join the police. Therefore, this discrimination has been practised not against a small number of individuals but against a significant number of people in the community.

I note that the SDLP has tabled an amendment, which, far from trying to end the practice,

seeks to continue it. I do not understand how any political party that aspires to fairness and equality could not only be against ending discrimination but want it to continue. That is what the SDLP amendment proposes.

Some people argue that, because for many decades, Roman Catholics — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Only one Member should be on his or her feet. Continue, Mr Campbell.

Mr Campbell: The argument goes that, because Roman Catholics have been substantially under-represented in the police over many years, there has to be some sort of device to try to counter that under-representation. That does not take account of the fact that the rationale for the under-representation was the murder campaign that was carried out by the Provisional IRA and, before that, the old IRA for between four and five decades.

Once the violence and intimidation stopped, the numbers of people from the Roman Catholic community who applied to join the police increased substantially. Before the introduction of the 50:50 recruitment policy, 8% of the police were Roman Catholics, and, as I said, the primary reason for that was that Roman Catholics were at risk of being shot if they applied to join the police. Once that threat was lifted, the numbers of Catholics applying to join the police went up to over 20% and then to over 40%.

The key point is that, even if there had not been a 50:50 recruitment process, the numbers of Roman Catholics who joined the police would have increased. Over 40% of the people who applied to join the police were Roman Catholics, and, provided the merit principle was applied in both communities, one might expect over 40% of the people who applied to be successful. Therefore, the percentage of Roman Catholics in the police would have gone up anyway, irrespective of the 50:50 rule.

The abandonment of the 50:50 rule would not have diminished the number of Roman Catholic applicants in any meaningful way, and it would have meant that there was not an effect on the Protestant community. I am sure that public representatives who live and work in the Protestant community can testify to the fact that the 50:50 rule causes resentment in the Protestant community. Many individuals who wanted a career in the police have come

to constituency offices and said that they sat the required exams and were told that they were a suitable candidate only to get a letter telling them that, under the 50:50 policy, they could not be recruited. For many people in the Protestant community, that is tantamount to saying that Protestants need not apply.

As I said, the application of an open-ended merit principle would have had little effect on the increase in the numbers of Roman Catholic recruits because 40% of the applicants came from that community. In fact, I met Mr Goggins, our security Minister, and senior police officers two weeks ago, and I was informed that by the end of next month 28.7% of the Police Service will be Roman Catholic, which is up from 8% just over 10 years ago.

Many people try to testify that the rationale for the 50:50 recruitment policy is under-representation, yet there is a significant under-representation of the Protestant community in other aspects of public service in Northern Ireland. I never hear the SDLP proposing the introduction of a 50:50 rule in the Housing Executive, even though Roman Catholics are more likely to be police officers than Protestants are to be housing officers. There is never a proposal, suggestion or hint that we should move to 50:50 recruitment in the Housing Executive, yet, as I say, there is more merit in that, because more than 40% of those applying to join the Police Service are Catholic, whereas only 36% of those employed by the Housing Executive are Protestant.

It seems that, on numerous occasions, there are those who take a blinkered approach and say that they want to address one type of disadvantage but, in other instances, they are quite happy to accommodate one group and disadvantage another. We must move forward to a brighter and better day where there is equality of opportunity. That will only be seen, felt and experienced when people who apply for a job in the police know that they will get it on the basis of their being the best qualified person for the job and that their religious persuasion — or perceived religious persuasion — is totally and utterly irrelevant to the outcome of their application.

The numbers speak for themselves: 40,000-plus applications have come through the system. At the meeting that I mentioned earlier, Mr Goggins and senior police officers said that

I should tell my community to keep applying for policing jobs even if they had been turned down last year and this year. It might be good enough to tell people to keep trying and applying, but the point is that they should not have to keep reapplying only to suffer discrimination year on year. The discrimination ought to end.

On 8 February 2010, a latter-day democrat and one-time terrorist said:

“under no circumstances would I tolerate any section of our community being discriminated against because of religion.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 48, p28, col 1].

The man who said that, in answer to a question that I asked in the Chamber, was Martin McGuinness.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that mobile phones should be switched off. If Members refuse to acknowledge that request, I will simply refuse to call them to speak.

I call Mr Attwood to move amendment No 1.

Mr Attwood: I trust that that is confirmation that my mobile phone is off. *[Laughter.]*

I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after “renewal” and insert

“of 50:50 recruitment to the PSNI; believes that special measures are still needed to achieve a police service which is representative of the community as recommended by the Patten report; and recommends that 50:50 recruitment should continue after the Catholic community background reaches 30 for police officers, to help bring about the ‘closer resemblance to that of the community as a whole’ in the composition of both police officers and civilian staff respectively.”

The SDLP and I acknowledge that there are different views about 50:50 recruitment, but I do not want the unionist party to have a difference of opinion from us in our belief that one of the single greatest achievements — arguably, the single greatest achievement — since the Good Friday Agreement is what the parties have done in respect of the new beginning for policing.

I have said before, and I will say again, that the contribution to policing by the unionist parties has been their finest hour over the past number of years. I have sat on the Policing Board from the beginning, so I know that much of the business of the Patten report, the changes to policing and the Policing Board sat heavily with the unionist

parties. Despite the difficulties that we all had in bringing about the new beginning to policing and implementing the Patten recommendations, unionism never walked from the board; it played its full role.

Even when the institutions in the North were suspended, when there was political turbulence and when other parties were not participating in the new beginning to policing, the SDLP, the UUP and the DUP never walked off the pitch. I acknowledge that, whatever our differences about 50:50 recruitment, my differences with unionism over the past 10 years are not about what the unionist parties contributed to the new beginning to policing.

More than that, nothing that we say in the Chamber tonight should diminish in any way the bravery and leadership shown by those individuals who joined the PSNI and those who applied to join it over the past 15 or 16 recruitment exercises. We realise the level of threat that police officers are under and the number of attacks on them, including those on an officer who was working in west Belfast and on officers in other parts of the North over recent days. Nothing in the difference of opinion on 50:50 recruitment should take away from the contribution that those officers have made.

That is why I take issue with Gregory Campbell's assertion that 50:50 recruitment sends out the message that no Protestant need apply. If Protestant applicants had taken Mr Campbell's advice, the 63% of applicants from a non-Catholic or Protestant background would not have applied. Like the Catholic community, the Protestant community learned a lesson from the Patten report that Protestants, Catholic and others should apply. They did so, because 63% of applicants to the police over the past 11 years have come from a non-Catholic or Protestant background, and 37% have come from a Catholic background.

Those figures speak eloquently to those who have said over the past 10 years that no Protestant need apply. Similarly, those figures speak eloquently to those who say today that no Catholic need apply due to the terror threat. Through those figures, people are saying boldly and courageously what they think of those threats to the community and of those who threaten them.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Although it is very gratifying to hear you congratulating unionists —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member address all his remarks through the Chair?

Mr Paisley Jnr: It is very gratifying to hear the Member welcoming the fact that unionists stayed on the Policing Board. However, he must acknowledge that, for decades, the SDLP deliberately boycotted the Police Authority. Perhaps if the SDLP had joined the Police Authority and demonstrated the level of commitment that it is now prepared to show to the Policing Board, we would not have as many police graves.

Mr Attwood: The Member knows the response to that. He knows that the RUC, because it so substantially reflected the unionist view of the world, was an arm of the state and was not an impartial vehicle for the delivery of civilian policing. That is not my view; the Patten report stated that the RUC was an arm of the state, which did not treat all its citizens and all its communities equally. That is why we had the Good Friday Agreement and the Patten report, which have created a new threshold and template for the nature of policing. Therefore, bringing up the Police Authority is a red herring, because the problem with policing was not the Police Authority; it was the nature, the culture and the practice of policing and the experience of nationalism over too many years and in too many instances.

We want the retention of 50:50 recruitment because it honours the Patten recommendations properly. The British Government are disingenuous in their consultation document on 50:50 recruitment. In the foreword, the Minister of State, Paul Goggins, says:

"we still have a short distance to go before we have a police service which is representative of the community."

In the British Government's opinion, "representative of the community" means 30%. That is not representative of the community. I accept that substantial progress has been made towards that objective. However, based on the 2001 census figures, which showed the Catholic community at 44% of the total, it is disingenuous for the British Government to suggest that we have only a "short distance to go" before we have a representative police service.

4.45 pm

The Patten report set a different standard, which is more fundamental than the words of the

British Government. Patten recommended 50:50 for 10 years and said:

"We have not taken our model beyond ten years ... a judgment would need to be made as to whether special measures were still needed to achieve a police service representative of the community or whether this could now be expected to develop naturally. Either way we envisage that the composition of the police should continue to move towards a closer resemblance to that of the community as a whole."

Patten was telling the British Government that what was needed in order to create a representative police service, up to 44% Catholic on current trends, and what is needed to build on the significant successes of Patten and policing over the last 10 years, is the maintenance of 50:50 recruitment. Based on current application and recruitment rates, it will be at least 30 years before the uniformed side of the PSNI comprises 44% Catholics. On the civilian side, where Catholic representation has moved up to only 17% in the past 10 years, it could take 50, 60 or 70 years, based on current applicant and recruitment rates, before Catholic membership reaches 44%.

We are telling the British Government, as we are telling everybody, that, given the success of policing over the past 10 years, we should try to accelerate the overall balance as quickly as possible to deepen confidence, build strength and increase representation. If we do that through 50:50 recruitment, Catholic membership will reach 44% in less than 20 years. If we do not use 50:50 recruitment, it could take 30 years or more — and longer on the civilian side. That is not credible or sustainable and is not the right way to go. We appreciate, Mr Campbell — through you, Mr Deputy Speaker — that a small number of Protestants have not been recruited to the PSNI over the past 10 years because of the 50:50 recruitment policy. However, it is a small number, and a small number of Catholics have benefited as a result.

The SDLP believes, as the European authorities believe, that that positive method of recruitment is necessary in a situation where there has been such a historic imbalance of Catholics in the RUC. That imbalance was not caused only by republican organisations' threats against Catholics who joined the police force, but the nature and culture of the RUC and the experience of the Catholic community. We do not diminish the sense of hurt and disappointment

of a small number of Protestants who have not been recruited. However, there is also a deep sense of disappointment among thousands of Catholics and Protestants who have not been recruited for the reason that so many people want to join the police.

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

Mr Attwood: We should not jeopardise that.

Dr Farry: I beg to move amendment No 2: leave out all after “when” and insert

“all applicants, irrespective of their actual or perceived background, can be eligible for recruitment solely on merit.”

The Alliance Party welcomes today’s debate; it is a debate that the Assembly needs to have. Our party has consistently opposed the use of 50:50 quotas as set out in the Patten report and in subsequent legislation. That has been our long-standing position for the past decade and longer. Despite that, our support for policing reform in society has been clear.

There are three issues that inform my party’s opposition to the quotas. First, we believe that they are unnecessary; secondly, we see them as being divisive; and thirdly, we believe that they have questionable legality — I will come to those in a moment. We approach the subject largely from a liberal perspective, and our amendment flows from that point of view.

We are somewhat concerned about the language that is used in the DUP motion, because it refers to the needs of Protestants in relation to the way in which quotas are working out, as opposed to the interests of the whole community. We believe that our amendment offers a much more rounded approach to the issue, rather than focusing on something that benefits Catholics or works against the interests of Protestants. Quotas work against the whole community.

Mr Campbell: I accept what the Member says about the terms of the motion, but does he accept that it is worded as it is because it is the Protestant community that is discriminated against in the first place?

Dr Farry: I do not. I appreciate where Mr Campbell is coming from, but the point that I am making is that quotas work against the entire community, whether one is Protestant, Catholic or from

a different background. That is the essence that we need to capture in the thrust of the debate. The quota system is not simply a Protestant versus Catholic system; it comprises a Catholic quota and a Protestant and other, or non-Catholic, quota. Although, in the main, the people who are affected negatively by the system may be from a Protestant background, people from ethnic minority backgrounds also suffer as a consequence. The Police Service of Northern Ireland and other police services elsewhere in the UK have questions to answer about their representation of people from different ethnic minority backgrounds. However, the interests of people from such backgrounds are neglected because the system includes them in what is perceived to be the majority community in Northern Ireland.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does the Member accept that the number of people that he is talking about who have applied to be recruited in the past five years is so negligible that it is very difficult even to gather statistics on it? In fact, there may have been as few as 12 individuals.

Dr Farry: I would say, rather, that the recruitment of those 12 individuals makes my point for me. They may be a very small percentage of the overall number of recruits, but we have to reflect that, in Northern Ireland, we have a much more diverse society. In particular, in circumstances in which people from ethnic minorities have particular problems, having a representative police force is all the more important. A situation in which efforts to make the Police Service more representative are counter-productive, because the barriers are set even higher than elsewhere, does not make sense.

Mr O’Loan: The Member said that the Alliance Party was opposed to 50:50 recruitment from the outset and that it wanted it wound up as quickly as possible. Will he explain how we would have got to the situation that we have today, in which, at least, Catholics represent 28% of the Police Service? The current recruitment round has an application rate from Catholics of 38%. If that continues in perpetuity, we will never get above even 38% of Catholics in the PSNI, which is far from being representative of the population as a whole. How, otherwise, would we have got to the position that we are in today, and how does he see us ever getting to a situation in which we have a Police Service that is representative of the whole population?

Dr Farry: The answer to that is quite simple; representation will be achieved through recruitment on the basis of merit. Obviously, that will take us slightly longer, but the point is that the efforts that we are making to get a balanced and representative Police Service must be sustainable and not divisive. There are some extremely strong feelings in the House, which, no doubt, will be expressed as the debate goes on, and those feelings will reflect how the issue is viewed on the streets of Northern Ireland. It is certainly something that I have picked up on as I go round the doorsteps as an Alliance Party representative. However, I want to focus the debate on the interests of the whole community, rather than making it a Protestant or Catholic issue.

There is far too much labelling going on in this society. We have people who come from open, mixed and multiple backgrounds who do not see themselves as coming from a single identity, and it is important that we represent their point of view as well. There is a notion in society that our political identities, national identities and religious identities, all reinforce one another. For many people, that is not the case, and we should celebrate that fact, rather than constantly trying to pigeonhole people.

When the SDLP spokespeople who talk about the justice portfolio describe David Ford as a unionist, they are making a sectarian comment. David Ford is perfectly entitled to base his politics around an issue other than the union or a united Ireland and to not represent a sectoral interest of society. For him to be pigeonholed is sectarian, whether the SDLP accepts it or not. That is a fact.

The other aspect of how quotas can be counter-productive in trying to achieve a representative police force is that they can fail to reflect the diversity within the monolithic blocks that people have based public policy around, particularly in the Catholic, nationalist section of society. We want to ensure that people from a wide range of backgrounds come forward; not necessarily those from an SDLP political viewpoint who may be on the more moderate end of the political spectrum. We want people from a much more republican background to come forward also. The problem with the simplistic use of quotas is that it does not reflect the type of diversity that may exist at grassroots level in society.

The policy is flawed, even in the stated objectives of trying to achieve a representative and balanced outcome. To use a parallel in looking at the use of quotas, affirmative action has been taken by universities in North America where there is a heavy emphasis on trying to increase ethnic minority participation in classes. Evidence has shown that people who have benefited from those quotas tend to be drawn more from a middle class background and from those who already have the required qualifications. The process means that people in the more hard line ghetto areas who have not had the opportunity to reach a high level of education miss out. Quotas can be a simplistic way of trying to address the type of issue that people are seeking to address.

Mr A Maginness: How do you address the imbalance?

Dr Farry: I am happy to give way. Do you wish me to give way?

Mr A Maginness: It is a very simple question: how do you address the imbalance?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please refer all remarks through the Chair. Dr Farry, I will decide.

Dr Farry: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will decide whether someone is allowed to take the Floor.

Dr Farry: I am sorry; I was under the impression that Mr Maginness wanted me to give way. I was confused, given that he was speaking from a sedentary position.

There are three problems. First, the matter is divisive: it polarises people and puts labels on recruits. It also detracts from the pure merit principle. Although I accept that all applicants have to meet the minimum criteria of ability, people are not subsequently treated purely according to their ranking within that merit. Secondly, there have been diversions from European law, in that the British Government have had to seek a number of derogations from European Union directives in order to proceed with the use of quotas. Thirdly, to make a point that may address the concern raised by Mr O'Loan and Mr Maginness, I believe that quotas are unnecessary, as well as being counterproductive and divisive. Other measures can be taken to make services such as the police service more representative of society. There are other affirmative action

measures short of the use of quotas. My party's argument has always been that that is where the emphasis in public policy should lie, which means being aggressive in reaching under-represented communities and going into schools in a proactive manner and encouraging applications from the sector or sectors that are under-represented. I want to see a balanced intake of people applying for jobs in the police and elsewhere. If we have that balance, we will have a workforce that is reflective of society over time.

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

Dr Farry: It may not happen overnight, but we have to proceed in a way that is sustainable.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. I ask Members to reject the motion, support amendment No 1, and reject amendment No 2. I ask this on behalf of my party under the requirements of the Good Friday Agreement, the spirit and intentions of Patten, and our party mandate from our special ard fheis in 2007. I will go further and say that we should do this in the overarching spirit of policing with the community, which is a principle of Patten and of the legislation that governs policing today.

5.00 pm

A number of Members understand fully that, in recent years, there has been an ongoing debate about how to embed the entire spirit of policing with the community as an integral part of the way in which the Police Service does its job. We hope that that project was given a lot of momentum by last year's appointment of Matt Baggott as Chief Constable of the PSNI. He has been acknowledged, certainly before taking up his new post, as a renowned expert and strong advocate of policing with the community. However, policing with the community cannot be done unless a police service is reflective of the community that it wants to serve.

The Good Friday Agreement talked about a new beginning. I accept that, across the different communities, there are many sensitivities regarding policing in the past number of decades. By the same token, the Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the majority of people across the North and, indeed, the whole island. Most people of goodwill have acknowledged, in recent times, that it is the only show in town.

It is the way to go, and we continue to build on its delivery.

The Good Friday Agreement also talked about providing a new beginning for policing and creating a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the whole community. Flowing out of that was what became the Patten Commission. The Patten Commission made some excellent recommendations, but it did not go far enough. Members have mentioned the Patten report in the House this afternoon and referred to the magical figure of 30%. However, 30% is still not representative of the size of the Catholic community. Like others, I do not like dealing in the crude, headline terminology of Catholics and Protestants, but that is the kind of society that we lived in. It is almost shorthand for community representativeness, but it does not go far enough.

Members need to know what they are talking about in debates. The Patten Commission said that if a proactive 50:50 recruitment policy were adopted, there would be a representation from the Catholic community of between 29% and 33% within 10 years. Patten went on to say that, in parallel with that, recruitment could be carried out without any cap up to 1,000 Catholic officers in the part-time service of the PSNI. Those two measures, in parallel, would bring about a 40% Catholic representation in the PSNI in 10 years, which is a little bit closer to community representation than we are today and will be next year.

The British Government — as they always do in matters such as the bill of rights, which we debated earlier — subverted aspects of the Patten report and did not deliver on the spirit and intention of Patten. To deliver the type of representative police service to which this community is entitled, the 50:50 recruitment policy and other measures are needed. We tried to table an amendment that went further by calling for the retention of the 50:50 recruitment process and any other measure that might be necessary to ensure that, within a reasonable period, the PSNI, in all aspects, was representative of the community that it purports to serve.

Indeed, I argue that the PSNI will never fully have the entire confidence of this community until it is representative of that community. That is a job of work that, thankfully, many people

in the PSNI openly advocate. It makes sense, and it is another argument that Patten made about efficiency and effectiveness. If the Police Service is not representative, it will not attract support from the wider community.

I also argue that the motion is inherently sectarian, because —

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

Mr A Maskey: For every claim that Protestants are discriminated against because of the 50:50 recruitment practice, there are thousands of Catholics who have been discriminated against. It is not a Protestant Police Service, so every person should be appointed to an officer job on merit and on a 50:50 basis.

Mr B McCrea: The Ulster Unionist Party has long had difficulty with any form of discrimination, even positive discrimination. It creates a long-term cancer in our society and makes people feel that they are not being treated fairly. There are also issues relating to the legal powers.

Mr Maginness challenged a number of Members and asked how we will ever get to 50:50 or 40% Catholic representation if only 38% of the people applying to the Police Service are from the Catholic tradition. The answer is that many, many more people apply than there are places available. It can, therefore, be achieved through the application of simple mathematics, albeit in a different way. If Members want to know how to increase the number of Roman Catholics who serve in the police, a key point is that people should stop shooting and targeting those who serve. That is the real reason that we did not have balance in the past. The RUC was never opposed to having people from different traditions in its ranks.

Mr A Maginness: Does the Member agree that even in the most peaceful of times in Northern Ireland, the percentage of Catholics in the RUC never exceeded 11%? Why was that the case?

Mr B McCrea: One must ask why that was. When people started off with the RUC, it was with good intent.

I am surprised that the SDLP tabled such an amendment, because it appears irrelevant. The number of recruits that we need in coming years is not 400 annually but 100 annually. One begins to think how long it will take to change the situation. Surely we have reached a level

of maturity in the PSNI and elsewhere, whereby we can rely on the spirit of generosity and righteousness, and appoint recruits on merit.

Mr Attwood was a little selective in reading out the Patten recommendations. Members have danced around the issue. Even Mr Alex Maskey mentioned it. Paragraph 14.10 of the Patten report states:

"The model we have developed would lead to the proportion of Catholic officers more than doubling within four years, to between 17 and 19 ... and quadrupling within ten years to 29-33".

The text that has not been quoted from that paragraph reads:

"We believe that this is a very substantial increase within a reasonable timeframe ... It quickly gets into the range of 'critical mass' estimates that experts have given us (between 15 and 30), as the level needed to ensure that a minority does not find itself submerged within a majority organizational culture."

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way again?

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry, but I have already given way, and I am quoting from the Patten report on this point.

We are at the top end of that range. The figures that I have before me show that we are at 27.88%, as of February this year, and the projections are that we will hit the Patten targets. We have now reached a stage of maturity, and we can make the point that all are welcome to join the police on the basis of merit.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way once more?

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry, Mr Maginness. I have already given way and will not do so again.

I will address amendment No 2. It may come as a surprise to Mr Farry that the Ulster Unionist Party will support the amendment. Mr Farry said to the SDLP that Mr Ford does not like to be called sectarian just because he is a unionist. The Ulster Unionist Party does not support the amendment without good reason. We are determined to be a non-sectarian party that is open to all the people. We are pro-Union and pro-devolution. That is the way forward and that is why we will support the amendment. However, if the sauce is good enough for the gander, it is good enough for the goose.

I return to the SDLP's point. I do not understand why that party is fixated on the past and on going backwards, and on dragging us into debates that are unproductive. Mr Attwood talked about the positive things that we have all done, yet he then dragged us back and said that we cannot be relied on to act in a positive manner.

We should fix on the strategic review of policing's revelation that there are 704 fewer front line police officers than there were three years ago and that, since the Patten recommendations were implemented, the experience base has diminished by 73%. There are now 3,904 officers in the PSNI who served in the RUC and 3,358 who have been recruited since the establishment of the PSNI. The impact of that is that we no longer have the experience that we need to deal with serious crime.

Look at the terrorist attacks that we have had recently — we do not have that resource there either. It is not about a sectarian headcount; it is about selecting good officers on merit who give us the police service that we need.

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

Mr B McCrea: The fundamental challenge for all of us is to get a police service that all the people of Northern Ireland can support. That is the only way to a sustainable long-term future, and that is why we support amendment No 2.

Mr T Clarke: I support the motion. I welcome the fact that the discriminatory policy is, at long last, coming to an end. It has been our party's position that the policy of 50:50 recruitment in the PSNI should be brought to an end. To go further, it should never have been introduced in the first place. It is discriminatory to select people on the basis of whether they are Catholic, Protestant or other. I know of many people, some of whom were in the Reserve forces, who have applied once, twice, three times and even four times to join the Police Service in recent years and have been turned down because they were Protestants. That is absolutely outrageous.

The argument for the policy was to increase the number of Catholic police officers in the PSNI. One has to ask what religion has to do with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Even the Member opposite referred to merit in his closing remarks. Unfortunately, he added a comment about 50:50 recruitment, so although he went

halfway to declaring that recruitment should be based on merit, he put in the caveat that it should be merit that was based on 50:50 recruitment. It should be on merit alone, not on any other basis. The policy demonstrates that the SDLP and Sinn Féin are not interested in human rights or equality. They speak so much and so loudly about equality, but this policy flies in the face of that.

I noted that my party colleague Gregory Campbell, at the introduction of the debate, referred to Alex Attwood and the statistics that show the under-representation of Protestants in the Housing Executive. Another example is the Equality Commission, in which there is a stark contrast between the representation of Protestants and Catholics. If Alex Attwood or any other SDLP Member wishes to put forward a motion to introduce fairness and equality to the Protestant community in either of those two sectors, I would happily sign it. That would be very fitting, given that the SDLP Minister holds the portfolio of Social Development, which is responsible for the Housing Executive. If any SDLP member wishes to come to me in the near future, I would certainly sign that piece of paper with open hands to bring that discrimination to an end.

In no other western country would a policy of 50:50 be allowed to operate. Quite frankly, it flies in the face of basic human rights and equality of opportunity. I pay tribute to the members of the RUC, the UDR, the Special Constabulary and the Royal Irish Regiment for their commitment, dedication and honour in serving Ulster during the darkest days, which were known as the Troubles. I pay tribute to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives at the hands of terrorists. Those people did not join those forces because of Catholics or Protestants; they joined those forces to serve everyone in Northern Ireland. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat. Éirím chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do leasú uimhir a haon.

I support amendment No 1. Policing in the North has been transformed in the 10 years since the Patten report was published. As my colleague Alex Maskey stated, Patten did not go far enough on a range of issues, including 50:50 recruitment. However, we concluded that if the Patten proposals were implemented, they could provide the threshold for a new policing service.

To republicans and nationalists, policing was once the armed wing of unionism. It was used as a tool to abuse and repress. In my constituency, I remember the cases of Sammy Devenny and many others. However, in the years following the Good Friday Agreement and the Patten reform, through legislative changes that were secured by Sinn Féin and others, democratic control and accountability were forced onto policing structures here. Those structures have been transformed. Republicans are now at the heart of policing, ensuring that the PSNI is held to democratic account while these institutions prepare to take full account of policing and justice powers for the first time in almost four decades.

5.15 pm

Patten has contributed to creating that new atmosphere. As has been mentioned, when the provision was introduced in 2001, Catholics made up just 8.3% of the police. Today, as has been said, it stands at almost 28%, which is still well short of being truly representative of the community as a whole. However, it is progress in the right direction, and I would have hoped that the Members who tabled the motion would have welcomed that. After all, what is so threatening about having a police service that is representative of the community that it serves?

Gregory Campbell and others have consistently railed against the Patten reforms. Gregory Campbell is one of those who have been telling the world for years that everything would be OK if Catholics accepted the forces of law and order. I believe that Gregory Campbell wants Catholics to be policed, but in my opinion, he does not want them to be in the police. However, just like your Parliament, the days of a Protestant force for a Protestant people are long gone.

The 50:50 recruitment policy is not about discrimination against Protestants or about giving Catholics an unfair advantage; it is simply about recruiting on a representative basis. Regardless of whether it is applied to police officers or to civilian staff, recruitment must be carried out in a way that reflects the community as a whole. A good police service should be representative of the community that it serves, and we are now on track to achieve that through 50:50 recruitment. Therefore, I welcome the retention of that provision for another year. I hope, as the amendment states, that the policy continues after the percentage of members from

a Catholic community background in the Police Service reaches 30%. That continuation will help to bring about a closer resemblance to the community as a whole.

The experience of policing has shown us that special measures are absolutely necessary to bring the number of Catholics in the PSNI up to the level that it should be. Such measures should remain an option in the years ahead until we reach the stage at which the PSNI is truly representative at all levels.

Mr Weir: The Member puts great store by her belief that processes should be put in place and maintained to ensure that the Police Service fully reflects society. Why, then, has her party not tabled an amendment requiring similar percentage quotas on the grounds of gender or for ethnic minorities, for example? Surely if the police are to be fully representative of all sections of society, her party would be similarly exercised about putting in place legal quotas that reflect all elements of society, rather than about having quotas that are based simply on a sectarian headcount.

Ms Anderson: We are similarly exercised about those issues, but we are dealing with the fact that one community used to police another. One community used to impose policy on another. Thankfully, those days are gone, and measures such as 50:50 recruitment should remain an option in the years ahead until we reach the stage at which the PSNI is truly representative at all levels. The fact remains that there continues to be a serious under-representation of Catholic officers in senior ranks, as many Members here who are on the Policing Board know. Indeed, I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board.

Therefore, as we continue to build a new era of human rights-based policing here, with justice responsibilities being transferred out of Britain into the hands of people here in Ireland, I urge the proposers of the motion and the amendments to stop re-fighting the old lost battles over and over again. They should join with the rest of us in building the kind of representative, accountable policing service that people voted for and want to see. I support amendment No 1. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Spratt: I am pleased to speak in the debate, and I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board and as Chairperson of the

Assembly and Executive Review Committee. I support the motion.

It must be said that since 2001, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has undergone unprecedented change, as has the entire British police service. Indeed, that change continues. The PSNI is now one of the most accountable police services in Europe, and, possibly, in the world.

Some figures have been cited, one of which was that 27% of the PSNI's membership is now Catholic. It has also been said that the 50:50 policy has been extended for another year to allow that proportion to hit the 30% target.

The Patten report has been quoted many times today, but here is a new quote:

"The percentage of Catholic applicants rose from 12 to 21 after the IRA ceasefire in 1994, and fell back when the ceasefire ended. It rose again in 1998 to 20."

That is why, over the years, there has been an imbalance. Even Patten accepted that fact, and nobody can rubbish it.

I spent 30 years in the Police Service. I see some SDLP Members smiling, but I challenge any Member, or anybody outside the House, to say that, throughout my service, I did not serve the whole community impartially.

Mr McElduff: Does the Member accept that in some people's experiences in places such as Carrickmore, County Tyrone, where the RUC's behaviour towards the local population was often disgraceful, the RUC presented itself as a sectarian force? Notwithstanding the Member's commitment, does he accept that that was the case?

Mr Spratt: On many occasions over many years, it was RUC officers investigating themselves who brought to justice members who had done wrong. I could quote many instances in which that was the case, so do not give me any lectures.

My son, who is now a police officer in another part of the United Kingdom, has first-hand experience of 50:50 recruitment. On two occasions, I saw the devastation on that young man's face. He twice passed the first part of the PSNI's recruitment process, which is much more robust than other police recruitment processes in the United Kingdom, and on both occasions, he was elated to receive a letter to say that he

had passed. Within a week to 10 days, there was absolute devastation when the "sorry you're a Prod" letter arrived on the doorstep. That scenario was repeated in many homes. Whether people like that or not, it is wrong.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I have already given way.

There has been much talk about police services in the rest of the United Kingdom, and Alex Maskey spoke about community policing. Throughout the United Kingdom, many cities are as divided as Northern Ireland, and people from ethnic backgrounds do not apply to join those police services. All parts of the Catholic community must encourage Catholics to join the police. Everyone should have equal opportunities and be recruited on merit, and the best people for the job must apply.

Basil McCrea referred to the future, and he mentioned a figure of 100 recruits in the nine to 10 years after 2011. As the chair of the Policing Board's human resources committee, I know from Police Service figures that only 40 or 50 new recruits will be required to replace those who will leave the Police Service because they are at pension age, resigning or being dismissed. The recruitment process should be based on merit, and the best person should get the job, irrespective of religion.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is no different from any other British police service or, if people want to talk about them, from the guards. Policing and community policing is about providing a service to the community, irrespective of a person's religion, ethnic background or anything else. That is what the public deserve and should have, so let us get away from tarnishing the police as a Protestant police force for a Protestant people, an expression that Alasdair McDonnell used only last week when, in an open forum at Wellington College, he deliberately misinterpreted figures.

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

Mr Spratt: That was wrong, and it needs to stop.

Mr Cree: I also wish to place on record my membership of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

I welcome the debate today and would have welcomed it last week as well. The Ulster

Unionist Party has always believed that the 50:50 recruitment policy initiated by Patten was the repugnant legalisation of religious discrimination. I welcome the end of a policy that has placed Northern Ireland outside the norm of equality legislation in the UK and across Europe.

Any reasons that people may have had for supporting 50:50 recruitment in the past have surely disappeared by now. We should not ignore the fact that having put recruits through a discriminatory process, we ask them to swear an oath upholding equality and fundamental human rights.

Let it not be forgotten that Sinn Féin and the SDLP support the Police Service in Northern Ireland. It is good that both parties sit on the Policing Board, which scrutinises the Police Service, and on the district policing partnerships, which help to set priorities for local community policing. Other Members touched on the fact that we probably have the most regulated police service in the Western World.

In light of those facts, the SDLP amendment is deeply regrettable and, in truth, in stark contradiction to the principles on which I thought that party was based. The equality in which I believe means that people are judged on their talents and abilities, not on their status at birth or their religion or ethnicity. I want a Northern Ireland that promotes that type of equality.

There is no doubt that Northern Ireland has changed for the better. I genuinely want the Police Service to reflect the entire community. That means that the Police Service must be made up of Protestants, Roman Catholics and anyone else who wants to join. However, promoting discrimination to achieve that goal is simply wrong. Whether people are appointed to the Police Service must be based on merit alone. Some Members implied that police officers are there to represent their section of the community. That is also wrong and should not be accepted by any right-thinking person. Everybody in this place has a clear responsibility to encourage Protestants, Roman Catholics and any other religious or ethnic group to join the police and to serve all the people of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party condemns the cowardly attacks by dissident republicans on Catholic officers in the PSNI, and I am pleased that

the attacks have not reduced the number of Catholics applying to serve in Northern Ireland. However, if we are genuine about creating a new and sustainable dispensation in Northern Ireland, everyone must be treated equally. The SDLP should now do the right thing by respecting the decision to end 50:50 recruitment and working towards a genuinely equal Police Service.

The 50:50 recruitment policy meant that one section of the community lost confidence in the police. The SDLP has shown today that it does not trust the structures of which it is part, and it does not trust the brave policemen and policewomen in Northern Ireland to serve the entire community. That is deeply regrettable.

If Northern Ireland is to have a more positive future, we must promote genuine equality of opportunity for all. We will have to build a Northern Ireland that is based on trust. Earlier, Mr Attwood referred to the fact, as he saw it, that Protestants had not been unduly affected by the 50:50 recruitment policy. However, since the introduction of the policy, 945 Protestants and no Roman Catholics have been rejected. That discrepancy speaks for itself. The decision to end the deeply flawed policy of 50:50 recruitment will help to boost confidence again. Therefore, everyone should welcome it.

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

The Ulster Unionist Party had suggested a similar amendment to that of the Alliance Party, but, unfortunately, it was not accepted for debate today. As a result, I am happy to support the motion as altered by amendment No 2.

5.30 pm

Mr A Maginness: I am pleased to participate in the debate. I am amused by the unionists' argument that they are opposed to positive discrimination because, as is the case with the Alliance Party, they do not present any alternative argument on how to achieve a police service that is representative of the whole community. That is the basic weakness of their argument. If 50:50 recruitment did not exist, Catholics would not have such significant representation in the Police Service.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way, unlike his colleague Alex Attwood who refused to do so earlier. Alban Maginness has made that same point several times. Does he

accept that 40% of those applying to the police, currently and in previous competitions, are Catholic? That, in and of itself, will eventually resolve the under-representation of Catholics in the Police Service. However long that might take, it will be resolved more quickly than the under-representation of Protestants in the Housing Executive.

Mr A Maginness: I accept that there is a variety of figures.

We want a steady stream of people from the Catholic community to join the Police Service to make it representative of the whole community. As members of the Police Service, we want them to represent the whole community, not only the Catholic community or the Protestant community. That is the important objective, and it is one that we should all want. When people signed up to the Patten report, they agreed, as stated in chapter 14, that the community would be fully represented in the Police Service.

Mr Simpson: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No; my time is running out.

If Members want to consider the arguments, paragraph 14.11 of chapter 14 of the report states:

"We have not taken our model beyond 10 years. As we have said in the previous chapter, we would expect the question of the size of the police service to be revisited by that time. In the light of recruitment experience and other developments between now and then, a judgment would need to be made as to whether special measures were still needed to achieve a police service representative of the community or whether this could now be expected to develop naturally. Either way we envisage that the composition of the police should continue to move towards a closer resemblance to that of the community as a whole."

That is what Patten said, and people signed up to that worthy objective.

We have almost achieved 30% Catholic representation, and that is good for all of us. That figure of 30% represents the critical mass to which the Patten report refers. However, there is a fundamental difference between establishing a critical mass and achieving representativeness of a community in the Police Service.

It also amuses me that the unionist parties forget that, in 1922, Sir Dawson Bates recommended that one third of RUC recruits be taken from

the Catholic community. That was an attempt to make the Police Service representative of the whole community. In case some Members think that Sir Dawson Bates was a softie, he was far from it. As the Minister of Home Affairs for several years, he was responsible for gerrymandering and, amongst other things, the abolition of proportional representation. From a unionist point of view, his political credentials were sound, and his view should be instructive to all unionist Members. Such a recruitment policy is a proper means by which to try to establish a community balance in the Police Service.

More work remains to be done to make the Police Service of Northern Ireland fully representative. Contrary to what the Alliance Party said, it cannot be achieved on a laissez-faire basis. If we were to rely on what the Alliance Party said, we would be stuck with the percentage of Catholic representation in the Police Service at around the mid-teens. That level would not have been exceeded, the percentage would not be close to the critical mass of 30%, and the Police Service would not be approaching the point at which it could be deemed as representative of the whole community. That is an important achievement.

The people who have been appointed, whether from the Protestant community or the Catholic community, are meritorious. Everyone should remember that. The merit pool is important.

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

Mr A Maginness: Shame on anyone who suggests that police officers, whether Catholic or Protestant, are unmeritorious and unworthy of membership of the Police Service.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board.

I support amendment No 1. The Chief Constable's annual report for 2008-09 stated:

"The PSNI wants to have a workforce that is reflective of the society it serves."

It went on to say:

"It is through initiatives such as ... the 50/50 legislation that the PSNI hopes to establish a truly reflective workforce."

That makes it clear that the top-ranking police officers in the PSNI recognise that there is a

compositional problem and see the benefits of implementing a 50:50 recruitment policy or something similar until the workforce is more representative than it is now.

Mr Easton: The Member's party is fond of talking about equality, but there does not seem to be equality for Protestants joining the PSNI. Does his party believe that recruitment to the PSNI should be based on the best man or woman for the job and not on his or her religion?

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

Mr McKay: As was made clear in previous contributions, a merit pool exists, and everyone who gets a job in the PSNI through the 50:50 recruitment system is appointed on merit.

As I said, it is clear that top-ranking police officers recognise that there is a compositional problem that must be dealt with. The PSNI top team, which includes the Chief Constable, faces a challenge to bring forward proposals to ensure that compositional change continues if Patten is phased out. If they do not, and the percentage of Catholic employees and employees from other minorities in the Police Service decreases, confidence in the police will suffer a massive blow.

We must, of course, address the representation of other minorities and other sections of our society. Stephen Farry referred to those from working-class communities. There is an under-representation as far as the loyalist and republican communities are concerned.

Mr Simpson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: I will not.

Peter Weir referred to under-representation in gender and race. The Policing Board has tried to address that through a gender action plan. Sinn Féin has submitted proposals to look at measures that other police services have implemented where the representation of females in the police is monitored.

At a time when we should be maximising confidence through the devolution of policing and justice powers, there is a danger that that confidence could be eroded from within.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: I will not give way.

The Patten report said:

"real community policing is impossible if the composition of the police service bears little relationship to the composition of the community as a whole."

That point was also made in the Macpherson report, which, following the death of Stephen Lawrence, highlighted the racism in the Metropolitan Police Service in London.

Patten did not place a cap on the 50:50 recruitment programme when Catholic composition reached 30%; the NIO and the British Government did that. Patten forecast that the programme could achieve as much as 33% Catholic representation in the Police Service after 10 years and said that the composition of the police should continue to move towards a closer resemblance to that of the community as a whole.

Other opportunities have been missed. Alex Maskey referred to the recruitment of part-time officers, which could have been handled better.

There is an onus on the board and, indeed, on the PSNI to look into the number of new recruits who leave the service and to interpret the reasons for their leaving. Three hundred and thirty officers who joined the PSNI since November 2001 have left, 209 of whom had Catholic backgrounds. Therefore, Catholics are significantly more likely to leave the police. Clearly, that area requires more scrutiny. Not enough exit interviews are being carried out with those leaving the Police Service.

Aside from the 50:50 issue, it was envisaged that the accommodation of lateral entry would help to deal with the more severe under-representation of Catholics at the higher levels of the service. Unfortunately, that has not come to pass, and the British and Irish Governments have not shown the political will necessary to deal with the barriers being faced by gardaí who want to join the PSNI by way of lateral entry. Given the proposed phasing out of 50:50 recruitment, the two Governments must urgently put in place a plan to deal with the issue of pensions for those seeking to transfer using that mechanism. With the forthcoming promotions in the police, the importance of the lateral entry mechanism cannot be underestimated.

The changes to the Police Service and to policing over the past 10 years have been positive, but it is important for that process of change to continue. Community representation

is intertwined with community confidence and real community policing. A lot of work has been done, but a lot more needs to be done.

Dr W McCrea: The debate is timely, and I congratulate my colleagues on bringing it to the House. We have had a decade of discrimination against the Protestant community, and it is sad that that is to be extended for a further year. However, it will be welcomed if it is the final year.

Significant numbers of Protestants across the community have been deliberately discriminated against because of the action taken to kowtow to the republican agenda and to nationalist agitation. Today's debate has been very interesting. I never cease to be amazed by the arrogance of some people, which verges on hypocrisy. On the one hand, they are against discrimination and are for fairness and equality legislation. However, when it comes to Protestants, it really does not matter: that can all be thrown out the window. In his remarks, Mr Alban Maginness said that it amuses him. I can tell Mr Maginness that there is nothing amusing about discrimination when one is being discriminated against. I realise that that fact might amuse him, but many of the young people who have applied to join the Police Service of Northern Ireland want to serve their community.

I pay tribute to those who served the community in the RUC, the RUC Reserve and the RUC GC. They served the community during some of the most difficult years that Northern Ireland has been through. I pay tribute to those young men and women from both the Protestant community and the Roman Catholic community who stood side by side against a vicious onslaught of terrorism, and did so courageously. I congratulate all those in the community who decided to make their contribution to the well-being of Northern Ireland, not because of their religious name or tag, but because they wanted to serve the people and to bring peace and stability to Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Protestant community resents the fact that when applicants go through all the examinations and health checks and are acknowledged to be suitable candidates to serve the community, they are told that the only reason that they are being turned down is that they happen to be Protestant.

When Mr Maginness made his comments, he was challenged by my friend from East Londonderry Gregory Campbell about equality

of representation for Protestants in the Housing Executive. He never took it under his notice. He had nothing to say. He was totally silent, and the record of the House will prove his silence. He was silent because he does not really care about the Protestant community. He does not care about it being discriminated against in the Housing Executive, and he does not care about it being discriminated against in the Health Service. He just does not care, simply because fairness and equality mean nothing when a person happens to be a Prod.

Just as those people do not want to see a Prod on the streets or walking the roads, so they do not care whether they have a job. I do not care about a person's religion. If a person is a Roman Catholic, that person has the right to a job, and he or she has the right to have opportunities equal to those of their fellow citizens in this country. It is not a person's religion that should decide whether they get a job; whether they are best person for that job should decide.

5.45 pm

Many years ago, before I was the chairperson of Magherafelt District Council, a charge was made against the SDLP that when it was in control of that council, it had discriminated against the Roman Catholic community. It is on record that the only time that the Roman Catholic community got fairness of employment in that council was during the four years that unionists controlled it. Indeed, I was the chairman of the council during that time. Therefore, I will not stand for lectures from anyone on the issue of fairness.

I believe that the best person for the job should be the one who gets it, irrespective of their religious persuasion. That person would deserve the job, regardless of whether the post is in the police, the Housing Executive or in any other body in society. That is why I give my wholehearted support to the colleagues of mine who tabled the motion. A discrimination exists that must be condemned and ended now. I ask the House to give its resounding support to the motion.

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

Dr W McCrea: Let us see Northern Ireland moving forward to brighter and better days in which we can cast aside discrimination

against both the Protestant community and the community at large.

Mr Paisley Jnr: A viable principle in any democracy ought to be that religious discrimination is wrong — period. The British Government have had to create a derogation from law, and they have had to abuse natural justice and create a false situation in which that principle has been violated and in which active discrimination has an impact day and daily.

Earlier in the debate, Jimmy Spratt gave a very moving account of what happened in his own house. Indeed, that account could be repeated 1,000 times across the homes of Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Paisley Jnr: Let me make my point.

A person could have applied for a job in the Police Service, could have passed all the tests, may have gone through vetting and had everything approved, yet a letter could land on their doormat telling them that because they are a Protestant, they will not be getting in. That is an indictment of a democratic society, and it tells a story of discrimination that the House should be united in opposing. It is discrimination, regardless of whether it is against Roman Catholics or Protestants, and it happens because of the place in which the people concerned choose to worship or because an accident of birth means that they have ticked a particular box on a form. The House should stand in unity against such discrimination. Instead, however, we have Members trying to contrive clever little arguments that justify discrimination. Discrimination cannot be justified; it is wrong. The House should stand united against it, and it is a sad reflection of our society that it has not.

The House has heard a great deal from the SDLP about the Patten report and about how it should be protected, how it is a totem about which everything is right and how we should never move away from it. However, the SDLP was quite content to move away from the Patten report when it demanded 2,500 part-time officers in the Police Service. I have yet to hear that party demand that that element of the Patten report be implemented. I have also yet to hear the SDLP argue decisively that the Patten report should be implemented for building a police college in Northern Ireland, and I have yet

to hear that party oppose the extension of the contracts of the full-time Reserve for four years, even though Patten suggested that it should be made extinct by April 2006.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Paisley Jnr: I will give way in a moment.

Although the SDLP keeps clinging to the point that the Patten report is invaluable and must be protected, the fact is that that party is cherry-picking because it likes discrimination against Protestants. That is the bottom line.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. Returning to an earlier point, will the Member tell the House what he would say to a meritorious Catholic applicant who received a refusal because they did not fit the 50:50 recruitment policy? The whole emphasis of the debate is on the Protestants who did not get the jobs. What about the Catholic applicants?

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

Mr Paisley Jnr: I thought that my earlier comments would have sufficed. All discrimination is wrong, and the only people who should receive letters of refusal are those who have not been meritoriously successful and who have been advised to try again. That refusal should not be based on their religion. However, it is unfortunate that such discrimination happens. The fact of the matter is that discrimination fosters more discrimination and more hurt.

Some points were made earlier in the debate about how some want to see more discrimination — indeed, some want discrimination extended for another 30 years. I hope that the House says that enough is enough, that discrimination will not be extended for another 30 years, and 50:50 recruitment will not be used for the recruitment of civilians or anyone else. We should end the evil of discrimination.

There is an issue about the number of Roman Catholic recruits who have left the Police Service. The Member for North Antrim said that 209 Roman Catholics who had been probationer constables and then constables had subsequently left the service. That happens twice as often among Roman Catholic recruits as it does among Protestant recruits. However, we should look at the reasons why some of those people are dismissed. According to the sheet of paper that the Member quoted from

— selectively — 80 student officers resigned and 36 were dismissed. Forty-one probationer constables were dismissed, seven constables were dismissed, and 51 resigned because they did not like the job. One sergeant resigned because he did not like the job.

Those people leave the service for a whole host of reasons. Most of them do so voluntarily because they do not like the service. One has to accept that, when, for so many years, members of a community were deliberately targeted and murdered if they joined the police, and the so-called democrats of that community did not encourage their community to join the police, and would not even join the Police Authority, it is little wonder that Roman Catholics did not feel comfortable about joining. When they do join and discover that it is not the job that they actually wanted, they have to face up to the consequences of that, and it is better for them to get out. The fact is that those 209 vacancies could have been filled by people who should have been meritoriously recruited to them. That is the indictment of the House, and I hope that we right that great wrong.

Mr Bell: I fear, when I listen to the arguments for discrimination from the Benches opposite, that Members are defending their mistakes almost as if they were defending their inheritance. When the history of 50:50 recruitment is written, it will be shown to be the antithesis of fairness and equality.

I have four points to make, and I would like, if I may, to use the acronym SDLP. The “S” stands for “sectarian”. We have already heard today the attempted identification of Mr Ford as a unionist — a clear example of sectarianism creeping into the SDLP. The “D” stands for discrimination. We in Northern Ireland have had to go to Europe to say that we wish to depart from the acceptable standards of fairness and equality. The Benches opposite want to go against standard practice on human rights. They want to derogate from human rights in order to get the discrimination in the SDLP against Protestant people who apply for jobs on merit.

As for labour relations, when I think of the SDLP and look at the little bunch of green capitalists in front of me, I see a party as far removed from that of Fitt and Devlin as it is possible to be. Is the 50:50 recruitment policy not the opposite of labour relations? We will bring people in, set them a test, offer them a position on merit, but

at the end of that process, the SDLP will tell them that it will discriminate against them and derogate from internationally accepted human rights principles in order to do it.

My colleague Ian Paisley Jnr referred to the picking in the SDLP. We have had the sectarianism, the discrimination, the opposite of labour relations, and then we have the picking of the parts of the Patten reforms that they like and the parts that they do not like. Is it coincidence that the parts that they do not like are the parts that particularly affect the Protestant community? I will mention a case from my Strangford constituency, although I will not mention the person's name.

A young man got his job through merit and served for a number of years in the Metropolitan Police in London, where he gained a plethora of experience in a modern UK city. In Strangford, we want people to come to live, invest and work in the area. That young man came from a United Kingdom police force with a proven track record of excellence and expertise, and he applied to join the PSNI. Having got all the way through the system, he was told that although he was qualified and had a proven track record and references in policing, he would be discriminated against in Northern Ireland because he is a Protestant.

How can I go back to that person and say that I want him to live and work in Strangford and raise his family and invest there, when he will be discriminated against because he is a Protestant? Is that not the worst form of discrimination imaginable? Is that not discrimination with a capital “D”? How can we ever turn that around?

In the future, people will ask us questions. They will ask why we derogated from human rights by discriminating against Protestants. It will be asked why many people who could have served the Police Service very well are not going to be given that opportunity. I join Dr McCrea in paying tribute to the men and women of the police, the RUC Reserve and the RUC George Cross, who served the public when the SDLP ran away. They continued to provide a service when they were being terrorised in and outside of work and when off-duty disabled police officers were shot. Is it not the ultimate in heroism that they continued to serve while the SDLP ran away?

I am sad that only two Ulster Unionist Party Members are present for a debate on a matter

of such magnitude. It gives me no pleasure to say that the principle of 50:50 recruitment originated in the mind of Ken Maginnis.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The business on the Order Paper has not been disposed of by 6.00 pm. In accordance with Standing Order 10(3), I propose to allow the business to continue until 7.00 pm or until business has been completed.

Mr Shannon: I support the original motion. As will most Members, I can well remember the day when the saying “may the best man win” was applicable for all competitions and for all job applications. The person who performed best and who was the best skilled would win the gold medal or get the job. Clearly, that has not been the case in PSNI recruitment since the Patten recommendations for a 50:50 policy came into play. It is no longer the case that the best, most skilled or most fit-for-purpose man or woman will get the job; it is the one who ticks the right background boxes.

The best way of illustrating the issue is to give an example without mentioning any names, as other Members have done. Recently, I was contacted by a young man who went through the rigorous selection process on three occasions. On each occasion, he scored well, but, unfortunately, he did not come from the right background. I long for the day when that young man will phone me to say that he has been accepted to join the PSNI and can make a contribution to society, as many such young people can.

I will give an example from my constituency of Strangford, which Jonathan Bell also represents. Members will remember a song that used to be on TV called ‘Two Little Boys’ by Rolf Harris, and they will be glad to hear that I am not going to sing it. The song is about two young boys who grew up together and ended up on the battlefield. One was a Union soldier and the other was a Confederate soldier.

I am very annoyed by the SDLP amendment, because I know of two young boys from the same district who ran about together. If they were standing in front of us, you could not tell the difference in where they came from, because they both looked the same. They were the same age when they applied to join the police, and they were friends. They both made it through the application process as far as the medical and the role play. One got through to

the next stage but, unfortunately, the other one did not.

The one who got in was a Roman Catholic. I know the young man, and I am sure that he will make a superb police officer and will do extremely well. However, he got a lower score in the role play than the Protestant applicant, yet the SDLP says that the system is meritorious and honest and not discriminatory and biased against Protestants. The fact is that it is dishonest, and so is the SDLP’s amendment. I am very annoyed about that, but I will have to deal with it.

6.00 pm

The number of people from a Catholic background who have applied to the Police Service has risen. In fact, the figures quoted today show that 28·7% of police officers are Roman Catholic. Times are changing, and we should support the principle of people getting jobs based on their merit, experience and ability rather than on which church they attend on Sundays. Minister Goggins has stated that the 50:50 process will be run for the last time this year. Many people in the Province breathed a sigh of relief when they heard that, and they are pleased that that will be the case. A discriminatory process is in place that is grossly unfair to Protestant people, and that is quite annoying.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Does the Member accept that it costs £61,022·95 to recruit a single police officer and that the reason that it costs so much — it is about £30,000 more than the rest of the UK — is the discrimination clause? Earlier, we heard that 209 Roman Catholic officers have left the service, which means that in excess of £12 million of resources has been wasted over the past couple of years because of that recruitment clause. That is a disaster financially, socially and for community relations.

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

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for his comments, and I agree with him wholeheartedly. His point clearly illustrates the issue. The monetary factor must also be taken into consideration.

I work closely with community groups in my constituency of Strangford, and I can assure Members that the only questions that those groups ask about police offers are whether they

are willing to get their hands dirty, muck in with everyone else and do the job. They do not ask what their religion is. They do not want to know which box those police officers mark on election day; rather, they want to know whether they will go the extra mile when necessary. They do not want an officer who fits the right profile; rather, they want an officer who can profile and catch the thieves who are terrorising their areas. That is an issue for the many people whom I represent. They want police officers who are called to the job as their vocation and who are sensitive to the needs of the community in which they serve. That is not found in a person's religion but in the quality of his or her character.

The DUP wants the best for all people, so, regardless of religion, why accept less than the best that we can have? I am happy to support the motion because I know that, in doing so, I am supporting the end of discrimination and a new era for PSNI officers of all religions who are not there to fill a quota but are there to do the job to the best standard that can be achieved. That young Protestant from my area who did not get into the Police Service because he attends the wrong church on a Sunday must be given the chance to do a good job.

Mr G Robinson: First, I express my sincere thanks to all past and present members of the Police Service in Northern Ireland and their families. They have done a sterling job over many years, often in very difficult circumstances. I salute them and thank them for their service to the entire community. I pay tribute to all those from both communities in Northern Ireland who are in the security forces, some of whom made the supreme sacrifice.

Some Members have cried discrimination at every possible opportunity over many years. Today, they will try to justify discrimination in the form of 50:50 recruitment to the Police Service. That shows how determined they are to ensure that the unionist population loses out in the process of selecting police officers. However, discrimination is discrimination no matter how one tries to justify it. They use the phrase "positive discrimination" only as a PR stunt to spin their hypocrisy when it comes to equality for every member of Northern Ireland's population.

Recent press coverage said that 1,000 applicants to the Police Service who were perceived to be from the unionist community and were suitably

qualified to begin training were unable to be offered a position because they were not from the nationalist community. Is that the equal society that Members want to build? That is not my vision for the future. I want to see police officers on the street who gained their position on merit and not because of their perceived religious background.

Another aspect of this twisted process is the future strength of the Police Service. Will it be adequately manned? If candidates from the nationalist community were required to fill 500 vacancies but only 200 applied, the perception is that the 200 applicants would get positions and the Police Service would only be able to recruit another 200 officers in order to fulfil the requirements of the 50:50 policy. What would happen to the other 100 positions? They would remain unfilled. That could ultimately lead to an undermanned police service, stretched to the limit and providing a poorer service. That would not serve the people of Northern Ireland well, regardless of political or religious background.

As the motion states, all of us can look forward to a new beginning for recruitment to the Police Service that is based on the merit of candidates and not on perceived religious affiliations. For the first time in a decade, employment opportunities will be based on equality.

Mr Simpson: We have listened to comments from Members on the opposite side of the House about more Catholics joining the police force. However, in Craigavon on Saturday night, the co-religionists of those Members attacked young police officers and attempted to take their lives. Does the Member agree that in the long term that could have a detrimental effect on young Catholics joining the police force?

Mr G Robinson: I agree entirely with my colleague's sentiments.

Candidates must fit the physical and educational criteria laid down for entrance to the police, instead of being turned down because of their perceived religious affiliation. I congratulate my colleagues on securing the debate and take great pleasure in supporting the motion.

Dr Farry: The debate has been fairly restrained and largely constructive, compared with what it could have been. The issue of 50:50 recruitment is clearly divisive, and there is a significant sense of grievance on a number of sides of the House.

Our amendment seeks to find the broadest basis possible for agreement and unity in the House. The two nationalist parties have a diametrically opposed viewpoint, but hopefully our amendment provides the basis around which a number of parties can unite. What we are trying to do is straightforward: primarily, we are trying to welcome the forthcoming end of the 50:50 recruitment policy. The stated opposition in the Assembly to the use of quotas is clear. The important step forward of ensuring that recruitment is based solely on merit is central to what we are trying to achieve.

We welcome the support from the Ulster Unionist Benches. Although parties in here may have differences on a range of issues, my party always judges issues on the words on paper and on what people are saying. Basil McCrea is not here, but I have no doubt that he does the same.

I urge the DUP to consider supporting our amendment. I identify with the sense of grievance that DUP Members have expressed today, and the points raised with them as elected representatives are no different to those that I and many other Members hear. However, it is important that we move the issue away from being a grievance for the Protestant section of society, although I recognise that people from that background are affected by 50:50 recruitment more than anyone else. Looking to the future, it is important that we frame the issue as something that works against the interests of society as a whole and recognise that people, whether they are of Protestant, Catholic or ethnic minority background, have a different sense of identity in society. The debate is an opportunity to look to the future and to say that the issue is not about one section of society versus another but about the important principle of merit and ensuring that all police officers in Northern Ireland are treated as individuals and are judged solely on the skills that they bring to the table.

Leslie Cree and Alban Maginness outlined the essence of the shared and common vision that we are seeking to achieve in Northern Ireland, which is, essentially, that every professional police officer, irrespective of his or her background, should and will be capable of delivering the same fair and impartial service to all sections of the community without any issues of religion. We can all unite around that idea and around the merit principle as the important bases on

which to recruit. The merit pool is not the only issue. We must also consider how candidates are ranked, because people feel a sense of grievance when someone who scored lower than them is recruited ahead of them.

Other issues about quotas have been raised. We made the point that quotas can be counter-productive and that they are sometimes too simplistic to capture the real diversity in our society, particularly among people from a working-class background. Daithí McKay echoed that sentiment. Moreover, we need to consider the issue of retention. During the debate, Members made a challenge and asked what the alternative is. I sincerely believe that quotas are not necessary to achieve a representative police service. Members can quote statistics from the past number of years, but the political process has been up and down.

If we, as a society, send out a united message that we respect police officers and support recruitment on merit without discrimination, we can encourage applicants to come from all sections of society in proportion to their distribution across society. Over time — quickly, I hope — we will create a truly representative police service, and the sense of grievance will be absent from society. I urge all Members to unite around the Alliance Party amendment, which represents the best and most positive way to send a clear signal of what people want to achieve.

Mrs D Kelly: Many comments have been batted back and forth about the SDLP and some Members have tried to be amusing in their insults. The SDLP is prepared to take that on the chin. Members have talked about standing up for equality and fairness. Members opposite and many Members across the Chamber seem to have forgotten why the fair employment legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland, why the Equality Commission still exists and why we need a bill of rights: it is because there was so much discrimination in the past. We all agree that a police service is one of the central pillars of any democracy.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I am delighted that the Member has brought the Fair Employment Commission into the debate. She must know that, historically, the largest claim that was ever taken and fought by the Fair Employment Commission was on behalf of a Protestant who had been discriminated

against. That case demonstrated the high levels of discrimination against Protestants.

Does the Member recognise and accept that the Irish state in the Republic of Ireland is only now coming to terms with the history of the Royal Irish Constabulary? When will the SDLP come to terms with and accept the history of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, instead of denigrating it?

Mrs D Kelly: I will deal with the Member's points. My party has always been on record as saying that many good men and women in the RUC stood against terrorism in the past. However, as events and reports have shown, some members of the RUC colluded with loyalist paramilitaries in their attack against the Catholic community. That is a matter of record; it has been evidenced and researched. In fact, people — not nearly enough of them — have been brought to court and to justice over that.

The Member mentioned standing up for discrimination against Protestants. As a member of Craigavon Borough Council, I and other members of my party are the only representatives who have gone to the Equality Commission on four occasions because of that council's unfair treatment of Protestants in Craigavon. I await the outcome of those tribunals with interest.

6.15 pm

Mr Paisley Jnr: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: No; I have already given way, and I have very little time to deal with the matter.

I hope that, as a result of this debate and the debate on the bill of rights, Sinn Féin Members will think again before they go through the Lobbies to support a Justice Minister from the Alliance Party. That party's Members skulked out of the Chamber before the main Question was put on the bill of rights motion, and they cannot even agree on the 50:50 recruitment policy. The Alliance Party is in denial about what happened in the past on policing, and it should reflect, as a party, on whether it should continue its collusion with the unionist parties on the gerrymandering of the Justice Minister post. Time and time again, the Alliance Party has kowtowed to the DUP on all those matters of importance to the whole community.

A number of issues were raised in the debate. Mr Attwood began by saying clearly that our party is on record as supporting and acknowledging

the bravery and the leadership shown by the young men and women who apply to join the PSNI. Indeed, by the time Sinn Féin decided to join the Policing Board, 87% of the Patten recommendations had been either wholly or partly acted on, endorsed or implemented.

Mr Paisley Jnr threw out a few red herrings, which he knows to be entirely disingenuous, about the SDLP's support for policing. Our party — Alex Attwood in particular — has on many occasions led the campaign for funding for a new police college. We have supported the opening-up of the debate on the part-time PSNI Reserve, but we have failed, as Alex Maskey rightly pointed out, to deliver on community policing in the way in which Patten envisaged and our communities hoped for.

Mr Simpson was right when he said that those who attacked the police at the weekend are making it more difficult to implement the outstanding Patten recommendations on police community support officers, community policing and the defortification of our police stations. Those people are acting against the wishes of the community —

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

Mrs D Kelly: — and they are acting against Patten.

Do I have an extra minute, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker: You do have an extra minute, Mrs Kelly. That was my mistake.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that Members will be delighted to hear that.

I want to deal with any misunderstandings that exist about the merit pool. In response to a question for written answer that Lord Laird asked in the House of Lords, Baroness Royall of Blaisdon said:

"The 50:50 recruitment procedures are only applicable to those applicants in the merit pool, by which time they have demonstrated that they meet the required UK standards."

Therefore, all applicants are in the merit pool. George Robinson raised the "What if?" scenario — if not enough Catholics apply in a particular funding round, no one will get a job. That has not happened, nor is it likely to happen.

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

Mrs D Kelly: The figures show that applications from both communities continue to rise, despite the background of increased violence.

Mr Weir: At the end of what has been a passionate but well-mannered debate, I support the motion that my colleague Gregory Campbell moved. I declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

I think that it was Ian Paisley Jnr who said that the motion was about righting wrongs. Some of the older Members in the Chamber will recall that, after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, one of the unionist slogans used at the next Westminster election was "To Put Right a Great Wrong". That is what the House should do, in order to send out a clear signal. Ian Paisley Jnr said that religious discrimination is never right, whether it is directed at Protestants or Catholics. The Assembly should take a firm stance and decide that those who seek employment in the police or in any other profession should be employed purely on merit. That should be a strict principle. The SDLP and Sinn Féin have preached at us and lectured us ad nauseam on equality, but unfortunately I am not surprised to say that today we have seen that they are doing the opposite. They do not practise what they preach. The opportunity to stand four-square behind the merit principle seems to have been rejected by two of the parties opposite.

In moving the motion, Gregory Campbell highlighted the fact that there have been in the region of 40,000 applications to join the police force in past years. This is not some mere theoretical debate; it is something that impacts on many people's lives. Reference was made later in the debate to the fact that around 1,000 applicants from the Protestant community had been rejected solely on the basis of community background, and no applications from the Catholic community have been rejected.

As Mr Campbell indicated, the principal reason that there were so few Catholics in the old RUC was the campaign by the Provisional IRA. Whether it was the direct violence of the IRA or the shunning of the police by the SDLP which failed to take its place on the Police Authority for much of the Troubles, it is no wonder that the figures were so low at that stage. We have also seen that, whenever the threat of violence has been largely removed following the ceasefires —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly.

Mr A Maginness: The highest level of Catholics in the RUC was around 11%. That was during peaceful times.

Mr Weir: Why?

Mr A Maginness: You may ask why. The figure was 11% not because of any IRA campaign. It was 11%, and the historical and political reasons are there if you care to look at them.

Mr Weir: The historical reasons are that, just as the SDLP's fingerprints are all over trying to keep people out of the police, its predecessors in the Nationalist Party and other nationalist parties urged people not to be members of the police force for years. It was not just the terrorism of the party opposite but the constitutional blocking of parties such as the SDLP and the old Nationalist Party. The guilt lies at the door of the SDLP as well.

The evidence of the extent to which the situation was based on violence was that even in the first year of the ceasefire we saw the number of people from the Catholic community applying to join the police force almost double. It has been indicated that, had there not been a 50:50 recruitment campaign over the past years, nearly 40% of applicants would have come from the Catholic community. Therefore, there was no need for it.

The double standards of the parties opposite on discrimination were highlighted by the proposer and a number of other Members. Whether it is the Housing Executive or the Equality Commission, where there is a disproportionate number of Catholics in any section of the workforce, there is silence. There is no advocacy of 50:50 recruitment in those cases. The Civil Service, for example, has a disproportionate number of Catholics at the lower levels. Has a quota system been offered or suggested by any of the parties opposite? No, it has not.
[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members to make all comments through the Chair and not from a sedentary position.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No, I only have a few minutes.

Mr Attwood started off with a fine contribution, praising the work of unionists on the Policing

Board, and then, like one of the skiers in the winter Olympics, he went downhill rapidly soon afterwards. He said that, although there were many fine people in the RUC, they were seen as an arm of the state. He went on to suggest that special measures should be carried on for 20 or 30 years in the police force as a whole and, perhaps, for 60 or 70 years when it came to civilian recruitment for the PSNI. Although I welcome the concession that the Member made, he clearly sees partition carrying on into the long-term future to advocate those sorts of measures. I reject the level of discrimination that he sees as being in place.

Mr Farry's measured contribution indicated that the Alliance Party, to its credit, has been consistently opposed to 50:50 recruitment, and he said that it was unnecessary, divisive and of questionable legality. We have some reservations about the Alliance Party's amendment because it avoids direct reference to the community that has been most discriminated against. However, in a spirit of cross-community consensus, Mr Farry's remarks have persuaded us to support his amendment. He is right that, although the discrimination inherent in 50:50 recruitment has been against the Protestant community, there has also been a negative impact on members of the Roman Catholic community and other communities who have sought to join the police.

Any Catholic officer who has joined the police over the last number of years has had a degree of stigma over their head that they have not necessarily got their place completely on merit. When we move to recruitment on merit next year, for which this party argued —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way? His remarks are grossly insulting.

Mr Weir: I will not give way; I have only another two and a half minutes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the Member does not want to give way.

Mr Weir: I am afraid that some of the Members opposite will have to be insulted from a sedentary position.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Member to suggest that a member of the PSNI is — *[Interruption.]* I am making a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is making a point of order.

Mr Attwood: Is it in order for a Member — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Attwood has the Floor.

Mr Paisley Jnr: To which Standing Order does the point of order refer?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will make that judgement.

Mr Attwood: Is it in order for a Member of the House to suggest that any person in public employment in the North, including members of the PSNI, is employed on grounds other than merit? Everyone, including the Chief Constable, confirms that every member of the PSNI has been recruited on merit. Is it in order for a Member to suggest otherwise?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The point has been made, but it is not a point of order.

Dr W McCrea: Is it right for a Member to abuse the systems of the House? The Member knows that that is not a point of order.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, we have had many spurious contributions.

Mr Weir: I will return briefly to the debate. Several Sinn Féin Members, including Alex Maskey, tried to compete with the SDLP by making out that they were not just pro-Patten but pro-Patten-plus. They claimed that that the evil hand of the Government was behind all forms of discrimination.

Trevor Clarke, Jim Shannon, Jonathan Bell, Jimmy Spratt and others gave personal examples of people who applied to the Police Service but were turned down. We must remember that a range of human stories and lost opportunities lie behind the figures. Mr Clarke even held out the hand of friendship to Mr Attwood and suggested that, if equality was really what that Member seeks, he will be willing to support a motion on that basis. Double standards have been demonstrated by the Members opposite. As many Members asked, if they are so wrapped up in the idea that the Police Service must be completely representative of society, why are there no special quotas for women, ethnic minorities and every other kind of minority? The desire for 50:50 recruitment is driven by one motivation.

As William McCrea said, the DUP was never in favour of 50:50 recruitment, but we welcome the fact that this is its final year. We look forward to a situation in which all police officers can provide the required service on the basis of merit. That will also — I pick up Ian Paisley Jnr's point — lead to recruitment that is more cost-effective than the somewhat constrained current approach. Resources can be taken from the false position of 50:50 recruitment and put towards front line policing and dealing with crime. Officers will be able to deal with crime, having been appointed on merit.

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

Mr Weir: That is what society wants. I support the motion and the Alliance Party's amendment.

6.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that if the amendment is made, amendment No 2 will not be called. If that is the outcome, I will proceed to put the Question on the motion as amended.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 46.

AYES

Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P J Bradley and Mrs M Bradley.

NOES

Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, 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, Dr W 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, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bell and Mr T Clarke.

Question accordingly negated.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 46; Noes 37.

AYES

Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, 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, Dr W 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, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCarthy and Mr B Wilson.

NOES

Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr Burns.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 46; Noes 37.

AYES

Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dodds, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, 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, Dr W 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,
Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon,
Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir,
Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.*

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Bell and Mr T Clarke.

NOES

*Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley,
Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler,
Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher,
Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard,
Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey,
Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney,
Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff,
Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness,
Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Murphy,
Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill,
Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.*

Tellers for the Noes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr Burns.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

*That this Assembly notes the renewal for one
final year of 50:50 recruitment to the police
in Northern Ireland; looks forward to the next
substantial recruitment competition when all
applicants, irrespective of their actual or perceived
background, can be eligible for recruitment solely
on merit.*

Adjourned at 7.01 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 2 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment —

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During yesterday's debate on the 50:50 recruitment policy, a Member said:

"Catholic officers who joined the police in recent years have the stigma of not necessarily getting their place completely on merit." — [Official Report, Vol 49, No 1, p68, col 2].

The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of stigma is:

"a mark or sign of disgrace or discredit".

I ask you to review Hansard, Mr Speaker, and make a ruling on the matter. To suggest that any member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, given what it has experienced recently and over a long period could, in any way, be deemed to carry a sign of disgrace or discredit is a poor reflection on those who would make such a comment and a poor reflection on the House. A ruling is required to ensure that, in future, comments of such gravity and severity are not made in the House or, if they are made, that they be corrected immediately.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I have continually warned all sides of the House about the language that they may use in the House and to be moderate and temperate in their language. I will study Hansard and come back to the House directly or to the Member directly.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I stress the point that, in addition to Members making unparliamentary or inappropriate comments about other Members, I am of the view that a line may have been crossed when inappropriate and improper references were made to people outside the Building. Whenever

a Member uses a word that has a very explicit and unfortunate meaning, such as the word "stigma", I believe that a ruling must be made, rather than a mere exhortation being given to Members to be moderate in their comments.

Mr Speaker: On occasions in the House, debates can raise emotions from all Members, and some of the comments that are made are part of the cut and thrust of debate. Once again, I remind Members to be of good temper when they speak in the House. It is important for Members on all sides of the House to remember that.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At the end of questions for oral answer to the Department of the Environment yesterday, I raised a point of order with you about a DUP Member making unacceptable comments from a sedentary position. You gave a commitment to check the Hansard report, and I thank you for that. However, I checked Hansard this morning, and it does not record that sedentary comment. Will you give a commitment to check the tape on that matter?

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me deal with Mr McDevitt's point of order first.

Hansard does not record everything. There is a procedure for how it does its work. I advise the Member to speak to Hansard or to the Business Office about that issue.

As I said yesterday — I thought that I dealt with the issue fairly strongly — Members should not try to speak from a sedentary position in the House, because, on occasions, remarks can be picked up. As the Member found when he read the Hansard report for yesterday, not every remark is picked up. However, that does not necessarily mean that neither I nor the Clerks at Table hear those remarks. Members

may have the notion that because remarks are not picked up by Hansard they are not picked up at the Table. However, that is not the case, and I remind Members of what I said yesterday: it is vital that they do not try to speak from a sedentary position. It is wrong, and I remind all sides of the House of that again.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday we had the shameful behaviour of the Deputy Speaker John Dallat of the SDLP shouting from a sedentary position for the Minister of the Environment to resign. Will you make a ruling on that disgraceful behaviour as urgently as possible?

Furthermore, Mr Attwood raised a point of order this morning about public officials being slurred, yet in recent Committee meetings, Members have slurred planning officials. Can the House have your ruling on that? Perhaps the SDLP will take the log out of its own eye before it looks for the speck in others'. Moreover, is Conall McDevitt's sectional behaviour in raising of a point of order about people speaking from a sedentary position, when he wilfully watched and heard the Deputy Speaker screaming "resign" from a sedentary position yesterday, not sectarian in itself?

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us try to close this debate down. All parties in the House have Members who, from time to time, will try to speak from a sedentary position. Let us remind ourselves that that should not happen.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If the Member's point of order is on the same issue, I am very reluctant to take it. If it is a different point of order on a different issue, I will take it.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is it on a totally different subject?

Mr Attwood: I can give the Speaker a 100% guarantee that it is, although my point of order arises from one that was raised on a previous day.

You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that you stated that you did not have the power to make a ruling that the First Minister should lodge legal advice in the Library. Subsequently, I met you last Tuesday in relation to the matter. The First Minister stepped down from office for 21 days and has now been in office again for 24 days. He was out of office awaiting legal advice for

a shorter period than other people have been waiting to hear about that legal advice since he returned to office.

Given that it is a matter of public interest, that the Department of Finance and Personnel has said that it would be inappropriate to publish the instructions to counsel in respect of that legal advice and that there is now a long delay and some doubt about the matter, I urge you, Mr Speaker, to bring the matter to a close as quickly as possible. I urge you to consider whether a ruling from the Chair is appropriate or whether in some other manner it can be indicated to Ministers, including the First Minister, that it is a matter that needs to be shared with the House and the wider public.

Mr Speaker: I have given the Member quite a bit of latitude on this issue, as he will appreciate. I have spoken to him and have once again written to him, and, as far as I am concerned as Speaker, that is where it ends. There are other avenues that the Member should explore in trying to resolve the issue. I do not feel that, as Speaker, it is my job to come in here and make a statement on a particular issue that a particular Member has brought to me, because I would be doing that quite often. I believe that there are other avenues that the Member could pursue in relation to the issue.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I have not yet received a letter from you in relation to the matters that I raised with you in our conversation last Tuesday. If that is your final ruling on the matter there is nothing further that I can do, except to express the concern that the requirements of accountability and disclosure to the House in this matter — subject to the issues of privilege and ongoing legal investigations — will not have been satisfied if the House is not in a position to require anything further from the First Minister.

Mr Speaker: I have taken some time to look at the issue. In fact, I have taken my own counsel on the issue, and my mind has not changed from the first day that the Member raised the point of order. Once again, I say to the Member, as I did when I spoke to him face to face, that I believe there are other avenues that he should follow, which can hopefully resolve the issue for him.

Ministerial Statement

Planning Reform

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I can assure you that, being in a debating chamber, you will not need to wrap me up in bandages or mollycoddle me; I am quite up for the challenge of facing the Chamber and do not need to be pampered, unlike some Members who have intervened this morning.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement to formally update Members on our current position in relation to the reform of the planning system. As Members know, over the past few years there has been widespread pressure for reform from many quarters. That is continuing, and was drawn into sharp focus with the publication last month of the Public Accounts Committee's report on the performance of the Planning Service. We all recognise that the planning system needs to be able to adapt more flexibly and quickly to the many challenges facing our society today.

The Executive are committed to doing what they can to grow the economy, and we all know that we need a planning system that helps us to do that. Members will be aware that the consultation paper 'Reform of the Planning System in Northern Ireland: Your Chance to Influence Change' was issued for public consultation on 6 July 2009. The proposals were widely publicised through the consultation period, and people were informed of the 11 independently facilitated stakeholder events arranged as part of the consultation process. Almost 500 people attended the stakeholder events, which were held across Northern Ireland, and an independent report was prepared by the consultants who managed and facilitated the events. In addition, more than 260 written responses to the consultation paper were received from a wide range of interests, from agents, architects and business and development interests to environmental groups, residents' groups and community and voluntary groups. The independent facilitator's report and the responses to the consultation were all considered carefully as part of the policy finalisation process.

10.45 am

In January 2010, I circulated my final proposals to ministerial colleagues for consideration. I can now inform the Assembly that the Executive have agreed the final proposals, and, in doing so, they have also agreed that we should begin to draft the necessary legislation to give effect to the reforms and to the transfer of the majority of planning functions to local government.

Members will be aware that the consultation responses ran to more than 200 pages, so they will be relieved to hear that I do not intend to share that level of detail with them today. However, I shall provide a brief summary of the final proposals. The Government's response to the consultation will be made available on the Planning Service website later this month, along with the final equality impact assessment at a strategic level.

Generally, the consultation responses indicated broad support for the majority of the proposals outlined in the consultation paper. As a result, the final positions in many areas reflect the proposals that were set out in the original paper. On some issues, respondents' comments were more mixed. By "respondents" I mean those who replied in writing and those who offered feedback through the facilitated sessions. On other issues, there was strong opposition to specific proposals. I shall highlight the nature of the response as I deal with the various issues.

The consultation paper asked whether, in future, planning policy statements (PPSs) should provide strategic direction and regional policy advice only, which would then be interpreted locally in development plans. That question received a fairly mixed response. However, a majority across almost all groups favoured the retention of some elements of operational policy in PPSs.

In the Programme for Government, we committed to having an up-to-date suite of PPSs in place by 2011. That will include a new PPS 1 which sets out the general principles underlying the planning system. Bearing that in mind and taking into consideration the mixed consultation result and the time and resources that are required to review, consult on and publish new PPSs, I have decided that we will not review our existing approach at this stage. After the transfer of functions, my officials will work with councils and others to determine how best to

manage the nature, timing and presentation of future planning policies.

Members will be aware that the consultation paper proposed a wide range of key changes in order to create a more flexible and faster local development plan system underpinned by earlier and more effective participation from the public and other stakeholders. Councils will be able to use the new local development plans to provide a clear and realistic vision of how places should change and what they will be like in the future. The plan will support that vision by indicating clearly where development, including regeneration, should take place and what form it should take. In addition, the opportunity to develop appropriate linkages with the new community planning responsibilities should not be missed.

The responses to the consultation paper indicated broad support for the majority of the development plan proposals, and, in most areas, we will proceed as indicated in the paper. I will not restate the detailed proposals today, but, broadly, I confirm that, under the new system, the plan will consist of two separate but related documents that will be prepared and adopted separately to ensure that early strategic direction is in place. Indeed, my officials have recently been in contact with colleagues on transition committees and transition management teams to agree arrangements to work co-operatively on pilot studies for several plans so that those can be progressed quickly when functions are transferred.

Furthermore, a more meaningful and effective approach will be taken to enabling interested parties and the local community to engage early in the plan process. A preferred options paper will be introduced as a basis for public consultation, and there will be a requirement that the plan process include a clear statement of community involvement.

There was opposition to the proposal that the Department should give examiners the power to determine the most appropriate procedures to be used when dealing with representations to the local development plan. The aim of the proposal was not to stifle debate at the independent examination or to stop certain stakeholders from contributing; rather, it was simply to enable the independent examiners to better manage the examination process.

A recurring theme among the responses was that the proposal would undermine the legitimacy of the public participation process and that the removal of the right to be heard orally would impact detrimentally on those with the lowest levels of literacy. After taking into consideration the comments made, the level of opposition and the perception that there may be a potential detrimental impact on some sections of the community, I have decided not to proceed with that proposal. My Department will consider other administrative ways by which the management of independent examinations may be improved.

The consultation paper set out proposals for modernising the planning application system. Those proposals were aimed at creating a more responsive, fair, predictable and efficient system by changing the culture of the planning application process to a development management approach; moving away from operating the planning system as a mainly regulatory process towards a more dynamic way of enabling and facilitating sustainable economic and social development; establishing a hierarchy of development based on a three-tier classification of developments, so that resources can be focused on those applications with greater economic and social significance through more proportionate decision-making mechanisms; and introducing new streamlined processes for applications within the hierarchy to front-load the process by promoting earlier pre-application discussion, improving the predictability of timescales and ensuring effective engagement of the local community and elected representatives at the pre-application stage.

As with the development plan, there was a lot of detail in the consultation paper, which I will not rehearse today. In general, there was strong support for the development management proposals from the consultation responses and the stakeholder events. For example, there was support for and we will proceed with the proposals relating to the following: the introduction of a new planning hierarchy; the three proposed categories of development — regionally significant, major and local — and their respective definitions; the statutory requirement for developers to hold pre-application consultation with the community on regionally significant and major developments; the introduction of the power to decline to determine applications where pre-application

community consultation has not been carried out or where the applicant has not complied with the requirements of pre-application community consultation; the granting of a power to enable district councils to hold pre-determination hearings for major developments and a wider power to extend that for other types of applications; the requirement for councils to introduce schemes of officer delegation for local applications post-transfer, thereby building on the hugely successful streamlined arrangements that are in place at present; the expansion of the list of statutory consultees; and the introduction of a statutory obligation on those authorities to respond within a specified time frame.

There was a mixed response to the proposal that the Department should be given the option to appoint independent examiners to hold a hearing of or inquiry into applications for regionally significant development. However, it is essential that the Department should retain that option in situations where the Planning Appeals Commission is unable to hold a hearing or inquiry or commit to providing an advisory report within an acceptable timetable. We will, therefore, proceed with that proposal.

In the consultation paper, we propose to reduce the normal default duration for planning permission and other consents from five years to three years but to retain the power to vary that. There was a slender majority in support of the proposal. However, after taking into consideration the consultation responses, the current economic climate and the slowdown in development, I have decided not to proceed with that proposal at this time but to revisit it post-RPA implementation.

A key element of our aim to ensure that there is a more proportionate approach to planning has included a focus on extending permitted development rights. The potential for extending those rights for householder development, non-householder development and small-scale renewable-energy generation was the focus of a comprehensive consultation exercise that finished in late January this year. More than 130 responses were received, and officials are analysing those with a view to finalising the policy and bringing forward the necessary legislation during the next business year.

The consultation paper proposed some fundamental changes to how the appeals

system should operate as well as changes to existing procedures. We will take forward the majority of changes that received clear support in the public consultation. However, I have listened to concerns that were raised about some of the appeals issues and will now outline the changes that I have made.

Most of those who responded supported the proposal to reduce the six-month time limit within which appeals must be made, although there were varying opinions on what it should be reduced to. Taking account of all the responses, I have decided that the appeal period will be reduced to four months rather than the two months suggested in the consultation paper. However, powers will be provided to change that through subordinate legislation at a later date, if appropriate.

Appeals are currently processed either by written representation, with or without an accompanied site visit, or by a formal or informal hearing, and the appellant can request his or her preferred method. In the consultation paper, we proposed that the Planning Appeals Commission should be given statutory powers to enable it to decide the most appropriate method based on published criteria. That proposal provoked one of the highest responses across the range of questions, and less than a third of those who responded supported it. A number of respondents expressed concern that the written representation method could disadvantage the one quarter of adults in Northern Ireland with the lowest levels of literacy. Opposition was also expressed during the stakeholder events. Having carefully considered all the responses and, in light of the widespread opposition and concerns that were raised, I do not intend to proceed with that proposal.

There was overall majority support for the proposal not to allow appellants to introduce new material beyond what was before the planning authority when it made its original decision, unless it could be demonstrated that the additional material could not have been submitted earlier. However, business, developers, the Planning Appeals Commission and agents and architects were opposed to that. Those who rejected the proposal viewed new material as a means of negotiation and addressing issues that would add flexibility to the system and allow it to respond to changing circumstances. I have taken into account the strong representations that were made in

opposition to that proposal and have decided not to bring forward any legislative change. However, my officials will look at lessons that were learned from the Scottish experience, monitor the Planning Appeals Commission's handling of new information, and, in the interim, draw the conclusions of the consultation and the issues raised in it to the attention of the commission.

Following the transfer of planning powers to the new district councils and in keeping with the theme of strengthening local accountability, the Department sought views on establishing local member review bodies in each district council to determine certain minor appeals. That proposal attracted minimal support across all respondent groups, with less than a third of respondents in favour of it. Those who opposed the proposal expressed concern that local councillors may not have the skills, knowledge, experience or impartiality required for such bodies to operate fairly and effectively. I have therefore decided that local member review bodies should not be introduced at this time, but the situation should be reviewed post-RPA.

On the basis of our assessment of the likely effects of third-party appeals on the planning system and of our objectives for planning reform, the consultation paper made it clear that there were no proposals to make provision for third-party appeals in the current package of reforms. However, I undertook to seek views on the issue before reaching a final decision. The question attracted a high response, and opinion was split, with almost 60% of respondents supporting the introduction of a third-party right of appeal and 40% opposing it. Most of those in favour felt that any third-party appeal rights should be restricted in some way. Many of the responses raised issues that need to be more fully explored. Taking account of the proposed changes to the planning system on the issue of front-loading the process through the promotion of earlier engagement with the local community and on the analysis of responses, I remain of the view that there does not appear to be an immediate and compelling reason to proceed towards making provision for third-party appeals in the current round of planning reform proposals.

Further consideration of the issue will be deferred until the extensive changes to the planning system under planning reform and the transfer of functions to local government are

given sufficient time to bed in. That will allow us to assess their impact and effectiveness before considering whether further changes may be required.

11.00 am

As I said, enforcement is integral to managing development. One of the fundamental elements of the planning process is the power to take action, where it is considered expedient, against unauthorised development and breaches of planning control. Otherwise, the credibility and integrity of the planning system will be undermined. Therefore, I intend to introduce legislation so that retrospective planning applications will attract a multiple of the normal planning fee. The final amount will be determined at a later stage and included in subordinate legislation. I also intend to proceed with the introduction of fixed penalty notice powers for breaches of an enforcement notice or a condition notice.

Although more than two thirds of those who commented supported the introduction of provisions on notification of initiation and completion of development, those opposed to it said that it could add to the workload of the planning authority without any significant gain. At the stakeholder events, although many people welcomed the proposals, some developers said that such a scheme would be unworkable. We will not proceed with that proposal at this stage, but officials will continue to monitor the impact of regulations that were introduced in Scotland in that area in 2008 and other recent enforcement measures in Scotland.

The consultation paper asked whether the Department should give further consideration to making it an immediate criminal offence to commence any development without planning permission. Just over half of respondents felt that the Department should not give that idea further consideration. There was a general recognition that such a power could unfairly penalise individuals who had unknowingly or unwittingly commenced development in breach of planning legislation. I have fully analysed the responses, considered all the key points and taken account of all other available and proposed enforcement tools, and I am satisfied that no further consideration should be given to that proposal. My Department will continue to use and to consolidate its existing suite of enforcement powers and give consideration to

measures that could help to ensure that levels of fines are commensurate with a breach of planning control.

The consultation document was also used as a vehicle to initiate debate on whether there is a case for seeking increased levels of contributions from developers to support the provision of infrastructure that is identified as important to Northern Ireland's social and economic development. The issue of developer contributions is not intrinsic either to planning reform or to the transfer of planning functions to councils. However, it was included in the consultation paper after agreement with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). The responses to the consultation indicated an appetite for seeking increased contributions, and more than two thirds of respondents supported that idea.

Given that infrastructure is funded and delivered by a range of Departments, including DFP, the Department for Regional Development (DRD), the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), funding and infrastructure responsibilities should be considered at Executive level. A separate paper will be produced and forwarded to the Executive in the near future to provide further details on the consultation responses. Regardless of which Department takes that work forward, I am keen to contribute to the role that the planning process might play in any future system of contributions.

The consultation paper also sought views on whether, following the transfer of functions, central government should continue to set planning fees, with consideration to be given to transferring fee-setting powers to councils after a review that will take place approximately three years post-transfer. More than two thirds of respondents were in favour of that proposal, and 87% supported the proposal that central government should have a statutory planning audit/inspection function in future. In light of that strong support, I am content to proceed with both proposals.

Views were also sought on culture change, capacity and related performance management issues. There was widespread recognition among respondents that the revised structures for the devolved delivery of the planning system will require a change in attitude among all stakeholders and the development of a new

culture. There was also recognition of the critical need to ensure that all key players and stakeholders have sufficient capacity to realise the full benefits of the reforms. We are already making progress through, for example, the introduction of the streamlined council consultation and, as I already mentioned, early work on pilot development plans.

My officials will continue to work with other sectors, particularly through the RPA implementation structures, to explore performance management issues and how best to enhance capacity in the system to ensure readiness for the changes that will arise through the implementation of the RPA and planning reform. I am also encouraged to note that other professional organisations, such as the Royal Town Planning Institute, are already considering their role in that respect, as it is clearly an area that involves many more players than my Department or the Planning Service.

As Members will be aware, views were also sought on the draft equality impact assessment (EQIA) at a strategic level, which was published with the consultation paper. Most of the responses received related to the specific reform proposals. I have indicated where I have taken those issues into account, with others, to influence the final position. We will publish the final EQIA at a strategic level later this month, alongside the Government's response to the wider planning reform consultation.

We also recognise the fact that there is a need to gather more relevant information on equality and planning. We have given a commitment to develop a monitoring strategy that will be implemented from 2011 onwards. We will take all the responses to the consultation process into account as part of the development of that strategy.

I appreciate the fact that my statement has been somewhat of a charge through a massive reform programme. All players in the planning system will experience significant change in adapting to new and different procedures and processes and, critically, in changing culture and mindsets.

In a statement to the Assembly on 14 September 2009, I said:

"The reforms that are proposed ... represent the most far-reaching changes to our planning system"
— [Official Report, Bound Volume 43, p22, col 1].

since the 1970s. I stand by that statement. We will make the necessary progress only if we have the right level of support from all stakeholders, including elected representatives, at every level.

Members will be aware that if we are to bring the proposed changes forward to 2011 to coincide with the transfer of the majority of planning functions to local government, we will have to work to an extremely tight legislative timescale. The final policy positions that I outlined will require primary legislation and a huge raft of subordinate legislative changes, all of which must be concluded before the dissolution of the Assembly in spring 2011.

Members will also be aware that, for a variety of reasons, we are well outside best practice in the delivery of the timetable for the legislative programme. However, we remain committed to doing all that we can to deliver the ambitious programme that has been set out and to transferring a fit-for-purpose planning system to local government in 2011.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mrs D Kelly): I thank the Minister of the Environment for his statement. He is right to conclude that he has brought an extensive set of planning reform proposals before the House. The Committee for the Environment faces a challenge to deliver on time its scrutiny of the proposed reforms and accompanying legislative requirements. It goes to show that early consultation can lead to a much improved and better-informed set of proposals.

I will address the planning policies that the Minister outlined in his statement. He stated that he had hoped, by 2011, to have in place an up-to-date suite of PPSs, including a new PPS 1. However, that will not now happen in that time frame. Will he give the House some detail about the new time frame that he envisages? Accelerated passage is not recommended practice for any Committee, and the Minister said that he wanted all the relevant legislation to be enacted by spring 2011. I would be grateful for some clarity on the time frame for that. I welcome the statement generally, but I want the Minister to give us some information on PPS 21, because many people in rural communities are awaiting the outcome of the deliberations on that PPS.

The Minister of the Environment: Mrs Kelly raises a number of issues. We still intend to

have a fit-for-purpose suite of planning policy statements in place by March 2011, which will include a revised PPS 1 that sets out the general principles for formulating planning policy, making development plans and exercising development management. The suite of planning policy statements, together with the revised regional development strategy (RDS), will provide a robust and consistent planning policy framework that will allow all new councils to carry out their planning functions.

I have completed my work on PPS 21; the matter is now with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and it will then go to the Executive. I hope that that will happen soon so that we can bring it to a conclusion. Further work has to be done on PPS 4 before it can be brought to the Executive. As regards the timescale, I want to work with the Committee as far as possible. We have had a good working relationship on all legislative proposals thus far, and I want that to continue to be the case.

The closer we get to March 2011 and the dissolution of the Assembly, the more pressure we will be under. The Committee will have to consider how it wishes to do things. If the Committee believes that something is not worth taking forward before March 2011, it may decide not to proceed with it. I am in the hands of the Committee in that respect.

Mr Speaker: As there is quite a bit of interest in the Minister's statement from all sides of the House, I ask all Members to be brief in their questions.

Mr Ross: The Minister will be aware of the huge backlog of planning applications in the Planning Appeals Commission. Will he outline how what he has laid out will impact on that?

He also referred to the massive challenge that local government will face in taking on additional planning responsibilities. What does he plan to do to help to build the capacity of local councillors and local government to deal with those responsibilities?

The Minister of the Environment: The Planning Appeals Commission has suffered the same difficulties as the Planning Service has, in that planning applications have more than doubled in a short space of time. The workload increased significantly, and, as a consequence, planning applications were not dealt with as quickly

as we would have liked. We cannot afford to leave ourselves in a position whereby the backlog keeps building as the Planning Appeals Commission works its way through it.

Independent examiners can be brought in to bring forward planning proposals, where appropriate. Some planning proposals can be quite controversial, and people will, therefore, call for public inquiries. However, if those public inquiries cannot be held for six months, a year or a year and a half, that will not be good for the economic or social development of Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is imperative that we are supported by an independent examination process that will ensure that the Planning Appeals Commission can be helped in that regard.

As regards capacity building in councils, I have already had an offer of assistance from the Royal Town Planning Institute, which is prepared to work with us on developing a training programme for councillors. Many councillors have considerable experience of planning issues, but we need to further enhance and embellish that experience. We intend to do that to properly prepare elected representatives in local government for their new and increased responsibilities.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, which I broadly welcome. Much progress has been made on the issue to date, and the Committee hopes that further progress can be made in a reasonable period.

I note the high level of interest in the third party appeal mechanism. In the absence of the introduction of such a system, what independent mechanism or mechanisms does the Minister feel should be in place to challenge a planning decision if a party feels that an application has not been properly assessed?

The Minister of the Environment: I am not fundamentally opposed to the notion of third party appeals. In fact, if people examine the records of previous Assembly debates, they will find that I have supported it. We are following a particular process of change to the planning system, and it involves a fairly fundamental change. We have decided to go with a mechanism to allow the community and voluntary sector to have its say at the start of the planning process. Instead of trying to stop the train when it is three quarters of the way down the line, they can get in at the start of the

process, exert their influence and have their opinions and voices heard.

11.15 am

In the statement, I made it clear that where satisfactory consultation had not taken place in the first place, councils could decide to reject the planning application outright without dealing with it. It is not a mechanism for lip service; it is a mechanism that allows the community to get fully involved in planning applications at the earliest point and to influence and change those planning applications for the well-being of the wider community.

I recognise that we cannot have both that and a third-party appeal mechanism at the end. It has to be one or the other. I want to give this system an opportunity to work. It will be for a future Minister of the Environment, if he or she is not satisfied with how it is working, to introduce a system that allows third party appeals. I am not necessarily opposed to third party appeals, but I want to give this system an opportunity to work first. It would not work if the process for community involvement applied at both ends.

Mr Beggs: I, too, give the statement a general welcome. Given the low level of public confidence in the planning system, it is clear that there is a need for change. The Minister advised that the changes to the new area plans are aimed at creating local development plans that are more flexible and can be realised quicker. It has taken an inordinate amount of time to put into operation the systems for the Belfast metropolitan area plan (BMAP) process and for the Larne, Ballymena and Antrim area plans.

Will the Minister confirm that the new area plans, which are to be developed by local councils under the new system, will still have to conform to the regional development strategy? That would prevent local councils racing to expand their green belt areas for further development and, thereby, also prevent the unplanned effect that that would have on development throughout Northern Ireland.

The Minister of the Environment: Planning policy is that area plans will be in general conformity with the regional development strategy. There can be change, but it should not be of such a substantial and significant nature that it wholly undermines the RDS. That will continue to be the case.

Mr Ford: I also thank the Minister for his statement and broadly welcome it. The Minister talked at some length about local development plans and, specifically, about establishing pilot studies. I declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council. At what point will the Antrim and Newtownabbey transition committee be able to engage in those pilot studies and deal with the hopelessly out-of-date plans, particularly those at the Antrim end? Will the Minister also confirm that the overall and final say on local development plans will rest with his Department and explain how that sits with court judgements on the need for independent environmental advice?

The Minister of the Environment:

Newtownabbey is under the BMAP, which should report to me next year. I sat on the Committee for the Environment with Mr Ford, and we were both critical of the BMAP proposals at that time. We did not believe that those would be delivered in the specified time frame of three years, and that was eight or nine years ago. The BMAP has not worked, because it has not delivered on time.

That is not good for developers, economic development, social development, environmentalists or community groups. It is not good for anyone not to have development plans delivered within a reasonable time frame. I have indicated to both Newtownabbey Borough Council and Antrim Borough Council that we will work with them on a joint project. I will correspond with the Member in writing as regards the timescales of that project.

The introduction of councils as the lead bodies on development plans will provide substantial independence and allow us to deal with the overriding issue of the lack of independence at central government level, which was raised in relation to a number of plans. I should mention that the people who were engaged in a court process against us in Craigavon have withdrawn it, and I hope that that will also be the case with the northern area plan. That will allow both area plans to proceed, which will be good news for everyone.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's statement. If all these proposals come to fruition, there will be fundamental changes to planning. In his statement, the Minister referred to permitted development, and I have raised that issue in the past. He said that officials are looking at the consultation responses. Will he give us an idea

of the type of development that will be permitted in the domestic situation? Will he also comment on the changes to enforcement? As many of us have heard in the past, Planning Service enforcement has been weak.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member please come to his question?

Mr I McCrea: Does the Minister feel that the changes that he proposes to enforcement will tackle that problem?

The Minister of the Environment: About 20% of planning applications could go towards permitted development, such as small-scale renewable energy projects, solar panels, small-scale turbines and small-scale single-storey extensions that do not impact on neighbours. There may be opportunities to leave many small planning applications exclusively in the hands of building control. That is right and proper. We need to reduce the amount of red tape and bureaucracy that exists in Northern Ireland and adopt a much more flexible system for our community.

As far as enforcement is concerned, the introduction of a premium fee to deter commencement of development prior to the submission of a planning application will discourage individuals who do things first and seek planning permission later. The size of the fee will be decided later. We will continue to use our current wide-ranging enforcement powers and seek to consolidate and enhance them where required.

It has been perhaps 30 years or more since there has been change as significant as this. We should not wait for a further 30 years before we do something significant in planning. We have the Assembly, and we no longer have to go to Westminster to plead for legislation. This House can deal with such matters as and when they arise. Where fundamental problems are identified, the House should be responsive to them.

If there is something in my proposals that does not work as envisaged in three or four years' time, Members can change it. We do not have to wait 30 years. We can change things as they need to be changed and introduce legislation as we need to do so. This House will work more credibly in the future if that is the case.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Minister's

statement. The recent Public Accounts Committee report on the Planning Service showed that there is a low level of confidence in it. Customer satisfaction stands at only 32%. I hope that that will be addressed.

Planning helps with building our economy. What conversations has the Minister had with local councils about the handover of planning functions to them in 2011? Will the new system be fit for purpose? It is important that planning facilitates the economy and that the new system works. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of the Environment: The councils and Planning Service have put in considerable effort through the strategic leadership board and the transition committees. We have identified a number of council areas where we can commence development plans under the new system, and preparatory work is under way in order that those plans will be ready to roll when the powers are transferred to local authorities.

Consistency, openness and transparency are all critical to any local authority's planning system. Political accountability at every level is also critical to ensuring widespread confidence in the planning system. As part of the transfer of planning functions to councils, ensuring that appropriate codes of conduct and best practice arrangements are in place will be important, because they will provide assurance to the public that the system is open, fair and transparent. They will also provide protection to our councillors and planning officers from unfounded allegations. I have often had to rebut unfounded allegations made against planning officers, even when I was a local councillor. I have never seen any evidence of planning officers being on the take.

Work on governance and related issues is being taken forward through the review of public administration implementation structures, in which planning officials are involved fully. Central to that work is the statutory code of conduct for councillors, which my officials are developing in consultation with the local government sector. Planning Service will provide a planning section of that code of conduct, the detail of which will be contained in the statutory code of conduct, which has yet to be agreed. To support the code, Planning Service will also draft supplementary guidance to assist councillors when dealing with planning matters.

The guidance will include information on such issues as lobbying of planning officers by councillors.

Mr Bell: I congratulate the Minister for the success of this statement. I welcome the cross-community consensus for the progress that the statement details.

Given the critical nature of planning and efforts to secure economic growth and regeneration, does the Minister accept that the proposals will be widely welcomed? Furthermore, will he inform the House how we would make progress if we were to find ourselves, through no fault of the Minister's, in a 26-council model?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for his question. We are looking at the 11-council model and at the 26-council model. It is absolutely critical that greater powers be transferred to local government and that greater efficiencies be delivered. The amalgamation process can form part of that, but it is absolutely critical that we deliver on powers and efficiencies as we work through the system. Many of the functions could be transferred to 26 councils, but it is still our aim to transfer them to 11 councils.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome much that is contained in the Minister's proposals and the hard work that the Department put into them. I look forward to seeing the changes that will make Northern Ireland a better and more efficient place for business.

I welcome the Minister's comment about pre-application consultation with the community and the fact that he wants to see a culture of change. One of the great concerns on the ground is that every developer is trying to pack in as much as he can, while local communities are chipping away at the consultation. How will the Minister give them strength, and what does he mean by "major developments", for which councils will be given the power to hold predetermination hearings? It is essential that we ensure that consultations work with the community, so how will the Minister achieve that?

The Minister of the Environment: If the current planning applications in the streamlined process, which it is proposed will be extended, were taken out of the system, they would generally be regarded as minor applications. To some extent, the process could be extended to minor applications. Strategic applications are very

often applications for shopping centres and large leisure facilities and those that step out of the development plan proposals and become article 31 planning applications. Major applications involve large-scale developments of housing, such as substantial numbers of apartments, and so forth. Those are the types of applications that are deemed as major and, therefore, require community consultation.

What may be a major development in a village such as Dunadry, in which I know the Member has an interest, may not be major in Antrim, Lisburn or Craigavon. Therefore, account has to be taken of the consequences that a development will have on a particular community.

Therefore, I suspect that a proposal to build 60 units of housing in a village with 200 units of housing would be major, whereas in another area it may not be major. That must be considered further, but, at this point, we probably have to be more sympathetic to people who wish to be consulted than to developers.

11.30 am

Mr Dallat: I also welcome the Minister's statement, particularly if it delivers on its promise of a more responsive, fair, predictable and efficient system. I am particularly interested in the Minister's desire to retain the right to appoint independent examiners to hold a hearing or an inquiry into regionally significant planning applications. In a truly non-sectarian way, is the Minister minded to appoint independent examiners to look at the Knock Golf Club planning application?

The Minister of the Environment: I will treat that question with the contempt that it deserves. We are discussing how to move the planning system forward and how we can tackle the lack of confidence in that system. Only around 30% of people are content with the current planning process. We have gone through a huge amount of work and community consultation in developing these proposals, and I believe that there will be widespread community support for the changes. It is simply pathetic that an individual Member cannot look at the proposals and come forward with a question that is relevant to the debate. Instead, he engages in his own prejudice on a particular planning application about which he appears to know very little.

Mr Shannon: I was looking forward to a debate on planning, Mr Speaker, but you reminded me that only questions on the Minister's statement are allowed. For that reason, I will focus on relevant issues.

As the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee has said, the recommendations relating to planning appeals indicate that there has been a lot of disquiet about the Planning Service, which the Minister acknowledged in his earlier reply. By and large, I welcome the Minister's response on the issues that he has brought to Members' attention. Will he assure me that his Department will accept pre-inquiry applications on smaller planning applications? In relation to the culture change and capacity-building to which the Minister referred, it is clear to everyone —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr Shannon: Does the Minister agree that it is clear to everybody that we need an attitude of can do, rather than cannot do? Those are my questions. Thank you for your graciousness, Mr Speaker.

The Minister of the Environment: In giving 99% of responsibility for planning applications to local government and divesting the Minister of the Environment of that responsibility, I believe that the drive, motivation and delivery of planning will come from local authorities. They will give their planning officers clear and specific instructions about the targets that must be met. If those targets are not met, local authorities will be asking why. Local authorities will also be identifying the resources required to deal with planning applications in their areas. In the same way that they have been extremely successful in delivering building control — in less than two weeks in most cases — I believe that local authorities can and will deliver on the planning system extremely successfully.

Mr McDavitt: I welcome the thrust of the Minister's statement. We all agree that public confidence in the planning system is at an all-time low. I know that the Minister agrees that many communities feel utterly disenfranchised by the planning process, not least the 700 people who objected to the Knock planning application and now feel left out of the system. I want to ask specifically about third-party appeals. We note that 60% of respondents favoured the idea of third-party appeals, and

I welcome the Minister's commitment to the principle. Surely it is time for him to consider including a trigger mechanism for third-party appeals in the draft proposals as a backstop. Despite the Minister's best laid plans, on occasion, a third party will require redress to him or to an appeals mechanism, as was the case in recent weeks at Knock golf course.

The Minister of the Environment: It is funny that the Member should have raised that question because, only recently, I was in the Malone/Eglantine area of his South Belfast constituency, where people felt disenfranchised by a process that did not work for them. Those people were extremely critical of the Planning Service and of the senior planning officer who was involved in developments there, several of which, I might add, were supported by the local MP.

I sometimes ask people whether they want one of the various third-party appeal processes to be adopted. Such a process involves several elements: the first party to deal with a planning application makes a strong presumption in favour of development; third-party appellants must pay costs should they lose; there is a short timescale in which to lodge a third-party appeal; initial decisions on planning applications are delivered in about eight weeks; and anyone who has not engaged in the planning process cannot lodge a third-party appeal. If we were to decide to take an alternative route, that is the kind of third-party appeal process that I would consider. However, I am not sure whether Northern Ireland is ready for that, and I will not go down the route of providing a third-party appeal process that would stretch out planning applications for two, three, four or five years. When such a system existed, it was not good for the economy, social infrastructure, environment or communities.

A third-party appeal process must deliver quickly and efficiently, and, if we choose to go down that alternative route, we would have to drop the present front-loading exercise. Therefore, the proposed route must be given an opportunity to succeed. If it does not work satisfactorily, the next mandate of the Assembly will have an opportunity to assess and modify it. At present, the proposed process is the best model, and I look forward to working with the Committee on developing the relevant legislation.

Ms Lo: The Minister mentioned the residents of South Belfast. When they read his statement,

many of those residents will be disappointed by what he has to say about enforcement, the third-party appeal process and the criminalisation of those who commence a development without planning permission. On several occasions, the Minister referred to community engagement. With respect, I do not think that he listened to everything that the community said. The Minister said that front-loading meant that there was insufficient evidence to support the introduction of third-party appeals. Will the Minister confirm that a front-loaded planning application is required only for major projects? Would a planning application for an apartment block of eight or 10 flats require front-loading?

The Minister of the Environment: I reiterate that the planning system cannot be loaded at the front and at the back. We are attempting to deliver a planning process that is fit for purpose. The Planning Service has experienced major difficulties in dealing with the number of planning applications that it receives. Applications must be dealt with in a way that is fair, impartial, efficient and consistent.

That is what we are setting out to achieve with these proposals. People should have the opportunity to make their case, and planning officials should have the opportunity to assess those applications according to the planning policies that are in place. Public representatives will have the opportunity, and rightly so, to represent the public on those issues. That is the best way forward at the moment, but, as I said, I am not ruling out something different in the future. However, at the moment, we are going through a fundamental change process which will give the community a far greater stake than is currently the case.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee referred to its highly critical report on the Planning Service, and the Minister will be aware of the report, which highlighted major issues and concerns around inefficiency and mismanagement. That clearly reaffirms and creates issues and concerns right across the whole spectrum of local government, including ratepayers, public representatives and the wider public. Therefore, will the Minister assure us that proper management and delivery structures, as well as the required efficiency, will be in place to ensure that the Planning Service is, and will be, fit for purpose come 2011?

The Minister of the Environment: There are a whole range of activities taking place, including these proposals, and they will greatly assist us in achieving many of the efficiencies that we have referred to, such as the streamlined processes. Specific teams have been put in place to deal with the backlogs in Craigavon, and the Chairman of the Committee will know about the backlog that existed there some time ago. However, the planning process that is being conducted by the Craigavon office is as different as night and day from what it was a number of years ago. Therefore, a number of steps are being taken.

However, I wish to make it clear that when the issue goes to local authorities, the buck will stop with them. If they do not deliver for the local community, it will be for the local community to indicate to their councillors and to their public representatives that the responsibility has been vested with them and to ask why they are not delivering. I am of the opinion that they will deliver. The expertise exists in the Planning Service and in local government to ensure that what we are asking them to take on, and what they want to take on, is something that they will do well.

Mr Gallagher: I understand from what the Minister said that he has moved draft PPS 21 along the system and off his desk. In relation to the very vexed issue of new dwellings for the farming community, under draft PPS 21, those dwellings have been located facing silo pits and with slurry lagoons close to back doors. In signing off, will the Minister tell us if he has given any further options for people who are caught in those difficult circumstances?

The Minister of the Environment: I very much look forward to making a statement on draft PPS 21 in the not-too-distant future when Executive clearance has been received, and I very much look forward to filling the Member in on the exact proposals for draft PPS 21 at that point. A number of changes have been made to the draft policy, which will be considerably better when it is produced.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Meeting in Misuse of Drugs Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that junior Minister Newton wishes to make a statement.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Newton):

In compliance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, I wish to make the following report on the seventh British-Irish Council (BIC) meeting in misuse of drugs sectoral format, which was held on Wednesday 24 February in the Tynwald in the Isle of Man.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was unable to attend. The Executive were, therefore, represented by myself and the Minister for Regional Development, Minister Murphy MP MLA. The report has been endorsed by Minister Murphy, and he has agreed that I should make the statement on behalf of both of us.

11.45 am

Mr Adrian Earnshaw, a Member of the House of Keys and the Isle of Man's Minister for Home Affairs, hosted the seventh BIC ministerial meeting in misuse of drugs sectoral format in the Tynwald buildings, the Isle of Man's government buildings in Douglas, Isle of Man. The meeting was chaired by Mr John Curran TD, Minister of State with responsibility for the national drugs strategy in Ireland. It focused, in particular, on how to effectively manage the challenges associated with substance misuse in the prison setting. The state of Guernsey was represented by Deputy Hunter Adam, the Health and Social Services Minister, and the state of Jersey by Deputy Anne Pryke, Health and Social Services Minister. The British Government were represented by Mr Matthew Bullard, head of drug supply reduction and the mandatory drug testing strategy of the national offender management service, and Mr Dominic Flint, senior policy adviser in the drug strategy unit of the Home Office. The Scottish Government were represented by Mr Alan Johnson, deputy director of drugs and community safety.

The British-Irish Council was established under the strand-three provisions of the Good Friday Agreement as a forum for its members to exchange information and to discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of relevant member Administrations. Ireland is the lead Administration in the Council on the misuse of drugs.

The meeting provided a good opportunity for Ministers from each member Administration to focus in detail on two key challenges related to the issue. The first of those challenges was the need to counteract the availability and use of drugs in prisons, and the second was the need to provide a range of treatment services in prisons that are comparable to those available in communities, which will thus enable prisoners to address their problem drug use.

During detailed discussions, Ministers exchanged information on their experiences and on best practices utilised across their jurisdictions. Many of the exchanges focused on improvements to security procedures aimed at preventing drugs getting into prisons. At the same time, it was emphasised that such action could be effective only when combined with the provision of drug treatment to prisoners. The importance of continuity of treatment for people following their release from prison was also emphasised. Ministers envisaged that if those key issues could be successfully addressed, it would facilitate their respective Governments impacting positively on the lives of prisoners, which would result in a reduction in the levels of reoffending and would continue to reduce problem drug use in society.

We, as Ministers from each of the BIC member Administrations, took the opportunity to utilise the BIC forum to exchange information on the sale and use of psychoactive substances, which are known as legal highs. The Ministers discussed the various measures planned and implemented across the jurisdictions and the outcomes of those interventions. Given the ongoing concerns around psychoactive substances, not only among the Administrations of the British-Irish Council, but across the EU and beyond, the Ministers directed that the BIC sector on the misuse of drugs should retain the use of psychoactive substances as a standing item on the agenda for the foreseeable future.

The Ministers reviewed the successful work carried out by the Council in that sector during 2009 and focused on important areas. The meeting in Guernsey focused on youth justice initiatives. In addition, Guernsey's response to psychoactive substance use was presented and discussed. The meeting in Ireland concentrated on drug-related death indices, and a major part of the meeting focused on developing effective policy responses to drug deaths.

The Scottish meeting dealt with the prevention of drugs misuse. The presentation and discussion centred on innovative approaches that have been taken in Scotland on drugs information and advice initiatives and the Scottish drugs awareness campaign on cocaine.

Ministers agreed that the meetings provided a useful forum for sharing, in a focused and practical manner, the detailed expertise and knowledge of people who are involved in prevention of drugs misuse throughout the British-Irish Council region. It was also noted that in addition to exploring specific themes in depth, each meeting had facilitated exchange of information on general developments and initiatives in respect of the misuse of drugs.

Ministers noted and agreed that work in 2010 will focus on the following areas: in Ireland, the policies of Administrations in tackling alcohol misuse; in the UK, new directions for drug and alcohol policy in meeting new challenges; and in Guernsey, community action in dealing with drugs, alcohol and antisocial disorder.

The meetings also facilitate strengthening and consolidation of ongoing co-operation and exchange of information, experience and best practice between members.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I report that the next BIC meeting in misuse of drugs sectoral format will be in spring 2011.

Mr Ross: I thank the junior Minister for his statement on an issue which, unfortunately, is all too prevalent in the media.

One issue that has been given a great deal of attention lately is that of so-called legal highs. What action is being taken to deal with legal highs and the people who supply them, particularly those who are able to change the make-up of drugs ever so slightly to try to get round existing laws?

I noted that our national Government were present at the meeting. Do they plan to make any currently legal drugs, such as mephedrone, illegal?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. He is quite right that, indeed, substances that are described as legal highs have been prominent in the press during the past number of weeks.

I can recall only one incident in Northern Ireland relating to those substances, which occurred in your constituency in Londonderry, Mr Speaker. At the time, the person involved was selling those substances. Whether one believes that that is legal, or responsible, is another question. However, that gentleman was shot. I cannot condone the shooting, which was disgraceful, but there is, obviously, major concern.

The Republic's Minister of State with responsibility for drugs, Mr John Curran, was able to state a number of incidents. He said that in Dublin, 100 shops sell legal highs. Until it is agreed that action must be taken, it is only a matter of time until that situation evolves in Northern Ireland. Mr Curran quoted an article in 'The Irish Times', which reported that someone can phone up and have drugs delivered up to 4.00 am in the manner that one would phone for a takeaway from a fast-food outlet. Mr Curran further reported that when a fire occurred in one such shop, its owner, when allowed to return to his premises by the police, retrieved a substantial amount of money from the safe; reputed to be around €500,000. That shop, in a Dublin facility, sells legal highs.

Legal highs are substances that are not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. They are self-administered to achieve an altered state of mind. It is the duty of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to advise Ministers on appropriate measures to be taken in respect of drugs that are, or appear likely to be, misused and cause, or may cause, social problems.

Following the publication of recent reports on the availability of mephedrone and given that evidence of the drug's harmful effects is emerging, the ACMD is looking at the issue as a priority and is due to report in early 2010. The ACMD's assessment of the harmful effects of drugs will be a key consideration in any decision to bring forward proposals to control any drug.

The Government's approach is to act to protect the public from the dangers or otherwise of harmful drugs. The availability of so-called legal highs changes the environment in which some young people now find themselves. It is completely legal for them to go to a shop and buy the so-called legal highs across the counter. Therefore, it is imperative that appropriate legislation is introduced that deals not only with current trends but with foreseeable ones. No one really knows how those drugs can reappear in greater strengths or in different substances that may have the same or, indeed, a worse effect, if I can use that term.

Legislation was introduced on 23 December 2009 to make it illegal to possess or distribute a range of substances, including GBL, 14BD, BZP, a group of substituted piperazines, a range of synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists, 24 anabolic steroids, and, wait for it, two growth promoters. That is the situation at the minute.

The States of Guernsey acted extremely quickly and identified that those substances lead to antisocial problems in the community. They were able to take the effective action of banning them as imports. That action was taken in Guernsey because of the concerns that they had for their young people. However, we cannot do that in Northern Ireland at the moment.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the junior Minister for his statement. After listening to the statement, I am sure that every Member will agree that it is encouraging that the misuse of drugs will be on the agenda of future BIC meetings.

Given that Ireland, through John Curran TD, is taking the lead role in the BIC on this issue, how can we make progress through the North/South Ministerial Council or even introduce parallel legislation to eradicate what is a worrying problem? I clarify that I did not ask that question because of any fixation that Sinn Féin has with "North/Southery".

How can we, as a legislature, and, indeed, through local government and communities, learn from the experience of our partners in the BIC and bring that knowledge to the people in our constituencies?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for her question. I understand exactly where she is coming from about sharing information and the importance of the issue

being on the agenda of future BIC meetings. It is important that, whenever the meetings take place, we ensure that we have the highest possible level of representation. I got out of the meeting that Northern Ireland does not have all the answers, Dublin does not have all the answers and Guernsey had one answer. It was requested that Northern Ireland share the information that we have with other Council members. We also requested that the other Administrations share information with us, because it is through the sharing of such information that we learn. That is the case whether the matter in question is drugs misuse in prisons or the drugs misuse that creates a situation in which people end up in prison. The sharing of that information is vital, as is keeping the matter on the agenda.

I attended the meeting because the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was not available. That was the second time that I have done that. We need to have the highest possible representation at BIC meetings.

12.00 noon

Mr Kennedy: I thank junior Minister Newton for his statement. Is he able to give an assessment of the current level of drugs available in Northern Ireland's prisons or young offenders centres, and has he any information on whether hard drugs are available? The matter is of grave concern to Ministers and Members. How can this be taken forward in action to deal with this considerable problem?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I will try to answer the Member's question in two formats — the scale of the misuse of drugs in prison and the treatment available in prison.

Substance misuse in Northern Ireland's prisons reflects the general level of misuse in the community. Although generally drugs misuse in Northern Ireland is lower than in the UK as a whole or Ireland, there is a small but significant drugs misuse population in Northern Ireland's prisons and justice settings. The drug report for 1 September 2009 to 30 November 2009 showed that there were 141 prisoners on drug misuse charges; 242 prisoners had a drug dependency on committal, 166 of whom had an addiction to cannabis; and 278 prisoners had a dependency on alcohol. During 2008, there were approximately 400 individual drugs finds in the prisons and, as a result, there have been 265 instances of prisoners being charged with

possession under prison rules. In the same year, 82 domestic visits were terminated due to the passing or suspected passing of drugs, and 47 prisoners have been placed on closed visits.

Treatment and prevention services in prisons are overseen by the Health Service, led by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which provides a range of statutory treatments, intervention and prevention services in a prison setting. Where necessary, the trust brings in community and voluntary sector providers to help deliver the services. Members will recognise that, although people with a drugs habit are in prison, it is important that they receive the same support as they would receive outside a prison.

There is also a key issue in the continuity of services between those receiving treatment in the prison setting and the service that they receive post-release. The fact that the South Eastern Trust has taken over responsibility for addiction in prison settings has helped to improve care pathways and increase interaction and liaison between the services. Work is ongoing between the Northern Ireland Prison Service's addiction services and the health and social care trust to improve the existing care pathways. In addition, there is significant collaborative work with the Probation Board, the PSNI and the trusts.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the Minister will agree that this region is in the midst of a drugs crisis that is exacerbated by the arrival of legal highs. The junior Minister does not need to travel to Derry to buy a legal high; he can buy one 500 yards from the gates of the Stormont estate and across the city.

I have two questions for the junior Minister. First, the second non-attendance in a row of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is something that many Members will note with concern. Perhaps the junior Minister will tell us why the Health Minister was unavailable to attend. Secondly, many aspects of the matter fall between the stools of health and justice. We all look forward to the early devolution of justice powers, so that we can completely control the drugs issue. Specifically, when can the House expect the Executive to take action on legal highs, including a ban on imports and distribution, the monitoring of shops and retail outlets distributing them and

the education of young people on the potential associated health risks?

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to the end of his question.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I am sorry, but I got a bit lost as to what Mr McDevitt's questions were during his statement to the House. Therefore, the House will understand if I do not answer fully.

I have already said that the highest possible representation is required at BIC meetings and that this is the second time that I have had to undertake the role. I can only inform the House that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was unavailable to travel to the meeting.

I was unaware that one can buy legal highs 500 yards from this Building. I wonder how the Member is aware of that, and I hope that he has shared that information with the authorities. It was implicit in his remark that he would do so.

I cannot remember what the Member's third question was.

Mr Speaker: I will allow the Member to ask it again.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you for your discretion, Mr Speaker. When will the House see some specific proposals from the Executive in the areas of education and the control of legal highs?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I covered that point in my statement to the House. I expect to see those proposals early this year.

Ms Lo: I was particularly interested in the point that the junior Minister made about the work that will be done in the UK this year that will focus on a new direction for drugs and alcohol policy. Will he explain that a little more? For example, will it include legislation on underage drinking or on the setting of minimum prices for alcohol?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): We are concentrating our work very much on education. The Member will be aware of the 2008 report, which examined ways of reducing the supply of drugs in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and that was the information that we shared with the other Administrations at the BIC meeting. That report recommended that we

increase staff training, improve visitor and prisoner search strategies in and around prisons and improve staff monitoring. That report produced 28 recommendations, one of the most successful of which was the introduction of passive drug dogs.

The remit of the Member's question is much wider. I was impressed by work that was undertaken on the Isle of Man, and, although the community there is not huge, the scale of what had been done there with schoolchildren, schoolteachers and parents of pupils is significant. Each of those groups received information that was tailored to their understanding, and that helped to educate them about various aspects of drug taking and the use of legal highs in particular. We can learn something from that approach, and, although we were dealing specifically with the use of drugs in our prison population, education to prevent young people from getting into trouble and going to prison should begin at a very early age.

Mr Bell: I welcome the positive work that Minister Newton has done in relation to psychoactive substances. Having been a social worker working with young people for 21 years, I agree with all of what my colleague the Member for South Belfast has said about the damage that those substances do to young people. In future meetings will the Minister look towards the model used in the USA, which allows for some substances to be more immediately classified? The problem in the past has been that, when a substance is classified, the compound and the name are changed, and then we need to go through the whole legal system to get it banned again. Will the Minister look towards proactive models in the USA, which would allow us to get substances that damage children and families banned more quickly?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. From his background as a social worker, he will have seen many of the problems emerging. The point that he makes is a valid one, and I tried to cover it in my statement and subsequent answers. Some of the compounds that are used are actually for growing plants. They are not suitable for human consumption, yet we are feeding them to young people and not-so-young people. How can we address the fast-changing drug types and methods of drug construction and manufacture? If we can learn from other parts of the world, I am keen to encourage that.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the statement from the junior Minister. I also believe that it is a shame that the Health Minister was not in attendance, because it is a very important issue that we are dealing with. Many people in our communities die every year because of drug misuse. Therefore, I urge his party colleagues to strongly lobby him to make sure that he is present the next time that the matter is discussed.

What will the Executive's focus be with regard to tackling drug misuse in 2010 when it comes to organisations from the community? In my constituency, the Falls Community Council has done tremendous work over many years tackling drug and alcohol misuse. One initiative that they worked on dealt with taxi companies that offered a dial-a-drink service — a type of service that was mentioned earlier — and they were very proactive in making sure that that was stopped. What initiatives will the Executive work on to ensure that organisations such as that across the North will be supported in the coming year?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. It is apparent from what the Member has said that what may have started from the ability to dial up alcohol at 3.00 am and get it delivered, according to Mr John Curran's experience in Dublin, has now moved into the supply of types of psychoactive drugs. No matter where we go on the matter, it will be necessary for us to bring the community along with us and, where there are community concerns, to listen to those.

That is related to the question that Ms Lo asked. Although we were dealing with the use of drugs in the Prison Service, underpinning all that is the work that is being done and needs to be done at all levels in the community to ensure that community leaders and those working directly with young people — youth leaders or school teachers — are totally aware of the long-term effects. Sometimes those effects are not so long-term: those substances can have a fairly immediate effect on personality and can cause brain damage. It is a wide approach, and we need to encourage that.

Mr Shannon: I thank the Minister for his statement. The frustration that we all have is with the fact that there are a great many people who abuse the system in relation to drugs and substances. Last week, I had a meeting with

the PSNI and some residents in Newtownards about mephedrone, in particular. As the Minister said in response to my colleague Jonathan Bell, mephedrone is a plant food. It is clear that people are breaking the law inadvertently — if that is the way to put it — because the law allows them to do so. If it is said that the plant food is not for human consumption, that keeps people right. It is clear that people are affected by taking plant food and mephedrone. What are the Executive and the North/South bodies doing about that issue? It is not just an issue for Newtownards in the middle of my constituency —

12.15 pm

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Shannon: It is an issue for everyone.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. I refer to the answer that I gave to Mr Alastair Ross. The Member is quite right that it is a growing problem. I outlined the number of drugs that, in December 2009, were made illegal to possess or distribute. People have the ability to manufacture those drugs, to change the compound slightly and the names of the drugs and to market them legally.

When I was in the Isle of Man, I was reminded of a case that was taken recently by human rights campaigners. In China, a guy who was deemed to have been engaged in the illegal importation of drugs into the country was put to death for that activity. A human rights campaign ensued on the basis that he had not been sentenced correctly and that he was not competent to answer questions. Nevertheless, the Chinese Government put him to death. Many of the drugs in Northern Ireland are manufactured in and exported from China. That is the extent of the problem that we are addressing.

Mr Dallat: I will leave aside the argument about the absence of the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Junior Minister Newton is a splendid substitute who speaks with a great deal of compassion. Given that no further meetings in the misuse of drugs sectoral format are scheduled for another year, does he agree that the drug barons will not be too worried? The message needs to go out that we intend to put their lights out rather than those of the thousands of people whom they have destroyed.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I share the Member's concern, and I thank him for that

compliment. He is right to say that the drug barons will not be worried, but the officers who are associated with the work will continue with it. We will make progress on the issues. If the Member wishes to be updated, I am happy to do so individually.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank junior Minister Newton for his statement. Reference was made to the work of the South Eastern Trust. Has the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety brought any proposals to the Executive on how the misuse of drugs is dealt with in prisons and on the treatment of prisoners?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I will have to come back to the Member on that. I am not aware of any such proposals being made since I took office, but I am happy to clarify the position for the Member.

Mr A Maginness: I congratulate the junior Minister on his comprehensive and important statement that arose out of the BIC meeting. It emphasises the importance of collaboration among all the jurisdictions in these islands.

Two matters disturb me. First, a mechanism must be available under secondary legislation to deal immediately and effectively with legal highs as they come on the market. Does the junior Minister know whether there has been any discussion about legislative mechanisms to deal with that issue instantly? Secondly, is he satisfied with the range of medical and psychiatric services that are available in prisons and detention centres to treat prisoners with drug problems?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): Earlier, I referred to the response in Guernsey, where it was decided to ban the import of psychoactive substances because Departments were concerned that the problem would be much worse by the time the legal system had allowed them to take the appropriate action. However, given that it is not a devolved matter, we cannot do that. However, I understand the Member's concern, and I will ask officials to check whether we can address that through secondary legislation.

The Member was quite right to raise a question about whether the treatments that are available to drug-addicted prisoners ensure that they are not addicted to or reliant on any drugs whatsoever when they return to society.

However, those treatments work only if the support that is provided to prisoners in the Prison Service is comparable to that which they receive on their return to society. Indeed, it is not sufficient for drug users to leave prison clean; they must be supported after they return to society so that they can, hopefully, play a much more constructive role than they did before. Although that area is not my responsibility but that of the Minister of Health, I believe that a holistic approach should be taken to individuals and their problems.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also thank the junior Minister for his statement. I believe that we will reap the benefits of the collaborative approach that has been taken, because we will be able to tap into the wealth of experience from other jurisdictions. The Minister mentioned the import of substances from China, and I am aware that a number of people are using the Internet to buy drugs from China. One of the difficulties is that an information gap exists between one level of society and the people who work in local communities, and that situation also applies to the issue of resources. How will the junior Minister guarantee that the information that we gather here is filtered through to communities and that those communities are resourced in a way that allows them to start tackling the problem head-on?

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank the Member for his question. He raised a point about the use of the Internet to buy and sell drugs, which may not have been mentioned yet. That is another worrying aspect, and one that is extremely difficult to control.

The Member asked how we can engage fully with the community. There is no doubt that going down the legal route of banning a substance will not fully address the problem. One SDLP member said that people are able to buy legal highs 500 yd from the gates of Stormont. People can just walk in, buy those substances like they would sweets from a sweetie shop and they can be taking them within 10 minutes. The Isle of Man's initiative involving schoolteachers, schoolchildren and parents is one that we should consider. Information must be shared at community level to make people aware of the difficulties that drug use will cause to individuals in the longer term. That strategic approach is extremely important.

The misuse of drugs is something that all the trusts will have to address, because it is not a problem that will go away easily. We need to address the problem before we destroy the lives of many of our young people. Indeed, the problem involves not only young people but more mature people. Essentially, the health and social care trusts will have to address the issue.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.26 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Final Stage

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Budget Bill [NIA 8/09] do now pass.

I am out of breath; I made it here just in time. Today's debate is a rerun; it must be the fourth time that we have debated this matter. I hope that everyone is worn down and worn out. I will not take up too much of the House's time with today's Final Stage. All the issues were thoroughly covered during the Supply resolutions debate and at Second Stage two weeks ago. In fact, the debate at Second Stage extended to some eight hours and was an Assembly record for a Budget Bill. Therefore, I hope that Members are well talked-out by this stage.

I thank Members for their contributions, which ranged far and wide — some further and wider than others — but which covered many important issues. I may not always agree with Members' remarks, but I appreciate that genuine economic and fiscal concern for Northern Ireland and its people lie behind them. I thank Members and Committee Chairpersons for their input.

Today's Final Stage signals the end of this financial year, and, as we turn our minds to 2010-11, I am acutely aware of the challenges that lie ahead. The Executive and Assembly are addressing some of those challenges, such as the Northern Ireland Civil Service equal pay claim and the funding of water and sewerage services, in the review of 2010-11 spending plans that is under consideration. At the same time, the Executive have agreed to reduce the opening level of overcommitment to zero to provide additional scope to address pressures in the 2010-11 in-year monitoring process, including, no doubt, the likely shortfall in planned departmental capital receipts.

In the face of all the challenges that lie ahead, and as we plan for a more constrained financial environment in the years ahead, I call on all Ministers and their Departments to continue

fundamentally to examine service delivery with a view to identifying and delivering further efficiency savings that can be recycled into front line services. Moreover, I call on all Assembly Committees to play their part in the process. Committees should continually examine areas of departmental spend and their spending priorities in the Programme for Government. That should not be curtailed to monitoring rounds or public expenditure exercises but should be a work in progress for each Committee.

We should get to know our Departments and get down to the business of fundamentally examining what public services are delivered by each Department; every area of spend by Departments; how services are delivered; whether there is room for improvement with more efficient and effective delivery; whether a service is a low priority; whether a service is still relevant; and whether a service is even in line with the Programme for Government.

In the current fiscal environment, tough decisions lie ahead. We must cut out wasteful and imprudent spend and make decisions about priorities for the future. Unfortunately, we will not be able to fund everything that we want to fund; we must make difficult choices and, perhaps, disappoint some people. In that context, the Executive proposed the establishment of the invest-to-save fund to support Departments in producing efficiencies and to prime the pump. The Executive recognise that the delivery and realisation of savings sometimes requires upfront investment. I am sure that Members will appreciate that fact and continue to work towards that end in their respective Committees.

In conclusion, as we move into 2010-11 and face all its challenges, I am hopeful that there will be an ever-increasing financial reality and maturity in the Chamber. Our minds are already turning to the provisional out-turn in June, followed by the preparation and laying of resource accounts and the ever-present issue of underspends. As an Executive, we have achieved much, but there is still much to achieve. Many challenges wait around the corner for the next financial year.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Weir): Like many Members, I have sometimes been cast in an unusual role in the House. Today, I find myself cast in the slightly unusual role of Jennifer McCann for the duration of the debate — it is not an

unwelcome role. I will speak on behalf of the Committee, after which I will make some brief remarks in a personal capacity. I am acutely aware of the Business Committee's indication of the need to keep our representations today succinct. All parties have respected that and have restricted the number of contributors to the debate.

Members will be aware that the Budget Bill provides the statutory authority for expenditure in 2009-2010 as specified in the spring Supplementary Estimates, which take account of what happened during the year's monitoring rounds. The Bill includes the Vote on Account, which allows public expenditure to continue in the early part of the next financial year until the Main Estimates for 2010-11 are voted on by the Assembly in early June.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence on the Budget Bill from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on 10 February 2010. That evidence session was the culmination of a process of scrutiny by the Committee of in-year monitoring rounds in 2009-2010, which, in addition to an explanation of the Department's position, included briefings on the strategic and cross-cutting issues relating to public expenditure following the outcome of each monitoring round. Following that evidence session, the Committee recommended that the Budget Bill be granted accelerated passage.

I want to take a few moments to outline the Committee's ongoing work on the 2010-11 financial position. Tomorrow, the Committee will formally consider its co-ordinated report on the review of the 2010-11 spending plans for Northern Ireland Departments, which will reflect the views of all 11 Assembly Statutory Committees. As Members heard during the Committee's recent take-note debate on that review, a number of Committees expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with shortcomings in the information provided by Departments on their revised spending proposals for 2010-11. The Committee for Finance and Personnel will aim to identify measures that can help to improve engagement on budgetary issues and avoid a recurrence of that situation.

The Committee will soon commence the next stage of its ongoing inquiry into the role of the Northern Ireland Assembly in scrutinising the Executive's Budget and expenditure. That will

include a review of the resources available to assist Statutory Committees and Members in general to undertake Budget and financial scrutiny. The Committee will put forward a set of practical recommendations for enhancing the Assembly's capacity in that regard.

The Committee also anxiously awaits the outcome of DFP's review of the Executive Budget process for 2008-2011. That review was due for completion by the end of 2008, and should inform the establishment of an effective process for determining future Budgets, once the review of the 2010-11 spending plans has been concluded.

It is important that the Assembly does not lose sight of the medium to long-term strategic financial issues that affect the Executive in minimising and managing any further public expenditure pressure in the years ahead. In that regard, the Committee will report to the Assembly shortly on the outcome of a detailed investigation into the drive for greater public sector efficiency and effectiveness. However, that is for the future. On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I support the motion.

I welcome the Budget Bill's Final Stage. It is, as the Minister said at Second Stage, a Budget Bill made in Ulster. Despite the pressures and the occasional gloomy forecast, we have a Budget that balances expenditure. There is no doubt that the various Departments have had to face a range of pressures, including the £370 million combination of capital and revenue that had to be found. However, that came about as the result of two factors; the Civil Service back pay settlement, and meeting the cost of water services.

It is undoubtedly right that those pressures are met, but we should be aware that there is an opportunity cost in meeting those commitments. That has been shown by the £370 million that has been sought. I suspect that we will revisit that, particularly the issue of water charges.

In looking to the future, we must ensure that, from a departmental point of view, there are no sacred cows that remain exempt from efficiencies. Consequently, I praise the work that the performance efficiency and delivery unit (PEDU) has undertaken so far and the Executive's commitment to the invest to save initiative. If spending a certain amount of money upfront will allow greater resources to

be allocated and released in future, then that is to be welcomed. The value of that thorough re-examination was evident in the announcements yesterday on the February monitoring round, which showed that there is still room for better financial management in some Departments.

As part of the self-denying ordinance, I promised to be brief. Consequently, I will practise what I preach. I urge Members to support the motion.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I will follow Peter's lead by being brief.

The Budget Bill has been thoroughly debated, and the Minister has made reference to the record amount of time that Members have devoted to the consideration of the proposals and recommendations therein. I look forward to the parties now supporting the Bill's Final Stage.

The Bill brings us into the final year of the three-year Budget period that was agreed in spring 2008. As well as authorising the Bill, we have to begin to turn our minds, hopefully in a constructive and strategic fashion, to planning the budgetary process for the next Assembly term.

I have noted other parties' concerns about the current arrangements. On reflection, I am confident that the agreed Budget has remained true to the aims and objectives of the Programme for Government, and that is reflected in the proposals in the Bill. We have to take account of the changing economic circumstances, which could well have blown us off course. We have addressed the original expectations of the Programme for Government despite the downturn and its potentially calamitous impacts.

In the next term, we have to make early decisions so that we have proper planning to decide whether there will be a one-year budgetary process or a three-year process that reflects the outcomes of the comprehensive spending review. The process should be timely and open, and we should be prepared to look at the existing arrangements, including in-year monitoring. We must continue to address value for money. One key issue that I think reflects the maturing political process here is that government is seen to be more agile, responsive and authoritative in its reactions. The key element in providing cohesiveness, coherence and a sense of

ownership and transparency is dealing with all of that in a timely and open fashion.

I commend the proposals. My party will support the motion. I commend all colleagues who contributed to the debate.

Mr McNarry: I support the Final Stage of the Budget Bill. That is not a case of capitulation, exhilaration or conversion. It is more a case of acknowledging the Minister's honest and practical approach, not just to what I have been saying for months, but to the realities that he is now accepting in the Budget. Hopefully, that will make for an improved working relationship in the days and months ahead.

Today's Budget is likely to come in for major revision during the next 12 months and beyond. That is partly down to the post-election spending cuts that we all expect. Those have the potential to affect Northern Ireland disproportionately because of the high level of public sector employment here.

2.15 pm

I appeal to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider the option of a Civil Service pay freeze or at least a freeze on pay increases as an alternative to job cuts, if that is what is in the pipeline. The protection of jobs is a priority for the Ulster Unionist Party, and it must also be the priority of the House. A Civil Service pay freeze may prevent job losses, which should be the last resort. The Minister must tell us whether he is on course to cut public sector jobs or whether he wishes to put an alternative to the House, either today or in due course. That is the elephant in the room as far as the Budget is concerned.

I was surprised at last week's outburst by the Minister of the Environment, who bemoaned the fact that he could not sack civil servants and was being forced to redeploy them. He must not have considered the impact that Civil Service job cuts would have on an already fragile economy. Such arrogant comments give rise to the public consistently branding the DUP as the job-cutting party.

Undoubtedly, the future of public sector employment is a big issue for Northern Ireland, and the Minister of Finance and Personnel must come clean about his thinking on the matter. I appreciate that he needs a bit of time, but drift is the enemy of good public policy, and we must

move away from that. I do not want decisions to be made in haste simply because they have been put off repeatedly. We need to develop a strategy to handle the looming situation, and we are honour bound to preserve and protect as many jobs as possible.

Should we move significant amounts of work out of the public sector and into the private sector? When that happened in the Water Service, jobs were lost. The issue must be properly debated and considered. Should we hit targets to enlarge the private sector by moving public sector work into the private sector just for the sake of a shuffle? Surely, the Minister is not thinking about doing that. Regardless of the approach that the Minister adopts, he will be left squarely responsible for public sector jobs and public sector job cuts. That is the real issue that lurks behind the Budget.

We must develop a more hard-headed, value-for-money approach. That is the type of comment that the Minister made during past debates, and I would welcome such an approach from him now. However, we need to extend that approach to how we spend the public's money. We must veer away from the wish-list politics that we have had to endure. We must return instead to making sensible assessments of the potential impacts of public spending, of investment and of the money that is available for expenditure. Given the current financial climate, it is also essential that we set achievable targets.

That spells out the need to revise the Programme for Government, something for which I have argued repeatedly. That is the other course of action that we must take to create a dynamic fork of government spending that creates and protects jobs, generates business and gives people a real return for their tax pounds. In that sense, the Minister of Finance and Personnel should become our country's fund manager, and, by creating a new agenda for revitalising our economy, he must get the most from taxpayers' money and the block grant allocation.

I fear that our finance policy is reactive and lacks vision because of inherited fault lines. If we do not address that policy properly, only interesting hardship lies ahead. I would prefer that we looked forward to interesting times, made more interesting, as they will be after the general election, when events bring new pressures, irrespective of who is in Government. In the light of what the Finance Minister has

told us, the Budget is just about competent. I suspect that he has been unable to tell us the whole story. We are reaching a stage of economic oppression, and the Minister knows that he needs to bring his challenges to the House and explain how he will deal with them.

I support the motion.

Mr McDevitt: Like Mr Weir, I stand in the place of another — Mr O’Loan. I apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to the Minister; Mr O’Loan is unavoidably elsewhere today. That said —

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We are glad.

Mr McDevitt: It means that you get the political speech, Minister.

The SDLP remains unconvinced that this Budget is the best that the Minister can produce. My party disagrees with sticking to the three-year budgetary cycle, blind to the global recession, the evidence of which is all around us. We would rather be debating the Final Stage of an emergency Budget that could deal with the realities facing our region, prioritise the young, the sick and the elderly, and do more than pay some lip service to the economy and jobs.

In the early stages of the Bill, I noted the Minister’s comments about the way that the Executive have been able to insulate many in society from the worst impacts of the shrinkage of the public purse. I do not doubt the Executive’s commitment to do that, nor the Minister’s determination to do so. However, because of the structure within which we have debated the Budget Bill, we have done little more than put a plaster over the problem. That is a pity; we could have done so much more.

We in the SDLP remain concerned about the extent to which this budgetary process is predicated on efficiency savings and asset sales which are yet to be realised. We note the warning that the Minister gave earlier that one of the pre-emptive shortfalls will occur in that very area. We also have serious concerns about the ability of this budgetary framework to properly defend front line services.

Despite the fact that the process is wrong, inefficient and inadequate, we must try to address the serious shortcomings that we know will exist in the year ahead. They are no more evident than in health, social services and public safety. They have left 90-year-olds with around

15 minutes of care each week, and they have left many in County Down concerned about the ability of the new Downe Hospital to fulfil its potential and to have an A&E service. They leave many elderly people across our region to worry about whether and how they will get a hot meal. They also bring ward closures and endless stories of cutbacks in mental health, cardiac care and other aspects of the social and health system.

The Budget does not offer an adequate response to those people or to the working families that face the brunt of this recession. As I noted previously, it makes little reference to the working poor and says little to the hundreds of families now homeless as a consequence of the economic downturn. It is myopic about the opportunities for efficiency savings in health, education, economic development, tourism development, innovation, environmental management or any other aspect of our regional polity which could benefit from greater co-operation with the Republic of Ireland.

Health managers, businesspeople and working families will want to see a much greater commitment from across the Executive in the year ahead to tackling the significant crisis that this region faces. Irrespective of community backgrounds, people want to see a commitment that extends beyond the “made in Ulster” proposition; a commitment that considers that Ulster, in the words of John Hewitt, is on the island of Ireland and that the island of Ireland is part of a great archipelago which some call the British Isles and others prefer to call “these islands”. That archipelago, of course, is part of a continent. To deny any of those realities is to deny the essence of Ulster. This Budget seems to be incapable sometimes of fulfilling the true opportunities for co-operation on this island and further afield. We call for a radical rethink in the year ahead.

I have no doubt that every party in the House shares a determination to protect and to support the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in defending front line services. However, I am sure that we all share the frustration and annoyance that he has yet to bring forward any proposals for how efficiencies could be sought in his Department in order to deliver the commitment to protect front line services. I agree with what the Minister and Mr Weir said about the importance of small but significant organisations such as PEDU in the public

service. We have to have the courage to know that no Department is a castle. No Department is beyond investigation or opinion about where efficiencies could be found. How can we support front line services and put patients first if the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will not share the basic information that is necessary for us to be able to collectively do that very thing?

That is another reason that we need a new Budget. As the financial leader in the Executive, our Finance Minister needs to be able to reconstruct the public finances in this region so that he can differentiate properly between essential important services and those that are perhaps hidden in big budgets.

The Hillsborough agreement between the DUP and Sinn Féin affirmed that there was a:

"shared belief in the importance of working together in a spirit of partnership to deliver success for the entire community."

Those are fine words indeed, and we will all support them. However, we ask that those words become the reality of financial and economic management in the year ahead. Whenever the Executive and the two big parties talk about putting the economy first, they should really mean it. They should challenge the assertion of the independent review of economic policy that there is no link between what was said in the Programme for Government and the reality of our Budget. We talk about the economy, but we do not really do very much about it.

The SDLP will, of course, support this Budget. We will support the paying of the salaries, the running of the services and all the practicalities. However, that does not mean that it is the best that Mr Wilson or this region is capable of.

Mr McCarthy: I apologise for the absence of my colleague Dr Farry, who has had to leave. He thrust two pieces of paper into my hand, and I can barely read them. However, I will do my best. I see that the Finance Minister is laughing; he is probably relieved that Stephen Farry has gone.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We think that Stephen has bother reading his notes.

Mr McCarthy: You are absolutely right.

Mr McNarry: Will you give way, Kieran?
[Laughter.]

Mr McCarthy: I will give way.

I am reading directly from what Stephen gave me. The final rounds of the debate have been long and largely good natured but serious. We support the Final Stage. We have to ensure the continued funding of Departments. We have already made clear our concerns about budgets. We have stressed the failure to address the cost of division in this society. We need to rebalance our economy and to protect our public services and local jobs. The Executive do not have the right balance between revenue raising and spending cuts. The entire burden is on spending cuts. There is a need for tough decisions and more than just rhetoric.

I will add my comments. I am concerned about the lack of funding for our rural roads, which is a matter that I raised during questions to the Minister of the Environment yesterday. Here we go again: the Ards Peninsula. I am sure that Mr Wilson has been to the Ards Peninsula, which is particularly dangerous if travelling by motorcycle.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Especially if Jim Shannon is driving.

Mr McCarthy: I appeal for more funding for our rural roads simply because they are dangerous. There is no doubt about that. I mentioned it briefly to Conor Murphy in the voting Lobby yesterday, and his response was to get him more money.

The man who has that money and holds the purse strings is listening to what I say. I am sure that Mr McNarry will agree with me when I say, on behalf of all Strangford constituents, that we need more funding for our roads, as well as for health and all the other services. Therefore, that is my —

2.30 pm

Mr McNarry: Will the Member include the Moss Road in Ballygowan in his plea?

Mr McCarthy: Of course I will include all roads.

I hope that the Minister is listening to me. It is a serious problem, and we want to see as much improvement as possible.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to conclude the Final Stage.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. You caught me by surprise. I thought that a few more Members were yet to speak, but I thank Members who

contributed to the debate, which, thankfully, has been a bit shorter than the Bill's Second Stage. Members are clearly exhausted. Mr Farry had to retire before the fray had even started, as did the Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, although she may have been exhausted after her lunchtime walk. However, she had Mr Weir stand in, and he did an excellent job.

I thank Members for their comments, and I will address some of the points that were made. I again emphasise the work that the Committee did in scrutinising and providing its views on the Budget. I accept that the Committee's work has been made a little difficult. Many of the other Committees were not able to provide information in full to the Committee for Finance and Personnel because a number of Departments have not yet produced their line-by-line plans to address financial pressures next year. It really is not acceptable that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Department for Regional Development have not produced their spending plans.

Our Assembly does not have an opposition, so Committees perform a great deal of the scrutiny and, to a certain extent, the opposition role by holding Ministers to account. It is difficult for Committees to do their job without information. Therefore, it is important that the required information be made available to Committees so that they can do their work properly. In his comments on behalf of the Committee, Mr Weir talked about its review of the Budget process and its involvement and engagement in the budgetary role. I look forward to the Committee's reports on the Government's proposals for the review of 2010-11 spending plans and on its inquiry into the Budget process and the resources that are available to support the Assembly. We will bring a report on that subject to the Committee for its consideration.

Mr McLaughlin pointed out, rightly, that we must now look at the budgetary process for the next three years. That will be difficult, because, at the minute, we are peering into a very dark glass. We do not possess clear information about what future departmental expenditure limits will be. Therefore, to plan Budgets ahead requires some guesswork. However, the first step is to review how we deal with the budgetary process. When the financial implications of

Government decisions at Westminster become clear and as the new process is implemented, perhaps we can move on.

I agree with Members who said that the budgetary process must look further ahead. It cannot be a year-on-year process. Departments need a degree of certainty. At least the three-year budgetary process enabled planning. The message that I get continually from industry, particularly from construction, is that having a three-year capital programme enables it to plan investment and to consider which projects are likely to be available to it.

Linked to that is the need to respond to changing situations with agility. I believe that the process that we have undergone and what we are discussing today demonstrate the Executive's willingness to look at situations that have changed and respond accordingly.

The only comfort that I took from anything that Mr McNarry said came at the beginning, when he said that, although he had not capitulated or been converted and was still critical, he at least acknowledges the reality of the situation, which is that we had to review the Budget, and the revised Budget recognises the changes that we had to face.

Mr McNarry then began to criticise. One thing that he said struck me, which was that we need an honest and hard-headed approach to future difficulties. I hope that no one will ever accuse me of not giving a hard-headed and honest response to the difficulties that lie ahead. However, some of Mr McNarry's suggestions for the way forward were not so much hard-headed as looking for easy answers. However, when one delves behind what initially seemed attractive, it becomes apparent that he did not provide much of an answer.

First, Mr McNarry suggested that, instead of cutting jobs, we should consider a pay freeze. I do not think that he said that from a position of ignorance, because I have explained the situation and, when we discussed the matter at the Executive, his leader asked whether we could consider a pay freeze and how much money that might save. On the face of it and given the cost of government wages in Northern Ireland — they account for around 65% of our spending — it seems an attractive proposition not to allow any wage increases in order to produce significant savings. However, one must then look at the reality of the proposition. How

much control do we have over the wage bill? The only part of government wages over which the Assembly and I, as the Finance Minister, have direct control are those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, which accounts for about 22,000 out of more than 260,000 public sector staff. Therefore, when it comes to wage negotiations, we do not have control over most of the wages of public sector employees. The majority of public sector wages are determined through national wage negotiations. For example, we do not determine the wages of teachers and nurses.

Secondly, long before this Executive were set up, the Northern Ireland Civil Service entered into pay agreements with its 22,000 employees, so there is a contractual element to their pay, which progresses along pay scales. Increments account for about 2·4% of the wage bill, which equates to a 2·4%-a-year cost increase. We are not even able to suspend those increases because they are a contractual obligation.

Thirdly, when it comes to making tough decisions about wages, everything is fine until there are protests about it. Only last week, one of the Member's own Ministers, despite an Executive decision that we should not pay bonuses to civil servants at a senior level, applied to me for a 4% bonus payment for such people. I suspect that it was easier for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to turn it down than for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to do so.

Mr McNarry: I am indebted to the Minister for spinning this out in the manner in which he has been doing. Perhaps he would prefer to address what I actually said, which was to face up to the challenge, or is he telling us that his preference is to cut jobs? I asked him specifically to consider ways to avoid jobs being cut.

I appreciate that there are obstacles. However, are they all insurmountable, or is the Minister saying that he has no choice and that he is not prepared to choose anything other than cutting jobs? In light of what the Minister said and what he has brought to the Department — he mentioned honesty and truth — would today's debate not be an opportunity to set some examples about what can be done? I appreciate that there will be hard choices.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not been spinning. I have been explaining because I do not want the Member to remain in the darkness with his ignorance of the matter.

He said that, instead of cutting jobs, we could freeze pay.

Mr McNarry: Are you going to cut jobs?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have an obligation to Members to show that it is not a choice simply between freezing pay and cutting jobs. If the easy option were to freeze pay and make huge savings, the Member would have made a valid point. However, I am not spinning. I am trying to explain to him that, should the Assembly decide to freeze pay, there will be no huge pot of money because our powers over pay in the public sector are limited.

What can we do? I tried to illustrate to the Member that we have made decisions. Do not forget that I froze bonuses to people at the top end of the Civil Service, despite the fact that the Senior Salaries Review Body recommended those bonuses and that they had been implemented in other parts of the United Kingdom. I did that to try to save money here, to avoid that spend, to set an example and to try to get the bandwagon rolling in other Departments.

Mr McNarry: The House agreed with you.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The House absolutely agreed with me. Therefore, if such decisions can be made, we will not run away from them. However, where there is no possibility of something being done, let us not pretend that it can be done. That gives people only a false hope that there is a solution.

If we can restrain pay increases, we will go down that road. There will probably be a national directive on the issue, and we are in negotiations with the trade unions for the 2009-2010 pay period. However, it is up to individual Ministers to decide how they will make any required savings and efficiencies in their Department. In some Departments, a huge part of the budget is spent on wage costs, and, if that Department identifies that things can be done better with fewer people or by moving things around, that will be done. If efficiency savings can be made and if we decide to use fewer people, much of that need will be addressed through the processes of natural wastage and redeployment, if possible. Compulsory redundancy will be the last resort. As I said earlier, that is why it is important for individual Ministers to come to their Committee and tell it how they intend to implement the savings that their Department has to make.

Perhaps Mr McNarry should be talking to the Minister from his party who has not brought the savings to the Committee.

2.45 pm

Mr McNarry: I am asking you.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member can intervene when I am finished. One of the Member's colleagues is the last person who would allow me to say how his Department should make efficiencies. Indeed, he would be the first to criticise me, and we would probably have a barrage from his party colleagues in here criticising me for paddling through the minutiae of his Department. The Executive make a Budget decision collectively, and that is what we did. It was collectively agreed. It was not Sammy Wilson's Budget; it was the Executive's Budget.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister to refer all his remarks through the Chair.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am speaking through the Chair, but I was speaking with my back to the Chair. I like to have face-to-face contact with the Member when I am having a go.

The Executive decide the Budget. Once that decision is made, it is up to individual Ministers to decide how they will apply the savings in their Department. My Department and I were criticised because we asked too many questions about where the swine flu money was going and whether it was going to be given back. We were criticised for footering around and for asking questions about when the money was going to be given back. That is why it is important that, once the Budget has been agreed, Ministers bring forward their spending plans and indicate how they intend to make their savings.

The Member might think that the easy answer is to freeze wages and that, hey presto, there will not be any need to worry about any other savings. However, I hope that I have at least explained to him — not spun it or made excuses — why that is not the easy answer. If he wanted hard-headed explanations, he has got a hard-headed explanation, not spin. It would have been easy for me to say that we would look at freezing wages and that, hopefully, that would mean that we would not have to make redundancies. In three or four weeks' time, however, people would be telling me that I had misled the House, because I knew that it was

not going to be as easy as that. That is why I have taken some time to explain the matter to the Member.

Mr McNarry: We are moving from spinning to waffling. It is always a sign that the Minister is in trouble when his explanations float somewhere up there in that big, high ceiling. I understand his explanation, but I want to bring him back to the question of whether he will introduce job cuts in his Department to deal with parts of the efficiencies that are required there, not to mention in the other Departments. Are we on that road? Will job cuts be introduced under the Minister's direction?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It seems that, every time the Member gets an explanation that he does not like, he considers it to be waffle. If he does not like the answer that he gets, that does not mean that it is waffle. It is fact that my Department controls only a certain percentage of wages. It is fact that we have —

Mr McNarry: The Minister's Department —

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I will come to my Department in a minute or two, when we will see how well the Member has read his papers.

It is fact that pay progression accounts for 2.4% of increased cost every year. It is fact that the rest of the public sector wages are negotiated nationally and are therefore outside the control of my Department or, indeed, any in Northern Ireland. That is not waffle; that is fact. If the Member does not like that and it upsets his little theory that, somehow or other, if wages are frozen, there are no more difficult decisions to make, that is up to him.

Sometimes, it happens that the Member turns his back on reality, only to find that he must then repent of his ways. For example, his arguments were so devastated that the House has not heard mention of black holes for months. The Member found out that his black holes never existed and that he had been imagining them. My Department has been able to balance the Budget. That is what the process in which the Assembly is engaged is all about. We are finalising a Budget that has taken account of money coming in, money that is available and costs. My Department has been able to present a Budget that has no big black hole in

it. That silenced the Member. His latest claim, therefore, is that that is waffle.

I wish to deal with the point that the Member made about my Department. I supplied the Committee for Finance and Personnel, of which he is a member, with a paper that outlined how DFP would make savings. The paper outlined implications and where savings would be made. It was made clear that some savings would be made through reducing the number of posts. The Member may not remember that, or perhaps he did not read the paper. If he had, I suspect that he would have given the Assembly figures for the number of posts that would be redeployed or changed in my Department. This may be what is wrong with the Member: he gets an idea into his head, yet he never tries to check the facts. He should do his homework. I used to have to say to youngsters in school that, before they come to class and ask me stupid questions, they should do the work, and then they might not ask stupid questions. If the truculent pupil — I was going to say “child” — at the back of the classroom who does all the shouting and is the teacher’s worst nightmare did his homework first, he might not have to ask the kind of questions that he asks.

The fact is that, if there are savings to be made during the next number of years — savings that the Member may know more about from his conversations with his Conservative friends — they will have to be made in a combination of ways. Let us be hard-headed and honest about that. Let us not pretend that there is an easy way out.

I want to deal with Mr McDevitt’s comments. He spoke for almost 15 minutes. I counted them. At the end of his speech, he agreed with me. He spent 15 minutes explaining why the Budget is bad, yet he agreed with it in the end. He came to the correct conclusion, even if he took a circuitous route.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, I remind you that Question Time begins at 3.00 pm.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Right. Quickly, then.

Let me just go through Mr McDevitt’s remarks. He disagrees with having a three-year budgetary cycle. I have already responded to that issue. There needs to be certainty, which the three-year budgetary cycle provides. However, changes are required, and we have made those changes.

Secondly, Mr McDevitt talked about the need for a radical rethink, which included more money being spent on hot meals; cardiac care; the accident and emergency unit at Downe Hospital; mental health; hundreds of homeless people; and environmental management. I scribbled down two other points that I cannot make out. If the Member wants to remind me what the other two issues were, I am happy to let him do so.

Mr McDevitt: The need for a radical rethink was perhaps reflected in the exchange that the Minister had with Mr McNarry, when he accepted that we have little control over such a big part of our cost base, namely our wage bill. Is it the Minister’s opinion that we are too dependent on UK-wide negotiations for salaries, particularly at senior levels and some professional levels, and that we should, in fact, be moving towards a more regional approach to pay?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The trade union friends of the SDLP would not be happy about regional pay agreements, which they have resisted for many years. I can see merit in regional pay agreements, but it should not be forgotten that they also have implications.

Rather than being a radical rethink, the issues that Mr McDevitt mentioned are part of a fantasy wish list. All those issues are worthy, but he did not make one suggestion as to how we should redirect resources to pay for them. The Member wants those issues to take priority, but from where should we redirect the resources? A more balanced and helpful approach would have been for the Member to suggest where the resources should be redirected from.

I know that the SDLP made suggestions for an alternative Budget, but, as I reminded the Member on a number of occasions, its suggestions represented a change of about 1% in current spending. That was the radical rethink that we got from the SDLP. It would not have enabled us to reprioritise and spend money on the issues that he talked about.

Mr McCarthy stood in eloquently for Mr Farry. He read his notes beautifully.

Dr Farry: That was the short version.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Yes; it was a short version. Had Mr Farry been speaking from those notes, it would have taken him one hour. Mr McCarthy got through Mr Farry’s notes

in about three minutes. I ask him to please pass his notes on to Mr McCarthy in future to save time. I always enjoy debates with Mr Farry, though.

Mr McCarthy mentioned rural roads. I know about the state of rural roads, and I talked about that the other day. Roads Service received £15 million in the December monitoring round. Spending on roads accounts for 40% of our capital budget. Spending on roads in Northern Ireland is 39% higher than in England. Therefore, spending on roads is fairly generous. However, it could always be argued that there is never enough money spent on anything. We have given some priority to spending on roads because it is an important part of our infrastructure.

I thank Members for taking part in the debate. I am glad that we have got to the Final Stage of the Budget Bill. I am sure that the House is also glad. I commend the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget Bill [NIA 8/09] do now pass.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Industrial Heritage

1. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what his Department is doing to promote our industrial heritage.(AQO 865/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr McCausland): National Museums Northern Ireland is committed to the interpretation and promotion of our industrial past. The refurbished Ulster Museum has a spectacular display tower that showcases the quality and scope of the national collections. It is prominently positioned on the ground floor of the museum and is the focal point for the display and interpretation of a number of iconic objects, including a nineteenth-century reeling machine used in the linen production process.

In addition, the gallery displays, at present, a narrative that acknowledges and conveys the significance of the key industries that formed our industrial heritage. In particular, the redesigned Belfast gallery uses photograph collections of National Museums Northern Ireland to convey a strong sense of the lives and working conditions of the many thousands of men and women who were employed in the linen, engineering, shipbuilding and other industries.

The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum houses a wide range of industrial heritage, including the successful exhibit, the flight experience, which celebrates Northern Ireland's connections with the aviation industry. The Transport Museum also includes a maritime collection, the highlight of which is the Titanic exhibition. There is also an increasing emphasis on web presentation and engagement.

Mr Neeson: I thank the Minister for his response. As he will know, when the Ulster Museum was being refurbished, some major industrial artefacts were removed. What plans has his Department to display the articles that were removed? Does he agree that the development of the Titanic signature project could provide an

opportunity for the promotion of our industrial heritage?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

The sheer size of the machinery to which the Member refers, and which was always very impressive when one walked into the old museum, made it impossible for it to be accommodated in the refurbished Ulster Museum. It is currently in secure storage and, as National Museums develops its collection management proposals, that issue will be addressed. Those artefacts are a vital part of our country's history, and it is true that, however good the photographs may be, they are no substitute for actual artefacts that make an impression on the visitor.

As I said in my original answer, the display tower in the refurbished museum will be the focal point for the display of a number of iconic objects. However, it is the intention that, in due course, an appropriate location will be found for the piece of machinery that was associated with the linen industry.

Mr K Robinson: I have listened carefully to the Minister's response. He knows as well as I do that what we see in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, the Ulster Museum and other places round the country is but a pale shadow of Northern Ireland's world-class industrial heritage. Will the Minister look at the position of HMS Caroline, the third oldest warship afloat in the world, which is sitting in Belfast and could form the basis of a museum that indicates not only our industrial past, but also our maritime past?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I appreciate the Member's interest in HMS Caroline, and it is shared widely across the country. HMS Caroline has served in Northern Ireland as a training ship for the Royal Naval Reserve, and she is still a commissioned ship of the Royal Navy. At present, the navy is considering the future of the ship. My Department convened a group of stakeholders on 28 January 2010 to discuss options in relation to HMS Caroline on a without prejudice basis. The Royal Navy, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Department for Social Development have agreed to collaborate on the development of a strategic outline case for the future use of HMS

Caroline. I am sure that we all join in wishing that initiative well.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister for his positive answers so far. However, does he share my view that we have neglected our industrial heritage over the past decades?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I agree with my colleague on that issue, and I share his concern about the preservation of our unique and rich industrial heritage. In response to an initiative from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, my Department is finalising the development of a museums policy. Beyond that, it will examine specific areas, including industrial heritage, in more detail.

Industry was one area that differentiated Ulster from the rest of this island, and Belfast was one of the great industrial powerhouses of the British empire. Industry also formed part of the background to unionist opposition to home rule, and all such moments in history should be commemorated, celebrated and remembered. I am also in favour of that because many of the entrepreneurs who promoted those great industries were from Scotland or of Scottish descent, including the founder of shipbuilding in Belfast, William Ritchie from Saltcoats.

Cultural Tourism

2. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline his vision to increase cultural tourism by promoting the rich vein of Irish history, culture and tradition; and how he will communicate this vision to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment to underpin the tourism strategy. (AQO 866/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

As Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I am committed to the promotion of Northern Ireland's shared history, and I recognise the diverse range of cultural identities that makes up our local community. Those identities must be represented and promoted in a balanced and inclusive manner. It is in that context that Northern Ireland will increase its cultural tourism product.

The opening of the brand new state-of-the-art Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in the Titanic Quarter is scheduled for May 2011 and will be a highly significant event for the promotion of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage. The greatly enhanced public and

exhibition space will allow PRONI to become a key venue for cultural heritage events that can be used to promote our shared history, culture and traditions. The Ulster Museum has also been refurbished recently at a cost of £17.2 million, and it seeks to tell the story of our people from earliest times through to the present day.

The Member will also be aware that the draft tourism strategy recognises the significant contribution that my Department makes to infrastructure, events, and recreation and leisure activity. On that basis, I have been invited by Minister Arlene Foster to participate on a steering group to monitor the progress of the implementation of that draft strategy.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. It is generally agreed that cultural tourists spend more money here than standard tourists. Therefore, it is vital that all Departments work together in developing the cultural tourism product. In my area —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should come to his question.

Mr W Clarke: I was just trying to set my question in context. What engagement has there been between the Minister, the Minister of the Environment and other stakeholders in the development of the tourism product?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The key point is the final one that I made in my initial response: Minister Foster is establishing a steering group to monitor progress on the implementation of the tourism strategy. As the Member acknowledged, that must be examined across Departments, because, for example, the Department of the Environment has responsibility for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and historic buildings. A range of Departments has a contribution to make, and actions are always more effective when taken on a cross-departmental basis. That approach will have a greater impact in the end.

Mr P J Bradley: The organisers of the Milwaukee Irish Fest are concentrating their efforts on promoting the culture of Northern Ireland during the event in August 2010. What assessment has the Minister made of their efforts, what level of encouragement is he prepared to offer them and does he have any plans to attend the event?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

I held a meeting with the organisers of the Milwaukee Irish Fest. In the past, that event was predominantly what I would charitably describe as a fairly “green” Irish festival. However, in recent years, an attempt has been made to broaden the sense of cultural representation. Last year, several musicians and others, largely from an Ulster-Scots tradition, attended the festival, contributed to it and were much appreciated by the folks who attended. The festival also gave them an opportunity to establish contacts with people in America and Canada and, in that respect, the trip was productive.

I know that, this year, the Ulster-Scots Agency is again supporting some musicians to go to that event. We are still considering what else might be done. I have not yet made a decision on whether to go, but I am always cautious with such things in case I am accused of travelling too much. I am sure that the Member would not want to get me into that very difficult situation.

Mr I McCrea: The main question was about promoting the rich vein of Irish history. In line with that, will the Minister outline his vision to increase cultural tourism by promoting the Ulster-Scots history, heritage and culture?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

As I said, I am committed to the promotion of Northern Ireland’s cultural diversity and shared history, recognising that we have a rich diversity and that there are different traditions and communities that need to be respected and reflected in a balanced and inclusive manner.

At present, four things come to mind with regard to the Ulster-Scots tradition. First, it is encouraging that the Prime Minister made a commitment to provide £5 million for an Ulster-Scots broadcast fund. That will help to bring the Ulster-Scots tradition to a wider audience, both on our local screens and on screens elsewhere. That is a long-standing issue on which I have long campaigned, and I am grateful for that commitment.

Secondly, there is also an Ulster-Scots strategy, which will be complementary to an Irish-language strategy. That will be ready by the end of this month. The intention is that it should be comprehensive and that it should cover areas such as education, broadcasting, tourism, and the social economy, among others.

Thirdly, in addition to the broadcast fund and the strategy, work is ongoing in relation to the Ulster-Scots Academy, which will unlock £11 million that remains there at present. That will be taken forward in a very inclusive way. I am about to sign off on a process to recruit a director, and we are also in the process of appointing an interim board to take that work forward.

Finally, we have reflected on the contribution that cultural centres can make to cultural development, and we are looking very seriously at the potential for developing two Ulster-Scots cultural centres, one in an urban setting and one in a rural setting. We have had conversations with folk in north Antrim who have a particular interest. They have shown a lot of initiative in taking their project so far, and we would be keen to work with them to take it through to completion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Cricket

4. **Mr Bresland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what his Department is doing to promote and develop cricket. (AQO 868/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I congratulate the Cricket Ireland team on qualifying for the 2010 Twenty20 World Cup to be played in the West Indies in April and May this year. This is the second year in a row that Ireland will be playing in that prestigious competition, and I wish the team all the best in its endeavours in its group, in which it will play against teams such as England and the West Indies.

Responsibility for the promotion and development of cricket rests, in the first instance, with the governing body for the sport, Cricket Ireland. However, in the past three financial years, Sport Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport generally in Northern Ireland, including the distribution of funding, has provided over £2.5 million to assist with the development of cricket here. A further £654,000 has been provided to date in this financial year.

In addition, Sport NI holds regular meetings with the board and staff of Cricket Ireland, including the CEO and national coach, and provides guidance, advice and support on various issues, including funding opportunities, changes in legislation and the development of performance systems and structures.

Mr Bresland: I thank the Minister for his answer. For his information, some of the cricketers representing Ireland are from west Tyrone. What assistance has the Minister's Department provided to cricket clubs in the north-west?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland is responsible for the development of sport, including the distribution of funding. Over the past three financial years, Sport NI has received two applications for funding from cricket clubs in the north-west under the Building Sport programme. In May 2007, Bready Cricket Club received two awards. The first was a capital fund of £1,692,451 towards a cricket centre of excellence. It also received £155,000 revenue towards the employment of a multi-sport cricket development officer for five years. In March 2009, Limavady Cricket and Rugby Football Club received an award of £216,632 towards the installation of a new drainage system, which was beneficial to the club's rugby pitches and the cricket outfield.

3.15 pm

I acknowledge the Member's point that a number of people from the north-west have been successful in cricket, and I am aware that two of Cricket Ireland's biggest stars hail from the north-west: William Porterfield, who is from Donemana, is the current captain and plays for Gloucestershire, and Boyd Rankin, who was born in Londonderry, plays county cricket for Warwickshire.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire faoi sheanchluiche a imrítear i mo thoghcheantar féin, an tlúr agus Ard Mhacha.

Is the Minister aware of the ancient sport of road bowls, as played in County Armagh —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That has no relevance to the question. I call Mr McCartney to ask a supplementary question.

Mr McCartney: I hate to come in as a late substitute, and I apologise to the Member.

I add my congratulations to the Irish team on its qualification for the World Twenty20 tournament. Is the Minister aware that the Irish cricket team has also qualified for the one-day international World Cup in India in 2011? That is an excellent opportunity because cricket is a popular sport in India. Should the Minister contact the tourism Minister not only to develop cricket but to

develop tourism as a result of the World Cup?
Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for his question. I agree entirely that every and any opportunity should be used to promote tourism to Northern Ireland. If there is an opportunity to fly the flag for Northern Ireland somewhere else, I am only too happy to support and encourage it.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his comment on the NIACUS scheme. Will he comment further on the success of the training course that was held in 2009 by the Northern Ireland Association of Cricket Umpires and Scorers for potential umpires in the Northern Cricket Union area?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We want to improve standards in cricket and in all sports. The two key themes in sport and in arts are participation and excellence. We are doing much work to increase participation, and we also need to improve the work on excellence. Any training that enhances the sport is to be encouraged and welcomed.

Windsor Park Football Stadium

5. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the disadvantage to other football league clubs, such as Glenavon FC, caused by the existing contract between Linfield FC and the Irish Football Association, and whether this contract should be replaced with a more equitable alternative in the event of any stadium development at Windsor Park. (AQO 869/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of and understand the concerns of clubs, and the situation must change. In that context, I refer the Member to my answer to a question for oral answer on Tuesday 20 October 2009 and to my answer to a question for written answer on 17 November 2009. Those answers set out my position on the issue. For convenience, I repeat my answer to the question for oral answer:

"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." — [Official Report, Vol 44, No 6, p220, col 1-2]

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he indicate how much funding DCAL provides to Irish league clubs, such as my hometown team of Glenavon Football Club, which dates back to 1885?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not in the least surprised that the Member managed to mention the fact that there is a long-established football club in his constituency. However, I wish to point out that Cliftonville Football Club, which is in my constituency of North Belfast, was the first football club to be established in Ulster and that its founder was a great unionist and Orangeman.

Sport NI is responsible for the development of sport, including the distribution of funding. Up to the end of the last financial year, Sport NI had made capital awards worth £2.8 million to senior Irish league clubs under its soccer strategy and stadia safety programmes. The recipients of those awards were: Ballymena United Football Club; Cliftonville Football Club; Donegal Celtic Football Club; which received two awards; and Portadown Football Club. The Department has also recently approved stadia safety business cases for another three projects that Sport NI recommended. As a result, Ballymena United Football Club, Institute Football Club and Crusaders Football Club were awarded the sums of £800,000, £800,000 and £650,000 respectively to improve stadia safety, the total cost of which was £2.25 million.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire faoin ábhar seo. Will the Minister explain what percentage of the overall capital costs are the IFA, the GAA and the Ulster branch of the IRFU themselves obliged to commit towards their individual schemes? The Minister will know that each governing body has identified its strategic requirements for stadium development, so what

percentage are they expected to contribute themselves?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I thank the Member for his question, but it is a little bit premature. The cost of each of the stadiums has not yet been finalised. We must await the completion of the outline business case and our consideration of that before the cost can be assessed. However, I have made it clear to all the governing bodies that they will be required to contribute to the cost but that the extent of that has not yet been determined.

Mr Cree: I, too, wished to ask a supplementary question about the development of the new stadia. However, perhaps the Minister will tell us what the timescale for the new stadia is? For example, will the issue of a football stadium be resolved quicker than the others, or will everyone have to wait until there is a combined resolution?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: We must recognise that the stadiums' design, construction, planning applications and contracts will not necessarily be synchronous with one another. However, we will endeavour to ensure that each one comes forward as quickly as possible. We want to get to the point where the matter is fully and finally resolved and where the proper stadium provision is in place. However, as I said, it is somewhat premature at this stage to talk about how those will line up with one another, but we will endeavour to do all that as quickly as possible. The responsibility for that lies with not only the consultants, but the governing bodies. They must work with the consultants to get the right results that meet the needs of each of the sports.

Sports Grounds: West Belfast

6. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has any plans to address the shortage of sports pitches in west Belfast to allow local GAA and soccer clubs to play within their local community. (AQO 870/10)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Belfast City Council is responsible for local recreational provision in Belfast. It is also responsible for assessing levels of recreational provision, including pitch provision, for all sports in the Belfast area, and for making plans to address any evident shortfalls in order to help

local sports clubs, such as GAA and football clubs, to play within their local community.

Sport Northern Ireland, which is the lead development agency for sport in Northern Ireland, supports all district councils, including Belfast City Council, in identifying and, where necessary, addressing deficiencies in pitch provision within their area. In addition, one of the priorities to emerge from 'Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019' is the development of a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to accessing all available sports facilities in local areas, particularly those in the education sector.

That issue will be considered as part of the implementation of the Sport Matters strategy. I recently wrote to the Minister for Social Development, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, asking them to nominate a senior official to join a DCAL-led Sport Matters monitoring group, which I plan to set up shortly. We feel that that is an important way in which the needs of local communities can be addressed within local communities. Some more thought is needed to make sure that new provision in a school setting meets wider needs and is accessible to people in the community when the school is not using it.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he aware of recent surveys that show that there is a shortfall of 116 pitches in the Belfast area? More than 50 of them are required in west Belfast; so that area has a greater shortage of pitches than any other part of Belfast.

The Minister mentioned the word "thought" and said that more thought needs to go into the process. There are a lot of people who want to play sport in west Belfast — soccer, Gaelic games or other sports — and they have heard too much about thought and want to see action. Will the Minister make sure that action is taken to address the shortfall, especially in west Belfast? Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As I said, Belfast City Council is responsible for local recreational provision in Belfast. I am sure that Mr Maskey knows at least one councillor on that council that he could talk to; perhaps, someone with whom he has a very close relationship.

There are councillors who will put forward the case for west Belfast very strongly, as there will be councillors who will put forward the cases for east, south and north Belfast. However, the primary responsibility lies with Belfast City Council, and the matter is one on which Mr Maskey and others want to see the council move forward.

Mr Kinahan: The Minister partly answered the question that I was going to ask. It is good to hear that he is talking to the Minister of Education. Will he ensure that all schools are included, and will he establish a time frame for receiving an answer on whether school pitches can be used by everybody?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I confirm that I have been speaking to the Minister of Education: whether she has been listening is something on which I could not possibly comment.

The first issue is urgency. I want the plan to be taken forward as quickly as possible. We are missing opportunities by not being able to use facilities that are associated with schools, and those facilities need to be opened up to the wider community. That happens in many places, but it should be happening everywhere. Instead of being the exception, it should be the norm. That would go a long way towards addressing the needs of our community. I assure the Member of my commitment to taking that matter forward with urgency.

Mrs M Bradley: I ask the Minister to undertake to work with Belfast City Council, Derry City Council, and any other council, to look at the need for soccer and GAA facilities in all areas, particularly the need for more pitches.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As I said, the primary responsibility for local recreational provision lies with local councils, and it is important that they engage fully with Sport NI, which is the funding body. Every effort should be made by councillors in Londonderry to make sure that they fully engage with Sport NI. If that happens, we are sure that there will be much better provision in Londonderry for the sports needs of the people who live there.

3.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas)

Order (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

Before I deal with the statutory rule, I will set out some background to the measure. In 2007, under direct rule, a package of reliefs aimed at businesses in rural areas was introduced. It included measures such as relief for farm diversification, environmentally friendly plant and machinery in quarries and an exemption for rural ATMs. Those decisions were taken after a wider consultation in 2005. One of the measures provided for a rates exemption for cash machines in rural areas based on a list of designated rural wards. The policy intention was to encourage and sustain the provision of ATMs in rural areas, which remains a worthy aim. At the time, direct rule Ministers decided that the exemption should be time-limited for three years, and the scheme is due to end on 31 March.

Last year, my Department undertook an evaluation to consider the merits of the scheme and to determine whether the measure should be discontinued. A range of research and analysis was undertaken, and we consulted key stakeholders such as the Rural Community Network, the Consumer Council and banking representatives. Moreover, the Committee for Finance and Personnel was briefed on the evaluation of the scheme, and its views were sought before decisions were taken on the way forward. That was done with an open mind and with a view to reaching consensus on how best to proceed.

I will now explain what the scheme does. The exemption is provided for stand-alone ATMs that are individually valued in the valuation list, such as those located outside petrol stations or on the high street. It does not apply to ATMs that are located in banks or building societies; they

tend to be valued as part of that property. At the time of the evaluation, 43 ATMs were eligible for the exemption. That represented an increase from the 37 that were eligible when the scheme was introduced in 2007. Although that increase is relatively small, it is important for those who benefit from it.

The evaluation of the scheme provided some evidence that the growth in the number of ATMs in rural areas is higher than it would have been had the measure not been in place. Furthermore, it showed that the policy has a positive effect and that more isolated rural locations benefit most. As part of the evaluation, consideration was also given to the financial and regulatory impact of the scheme. It found that the administrative cost of the exemption was negligible and that the scheme may assist small rural businesses. The financial cost of the scheme is just under £80,000 in forgone revenue. Given the benefits that it can bring, that is a modest sacrifice.

Consultation that was undertaken as part of the evaluation showed support for the measure and for its retention. Rural stakeholders made it clear that they wanted the exemption to be retained, and the British Bankers' Association was of the view that the rates exemption in itself did not make a substantive difference in the decision on where to locate new ATMs. Nevertheless, it stated that the exemption was a consideration in deciding whether to retain existing ATMs. Separately, the Bank of Ireland stated that it was a determining factor in deciding whether to retain or remove ATMs from rural locations.

On balance, I think that the scheme should stay. There is a risk that the removal of the measure at the current time could jeopardise the viability of machines that currently receive the exemption. I have taken account of the evaluation outcome and the views that were expressed during the consultation and those of the Committee, and, on balance, I believe that the rates exemption for individual ATMs in designated rural areas should continue. I acknowledge that the numbers involved and the subsequent impact are modest. However, that should not prevent us from doing all we can to ensure that banks and building societies are not discouraged from placing new ATMs or from retaining current ATMs in rural areas. Although the measure is a fairly modest one, it is worth preserving for isolated communities

that depend on ATMs. Travelling a few miles to the nearest town is not easy for everyone. Cash machines play an important part in sustaining rural economies. Evidence shows that money that is withdrawn locally is spent locally; almost two thirds of every £10 that is withdrawn from a cash machine is spent locally.

The recent spate of ATM thefts has had a significant impact on a number of rural communities and makes it all the more important that the Assembly demonstrates its continued support for the provision of cash machines in those areas. On that basis, I consider that the current exemption for ATMs in rural areas should be extended for a further three years.

My Executive colleagues and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel have already advised on the details of the statutory rule. The Committee indicated that it was content for individual, separately valued ATMs in designated rural areas to continue to be exempt from rates, particularly given the modest cost of the scheme.

The citation, commencement and interpretation of the Order are set out in article 1. Article 2 provides for the extension of the relevant date before which the scheme must end to 1 April 2013.

I look forward to Members' comments. I commend the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I thank the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Peter Weir, for covering the Committee's statement on the Final Stage of the Budget Bill.

I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. The Order provides exemptions from rates for individual ATMs in designated areas. It extends the scheme, which was originally introduced in 2007, for another three years until 2013. The purpose of the scheme is to encourage and sustain the provision of ATMs in rural areas.

As the scheme was due to expire in April 2010, the Department of Finance and Personnel carried out an evaluation in the second half of 2009 to determine its impact and effectiveness. The Committee received a briefing on the outcome of that consultation at its meeting on 4 November

2009. During the briefing, members heard that the number of ATMs that were eligible for exemption from rates had risen from 37 to 47 since the introduction of the scheme. Members were also asked to note that, in the responses to the consultation, banks had advised that the rates exemption did not affect the decision on the provision of new ATMs but might be a consideration when deciding whether to retain existing ATMs.

Members expressed concern that the closure of the scheme might have unintended consequences, as the removal of an ATM would, undoubtedly, have a negative effect at a local level. Members also noted that a programme was in place to look at the provision of ATMs in deprived urban areas. The Committee therefore wrote to the Department on 26 November 2009 to confirm that it would be content for rural ATMs to continue to be exempt from non-domestic rates.

The Committee initially considered the proposal for subordinate legislation at its meeting on 20 January and formally considered the statutory rule before the Assembly today at its meeting on 17 February, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Order be affirmed by the Assembly. I support the motion.

Mr Weir: I welcome this move; as has been indicated by the Chairperson, it is one on which the Committee and the Minister of Finance and Personnel are walking hand in hand. I welcome the proposal to extend the scheme that is already in place.

As the Minister said, most Members have a reasonable level of mobility that affords us ease of access; most of us can drive and get about. However, the ability of a lot of people in rural communities, particularly elderly people, to get about is severely limited. Consequently, this measure can help to make it relatively convenient for people to go down to their village and make use of an ATM.

As indicated, exemption from rates is not the decisive factor on which a bank will base its decision to site an ATM in an area, although it has, perhaps, a marginal effect. We are all aware that commercial decisions about whether something goes ahead or is withdrawn or retained can sometimes be relatively fine, and, even if the scheme has only a marginal impact, if it means the retention of an ATM or a bank taking

the decision to site an ATM in an area, then that community will be at an advantage. The Minister and the Chairperson of the Committee indicated that 47 local communities benefit from having an ATM due to rates exemption. It remains to be seen how many of those ATMs would be retained if the exemption were not available. However, it is an advantage for those communities.

The other advantage of people in rural communities not having to go five or 10 miles to the nearest town to withdraw money relates to the environment. That issue is close to the Minister's heart. The provision will cut down unnecessary journeys and help reduce CO2 emissions. The Minister is again undoubtedly proving his green credentials.

It was indicated that the impact of the provision on ATM siting may be relatively limited, but this is quite an imaginative issue. The cost implication for the regional rate and the wider effect on the public purse are relatively limited. As the Minister said, the overall cost of the scheme in lost revenue is around £80,000. That is a relatively small sum of money, and, if it means that a range of communities is able to benefit from ATMs, then that is useful.

Will the Minister provide information on the definition of a rural area? I appreciate that it may not be available to the Minister today because of the level of detail required. One will clearly not find an ATM in a hole in a hedge; they are situated in banks or in some form of service in villages across Northern Ireland. It would be useful if the Minister would explain, perhaps in a memo, what definition has been used to classify an area as a rural area. Mention has been made of the 47 communities in which rate exemption already applies. Clearly, that does not preclude other areas that may fall under the definition if ATMs are installed there in the future. Will the Minister give concrete examples of the specific towns and villages that fall outside the definition of rural area that could qualify for the scheme? We can all point to our constituencies. Belfast, Bangor or Antrim are clearly not rural communities and consequently would not benefit from the scheme. However, we are also aware of villages in our constituencies that may not have an ATM, and I would like some clarification of whether they will count as rural areas. We have all been involved in situations in our constituencies; perhaps we have lobbied banks to say that a certain village is being

ignored and that there is a strong groundswell of opinion that it should have an ATM. A definition from the Minister could be a useful argument for us to deploy. I urge the Minister to make that information available to Members.

The scheme is excellent and should carry on. It benefits many of our constituents across Northern Ireland at relatively little cost to the public purse.

3.45 pm

Mr Beggs: I, too, support the retention of the exemption from rates of ATMs in specified rural areas. Although the cost is relatively small, the exemption is a consideration for banks and businesses when deciding whether to retain or install an ATM.

Small rural shops have been under considerable pressure due to the trend towards supermarket shopping. Therefore we should take any measure possible to protect shops in isolated rural communities. If an ATM and, therefore, money is available locally, people will shop locally. An ATM can be important in retaining access to basic goods and facilities in rural areas.

ATMs in rural areas are of particular benefit to pensioners and people on benefits. The cost of journeys for people who have to travel into town to access money can account for a considerable proportion of their income. For example, the return journey to collect benefits or pick up money that has been paid directly into a bank account could easily cost £5. It is an important issue for disadvantaged people who live in rural communities.

Recently, ATMs have been under considerable pressure due to thefts. There is bound to be a question mark over where banks will replace ATMs and whether owners will invest in replacements before appropriate security measures have been put in place. I do not want to put any impediment in the way of the replacement of ATMs in rural communities. We hope that there will be no more thefts, and we wish to ensure that any gaps in the ATM network will be filled.

The exemption from rates for ATMs in specified rural areas is another measure that may encourage the replacement of ATMs and ensure the viability of some rural shops.

Mr O'Loan: I support the proposal. I will represent the views of my colleague Patsy McGlone, who had

wished to speak in the debate but cannot do so. We both represent large rural constituencies and are sympathetic to ensuring the financial inclusion of rural areas. Much of our economy is still cash-based, and, as Roy Beggs and others said, the most disadvantaged are particularly reliant on the availability of cash.

In considering policy, it is important that we look positively towards the availability of cash. As the Minister outlined, the proposal is a three-year exemption from rates for ATMs in specified rural areas after an initial three years' full exemption, and, as in all policy evaluation, we should look at the evidence. The number of rural ATMs eligible for exemption increased by 16% over the three-year period. Although the total number of 43 is small, that increase is considerable.

Definitive evidence has not been produced that rate relief is a key element in encouraging banks to retain and develop the ATM network. We should be reluctant to give money to banks, as they are not conspicuous in displaying a social conscience. I do not want to indulge in simple bank bashing, because some of our local banks have schemes that indicate a social conscience. However, given the recent history of banking and the fact that some banks are reporting large profits even in these difficult times, we should approach the matter with considerable scepticism. Even the evidence from the British Bankers' Association and the Bank of Ireland is not definitive. They have said that the exemption does not influence the placing of ATMs initially but that it may determine whether they are retained. We should certainly look at that, but dispassionately.

I note the views of key stakeholders. There is strong support for the Order from the Rural Development Council, the Rural Community Network and the Consumer Council. The Minister has quoted the evidence from research carried out by Queen's University for the Rural Development Council, which shows that £6.30 out of every £10 withdrawn is spent locally. Like others, I note the fact that the cost is not great; it is about £80,000, which works out at about £2,000 per ATM. In the absence of strong contrary evidence, it is prudent and sensible to extend this provision.

I stress what has been said already about thefts from ATMs. That is a big issue for the banks. There is a clear responsibility on the banks to secure their ATMs and recognise that, to date,

that security has not been adequate. Although the banks are looking at that issue, this is not the time to change policy. That point must be taken on board.

In future, we should distinguish between free-to-use ATMs and those for which people have to pay a fee. I am more reluctant to confer a benefit on banks or other financial agencies that charge people to use their ATMs than on those who provide a free service to the public.

Mr McCarthy: I support the Order. Anything that helps the rural community has my party's support. I was taken aback, however, by the attitude of some Members that this will cost only £80,000. Yesterday, in the Long Gallery, I sponsored a visit by Carers Northern Ireland, which provides an excellent service across Northern Ireland, despite having its funding cut. That group would be very glad of £80,000 or even half of it. Similarly, in my rural village, the Lifestart group has had to cut its cloth. Although £80,000 is a small amount in the big scheme of things, it could do a lot of good in those two instances.

That said, decisions must be taken, and the Finance Minister and the Committee have made that decision. On behalf of the United Community group, I support that decision.

Mr McQuillan: The Minister of Finance and Personnel is right to exempt ATMs from rates for another year, given the rise in the number of ATM robberies, especially in rural areas. ATMs are vital to local communities, especially in rural areas like those in my constituency, East Londonderry. The increase in robberies — in particular, the use of diggers and manually operated machinery to rob ATMs — offers a disincentive to banks to maintain those facilities, especially when they fall victim to more than one robbery. The banks have said that they will keep less money in ATMs in order to restrict the amount of money that can be stolen and to act as a deterrent to thieves. That is not enough. Why can banks not use other methods to prevent and deter robberies? I encourage them to do so. However, the actions of individuals and groups that rob ATMs must be condemned, and I call on communities where the thieves live to bring information to the police. The only people who are hurt by such actions are the communities of Northern Ireland.

Cash is on the way out as the main means of currency exchange, as more people opt

to use debit cards. Cash can be obtained from supermarkets and convenience stores through the use of cashback facilities. That is another disincentive to banks to maintain cash machines because other means of accessing money are becoming more popular, probably cheaper and have less risk associated with them. Nevertheless, the use of cash is better for local shopkeepers because they incur charges from banks when customers use debit cards to pay for their goods. That adds further pressure on small businesses and local shopkeepers, whose profit margins may be hit severely if people have to use debit cards rather than cash. I therefore worry that robberies on ATMs could have an effect on people's ability to access their money in rural areas. This rates exemption will offer an incentive to banks to keep ATMs where they are without incurring additional costs. The scheme will cost the public purse £80,000, which is good value for money. I commend the motion to the House, and I thank the Minister for maintaining the incentive in light of recent robberies.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As we are aware, this scheme was introduced in 2007 for three years as part of a package of rural relief measures that was aimed at businesses in rural areas. During the intervening years, we have witnessed a huge downturn in the economy, which has had a particularly detrimental impact on small businesses in rural areas. The call for this rates exemption to be extended has been supported by key stakeholders, such as the Consumer Council.

I note that, in October 2009, a policy evaluation for the scheme found that the number of ATMs in rural areas had increased by some 16% since the previous evaluation. That statistic demonstrates the importance of access to ATMs for people who live in rural areas. The economic downturn has also resulted in an increasing number of people being on benefits, many of which are paid electronically. ATMs are essential for those people to access their benefits and entitlements.

It is fair to say that ATMs in many ways represent a lifeline for people who live in rural, dispersed communities. In most cases, the main banks are centralised in provincial towns, and that can make it extremely difficult for people who have mobility issues to engage in even the smallest of financial transactions.

Recently, small businesses have been hit hard by the changing economic climate and attacks on their premises, which have devastating impacts on their livelihoods. The pattern of ATM thefts has also had a huge impact on rural communities. It would be an additional burden on small businesses if the Department of Finance and Personnel were to remove the current rates exemption.

In a recent 'Spotlight' programme, a construction expert said that, if the banks spent a little bit more money and installed reinforcing mechanisms with the machines, they would utterly wipe out the ability to steal the machines. I encourage the banks to take that advice, which would be of massive aid to rural areas.

Mr G Robinson: This debate addresses an issue that provides a great benefit to those who live in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Rural dwellers appreciate and need easy access to their money just as much as those who live in towns. By ensuring that it is cheaper for businesses to provide that vital service, we can help those businesses to continue to provide it.

In recent weeks and months, we have all seen the appalling damage that has been done to rural businesses by criminal gangs who decide to make unexpected illegal cash withdrawals. The repair bill and the loss of business after those raids can be considerable. This motion is aimed at helping and encouraging those businesses to keep providing ATMs in their local communities in the long term. The loss of service to the community is beyond price. The fact that someone lives in the country should not mean that they cannot have access to their cash on a 24-hour basis. If someone has access to a local ATM in a rural area, it could perhaps save them a 20-mile return journey to the nearest town's ATM. Is that not an excellent way of helping to stabilise and protect the rural population and aid small businesses, which are more common in rural areas, so that they thrive and remain viable?

This motion has a very practical and serious intent. I urge everyone to support it, as it is a small way of encouraging local community stability and business support at minimal cost to the public purse. I thank the Minister for his input, and I support the motion.

4.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to conclude the debate by making a winding-up speech on the motion.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr McLaughlin: Those are the wrong notes.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I hope that I have the right ones here.

I thank the Members who have taken part in this short debate. I welcome the universal support for the motion from around the Chamber, and especially from the Committee and its Chairperson. I just wish that everything could go through the Committee with the same widespread support that this measure has had. I look forward to the Committee Chairperson taking a number of other issues through in the same way for me in the future.

Mr Weir asked a question about the designated areas, and I am more than happy to circulate to Members the list of wards that have been designated. A number of villages already have rates-exempt ATMs. Based on the deprivation index, 200 such wards were prescribed when the Order was introduced in 2007.

The exemption costs £80,000. I reply to Mr McCarthy when I say that it is not a case of it costing "only" £80,000. I hope that it is not seen as a case of "only" that amount so it really does not matter. The consideration was whether the scheme provided value. If we had come to the conclusion that it did not provide value in rural areas, we would not have continued the scheme, regardless of whether the cost was £80,000, £8,000 or £800,000. However, the evaluation showed that it delivered value in all the forms that Members have described, including ensuring services in local areas and ensuring that people, particularly those who are not as mobile as others, have the opportunity to access cash that they can spend in local shops.

I assure Mr Weir that one of my top priorities in considering whether the measure should go forward was not the potential carbon footprint that may have resulted from the removal of the rates exemption. I am sure that Members will be shocked to hear me say that.

Mr Beggs talked about the importance of access to ATMs in rural areas. He mentioned the cost to many people of a round trip. Designated wards in his constituency include Blackhead, Whitehead and Ballygalley, where he knows that the loss of the shop has caused problems. The important issue is that the cost of accessing a small amount of cash might be quite considerable in

rural areas from which people may have to travel some distance to an ATM.

Mr Beggs and other Members mentioned the potential long-term impact of the thefts not from, but of, the cash machines at present. Without trying to provoke controversy in a debate that has so far been free of it and in which we have had total agreement, I say to Mr Beggs and others that after next Tuesday, if they vote in the right way, they will have ample opportunity and justification to raise such issues with a Justice Minister in the House who will hold the Chief Constable and police to account. I am sure that, just as he finds it a good experience to have me here as Finance Minister to talk about how to make the provision of those machines viable, he would welcome the opportunity of having a Justice Minister to talk about how to make ATMs safe.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thought that might provoke him. So, I look forward to Mr Beggs voting — I think that it is next Tuesday — in a way that allows him to legitimately raise the security of ATMs with an accountable Minister on the Floor of the House, because it is not an issue that is devolved at present. I will give way.

Mr Beggs: My point, which was valid in the context of the debate, was that having to pay rates might be the final straw that prevents banks from replacing ATMs. Furthermore, if the Minister and his colleagues are convinced about the rightness of what they agreed at Hillsborough, they are within their rights, and have enough votes, to take that decision themselves.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As the Member knows, not only am I convinced, but I have sought and will continue to seek to convince others that the right decision was made at Hillsborough. I am glad that he raised the point, and I would have been disappointed had he not done so. I am simply saying that the question of whether ATMs are retained in rural areas is a security issue. Security could have an impact on whether the machines stay in rural areas. Therefore, it would be much better to have a local Minister of Justice to debate with, question and call to account. If the Member agrees with that, I am sure that he will not act hypocritically by voting against the opportunity to do so. I shall leave that point with him and other Members who would like to be able to discuss such security issues in the future.

Mr O'Loan raised a couple of issues. He pointed out that the rates exemption resulted in a modest 16% increase in the number of ATMs. One might be disappointed that the increase in the number of machines that have been installed in those areas is not higher. However, at a time when many other services are being removed from rural areas, at least the trend has not been downward. In contrast to what has happened in rural areas to village shops, post offices, garages, and so forth, all of which have experienced a downward trend, it is one area in which there has been an upward trend.

The evidence from the British Bankers' Association and the Bank of Ireland is that the rates exemption at least helped to retain ATMs, and in the case of the Bank of Ireland, it influenced where it located the machines in rural areas. I accept Mr O'Loan's reluctance that money be given to the banks, particularly given the way in which they have behaved, but the modest rate relief is not primarily a way to benefit banks; it is a means of ensuring that services are provided locally.

Mr O'Loan also raised the issue of free-to-use machines, as opposed to those for which people must pay a fee. In fact, that issue was discussed during the original consultation period for the Order in 2005, when it was suggested that it should only apply to free-to-use ATMs. However, all the consultation responses, particularly that from the Rural Development Council, expressed the view that an ATM that charges a fee is better than no ATM. Therefore, ATMs for which fees are payable were included in the Order. Free-to-use ATMs are preferable, but if exempting rates is the only way to attain a machine, albeit one that people must pay to use, it is felt that that is worth doing.

I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. I thank Mr McQuillan, Mr Doherty and Mr G Robinson for their support, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 be affirmed.

Draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): I beg to move

That the Draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be approved.

Members will be glad to hear that this item of business will finish me today. Indeed, by the looks of things, it may finish off the rest of the Members, too.

Before I deal with the regulations, I want to set out the rationale behind the rates deferment scheme for homeowners pensioners. It is important to understand the purpose of the scheme and the consequences for those who participate in it. If Members remember only one fact from this debate, it should be that this is not a new relief or allowance. It provides a payment choice as opposed to free money. There is a cost attached to it, for my Department and for the participants. It is quite different from the wide range of measures that is available to help pensioners with their rates.

Deferment represents a new payment choice for owner-occupier pensioners who may not have the means to pay high rates bills or who are ineligible for rates relief or a rates rebate. The scheme could make a significant difference for them. The scheme will be attractive to pensioners who do not have access to other means of support and are struggling to meet mounting household bills while living in the family home during their retirement years. We want to provide them with a payment option that will enable them to remain in the homes in which they raised their families.

Evidence shows that people in Northern Ireland tend to stay put much more than people in other parts of the United Kingdom, which is a good thing for community life. Pensioners and their partners may be able to roll up their rates bills at a concessionary rate of interest until such time as they die, their property is sold or the conditions of the scheme are broken. It will be a long-term commitment that should not be entered into easily or lightly. It will involve a contractual commitment that could last for more than 30 years.

Given the long-term commitment involved, it is important that pensioners are made fully aware of all the facts to allow them to make informed

choices. There will be a range of issues for them to consider, including the level of mounting debt, the impact on the property on which the debt will be secured and, looking further into the future, the value of the estate that they may wish to pass on. For that reason, applicants will be provided with a projection of what the deferred debt could be. After that, they will need to make an informed choice about whether the scheme is appropriate to their needs.

I am sure that there will be varying views about the scheme. Some will view it as an opportunity to be availed of, should it suit the pensioner's circumstances, some will have concerns about the cost and revenue implications, and others may view it simply as a form of death duty. Deferment will be a welcome option for pensioners who have significant equity in their property.

As much as 85% of all pensioner households own their properties outright. For others, deferment will not be for them, particularly if they wish to leave their property fully to their children. However, deferment presents a further payment option. In that context, it is important to remember the position of the Finance and Personnel Committee, which is that even if only a small number of pensioners were to benefit, the choice of deferment should be made available to them.

We can achieve this aim through regulations. Although the scheme is unique in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, it is not uncommon internationally. Experience shows that take-up varies considerably. There are between 10,000 and 11,000 deferred rates in British Columbia and Oregon, while the figure for Minnesota and New Zealand is only a few hundred. Our best estimate locally is that, over the medium to long term, we may have 2,000 participants at any one time, but those numbers could be higher or lower. This shows, once again, that decisions made by this local Assembly can provide options that are perhaps not available in the wider UK context.

Before I turn to the statutory rule, I shall briefly run through the key aspects of the scheme on which there was detailed consultation, including liaison with key stakeholders and representatives of elderly people. By and large, there was broad support for the scheme, with many viewing it as a further option for pensioners. The regulations represent the

final outworkings of the Executive mandate of change. They allow my Department to enter into a deferment agreement with an owner-occupier of pensionable age, which is currently aged 60 or over, as well as their partner or surviving partner. In addition to a range of conditions that have to be met before and during deferment, everyone who owns the property must also enter into the deferment. If that is not possible, deferment cannot be granted, owing to the increased debt-recovery risks. Generally, all will have to occupy the property as their sole or main residence. Deferment will not be permitted on rented properties, second homes or empty homes. However, some limited exceptions on occupation will be made for nursing and residential care homes so that participants are not disadvantaged.

4.15 pm

Central to the deferment will be property ownership, occupation and equity, which is the property value free from a mortgage or charge. At the outset, there must be a minimum of 40% equity in the property. Consideration will also be given as to whether, at any time during the term of the deferment agreement and reflecting assumptions on life expectancy, there is likely to be less than 30% equity in the property. Where that double-check approach cannot be met, deferment will not be granted, owing to the risks posed. Where ongoing equity conditions are not met at any time during the deferment term, which we consider a low risk, owing to the assessment that will be undertaken at the outset, further deferment of rates will not be permitted, as a result of debt-recovery risks. The debt accrued to that point, however, would stand.

The deferred debt will be secured on the property, with daily compound interest accruing. It will be calculated using the Bank of England base rate minus 1%, subject to a minimum 1% threshold. Using trend data over the past 10 to 15 years, the base rate minus 1% has broadly equated to the rate of inflation.

In other schemes internationally, the rate of interest is similarly linked to the bank prime lending rate or average borrowing rates. In British Columbia, a 0.25% rate is applied, and the interest rates in some American states are around 5%.

Deferment will not be an easy choice for pensioners, and costs will be incurred to obtain

relevant information on the property title. Similar to experience elsewhere, the applicant will have to pay those costs. However, if deferment is allowed, the applicant will have the opportunity to roll the up-front costs into the deferred debt, with interest accruing.

Before I deal with the statutory rule, I will speak about administration costs and the revenue forgone. The non-recoverable administration costs are anticipated to be in the region of £125,000 a year, but that will depend on the actual take-up. Likewise, revenue forgone will depend on that, as well as on the rates liability. Assuming average property values, the revenue forgone could be around £200,000 in the first year through to around £1.5 million a year once the scheme and the numbers have settled. Beyond that, we expect the scheme to be broadly revenue neutral.

The revenue forgone and costs will impact on local councils. Councils will be paid in the normal way the district rates that are due and will not bear the direct costs that will result from the loss of revenue through ratepayer deferment. Councils will feel an impact only on a relatively small additional amount of their share of the cost of collection, and if any of the secured debt ends up having to be written off. As Members will be aware, both of those measures are in accordance with current procedures.

I have covered the key aspects of and issues related to the scheme. Regulation 1 deals with citation and commencement, while regulation 2 deals with interpretation. Regulation 3 sets out key issues relating to eligible persons, the deferment agreement and equity. Regulations 3 and 4 deal with the conditions to be met before entering into and during a deferment agreement, the detail of which is set out in schedules 1 and 2 to the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. Regulation 5 provides for the deferred debt to be secured on the property as a statutory charge. It will be enforceable as if it were a mortgage by deed created in favour of the Department. That necessarily provides stronger recovery powers than those that exist under current rating legislation, primarily owing to the level of debt that is likely to be involved. Regulation 6 provides for some minor modifications to the 1977 Order, including the disapplication of the normal rates demand and the early payment discount, where payments are made based on the amount outstanding under a

deferment scheme. Participants will be provided with an annual statement of the deferred debt.

I look forward to what I am sure will be an interesting debate. I have tried to deal with some issues that I am sure will be raised. I remind Members of my commitment during Final Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 to have a scheme that is effective and attracts sufficient and manageable numbers. As previously indicated, in a couple of years' time, I want to conduct a thorough evaluation of the scheme to examine how many people it helps and how effectively it provides value for money. That may serve to allay some concerns that Members may have about the operation of the scheme.

In conclusion, I commend the draft regulations to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. In its 'Report on the Committee's response to the 2007 Executive Review of the Domestic Rating System', which was published in November 2007, the Committee for Finance and Personnel recommended that a deferred rates payment scheme for pensioners be introduced. The Committee considered that even if only a small number of pensioners would benefit, the choice of deferment should be made available.

The draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations 2010 introduce a rates deferment scheme for owner-occupiers of pensionable age and their partner or surviving partner, with effect from 1 April 2010. It sets out the conditions that must be satisfied before the Department can enter into an agreement with an eligible person. It also sets out the terms that will apply to the deferment agreement, such as an advantageous rate of interest, which, together with an annual review facility, was included in the recommendation in the Committee's 2007 report.

The Committee considered the proposal for subordinate legislation at its meeting on 20 January 2010. It formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly at its meeting on 24 February 2010. Although the Examiner of Statutory Rules had not formally reported at the time of the Committee's consideration of the rule, he had written to the Committee to indicate that he had no issues to raise by way

of technical scrutiny. That was confirmed in the Examiner's eleventh report, which was issued on 26 February 2010.

At the meeting on 24 February, members questioned Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on the impact that the deferment of rates payments would have on councils and the anticipated level of take-up of the scheme. The officials advised that it is estimated that take-up will be in the region of 2,000 ratepayers. That will have an indirect impact on the cost of collection for what is, essentially, a complicated scheme.

The departmental officials confirmed that any additional costs in that respect will be shared among all councils. Officials also confirmed that there will be no direct impact on local councils as regards revenue forgone because the scheme is funded by regional rates. Councils will, therefore, continue to receive rates as if they had been collected by Land and Property Services (LPS).

Members raised concerns that there appears to be some confusion surrounding the issue and a general belief that the scheme will have a detrimental impact on local councils' income. DFP officials agreed to revise the forthcoming press notices about the scheme to include information that will clarify the position for councils.

Following its discussion on 24 February, the Committee agreed to recommend that the draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations 2010 be approved by the Assembly. I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Weir: I, too, rise to support the draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. Given the Chairperson's comments on the impact on local councils, I must declare an interest at the outset as a member of North Down Borough Council and as vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

The draft regulations are a welcome and sensible move. I welcome assurances that have been given that, at least with regard to direct income, there will be no detrimental effect on local councils. There may be a marginal impact on indirect income due to the additional charges that affect LPS. However, that will be relatively small.

The Minister prides himself on being someone who tells it like it is, tries to stick to the facts

and avoids spin where possible. If we are looking for a measure that, to use the adage from the advert, “does exactly what it says on the tin”, we will find that the rates deferment proposals are fairly clear cut. The title shows clearly what is intended. As the Minister said, the regulations are not about additional relief but about deferment. Indeed, the level of detail that the Minister went into in explaining the regulations shows that a lot of detailed work has been carried out to ensure that the measures are properly applied.

The reservations expressed are principally on the basis that a lot of pensioners will view the measures as not being in their interests or not attractive to them. That is because they come from a generation that does not like the idea of building up debt. They prefer to pay bills as soon as they receive them. Others will not want to build up a charge on their property that may come out of their will or be deducted from the value of their property at the time of their death. Perhaps I should express a personal interest in that I hope that my folks do not see the scheme as an opportunity to rob me of my inheritance when it is on the statute book. A brief shaft of selfish honesty has emerged in the debate.

Mr McLaughlin: Are you declaring an interest?

Mr Weir: Yes.

The regulations will not necessarily appeal to a lot of pensioners. We can benefit from the experiences of elsewhere. It was indicated that where such measures have been used, whether in British Columbia or New Zealand, take-up has been limited. Nevertheless, it is a valuable measure because it will provide pensioners with an additional payment option.

We are all well aware that a lot of pensioners benefit from the various rates relief schemes that are available. However, we are also aware of some who are ineligible for pension credit, rates relief and a range of other measures because of their economic circumstances. They may find themselves in a situation in which they have financial assets in the form of property but are cash poor. The regulations will provide another option for such people in that they will be able to avoid the situation in which they feel under mounting financial pressure and are struggling to pay a bill. The regulations will provide some relief and another option. Indeed, in extreme circumstances, and when faced with large rates

bills, pensioners will not be forced to sell their houses to help to pay their debts.

In addition to the financial advantages that the regulations will provide for individuals, they will have a social advantage in helping pensioners to stay in their homes for longer. That is to be welcomed.

Given the experiences elsewhere, I suspect that take-up will be limited. Nevertheless, the regulations will be of major benefit to a small number of pensioners throughout Northern Ireland. They will have a direct and positive impact on the financial choices that they face. I commend the motion.

Mr Beggs: The Minister said that the regulations will have some rates implications for local authorities. Therefore, I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council.

I note that the regulations will provide an additional measure that pensioners and others who are eligible will be able to consider using. Therefore, it is not a measure that they must use but an additional option that they can voluntarily buy into should they choose to, and they will be able to consider whether it is beneficial to them.

Many pensioners are asset rich but income poor. They may have worked all their lives, saved, paid off their homes, reared their families and their children may then have moved on. At that point, being reliant on pensions, for example, how do they continue to pay rates that may be disproportionate to their income? I welcome the regulations as they will provide an option that pensioners can consider and which may enable them to continue to live in their family homes and to defer the payments.

Should they decide to move, there would be considerable cost involved. As well as the upset of moving home at the later part of their life and moving away from much of what is dear to them, they may, perhaps, be moving away from friends in the neighbourhood who could support them in their later years. If the legislation will benefit such people, then it must be supported.

I note from what the Minister said that considerable protection will be built into the public purse so that it will be applicable to those with at least 40% equity on their homes. Therefore, there should be minimal risk to the public purse, yet it will bring an advantage to

some pensioners. Therefore, I support the rates exemption.

4.30 pm

Mr O'Loan: I support the proposal: I supported it from the outset when it was being considered by the Committee. Even if the demand for it is not huge, the proposal is soundly based. It will be of benefit to a certain group of people and, as the Minister said, it is entirely an option. However, there are some who may be disposed to take up that option, particularly those who are described as being asset rich and cash poor. It is something that a small number of people in that category may welcome, and that is why I welcomed it.

The proposal may be availed of by others who want to have the choice of enjoying the money available to them at that time of their life and who may ordain that their rates are eventually paid for out of their estate. If people want to make that choice, then it is good to offer it.

I welcome the fact that there is no impact on council income, with the exception of the relatively small issue of the cost of collection.

As with any new scheme, it is right to evaluate it, and I know that rating policy division will do so. Rating policy division does a good job of bringing clear evaluations before the Committee, and it takes the views of the Committee seriously. As this is a new scheme, it is right that it has a close evaluation. We are told that the scheme will be a complex one to administer and, from what the Minister has said, one can see why. Therefore, it will be a relatively costly scheme for the Department to administer. If take-up turns out to be extremely low and the costs are significant, it may be necessary to determine whether it should be continued. Therefore, we need to be sensitive to that issue. Nevertheless, we should give it our full support.

Dr Farry: Like other Members, I will try to be mercifully brief. We are doing very well with today's business. I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council, just in case it comes up.

I will be supporting the measure. I gave my 100% support to a rates proposal from the Minister, which will be welcome news after the battles that we have had over other aspects in recent months.

Like Mr O'Loan, I do not think that we should be entering into the situation lightly. Compared to some of the other reliefs that we have talked about, this is more complex and will create a much deeper and more costly administrative burden. We should not dismiss the financial implications of the cost of the administration on those who provide it. We should note that Land and Property Services (LPS) has been overstretched during the past few years. What the Assembly has asked of LPS has contributed to that situation considerably, and its baseline in the budget has proven to be inadequate to the task in hand. Special measures have had to be introduced to address that situation and reflect the changed circumstances with regard to rating policy.

Furthermore, I would not overly dismiss the impact on councils. I have seen quite significant hikes in the percentage costs that councils have been asked to contribute in recent years, some as much as 15%. Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming public interest in moving ahead with this policy intervention.

One could take a very cold, callous and mean free-market approach to housing and suggest that if someone finds themselves in a situation in which they are unable to meet the running costs of the household — including paying their rates — they should consider moving to a less expensive form of accommodation. However, that approach neglects the very clear social purpose that a house brings. A house is not simply an economic transaction; it is something that goes to a person's senses of security, tradition and community, and we should not dismiss that lightly. Our senior citizens are more reluctant than anyone else to move homes when they face financial difficulties, because they have a much longer history in those houses and communities. Therefore, it is important that we seek to give that group of people as much support as possible.

The rates deferment scheme is very much an option and it is something that people will have to consider in line with their individual circumstances. However, no pressure should be placed on individuals, and it may be the case that those who have fewer dependents, or no dependents, perceive the scheme to be very much in their interest, while those who have dependents like Mr Weir would perhaps think twice about whether they would want to rob him of his inheritance.

I do not think that the scheme should be labelled as a death tax. It is the very opposite of that, and will ensure that people are able to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour while they are alive. It will also enable them to enjoy their retirement in the place where they have lived, rather than facing difficult financial circumstances and being forced to move into a different type of accommodation. If the scheme works for a certain number of people, the Assembly has a duty to move in that direction.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I thank Members for their views on the rates deferment scheme. Given the novel and complex nature of the measure, we will watch its development with interest. I appreciate that there are some concerns about the scheme, including the debt potential, but deferment provides an important choice for those who are outside the thresholds for rates assistance, be that through housing benefit or the rate relief scheme.

Through the measure, the Assembly can ensure that pensioners do not feel pressurised to leave their family homes for financial reasons. As Mr Farry put it, houses should not simply be regarded as market transactions whereby, if people cannot afford their house, they go to a weer house or a different area. Very often a great deal of emotional baggage is attached to a house and it provides a social context and family support; all of which make it much more than that. It is important that, if people are caught in those circumstances, we try to find ways of facilitating them.

Several issues have been raised during the debate. First, all Members seem to appreciate that the scheme is not a way of giving further relief to individuals. There are costs involved and it does, and will, require people to think long and hard before they go down the route of applying for it. Several Members have also pointed out that it will only be in very specific circumstances that people will apply for rates deferment. Normally applicants will have a source of income that stops them from obtaining rates relief, as well as a house with considerable equity, but are facing rates bills which are eating into their limited pension or income, and are not too concerned about scallywags like Peter Weir, who are more interested in their inheritances than their parents' well-being and ability to enjoy their retirements. It is a way of freeing up that income — that is the important thing. However,

it is not without cost, and it is important that we spell that out.

I did not like Mr Weir's description of me as someone who "avoids spin where possible". I am glad that he is not here, because I would have something more to say about that. "Avoids spin full stop" would have done. He raised two points. The scheme will involve costs to councils and to LPS. The identified costs for the scheme amount to around £125,000 per annum.

When I took over in the Department, I did not warm to the scheme. In fact, the first time that I appeared before the Committee and Mr O'Loan asked me a question about it, I was not all that enthusiastic about it because of the administrative costs that I was given at that stage. The process is complex; a lot of checks, etc, need to be done. Some of those costs will be borne by the people who are applying for the scheme, but there are ongoing administrative costs for the Department, and they were considerably higher than £125,000. It is important that we try to keep those costs to a minimum. I trust that the reduced cost of £125,000 per annum will be deliverable. Councils will be responsible for 45% of those costs, so some administrative costs will be spread across the councils.

We will seek to ensure that there is guidance for the individuals who apply and that they are given an indication of where the debt is likely to go during the period of deferment. With all the information that we can get from actuaries about life expectancy, the value of the house, what will happen to rates, etc, we will seek to give individuals who apply some indication of the costs involved. For example, if someone applies for deferral of rates on a property that is currently worth £150,000 — assuming that there is a rates bill of about £800 on that, which is about the standard — after 20 years, they would have a deferred debt of £60,000. Of course, the value of the house would have gone up during that period, but a considerable amount of debt could be accumulated, and that is why we have to build in all the safeguards to ensure that people will be capable of paying.

As Mr Beggs pointed out, that is the reason why we want to ensure that all applicants have at least 40% equity at the very start, because the last thing that we want to do is leave someone saddled with a debt when they do not even have an asset that can be used to pay it. Mr

Beggs indicated that it is important that we minimise the risk to the public purse and to the individuals. That is why an applicant will only be accepted for the scheme after he or she has been given considerable explanation of the full implications by the Department.

I welcome the fact that, twice in one day, Mr Beggs and Mr O'Loan have agreed with me. I hope that the local papers hear about that, because normally only our disagreements get into the 'Larne Times' and the 'Carrickfergus Advertiser', etc. I hope that the Member will indicate that he was pleased on the two accounts of rural dwellers' access to cash and pensioners' access to their cash through the deferral of rates and that he welcomes the actions that I have taken.

As far as Mr Farry is concerned, I am pleased that I have made one proposal on rates that he has agreed with — it must be the first in the last two weeks. It is good that he has done that. He has pointed out that it is complex. I hope that I have reassured him about the costs to the councils and of the fact that it is not a "death tax". It will free up people's incomes and enable them, if they desire, to benefit from some of the equity from their house now rather than spending their income on paying rates.

4.45 pm

The option for deferment will impact on a limited number of people, but the more people who take it on, the lower the administrative cost will be per individual. The proposals address the financial difficulties that a specific group of people might face as a result of the current way in which rates are levied in Northern Ireland. I commend the measure to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Draft Rates (Deferment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee agreed previously that, where two or more amendments have been selected, additional time may be allocated at the Speaker's discretion. As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed 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. The proposer of each 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.

Mrs D Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish the long overdue cohesion, sharing and integration strategy by March 2010; believes that publication would be an illustration of commitment to fruitful working relationships; and calls for the establishment of a dedicated Executive mechanism and a Standing Committee, in accordance with Standing Order 50(2), to encourage, monitor and scrutinise implementation of the strategy across all government Departments.

Given current events, the motion is timely, and the subject has been debated in the House on at least two occasions. According to the research papers, Members from across the House have asked many questions about why a strategy on an issue that goes to the heart of the divided society in which we all live has been delayed so long.

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

The research that has been conducted over the years is quite clear. Over 80% of respondents to the recent Northern Ireland life and times survey stated that they wanted to live in a shared society. That means that people want shared housing, shared workplaces, shared spaces and shared public amenities. We all know about the economic cost of not dealing with the divisions in our community, but the issue is about more than that. Unfortunately, too many people lost their lives in the past 30 to 40 years because of the divided society in which we have all lived and grown up.

The motion calls for the publication of the strategy. I note that, last week, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced that they had agreed the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. Unfortunately, it was not produced to the Executive, and, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been shared with other parties, or with Ministers from those parties at the Executive. Indeed, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has had no opportunity to scrutinise such a document.

Last autumn, the DUP published what it believed was the basis for an agreement on cohesion, sharing and integration between it and Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin retaliated by issuing its own document on how a shared future should go. It is interesting to read the draft strategy, which Mr Donaldson issued when he was a junior Minister.

The draft strategy identifies political leadership and community engagement as key priorities. It also states:

"We believe that strong local political leadership is essential to the success of this strategy. For this reason we will establish a new Ministerially-led Good Relations Panel. With the support of the Head of the Civil Service, other departments, local government (from both NILGA and SOLACE) key stakeholders with a role and responsibilities in tackling sectarianism, racism and racial inequalities and statutory bodies such as the Equality Commission, the Community Relations Council and PSNI, the Ministerial Panel's priorities will be reviewing and monitoring".

We will wait to see whether that paragraph remains in the agreed strategy and judge it accordingly. Some people, however, are sceptical about whether agreement has been reached and view the statement to that effect as a means to give cover to the Alliance Party as its grabs for the justice Ministry post. Given the kind of political leadership that is shown in this place, it is interesting that political leadership is to form a key part of the strategy. I will come back to that point later.

In some of the responses, local councils expressed concern that the onus for promoting good relations is being pushed down to local council level. I accept that there is a genuine need for leadership at local council and local community level. However, that does not mean that Members and party leaders in this place should be allowed to move away from their

responsibility to provide strong leadership. We will wait to see how that situation develops over the next few weeks.

One of the critical issues is the need for cross-community relations and cross-community work. During the outworking of the peace programme over the past 10 to 15 years, capacity was increased on a single-identity basis. That was necessary during that time, but what is required now is more cross-community work. In fact, research by the University of Ulster and the University of Oxford shows that the real benefit from such work is a greater opportunity for cross-community contact, which has an effect not only on the individuals who engage in the work but on the perceptions and attitudes of the communities that they represent. I trust that cross-community work will be a central plank of the published strategy.

Two amendments have been proposed to the substantive motion: one from the Alliance Party and one from the Ulster Unionist Party. Members should note that the SDLP substantive motion calls for:

"the establishment of a dedicated Executive mechanism and a Standing Committee, in accordance with Standing Order 50(2), to encourage, monitor and scrutinise implementation of the strategy across all government Departments."

We strongly believe that our motion outlines the minimum requirement, because we are so far behind in the development of cross-community work and a cohesive, sharing and integration strategy that we must not lose any time in implementing the final published strategy.

The SDLP cannot support the Alliance Party amendment, because it weakens the substantive motion. The Alliance Party seems happy to note the recent progress made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and it has its reasons for doing so. However, the rest of us have much more to say on the matter. It is interesting that the Alliance Party agreed to put forward a name for the justice Ministry without seeing the colour of First Minister and deputy First Minister's money in respect of the strategy. The Alliance Party amendment does not go far enough.

Similarly, the Ulster Unionist Party amendment does not go far enough in respect of monitoring, and I hope that it will reflect on that. However, the UUP entered into the spirit of the

substantive motion to a much greater extent than the Alliance Party. We wish this place to demonstrate much stronger and more meaningful political leadership to the community and wider society. I welcome the fact that the junior Minister is present this afternoon, and I look forward to his reply.

The SDLP, from its very foundation, has sought to build better community relations and tackle sectarianism and racism.

Indeed, our new party leader, Minister Margaret Ritchie, made that a key platform in her bid for the SDLP leadership. She outlined how she envisaged a society that was reconciled, not only in relation to the two main communities in the North, but on a North/South basis.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Sorry, I cannot, because I have very little time left.

There is concern within ethnic minority groups and other organisations that sectarianism and racism are being dealt with by one strategy, when, in the past, there were two different strategies. It will be interesting to hear from the junior Minister about that, because some concerns have been expressed about how sectarianism and racism will be recognised and dealt with.

In the draft strategy that Mr Donaldson issued, there is also mention of a flag protocol and of how we deal with our past. How we deal with our past impacts so much on today. If we do not tell the truth about the past, we see former terrorists glorified, memorials erected without any planning approval and flags going up all over our towns and villages, which clearly demarcate them and identify them with one community or the other. Many people feel that those flags make members of the community that they do not represent feel unwelcome. There needs to be a strong emphasis on the issue and a real political will to tackle flags, emblems and symbols of the past. As Members know, in my constituency last weekend, young people were engaged in violence. Unless we get to the truth of the past, we will prolong the effects of it and will not learn lessons from it, which means that young people's lives will continue to be corrupted.

The "separate but equal" policy from Sinn Féin is not acceptable to the SDLP. The SDLP

is interested only in a shared future and a shared society based on equality. I restate our disappointment with Sinn Féin for not allowing nationalist votes to be equal to unionist votes. That has allowed the gerrymandering of the justice ministry post.

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

Mrs D Kelly: I am sure that junior Minister Newton will not tolerate members of his party joining Facebook sites that say "No Pope here."

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"notes the recent progress made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in agreeing their draft cohesion, sharing and integration strategy; believes that publication of the draft for consultation will be an illustration of commitment to fruitful working relationships and to the building of a shared and better future; recognises the importance of a commitment at all levels of government and within civic society in creating a shared and equal society; and looks forward to early public consultation on the draft strategy which will give all parties and the wider community the opportunity to make a contribution to the shape and direction of final policy."

I will try to address the motion and our amendment and not just respond to the usual rant that we hear on all occasions such as this. Undoubtedly, today's debate on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy is timely, although I am not sure that the precise wording of the motion is timely given the changes that we have seen in recent days.

Building a shared future for the people of Northern Ireland is the biggest issue facing the Assembly, the Executive, all the institutions of government and every public agency. Sadly, it has been neglected over the years. On two occasions during the Assembly's first mandate, my colleagues and I voted against the Programme for Government that was introduced under the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, because on neither occasion did it properly address the issue of building a shared future. Therefore, although it is very welcome to hear Dolores Kelly mention the SDLP's commitment to the building of a shared future, if she had been in the Assembly in its first guise in 1998, she would have seen that what came forth from the Administration that was jointly led by her then deputy party leader was a little

lacking. Therefore, if people are going to issue brickbats in all directions, they should look first at the realities of life.

Dr Farry: I appreciate that this matter affects Mr Ford personally. Does he agree that it is rather strange for a party to profess its support for a shared future and its opposition to sectarianism but then make sectarian comments by labelling him as a unionist? Surely, in a shared society —

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. If the Member checks the Hansard report, he will see that I did not name Mr Ford.

Dr Farry: Statements made by the Member's party leader and some of her colleagues have labelled Mr Ford as a unionist. Surely, in a shared society, people have a right to have a political opinion that is not based on a point of view about the border or on a point of view that represents a section of society but that is based on a point of view that represents all of society.

5.00 pm

Mr Ford: I entirely agree with my colleague. I must confess that his intervention is a much higher tribute to the quality of my handwriting than I had thought was justified. I did not realise that he was able to read several lines below the point that I had reached in my notes from such a distance over my shoulder. I am grateful to know that my handwriting is so good.

Dr Farry is absolutely right: the current leader of the SDLP feels obliged to label as a unionist anybody who does not fit her definition of a nationalist. Moreover, she has made cheap sectarian jibes about the effect that an Alliance Party member filling a role on the Executive would have, and she did so on the presumption that those of us who have taken an entirely different stance to that of unionism on many points over the years are now somehow unionists. That shows the kind of sectarianism that is coming from the SDLP, and it gives the lie to the fine words of the motion.

No progress was made on building a shared future during the first Assembly mandate; progress occurred only during the period of direct rule. That is an indictment of the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, and there is no doubt that very little progress was made after the restoration of devolution in May 2007 until recent weeks. Instead, there has been delay and deadlock, and, in that sense, the

wording of the SDLP's motion might have been relevant a couple of weeks ago. However, there has been some movement in the process. That movement is clearly limited, and it is obvious that the full issue is not being dealt with. However, we did not see similar progress on any previous occasion. We did not see progress on building a shared future under the leadership of David Trimble and Séamus Mallon. We did not see progress on building a shared future under the leadership of David Trimble and Mark Durkan. We did not see progress on developing the strategy under the leadership of Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness.

Mr McDevitt: Will Mr Ford confirm that he has seen the First Minister and deputy First Minister's new paper that he is expounding the virtues of?

Mr Ford: It seems that Mr McDevitt can not only read my poor handwriting over my shoulder but can read at an angle. That was the next line in my notes.

Let me make it clear that I welcome the process. The document that has been agreed by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister remains an OFMDFM document, and I understand that it is now out for consultation in Departments. It is not an Alliance Party document. We did not shape or write it, and we have not even seen it. The issue is whether the process is moving forward; it is not about a suggestion that our document has been adopted.

I have absolutely no doubt that, given the conflicting documents that the DUP and Sinn Féin put forward last summer, the document will contain significant gaps. I have no doubt that we will seek to strengthen it, and the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists may even want to strengthen it. However, that is the point of a consultation process, and that is the stage that we have now reached. A process is now under way that was not under way a few weeks ago. That represents movement, renders the motion out of date and makes our amendment significantly more appropriate.

I welcome the process and the fact that it has started to move in the past couple of weeks. It is possible that the Alliance Party's constructive attitude has had an effect on the way that the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Féin —

Mr B McCrea: I would have thought so.

Mr Kennedy: Credit where credit is due.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. All remarks should be made through the Chair. I understand, Mr Kennedy, that you will have 10 minutes to speak after Mr Ford has finished.

Mr Ford: I am not sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, whether you will deduct the time that some Members have used to speak from a sedentary position from their overall speaking time.

There is no doubt that a full commitment to building a shared future is required in the Assembly, in the Executive, in every institution of government and in civic society. There is no doubt that there are huge arrears in what needs to be done, and that affects every part of Government policy. That is why it is important that a document is now being circulated to Departments in a way that ensures that all Departments accept their responsibilities and are brought on board. This is not an OFMDFM paper exercise; it is a process that must ensure effective delivery and the engagement of every part of government. It must ensure that every agency from Roads Service to the health and social care trusts accepts that there is an obligation to change things.

At last year's US investment conference, we heard the cogent comments of Mayor Bloomberg of New York, who made it absolutely clear that the concept of building a shared future and allowing a completely open society is not airy-fairy liberal waffle — much as some may wish to suggest that it is — but is of fundamental and practical importance in building a modern economy in which people maximise their opportunities for economic activity, whether in employment or in opening a business, and which ensures that the best possible economic development happens. Why would anyone suggest that this region, with an economic development record that is almost as bad as any other region of the UK, could possibly afford any obstacles to moving its economy forward? It is vital that we develop that economy and that we build on the opportunities that exist.

It is vital, against the background of the increase in violence of the past few weeks and, to some extent, of the past few years, as witnessed, for example, in the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) reports, that we take serious action to tackle good relations issues and build a shared future. We cannot move society forward unless we start to address those issues.

That is why it is vital that we have a home-grown structure for the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy — not something dropped down from direct rule that is ignored by the devolved Administration but something drawn up under devolution which builds and makes opportunities for all our people.

There is a huge range of things that need to be done, but there are also examples of things that have been seen to move forward. Thirty years ago, fair employment was an impossible dream, but it is now the accepted position in virtually every workplace in Northern Ireland. There was a commitment to seeing that there was fairness in employment, and it happened. We have seen the demand for shared schooling, with the massive oversubscription of nearly all integrated schools an indication of how people wish their children to be educated. We have seen the demand for shared housing, which cannot be met, particularly in the greater Belfast conurbation but also in other towns. Public housing is segregated, yet it is clear that people wish to live in mixed and inclusive areas.

The shared future process must be seen to apply to every part of government. There must be a robust, serious and meaningful policy, and it must be put into operation by every Department and every public agency. Last week's developments were a start on that process.

Mr Kennedy: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after the second "calls" and insert

"on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure the strategy has robust monitoring and evaluation criteria to facilitate its successful implementation."

I am grateful for the opportunity to move amendment No 2. I speak not as Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister but as an Ulster Unionist Party representative.

We should thank the SDLP for tabling the motion. The Ulster Unionist Party broadly supports the main thrust of the motion, although we have reservations about the establishment of another Standing Committee in this place, and I will come to that issue in a moment. That is our concern, and it is the reason why we tabled our amendment.

Despite the recent statement issued by the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on the cohesion, sharing and

integration strategy, the strategy has yet to be published for wider circulation. Despite, again, the rather long-winded and self-congratulatory tone of the Alliance Party amendment, we have, in reality, not moved very far.

The original statement by the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister said:

“Over the coming weeks, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will ask government departments for their input into the programme. The document will then be presented to the OFMDFM committee before being submitted to the Executive. The draft programme will then go out for public consultation.”

Although I welcome the progress, I have concerns that it is yet another formula for more process, like most things that have arisen out of Hillsborough. It appears that the Alliance Party has sold its soul for the promise of process politics. Taking into consideration the fact that no document has yet been published, we will not support the Alliance Party amendment.

Mr A Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: No; I have considerable progress to make.

The publication of a CSI strategy was a commitment of the Programme for Government. It provided us with an opportunity to build a more pluralist and cohesive society in this part of the United Kingdom. Intrinsic to that concept is the recognition of our diversity and the determination to make mutual respect and recognition the basis of a Northern Ireland that is at ease with itself. We do not advocate being “equal but separate”, as that would maintain the divisions that have blighted our society for too long. However, “equal but separate” is the only example that Sinn Féin and the DUP have shown on the issue. There has been a complete lack of leadership as the situation has veered from a tragically missed opportunity almost to farce, as both parties published their own version of the programme. More than two years into the Assembly's remit, it is safe to say that the DUP and Sinn Féin-led Executive have failed on this and many other issues. That view is shared by others, including Mr Duncan Morrow of the Community Relations Council, who described the failure to agree policy and ensure a shared and better future as “embarrassing and potentially dangerous”. Even Sir Hugh Orde,

before leaving office, lamented that CSI was hardly on the public agenda at all.

Recent events have illustrated the fundamental need for a CSI policy. Unfortunately, people in Northern Ireland are growing ever more cynical about our politics. This process will not have reduced that cynicism. We have had an impasse for over two years. Then, when it has been politically expedient for the DUP and Sinn Féin in order to get the Alliance Party over the line on policing and justice, the rabbit is finally pulled out of the hat. If it was that easy, many people will ask, why was it not done before? That is no way for a functioning Executive to work, and I fear that that progress does not mean that genuine change has taken place. It has been expedient for the DUP and Sinn Féin to make that decision in that way.

I will move on to our amendment. As I stated, we support the thrust of the SDLP motion, and we await the publication of the programme with interest. Although I recognise and share the SDLP's desire to see the CSI programme implemented, I am not convinced and neither is my party that the establishment of a new Standing Committee is the best way to ensure its implementation, nor would it be the best use of scarce resources. Setting up a new Standing Committee is not perhaps the best use of resources at a time of financial constraint, when we have all been calling for more efficient government. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has responsibility for scrutinising the strategy, which is cross-cutting, as are many OFMDFM strategies. Therefore, a new Standing Committee would be uncertain, as it would not be linked to any specific Department and would be less likely to hold Ministers to account. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that robust monitoring and evaluation criteria incorporated into the strategy would help its implementation as well as Committee scrutiny.

5.15 pm

We must remember that a significant amount of the policy will be delivered at a local level. The strategy will, hopefully, be implemented by the new councils, if we ever get them, in communities and in the voluntary sector. We must provide those groups, as well as the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with the tools and expertise that they need get the required results.

Questions arise about who will set the targets, if there are any, and who will be statutorily responsible. The Ulster Unionist Party is always cautious about setting arbitrary targets that become the focus of a strategy over and above the changes that are needed on the ground. The cohesion, sharing and integration strategy will essentially be about getting people to work together at local level, which is always hard to measure.

We wait to see what the final programme will look like and whose version will be used. Clarification is needed on whether the good relations baseline indicators will still be used; whether they are still relevant nearly three years after their publication; and whether the aims of the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy are the same as they were for A Shared Future. Remember that? What is the difference between a strategy and a programme? Perhaps the junior Minister, whose presence I welcome, will tell us what the difference is. It is clear that people will need robust monitoring and evaluation criteria if the programme is to make the positive impact on the ground that we all hope it will.

I commend the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment and seek the House's support for it.

Mr Bell: I support the Alliance Party's amendment. *[Interruption.]* It is in the spirit of cross-community understanding.

There is an old saying that those who do not learn from their mistakes are destined to repeat them. The Ulster Unionists, on their watch, made the mistake of trying to implement this document for a number of years. The SDLP, on its watch, also made the mistake of trying to introduce something. The Ulster Unionists and Conservatives and the SDLP had their watch, and both failed. It is important for the House that we do not fail on our watch.

It is important that we look at our aim and at what we are here to do. We are here to build a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland. It is not the time to make sectarian jibes or follow false leads. We are here to build a new future for Northern Ireland, and we all bear a serious responsibility to achieve that. As our Members for Upper Bann will know, it is a time for us to reflect on the short political life since 1997, a year in which we lost two policemen, Constable Graham and Reserve Constable Johnston. A year before those murders, a young man called Mr Michael

McGoldrick was also murdered. When I was growing up, I lost two brothers: Frederick Starrett and Robert Cummings. All those people paid a heavy price to give us the peace that we have today. After a weekend in which we recalled the horrific events that occurred in Newry — I have some very good friends who were left without their husbands there — it is important that we take our opportunity today. Many people gave their today for our tomorrow. It is important that we get it right, as opposed to getting it rushed.

My brief research indicates that some £29 million has already been invested in good relations work in the current CSR period. The Executive worked immediately to seek agreement on a new programme and a new policy direction. It has been a difficult process, and it is important that we get it right, as opposed to getting it rushed.

The DUP is pleased that, at long last, we have an agreement for a shared and better future for everyone in Northern Ireland. When all Executive Departments have put forward their views and have had their chance to contribute, the strategy will go to public consultation. The people of Northern Ireland understand that it is important that we get this right, as opposed to getting it rushed.

Although the strategy is not yet published, a lot of important work has been done in other areas, including sterling work on parading. Others may seek to use that issue for political advantage, but a lot of good and hard work has been done on the parading issue, and I seriously commend everyone who was involved.

The motion calls on the Executive to publish the strategy by March 2010. People do not seem to understand that the DUP will not serve artificial deadlines. It is more important that we have a strategy that is fit for purpose and that all parties have had a chance to make a contribution. Now that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have agreed their programme for cohesion, sharing and integration, Executive Ministers will have their chance to comment, including the Minister for Social Development, who has made a good contribution. The SDLP could learn a lot by looking to her example of sharing ideas with colleagues and integrating them with the work that DSD has already done. A little more homework is required on that issue.

We need cohesion. Mr Kennedy introduced himself as an Ulster Unionist. I do not know

whether that meets electoral law. Should he not have said that he was a member of the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists — New Force? On his right-hand side, there are the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists. Mr Cameron tells us that he supports the Hillsborough agreement.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please. Your time is up.

Mr Bell: On his left, there is Mr McNarry, who tells us that it is a betrayal.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the debate on the CSI strategy. Like the Member who spoke previously, I warmly welcome the recent announcement that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have agreed a programme for cohesion, sharing and integration and that they are at the stage of seeking input from Departments. It is my understanding that the document is then to be presented for scrutiny to the Statutory Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, chaired by Danny Kennedy. As a member of that Committee, I look forward to that development and the opportunity to discuss the strategy.

Mr A Maskey: The Member has just referred to the Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee. Danny Kennedy said, in a rather incoherent way, that he maybe nearly supported the motion. Will the Member consider how Mr Kennedy's proclamation that he supports the motion squares with the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party held secret meetings with the DUP and the Orange Order to try to ensure that nationalist representatives are denied election to seats? I wonder what part of the strategy they are interested in. All they are interested in is —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I gracefully remind Members that interjections are supposed to be short and to the point.

Mr McElduff: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank Mr Maskey for his intervention. Danny Kennedy made the point that a Statutory Committee exists to monitor and seek the implementation of the sharing and cohesion programme. A Statutory Committee is much more powerful than a Standing Committee. I do not support diluting the implementation or scrutiny of this strategy through referring it to a Standing Committee. The Statutory

OFMDFM Committee is the proper Committee to scrutinise the strategy.

Mr Kennedy: So you are with us?

Mr McElduff: Certainly, Danny, and I will see you next Wednesday at 2.00 pm.

The programme sets out a vision for a new era to build a shared and better future in which fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect are acknowledged and accepted by all. I welcome the fact that the Alliance Party amendment is up to date and notes the recent progress made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in agreeing the CSI strategy. That is helpful.

In my constituency of West Tyrone, the iconic Lisanelly education campus project exemplifies cohesion, sharing and integration. I pay tribute to the leadership of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister and of the previous First Minister, Ian Paisley, who was also supportive of that project. Leadership at local level has been provided by people like Monsignor Donnelly; Reverend Robert Herron; Danny McSorley, the chief executive of Omagh District Council; Barry Mulholland, the chief executive of the Western Education and Library Board; and Pat Doherty MP. That group of five has been at the heart of lobbying for the establishment of the Lisanelly education campus. It is an iconic project. A number of post-primary schools will be located on one broad site and will share facilities.

The SDLP is very good at speaking about a shared and better future. I would like the SDLP leader, Margaret Ritchie, to travel to Omagh and have a word with her three councillors on Omagh District Council, who have been begrudging and obstructive towards that project at every turn. The challenge of leadership has fallen on other shoulders at every turn. Regrettably, the SDLP contribution in Omagh has been obstructive and begrudging. That featured in a recent letter to a newspaper, which was written by a local man from Glencordial called Joseph Ferris. It was a very accurate and on-the-mark letter that reflected the words that were spoken by SDLP Omagh district councillors.

I also make reference to the Greencastle flag initiative. The CSI programme will include references to respect for flags and not having a proliferation of flags or emblems in our communities. The Irish national flag is the chosen flag of the people of Greencastle,

mid-Tyrone. The rules of the flag are displayed at the crossroads in Greencastle, and one national flag flies in that area. That initiative has led to other flags being taken down. There is not a proliferation of flags in that area. Other communities should introduce that initiative.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr McElduff: I have limited time, Basil. I have about 19 seconds left, but I will give way for five or six seconds. Go ahead.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Member agree that Ulster is at the crossroads?

Mr McElduff: Thanks very much. I hope that that is a nine-county Ulster, Basil, not a six-county Ulster.

I will leave it at that. Martin McGuinness is doing a great job.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to stick to the motion.

Mr B McCrea: OK, George?

Mr G Robinson: Thanks, Basil. I have no doubt that this debate will bring everything except cohesion to this Assembly. It is a pity that some people see fit to create difficulties instead of trying to resolve them. However, I will concentrate on two areas: the creation of an equal society and the consultation on the strategy.

It is up to this Assembly to lead Northern Ireland towards the goal of an equal society. It is up to all of us to set an example on the political level that will be seen and hopefully followed by civic society. The publication of the draft consultation will be a start in the right direction. It will show the world that Northern Ireland's politicians want to keep moving forward in their genuine attempts to build a society in which everyone is equal. That would also be a very public sign of this Assembly's determination to work together for the good of all our citizens.

I appreciate that not everyone wants progress. Some people outside this Assembly actively oppose it politically and others violently. Those people have no respect for the people of Northern Ireland. They are the very reason why a united way forward politically via the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy must be found.

5.30 pm

To ensure that the Assembly has an acceptable draft strategy for all peace-loving people in Northern Ireland, there will be a public consultation process. I urge everyone to contribute to it, so that the final policy maximises the strategy's impact for community cohesion, sharing and integration.

However, I sound a note of caution to the Members on the Benches opposite. The policy must ensure that local historical figures, including WF Massey from Limavady, in the East Londonderry constituency, which I am proud to represent, are treated with respect. Links with the RAF and army regiments should be celebrated, and the presentations that the armed services made to Limavady Borough Council should be treated with the respect that they deserve, which, unfortunately, has not always been the case.

I hope that Members on the Benches opposite will ensure that equality, shared spaces and community cohesion are not perceived as one-way traffic in future. Only when everyone in Northern Ireland feels that they receive genuine respect for their culture, heritage and beliefs can the strategy be of full use. Nevertheless, it is important that progress is made quickly, and I understand that the publication of the consultation document is not too far off. I look forward to seeing it. I support amendment No 1.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the advances made on the CSI strategy, which must deal with many issues. There are many isms in our society. We all have our examples. I can relate to the ism in sectarianism, which underpinned the murder of Kevin McDaid and the injuring of Damien Fleming in my constituency last year. All such incidents are dreadful, and we must work to eradicate them.

We must deal not only with the ism of the two communities: many intolerances and prejudices must be dealt with. We have to work to rid our society of all the dreadful isms that will be addressed in the CSI strategy. We have to work in the context of fairness, equality, rights, respect and responsibility. There will be many layers of responsibility, and it is essential to involve local communities in the process. They will have an integral role in shaping how the CSI policy is put into practice. It is OK to talk about strategies and high-level documents, but this

strategy cannot make it from the top down; it must meet the work that goes, proverbially, from the ground up.

I make my main comments in my role as party spokesperson on ethnic minorities. Sometimes our debates concentrate too much on two communities when there are many communities in this region. Tackling racial harassment and racial discrimination must be equally integral to our overall task. Members have referred to two strategies. We must ensure that the CSI strategy refines and betters what is in place and that it will bring together a whole family of policies and approaches.

I will refer briefly to the six shared aims in the racial strategy, because they are most important to our ethnic minority groups. The elimination of racial inequality must surely be a central plank. We must strive to eliminate all types of racial inequality in our society. There has to be equal protection for our ethnic minorities. If I had time to go into the detail of that, there are many areas in which protection of ethnic minority groups is still lacking. There must be protection of their rights and protection against racism and racist crime.

There are many issues on equality of service provision that NICEM (the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities) and its like are worried about, such as people losing rights when their spouse is directly affected or loses a job. The CSI strategy must include work to improve service provision in that and many other areas. It must increase the participation of our ethnic minority groups and the process of dialogue with and between those groups. Some good work is being carried out, but many more hurdles remain to be overcome and many areas must be improved on.

We must also build ethnic groups' capacity to know their rights and to know how to take on the system. Many people from Ireland have gone to live in other countries, and the biggest barrier that they faced was getting to know the local system and how it worked. Therefore, we must ensure that that shared aim is protected and, indeed, improved. All six shared aims, which are so important to ethnic minorities, must be enhanced, not just rubber stamped.

It is OK to debate strategies and documents using fine words, but it is not OK for Members to be trying to score cheap political points. Cohesion, sharing and integration will require

more than a document that is written in black and white; all aspects of the strategy will require a change in attitude from everyone in society. That means that people from many areas in our society, including politicians, will have to work from the ground up to help ethnic minorities and all community groups. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Shannon: As a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I am aware, as are others, of how much hard work has gone into producing the strategy. Sometimes, there has been frustration about the speed of the project, and there is no question that we have been waiting for it for a while and that people are impatient for its delivery. I understand that frustration; however, as has often been said in the Chamber, particularly during the previous debate on the strategy, we can have either a rushed strategy or the right strategy. Rather than forcing the publication of a document that is not fit for purpose, we should get it right. In my office, as, I am sure, in many others, the girls have a saying: do it right now, or do it right. Those options are different, and given the choice of doing things right now or of doing them right, I would always rather have them done right.

Thair cannae bae onieboadie i the Chammer wha dusnae knaw fer wie this strategy was maide fer an' what bes in hit. Hits a strategy at maun bae far reachin' tae ansuer aa o' the differ needs i the Province adae wi' fairness an' equalitie an' tae achieve thon a clatter o' thocht maun bae pit intae hit. This hes bein the case ap tae noo an' the yairn aboot the hare an' the tortoise bes yin at cums tae min'.

There can be no one in the Chamber who is unaware of what the strategy has been designed for and what it incorporates. To provide all the fairness and equality needs in the Province, the strategy must be far-reaching. If that is to be achieved, a lot of thought must be put into it. That has certainly been the case, and the story of the hare and the tortoise springs to mind.

Although I agree that some things, such as Planning Service reforms, can and should be done quickly, other things should be changed only at the right time and in the right way. The best and most relevant example is post-primary transfer. The Minister of Education decided what she did not want, she threw it out the window, but she made no provision to replace it. She left an entire year of children frightened and

insecure about what the future held for them, and if it were not for the work of a body that was not even funded by her Department, we would have had even more chaos in schools than we do now. That is a typical example of what happens when, in the hope of getting a good response to what one believes in, one rushes into doing something else.

Nevertheless, I agree that it is vital to have a strategy in place and that we adhere to its recommendations. I would prefer us to be implementing the strategy already, but, to change things in Northern Ireland, it is more important that it is the right one. As I said in the previous debate on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, I am well known for my drive to eradicate poverty. Indeed, that is one of the Committee's aims and commitments, and it is still of the utmost importance. Therefore, in the light of the economic downturn and the financial pressure that many families are under, it is vital that we adopt the right approach and ensure that that extra financial burden does not cause those who are struggling to keep their heads above water to sink to the bottom. I know that a shared future and the eradication of poverty are linked, and when everyone in Northern Ireland works together, across all boundaries and from all ethnic groups, religious persuasions and political backgrounds, we can achieve a lot for the Province. As a people, we will be stronger for that.

However, cohesion and sharing are not waiting on the strategy's being published; they are happening already. I have seen great examples of cohesion and sharing at work in community groups in my constituency and in other constituencies. There is no doubt that there are still some old division lines in the Province, and some new ones have appeared with the increase of migrant workers and new prejudices coming to the fore. However, it is clear that much work is already being done in the community to combat that. I extend my congratulations to the community leaders who work so hard in my constituency and in other constituencies to ensure that everyone is included in their schemes; they do not ask anyone their religious persuasion or where they go on Sunday.

Let us get the document into play as soon as it is prudent to do so, but let us not pretend that without it there is no sharing, cohesion and integration; they take place every day, and will continue due to the goodwill of the people.

They are not solely based on this document, important though it is; the fact that it has not been published yet does not stop the principles to which we adhere being worked out in communities. I support the amendment.

Mr Elliott: I rise with mixed emotions: I am pleased to hear that there is progress, but I am annoyed that OFMDFM has failed to deliver on the issue. There are some suggestions of a broad strategy, but there is nothing final, and there is no clear indication of what we will get. It was interesting to hear Mr Bell say that we should not make political jibes, but his speech contained almost nothing but political jibes. However, that is for him to assess. Nevertheless, we did hear the political facts that we have to contend with. It was interesting to hear him say that there has been huge progress on the parading issue, and I welcome that.

Mr McElduff: If something positive ever happened here, would the Member be prepared to acknowledge it? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Elliott: I thought that we were making huge progress with Mr McElduff: I often praise him. Therefore, I am surprised to hear him say that, but I suppose that is where he is coming from. I will deal with him later.

I am pleased to hear that there has been significant progress on parading, and I look for further acceptance from the nationalist/republican community of the right of the Loyal Orders to parade in areas throughout the Province where they have been stopped in years gone by. I welcome that progress and look forward to it in the Garvaghy Road, Ormeau Road and Dunloy.

The Lisanelly project in Omagh, which Mr McElduff mentioned, has potential if handled properly; however, I will go no further than that until we see if it is more positive than we believe it to be. However, it is a pity that his party colleague was not as positive in cohesion, sharing and integration on other educational issues where she has proved to be a total disaster. All she has done is divide communities. Therefore, he should give some advice to his colleague in that respect.

It is unfortunate that there was ethnic cleansing throughout the Province for years, and those are the type of hurts that we must try to heal. Mr Leonard said that it is not just about the document; it is about the outworkings of the

document. We can have all the documents in the world, but if the outworkings are not right and people do not interpret them properly and do not carry out what is expected, we will be no further forward. That is why there is work to be done, document or no, and even after a document comes out. The Ulster Unionist Party has been trying for years to bring people together, but others have not co-operated, and they are still not co-operating. One only has to look at the west bank of Londonderry, where the Protestant community has been almost totally alienated. That is very unfortunate, and there is a huge amount of bridge-building to be done there.

5.45 pm

I will move on to the Alliance Party amendment. I am not surprised that the Alliance has been bought off on this, but I am surprised at how easily it has been bought off, without even having a document to see. The Alliance Party amendment says that it:

"notes the recent progress ... believes that publication of the draft for consultation will be an illustration of commitment to fruitful working relationships".

What great flowery language that is, but I would expect nothing better from that party. I would like to know whether its members have actually seen the document. If they know what is in it, perhaps they can give us a flavour of it.

Mr Ford: Had the Member been in earlier to hear my speech, he would not have made that particular point, because I made it absolutely clear that we have not seen the document.

Mr Elliott: In fact, I was here to hear Mr Ford's rant, and it did not tell me anything.

Mr Ford: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am at a loss. The Member says that he was in to hear me say it, yet he repeats the question. That sounds to me perilously close to him accusing me of lying.

Mr Elliott: I would not dare dream of accusing Mr Ford of lying. It is not for me to make that judgement; it is for others. However, quite clearly, the Alliance Party has been bought off in this process. As my party colleague Danny Kennedy said, it has sold its soul just to get agreement for some political role that it wanted. There goes its whole opposition to the Executive and to the process that has happened here. It

has simply been bought off by some agreement with the two main parties.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that it is important to keep this debate very good-natured.

Mr McDevitt: There is no question that the story of dealing with sectarianism and racism in this region has been one of denial and delay; denial of the cancer at the heart of our society and delay in even accepting that we have some responsibility to do something about it.

The opportunity provided by the peace process was that it would enable us to tackle our underlying issues head on. In a society that has made coming out of conflict its international calling card, the failure to agree policy ensuring a shared and better future has become "embarrassing and potentially dangerous". Those are not my words; they are the words of the chief executive of the Community Relations Council in September 2009.

We all welcome process progress, whatever that means. Last week we were treated to a statement from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister telling us that there was something in the process, but we are yet to see it. In fact, we do not even know whether Ministers have seen it. In fact, we know that Ministers probably have not seen it. So, the questions that we need answered in the response to this debate are: when will Ministers see the document? When might Mr Ford see the document? When was the document agreed or not agreed? As it stands, this does not feel so much like a debate about CSI in the cohesion, sharing and integration sense, but in the hit show sense. Frankly, you would need forensic skills like those that are displayed fictionally in Miami, New York and Las Vegas to find what we are talking about here, such is the disrespect with which the two big parties are treating this issue.

"Separate but equal" may be enough for Sinn Féin and the DUP, but it is not enough for the SDLP. Why would we ever agree to anything that was the basis on which Thatcher built her multicultural Britain? Separate but equal is the exact same philosophy on which Thatcher built her so-called multiculturalism. It is the philosophy that led to race riots and unprecedented social unrest throughout the 80s. It may be good enough for some parties in this House in 2010, but it is not good enough

for us. I have to say that I would never ever have thought that it would have been good enough for the Alliance Party.

Many of us respect the Alliance Party. We have always thought that it was the party that did the decent thing and did its best to try to stay out of the communal conflict. However, in the past year or so, it has made politics out of the issue.

As recently as September 2009, Mr Ford came to the House and, quite rightly, berated the First Minister and deputy First Minister for not progressing their CSI strategy. However, on 2 November 2009, five or six weeks after coming to the House, he wrote an e-mail to the Liberal Democrat team in Westminster, in which he said that the Secretary of State was concerned that his party was pushing a shared future too much, as another distraction on the way to the devolution of justice. That e-mail was sent by the Alliance Party leader to the Liberal Democrats in November 2009, in the context of their preparation for a series of questions in Parliament. It meant “go soft” on a shared future; do not push the Secretary of State.

What concerns me particularly is that four days later, ‘The Belfast Telegraph’ reports Anna Lo as saying that:

“It would be nearly impossible for progress to be made on issues such as policing and justice if we don’t have a shared future strategy agreed urgently”.

The question arises as to who speaks for the Alliance Party; its leader or my constituency colleague in South Belfast. Four days earlier, the leader says go soft. Four days later, my South Belfast colleague publicly toes the party line.

It is too important an issue to play politics with. It has been too serious —

Mr Ford: A selective quotation referring to what may or may not have been said by the Secretary of State is being somewhat tenuously extended to suggest that it is my opinion. Perhaps the Member could reflect that to comment on someone else’s opinion is not necessarily to endorse it.

Mr McDevitt: I could read the reference into the record again. However, I do not need to because colleagues will be able to read it in Hansard tomorrow morning. The reference is not taken out of context. Mr David Ford invited a colleague

in the Liberal Democrats, in Parliament, to go soft on a shared future.

The issue is a defining one for the Assembly. If we get it right, we will send a signal to future generations that we are serious, not just about bottom-up community building but about top-down structural change. That is why my party’s motion does not just call for the Executive to get serious about tackling a shared future and developing a CSI strategy; it talks about the Assembly getting serious about that. It is why my party has said that appropriate mechanisms should be put in place at Executive level and at Assembly level to test all our resolve and prejudices and to make the issue one on which we can truly build a new future.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The debate is welcome, although it may have been overtaken by events that have taken place over the last while.

Good relations must be looked at with regard to how to involve and include people. It should be about sharing. It should be about respecting everyone’s views, aspirations and outlook for the future. It should not be about everyone’s being neutral, as the Northern Ireland Office-created Community Relations Council would, sometimes, have it; that everyone should drop their aspirations and live in a neutral society in which no one really has any respect for anyone else, but in which everyone is together — whatever that might mean. We should respect different opinions and explore diversity in order to enrich society, not to divide it.

Accepting that someone else has a different point of view and political outlook does not mean that one agrees with it. However, one can respect it and work with it. The issue is about building and promoting trust that allows us to do that, so that differences are better understood and can be seen as enriching, rather than threatening. Unfortunately, some of the politics that have been used have been more divisive than collective or aimed at trying to build a better society.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member explain why Sinn Féin published its own document last autumn and why the DUP published its own document, on which it thought it had the agreement of Sinn Féin? Is that not divisive?

Mr Molloy: I appreciate the Member’s point of view, but that did not signal any division whatsoever.

Those documents outlined party positions on the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. We await the publication of the SDLP's document on that strategy. Perhaps its members will not have to rely on the Northern Ireland Office and the Community Relations Council to devise a document for them.

It is important to build a confident community that can stand up for itself, but that can respect and work with others to build a proper society that can accommodate and celebrate diversity and not make people feel under threat or fear. Our society has come through a difficult time of conflict, and we need to find a way to deal with that. We are often lectured by the great and the good about how we should make plans for a future society. We are told by such people that everyone is wrong except them. Sometimes, in reality, those parties do not make a contribution to plans for a future society. We heard Mr Elliott talking about a shared society and integration. However, the first issue that he talked about was walking up the Garvaghy Road. That was not about sharing; it was about how they can dominate again and regain the privileged position that they held for so long.

We must tackle the divisions in society. However, we do not have to tackle them head-on.

Mr Elliott: My issue is not about division. For example, I do not have any particular love for the GAA, which Mr McElduff knows; however, I respect its tradition and its right to do what it does. All that I am asking is that the same respect is given to my community in places such as the Garvaghy Road and other areas.

Mr Molloy: If the Orange Order were respected on the Garvaghy Road, no one would have any problem with it walking there. However, because it has been involved in a coat-trailing exercise for so many years, it has become a problem. The Orange Order must build trust with residents in such areas so that communities can accept and work with it.

We must tackle sectarianism, discrimination and racism. We must have a zero-tolerance approach to the racism that we have seen in the past and to division in our society.

The Hillsborough agreement was a good visual sign of agreement between Sinn Féin and the DUP. Who criticised that agreement? The Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP did when they tried to rip the back out of it at every opportunity.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: No. I have already given way a couple of times.

That opportunity to build respect between communities and to build trust between the parties has been torn apart by opposition parties. They did not do so because they saw anything wrong with the agreement but because they want to score political points. That brings me back to my earlier point —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: I already said that I will not give way.

Sometimes the people who lecture the rest of us about what we should be doing are the last people who want agreement. They want to divide — *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr Molloy: Those people want to cause division and break up any sense of coming together. They do not want to see progress. They want to play on the fear and division in society so that they can score political points and gain some political leeway. That is why Sinn Féin will not support the motion, which calls for the establishment of a new Standing Committee. Why would we weaken the Statutory Committee that already exists to scrutinise OFMDFM? I am surprised that Mr Kennedy and the Ulster Unionist Party proposed an amendment. Mr Kennedy is no longer in the Chamber, but he is the Chairperson of the Committee that should be scrutinising OFMDFM. Why should we weaken and take away from its authority? That Committee should be doing the job that it is there to do. We support the Alliance Party's amendment because it supports the coming together of the two communities through consultation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Molloy: We should work with what we have and build on it for the future.

The junior Minister (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (Mr Newton): I welcome the opportunity to discuss and debate the proposed good relations programme, which aims to achieve greater cohesion, sharing and integration across Northern Ireland.

The development of the programme has been a priority in OFMDFM since devolution. Strong public ministerial commitments to the agenda have been given and statements have been made throughout that period. We now intend to reinforce those words and our significant funding of projects over the last number of years with this detailed Executive programme. Despite a long and at times frustrating process, we are reaching the critical final stages before we go out to public consultation.

6.00 pm

Much has been said over the past years and months about the issue, including in the House, with debates, speeches, questions and, at times, disagreements. However, despite that, it has been clear that all political parties have been united by one desire and aim, which is to produce a blueprint and a framework for a shared, brighter and better future for Northern Ireland.

Once again, today presents us with an opportune time for reflection. The loss, pain and trauma of those lost decades must serve as a reminder of why we must continue to strive together to secure the peace. No more victims must be created, hurt and trauma caused or divisions deepened because of sectarianism and hate. We must never forget the past, but we must not revisit it. The overwhelming majority of people across Northern Ireland want to move forward, and we must do so together. We must aim to bring every part of the community with us as we step forward with hope and optimism towards our shared future.

We have already come far on this journey. Since 2005-06, there has been a 31% reduction in sectarian-motivated crimes, and over 70% of young people believe that relationships between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant communities are better. That is testimony to the hard work carried out thus far. However, we cannot become complacent and there is much still to do.

The reprehensible murder of Kieran Doherty last Wednesday night, the attacks and violence in Craigavon and the other disturbances in Dunmurry and Belfast, combined with the bomb at Newry Courthouse serve as a stark reminder of what we want to remove utterly from our society.

It has been said that if nations want peace, they must not ignore the pinpricks that precede

the cannon shots. That is precisely why we are urgently trying to tackle the seeds of violence and sectarianism that are still attempting to grow at the heart of communities. There is no place for that destructive evil and malignant activity within a shared and better future.

We must, and we will, do all in our power to tackle the scourges of hate, prejudice and sectarianism. This programme attempts to identify the problems, commits us to finding solutions, and it fully resources a programme to reach our ultimate objectives of greater cohesion, sharing and integration right across our society.

It is critical that we ensure that the prejudices that have marred our past will not be repeated towards and within new communities who have decided to make Northern Ireland their home. That is an essential and central part of this new programme. Although the programme will focus on tackling sectarianism and racist attitudes and behaviours, it will be clearly stated that all manifestations of intolerance and prejudice are unacceptable in our society.

Considerable and valuable hard work has taken place in our communities over the past decades engaging in exactly that type of work. Since devolution, we have significantly increased resources to support that. We will now use that experience, research and best practice to move forward with renewed vigour within the context of an agreed programme. Every single one of us has the opportunity to contribute to that work. We must continue to identify what went wrong in the past and the reasons for segregation, hate, intolerance and division, and commit to work together to eliminate them.

We must all build a clear vision of where we want to go as a community and how we want our society to behave and interact. Without that, we are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past, when hopelessness and division blighted the ambitions and lives of generations.

Over the next few weeks, the final draft of the programme for CSI will be sent to all Departments. OFMDFM will work closely with its ministerial colleagues in areas such as education, transport, housing, youth provision, health, economic provision and rural communities to develop and secure the essential departmental actions that will become an integral part of the strategy. The strategy will also build on and enhance its cross-cutting nature by embedding good relations

at the heart of all Departments' policies and procedures. That is a key component of building a shared and better future so that government will work seamlessly, and in full partnership, to deliver real and meaningful benefits to all.

We must work hand in hand with community groups, churches, faith organisations, businesses and statutory agencies that already carry out such good work, because it is only through partnership that we can achieve our goals. We are committed to building on the work of the past, securing those foundations and reaching new heights through community collaboration. That top-up and bottom-down approach is the only way to ensure that the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration speaks for and represents the diversity of all our people and, crucially, is owned by all our people because it is the framework that they want, and it delivers what they want.

There are key aims in the CSI strategy, and the programme will support changes for people to promote fairness, equality, rights, responsibility and respect, with an emphasis on inclusion, interdependence, acceptance and understanding. It will embrace and support minority ethnic communities arriving into our society and create practical and open networks across communities and ethnic groups, North/South and east-west, to the benefit of all. It will also build on the shared values of human rights and equality to create a society that honours rights and accepts our civic responsibility to one another, and it will promote partnership communities that celebrate difference.

The strategy will support changes in places so that we have shared and safe spaces for working, shopping, socialising and playing; shared accessible and welcoming facilities that provide high-quality public services; greater sharing, respect and understanding for the expression of cultural diversity; safety for individuals and groups that wish to express and celebrate their identity peacefully; and cohesive integrated communities that share in education and integrated workplaces. However, what we do from here on in to give effect to concrete actions on the ground will build strong communities and give hope and pride to those isolated by physical, geographical or any other barrier. That work is vital.

Much work on the ground has continued unabated by individuals and groups working together in

and across communities to deal with difficult issues. Their commitment and hard work has allowed us to enjoy some of our most peaceful times for many years. The Executive have committed over £28 million during the current CSR period to resource such work, and we continue to work closely with the Special EU Programmes Body and other funders to deliver and ensure the maximum impact of our programmes and initiatives to guarantee real and meaningful good relations benefits.

Economic growth and prosperity are underpinned by stability, while violence, division and hate undermine that and rot away at the very foundations of our community. We require a stable society in which our children can play together, people can work together and families can live happily side by side regardless of their community or ethnic background or beliefs. That mutual acceptance and respect are the determining factors that will give us a stable, prosperous and growing economy.

In conclusion, and trying to look to the future, this is still a time of relative peace and opportunity in Northern Ireland. Although it remains a very challenging time both in economic and social terms, I believe that the will, the drive and the mindset of all of us is that we will deal with those challenges best by moving forward together. We must build for tomorrow. People who live in divided communities must be able to see and feel the impact of this new dispensation on the ground.

Our role, whether in the Executive or the Assembly, is to give leadership, work in partnership and lead by example to ensure that the effective implementation of the programme across government and its agencies is delivered. We must also ensure that the mechanisms that we put in place to guarantee its effective delivery and implementation are meaningful, targeted, robust and capable of standing the test of time, so that, over time, we are able to map progress on the health of good relations and make the necessary policy changes as and when appropriate.

The planning of the consultation process for the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration is at an advanced stage and will be robust and meaningful. We want to hear from all those interested, whether that is the person on the street, the business sector, the community workers, volunteers or the young people who will

move forward from the foundation that we are building. This debate is an excellent start, but it is only the beginning of the discussion. To quote Eleanor Roosevelt:

"For it isn't enough to talk of peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

Let us all commit ourselves to this project today. I hope that all Members will fully contribute their thoughts, views, ideas and actions to the programme as we move through the consultative stage.

I thank all of those who have taken part in what has been an informative and spirited debate, but there is perhaps a need to answer some of the misinformed, perhaps politically motivated and mischievous, comments. In the very short time that I have left, I will mention a few of those.

It is unfair for the proposer of the motion, Mrs Dolores Kelly, to suggest that we are so far behind in community work. She has demonstrated a clear lack of understanding and knowledge of the sheer scale of valuable and good work that is done day and daily by groups and individuals, including volunteers. Much of that work is supported by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and indeed by the Minister from the Member's own party.

The proposer of the motion also referred to the flags protocol for the management and removal of flags. All expressions of cultural diversity will be dealt with in the CSI strategy. A flags protocol already exists, and we recognise that updates are needed. That work is ongoing.

She mentioned the good relations panel. That panel will be convened as part of the implementation of the CSI strategy and will oversee the development and progress of departmental goals and action. The panel will be chaired by an OFMDFM Minister. She mentioned the Executive commitment to the elimination of racism and sectarianism, and I think that I have covered that issue already. She also referred to the relationship between the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration, and, again, I think that I covered that, too.

I will address a point that Mr Kennedy made earlier — I think that he was referring to how we arrived at the strategy after the discussions around the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. He said that if it was that easy, many people

will ask why it was not done before. Obviously, developing the strategy is not that easy. Had it been easy, it would have been done during the Trimble/Mallon reign.

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

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I thank those who have made a contribution, and I hope that they will contribute positively to the consultation process.

6.15 pm

Mr McCallister: I thank the Members who spoke and those who said that they supported our amendment, although they were mainly from our own party. *[Laughter.]* That shows the vision in the Ulster Unionist Party.

My colleague Mr Kennedy, in opening the debate, made an excellent speech.

Mr McElduff: I did not hear the Member correctly. Did he say "vision" or "division" in the Ulster Unionist Party?

Mr Ford: He will let you know.

Mr McCallister: I will come back to the Member. It was "vision", of course; he was right the first time.

In proposing our amendment, Mr Kennedy spoke about what we regard as important for a shared future. My party colleagues and I do not believe in the concept of separate but equal. When I attended the SDLP conference, I said that getting something on parades and something on the Irish language was not the way forward. Being constantly separate but equal is not the way to share our society.

Mrs Kelly drew attention to the SDLP's record over the years on reconciliation and to that party's commitment to completely nonviolent means, and it is important that that contribution be noted. Mr Ford said that he was determined to speak to the motion, only to spend most of his speech attacking the SDLP.

It has been an important debate. It was strange that Mr Bell talked about the success that has been built on the watch of the DUP and Sinn Féin and did not shy away from his partners in government, yet we hear that if the Ulster Unionist Party does not support the DUP next week, it may collapse the whole place. One

minute the Ulster Unionist Party is insignificant; the next, we are at the centre of his attention.

Mr Bell: I thank my friend Mr McCallister for those serious remarks on the devolution of policing and justice next week and the Hillsborough accord. Will he join me in thanking his leader, David Cameron, for his positive remarks on what the DUP achieved at Hillsborough?

Mr B McCrea: Can Mr McCallister help me to recall whether Mr Bell was ever in the Ulster Unionist Party, the Conservative Party or any other parties? Does he join me in welcoming Mr Bell to this place? For three long years, we laboured without his contribution, but, fortunately, he is now here to put us all right. I wonder to which party he will belong in the not too distant future.

Mr McCallister: I believe that Mr Bell has been in all those parties and in a fancy-dress party as well. *[Laughter.]* I congratulate him on breaking away from the traditional DUP mould and going to something fun and exciting.

He has been round all parts of the Province, and we heard about some of those great places in the debate. Mr McElduff gave us the Ulster-at-the-crossroads speech, although it turned out that he was talking about a crossroads in west Tyrone, where, hopefully, he flies an illegal flag.

Comments were made about how a shared future can be built. Make no bones about it: building a shared future is not easy. As the junior Minister made clear, many elements and many groups need to be involved. We have to make a start. No progress has been made in the past three years, although we are now led to believe that the imminent arrival of the Alliance Party into the Executive means that huge progress has been made. If the DUP and Sinn Féin had known that the Alliance Party was so cheap, they probably would not have set the bar quite so high.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member join me in thanking Mr Ford for all his efforts, because without him no progress on the strategy, in any form, would have been possible?

Mr McCallister: That is the Member's opinion; I could not possibly comment.

There are signs that something may be happening at last in OFMDFM. However, many other Executive functions need to move forward quickly. The strategy is long overdue. The

Minister did not say when it will be published, so we are still waiting to hear about that.

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

Mr McCallister: I support the Ulster Unionist Party amendment, and I urge other Members to do the same so that we can build a better society for us all.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Ms Lo to make a winding-up speech on amendment No 1. The Member should not feel that she has to follow the contribution of the previous Member to speak.

Ms Lo: It is a pity that the SDLP and the UUP do not feel that they can support our amendment, because, in so doing, people on the outside will think that the House is not united in supporting the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, which has been making some progress.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Her remarks are somewhat premature, given that we have not yet seen the agreed cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

Ms Lo: Would the Member not agree that at least some progress has been made? All of us have been asking questions over the past two and a half years. Certainly, I know that the SDLP and the Alliance Party have been doing so. At least we are seeing something, and that is a plus. A lot of Members —

Mr B McCrea: I swear that I just heard Ms Lo say:

"At least we are seeing something".

However, I am not sure that we are actually seeing the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, so perhaps the Member will clarify what she meant. I hope that she will carry on in her humorous manner, because it is very entertaining. I thank her for that.

Ms Lo: I am glad that there is good humour here. I said that there has been some progress in seeing the strategy published in the future. I think that the Minister said that it will be published next week. We will wait and see.

A number of Members spoke about the delay in publishing the new CSI strategy. It is unsurprising that Mr Bell and Mr Shannon defended the delay and said that that it was better to get it right than to rush it through. However, the two-and-a-half-year delay in publishing the strategy has obviously created a huge vacuum of political leadership in the Executive's ability to provide a

vision for community harmony and to lead the way in tackling division in Northern Ireland.

Over the years, the people of Northern Ireland have earned a bad reputation worldwide for being sectarian and racist. I recall that 'The Guardian' called Northern Ireland the "race-hate capital of Europe." That is not justified. As my party leader mentioned, the New York Mayor said at our conference that we need to bring down the peace walls if we want to prosper from inward investment. That important strategy must be put in place in Northern Ireland to allow us to take such action.

I am pleased about the progress that has been made, and I welcome the future publication of the policy to tackle sectarianism and racism, which are the twin evils of prejudice in society. Other members of ethnic minority communities and I were instrumental in bringing about the racial equality strategy.

It broke my heart to see that strategy fall apart in its second year, and it is extremely important that it be brought back and included in the mainstream CSI strategy. I do not agree with what Mrs Kelly said about ethnic minority groups not wanting the racial equality strategy to be diluted. They are pleased to see that racial equality is part of a mainstream policy. When we talk about tackling sectarianism, we are also talking about tackling racism.

As a member of the all-party Assembly group on ethnic minority communities groups, highlighted the importance of —

Mrs D Kelly: It was my understanding that NICEM and others were extremely concerned that, if the racial equality strategy were contained in the CSI strategy, it would be diluted. Will the Member clarify their position?

Ms Lo: There is some concern, but they are pleased to see the two strategies coming together in the mainstream shared future strategy. That was the point that I was trying to make.

Mr Leonard mentioned the protection of ethnic minorities and an increased dialogue between groups. Importantly, he also highlighted the need for a change in attitudes.

As the junior Minister said, a shared future strategy will result in cross-departmental actions to tackle division in public housing, schooling and shared places. I was pleased to hear him say that we should all move together towards

a shared future and away from the hurt and the harm that division has caused in Northern Ireland.

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

Ms Lo: We must not forget that the cost of division in Northern Ireland is estimated at £1 billion each year. That money would be much better spent on public services.

Mr Attwood: I concur with what Dolores Kelly said about the shared future strategy going to the heart of our society. I also agree with the comments of Jonathan Bell, Mr Shannon, the junior Minister and everybody else who acknowledged that there must be a resolution because of the bitterness that has been created over the past 40 years. Over that period, so many people were needlessly killed, and tens of thousands of people were hurt.

In moving amendment No 1, Mr Ford said that the agreement between the First Minister and deputy First Minister on a draft strategy had changed the situation and, consequently, the motion was not particularly timely. Mr Ford has four or five questions to answer. In his speech, Mr Ford identified a shared future — not the security threat, unemployment, poverty or people suffering hardship — as "the biggest issue" facing our society. Mr Ford said that a shared future was the biggest issue facing every party, every Minister and every public body. He thought that a shared future was so important that he said that twice. He said that the final published strategy must apply to every part of government, every Department and every public agency.

Given that Mr Ford set such a high hurdle for the shared future strategy, and given that it is so central to, and has such primacy in, the future of our society, why does he place his confidence and that of his party in an unpublished document that the junior Minister said was not even in final draft form? How can someone who has based his high standard for the shared future strategy on a secret, unpublished and unfinished document tell people that he is prepared to be nominated for the post of Minister of justice? There is no consistency in that approach.

6.30 pm

However, in his own way, Mr Ford conceded the point. He said that he believes that, when the document is published, it will contain "significant

gaps” and that he will want to strengthen it. In his opening comments, Mr Ford said that equality laws had changed the nature of equality in the North and that there is now equality in every workplace. He may be right, but the reason that he is right is the rigour and vigour around the enforcement and monitoring of fair employment laws. However, Mr Ford is telling members of his party and people in the North that he can put himself forward for the justice Ministry even though he knows that there are “significant gaps” in the shared future strategy that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have decided on. I do not understand that inconsistency.

The inconsistency goes deeper. Mr McDevitt referred to the comments that Ms Lo made four days after Mr Ford’s email to his Liberal Democrat friends in the House of Commons. In her statement, Ms Lo, rightly, said that the Executive cannot duck the issue of a shared future any longer and that they need to produce a CSI strategy to show that they are doing all that they can to eradicate prejudice. Ms Lo set the Alliance Party standard: that the Executive had to take the issue forward and had to demonstrate how they were standing up for a shared society. What did Mr Ford do? He said that an unpublished secret document that OFMDFM has not yet even finished fulfils his standard for nominating himself for justice Minister. Ms Lo may wish to consider those matters.

Mr Ford replied on a point of information to Mr McDevitt about the email that he sent to his Liberal Democrat friends last year. He said that the Secretary of State may be:

“concerned at us pushing Shared Future too much as another distraction on way to devolution of justice.”

Mr Ford did not deny that that is in the email. The real issue is how Mr Ford responded to the Secretary of State’s view. Mr Ford’s response to the Secretary of State’s concern on the issue of a shared future was:

“If we wanted to be slightly nice to Shaun”.

He added:

“It’s not that I particularly want to be nice to him, but he is more or less doing the rights things at present.”

That is Mr Ford’s standard for creating a shared future threshold and template for his entry into government. He said that the Alliance Party should be “slightly nice” because the Secretary of State was concerned about the party pushing the issue of a shared future because it might be a distraction on the way to devolution.

Mr Ford said that it is an indictment on the leadership of the SDLP and the UUP that, when they led the Government in this Building, they did not make progress on a shared future. That confirms how mean-spirited and desperate Mr Ford is. He did not comment on the fact that during the short period when the SDLP and the UUP led the Government, the DUP was not fully in the Executive, Sinn Féin was not on the Policing Board, not one weapon had been put beyond use, banks were being robbed and intelligence was being stolen. That was the difficult, unstable and turbulent context that that Government worked in, and Mr Ford should applaud rather than denigrate their achievement.

None of us — neither Ford nor I, nor any party, other than the leaderships of the DUP and Sinn Féin, and certainly not any public body that has a right to know or any community that needs to have a stake in a shared future — knows whether any progress has been made on the shared future document.

We should be vigilant, however, because we know from experience that sensitive issues, left to the DUP and Sinn Féin alone, whether they be the devolution of policing and justice powers, parading or the shared future process, have not matured and developed in good time and in a proper way. Even if that were not the case, junior Minister Newton has urged the parties and the people to take the issue forward. He said that he wants to bring every part of the community forward together. To emphasise that point, the opening paragraphs of the Hillsborough Agreement rely on and refer to having a spirit of inclusiveness, partnership and equality.

If the DUP and Sinn Féin are real about having those sentiments — I trust that they are — and junior Minister Newton is sincere about bringing every part of the community forward together — I trust that he is — they should publish the shared future agreement between the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. One cannot, in this society, on issues of primacy and great sensitivity —

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

The junior Minister (Mr Newton): I said that the document will be published shortly. It will be published so that Mr Attwood, his colleagues and all Departments can have the opportunity to scrutinise it and comment on it. If the document is found to be deficient in any way, they can have positive input into it. I hope that Mr Attwood's input will be positive. The document will be made available to him to scrutinise.

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

Mr Attwood: I can assure junior Minister Newton that he can rely on the SDLP, at least, to have that input. However, on issues of sensitivity and primacy, one cannot do business over the heads of the people. On issues such as parading, a shared future and the like, the people have the first right to know. Given that Mr Ford is relying on an unpublished document that is not yet even in final draft form, and given the issue of the devolution of policing and justice powers, on that ground, and on broader grounds, the document must be published now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sure that Members did not mind my giving Mr Attwood a few extra seconds because the Minister took up some of his time. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you inform the House under which Standing Order you have discretion to grant extra seconds? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Can we have some silence so that I can at least put the Question?

Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, Members should note that if the amendment is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2, as it will have been overtaken by the decision on amendment No 1. If that is the outcome, I will proceed to put the Question on the motion as amended.

I am sorry if some Members did not hear what I said, but some Members will just not keep quiet.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 43; Noes 23.

AYES

Mr Bell, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay, Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley Jnr, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Cobain, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mr McCallister.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Tellers have been appointed as follows: Tellers for the Ayes are Declan O'Loan and Dominic Bradley, and Tellers for the Noes are Sue Ramsey and Jennifer McCann. The Assembly will —

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. That does not sound right.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I apologise. I am very grateful to the Member for putting me right. Tellers for the Ayes are Sue Ramsey and Jennifer McCann, and Tellers for the Noes are Declan O'Loan and Dominic Bradley.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 42; Noes 23.

AYES

Mr Bell, Mr Brady, Mr Bresland, Mr Buchanan, Mr Butler, Mr T Clarke, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay,

Mr McQuillan, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Paisley Jnr, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Shannon, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms J McCann and Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Cobain, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr A Maginness, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McFarland, Mr McGlone, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr D Bradley and Mr O'Loan.

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the recent progress made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in agreeing their draft cohesion, sharing and integration strategy; believes that publication of the draft for consultation will be an illustration of commitment to fruitful working relationships and to the building of a shared and better future; recognises the importance of a commitment at all levels of government and within civic society in creating a shared and equal society; and looks forward to early public consultation on the draft strategy which will give all parties and the wider community the opportunity to make a contribution to the shape and direction of final policy.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Antisocial Behaviour: Holylands Area of South Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

Ms Lo: I welcome the Minister. He is not here yet, but I know that he is coming.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I am here.

Ms Lo: Oh, sorry. I expected to see you on another Bench. Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the Minister and my fellow MLAs for South Belfast to the Adjournment debate, even though it is so late in the day, to consider antisocial behaviour in the Holylands in general and the measures put in place, particularly for the forthcoming St Patrick's Day.

No doubt, all of us have received frequent correspondence in relation to antisocial behaviour in the area. I have tremendous sympathy for residents there whose daily lives are affected by often sustained antisocial behaviour. I have been to meetings at which women were in tears as they told public representatives how they had been tortured by noise and unacceptable behaviour on the streets. I can only imagine the stress and anxiety caused by having to deal with those issues regularly, and I commend the residents for their continued patience and commitment to improve the area for everyone.

My staff and I regularly attend the partners and communities together (PACT) initiative, which has proved to be a positive step in providing a platform for residents to articulate their views, request specific actions and receive feedback on a monthly basis. Clearly, good communication with those who are most affected is at the heart of working towards a lasting solution for the Holylands.

The difficulties that residents in that area have experienced are widespread, and they require meaningful input from a range of agencies. That need was never demonstrated better than on St Patrick's Day 2009, when a disgraceful display of extreme antisocial behaviour —bordering on the riotous — was witnessed. In light of that, I was pleased to welcome the establishment of the Holylands stakeholder forum by the Minister for Employment and Learning. The forum draws together key individuals, agencies and organisations in order to hone a strategic approach and to implement an effective series of short- medium- and long-term measures. In October 2009, the forum issued its first action plan, which detailed ongoing and proposed initiatives from the agencies involved. In addition, Belfast City Council reconvened its Holylands inter-agency steering group in order to assume responsibility for monitoring progress on the action plan.

I must also commend the continued work of the PSNI, which committed itself to providing the Holylands with appropriate resources, particularly during peak periods, to deal with antisocial behaviour. I have heard many positive comments from residents in praise of neighbourhood and senior officers' commitment to tackling issues on all levels. Through the provision of funding, training and grass-roots co-operation, the PSNI has expressed its ongoing support for the community safety warden scheme.

As well as providing essential services, such as waste management, cleansing and environmental health, Belfast City Council has played, and continues to play, an integral role in drawing key players together. Through dedicated staff members and the community safety warden scheme, the council's community safety department has taken the lead in dealing with antisocial behaviour.

Since St Patrick's Day last year, Queen's University, the University of Ulster and the students' union have made a concerted effort to improve students' conduct by initiating an education campaign, which includes the distribution of literature and e-mails that warn of the consequences of engaging in antisocial behaviour; personal and auditor visits from university representatives; and campaigns that promote the sensible use of alcohol. They deserve our praise for taking their roles and responsibilities seriously. Since the start of the academic year, the universities have disciplined

more than 370 students for acts of antisocial behaviour; measures include advice, warnings, fines and suspensions.

With St Patrick's Day only a fortnight away, I am heartened to know that all the relevant agencies and education institutions have come together to roll out the action plan, which began yesterday, 1 March, and which will run until 18 March. Over the next two weeks, an awareness-raising and education programme will be launched to remind students about their neighbourhood responsibilities and to promote the students' union as an alternative venue to congregating in the street. Students will be bombarded with publicity, including an inter-agency educational leaflet, which will be distributed by community safety wardens and, in the wider university area, by PSNI officers.

There will also be educational messages on Cool FM and Queens Radio, which is run by the students' union. Messages from the Queen's University vice chancellor, the students' union president, the University of Ulster and Belfast Metropolitan College will remind students of their responsibilities. In addition, there will be educational articles in both universities' house magazines and a three-day — 9, 10 and 11 March — programme will involve calling on all students who live in the Holylands area to distribute the festival leaflet and to educate students about living in the community. From 14 March to 17 March, a drink-awareness campaign will take place in the students' unions at Queen's University and the University of Ulster.

Around St Patrick's Day, operational plans will be put in place by the various agencies. A special PSNI operation is planned from 14 to 18 March, with substantial resources for 16 March and 17 March. Neighbourhood officers will be employed, with technical support officers on close standby. There will be a graduated police response. If necessary, the police presence will increase as numbers on the streets increase. Police and community safety wardens will have joint patrols, and there will be a full quota of 21 wardens for 17 March. Wardens and police will enforce alcohol by-laws, which forbid on-street drinking.

Belfast City Council officers will be operational in the wider university area from 14 to 18 March, enforcing legislation regarding underage drinking and monitoring off-licences in the area. Belfast City Council's noise team will be fully

operational over the St Patrick's Day period. About 80 students' union sabbatical officers, university representatives, chaplains and representatives from Queen's University's clubs and societies will be present from early morning on 17 March to advise students and their friends not to congregate on the streets. Tea, coffee, water and food will be served at four points in the Holylands/university area.

Eight CCTV cameras are due to be installed in the Holylands before 17 March. That will be in addition to police mobile CCTV. Additional street cleaning has been organised for before and after 17 March. Extra night buses will operate from Queen's students' union, commencing on 15 March and running until 18 March. The buses will transport students home to the wider university area.

Between 15 March and 17 March, a range of events and activities will take place to take the focus away from alcohol and to help to reduce the potential for antisocial behaviour. The programme contains sports competitions in the Queen's Physical Education Centre and arts and culture events, including music and spiritual/religious activities, in Queen's University and the students' union. The students' union will host cultural events throughout the day. Low-alcohol drinks will be sold and low-cost food will be on sale from early morning. The students' union will be open from 10.00 am.

Both universities and key statutory agencies have undertaken considerable planning in advance of this year's St Patrick's Day to avoid a repeat of last year's disgraceful episode. I commend them for their joint efforts, and we hope that the day will be enjoyed in peace and good spirits by all who are in the area.

However, there are still many ongoing wider issues that the Executive need to consider in order to have an overarching long-term strategy regarding the character and quality of life in the area. We have seen the area undergo a major transformation, due to the unregulated development of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and apartments to facilitate the demand for student housing. However, that has been to the detriment of a locality, the majority of which was once residential.

It is important to highlight the fundamental role that landlords and developers play in influencing the demography of the Holylands. Therefore, there is an urgent need for landlord registration

and regulation to hold landlords accountable for tenants' behaviour and for standards of housing. For example, an antisocial behaviour clause in a tenancy agreement allows a landlord to take action if a tenant is the cause of antisocial behaviour, but not all private landlords have that in their agreements. The Planning Service must take tougher enforcement action on unregistered HMOs and have control over applications for flats and HMOs in the area to stop the over-intensification of population there.

7.15 pm

Queen's University must explore avenues to increase student accommodation and to guarantee living quarters for first-year students at least. Perhaps that accommodation could be in the city centre, away from the Holylands.

We need to investigate the possibility of increasing the powers of the police to deal with antisocial behaviour in the area, so that they are able to move people on, apply spot fines and confiscate alcohol. The Department for Social Development's liquor licensing and registered clubs Bills will have the capacity to empower the PSNI to close nuisance licensed premises that have breached regulations and guidelines. That legislation needs to be enacted quickly to deal with irresponsible off-licences.

Many of the issues that I mentioned are raised in the stakeholder forum's action plan. I urge the Executive to take a collective approach to solve the perennial problem of antisocial behaviour in the Holylands.

Mr Spratt: I congratulate my colleague Anna Lo for bringing this debate to the House. We have been here many times before, and I know that the Minister for Employment and Learning has answered many questions in relation to the Holylands. I want to put on record my appreciation of what the Minister and his Department have done in trying to bring the various groups together, as it has been very important.

The problem that is experienced in the Holylands is creeping into other areas. In the past 10 days or so, I organised a visit with Minister Poots to the lower Malone area. We found that the problem with HMOs is creeping up towards Eglantine Avenue and is found in the whole lower Malone area as well. The problem is not confined to the Holylands area, although that

area saw the worst of what happened last St Patrick's Day.

I welcome the many moves that have been made by the various agencies over the past 12 months; I will not go over them all again. Much of the blame is placed on the universities, but sometimes the criticism that is directed at Queen's University in particular is ill-founded, to say the least. Of the 35 people who were arrested last St Patrick's Day, fewer than half were students. The others were people from various walks of life who came to the Holylands area and were involved in all sorts of antisocial behaviour.

Queen's University and the University of Ulster have done tremendous work over a protracted period, particularly Queen's, with various residents' groups. We should not take away from that; we should thank the universities for doing it and encourage them to continue going down that route. It is important to say that it is totally unfair when the blame is placed on students all the time. It is not always students, and it is unfair that sometimes they bear the brunt of the whole thing. However, let us face it: it is not just a St Patrick's Day problem, it is a problem in that area on, basically, a nightly basis. Most of the trouble is fuelled by alcohol and parties, and we all know what happens with all of that.

The police need to take robust action. I hear what they say about a gradual police response and all the rest of it, but they need to get in there and deal with antisocial behaviour and the many other problems. Some of those problems need to be nipped in the bud at a very early stage.

That can be done most effectively by having a large number of police officers, wardens and community stewards in the area and visible to the community, and who are there to deal with issues and to mingle with people from morning, throughout the day and, indeed, regularly at night. Some folk need to be trained to behave properly toward residents, not only on St Patrick's Day but on every other day of the year that they live in the area. Residents have a right to expect that. Landlords also have their part to play; as do those licensees who are quite happy to regularly sell cheap booze to people who are already intoxicated. There needs to be a much more responsible attitude shown.

During the past while, the Assembly has discussed policing and justice issues, and it will do so again next week. If policing and justice is

devolved in the near future, one of the first actions that the Assembly can take is to empower the police with the fixed-penalty system that works effectively in many other cities and parts of the United Kingdom. That legislation can deal with offences such as breach of the peace, minor criminal damage, disorderly behaviour, indecent behaviour, obstructing the police, and purchasing and selling alcohol to minors.

Many offences can be dealt with under a fixed penalty notice system. First and foremost, it sends out a warning to people without giving them serious criminal records. It tells them that their cards are marked and that if their behaviour continues, they will find themselves with criminal records that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. First and foremost, young people should be given a chance. That system has worked well in many cities throughout the UK. I am aware from information that I received from Sheffield that the system has worked particularly effectively in that city. The Assembly must look at that seriously.

In her comments, Anna Lo referred to HMOs. Unfortunately, HMOs have almost gone beyond redemption in the Holylands. The problem is evident, and, frankly, I do not know which Minister in the Assembly would try to solve it. The mess was created by direct rule Ministers and the Planning Service prior to devolution. An absolute mess has been created in that area. It is disgraceful. The Minister saw it creeping into other areas when he visited the residents of the lower Malone Road during the past few days. That opened his eyes. Co-ordination is needed so that another Holylands is not created in a different area close to the university. I have tried to impress on planners and other people that they must look at that problem. Responsibility must lie with landlords as well.

It is incumbent on all of us to do what we can to try to make the situation better. I welcome all the measures that Anna Lo mentioned in her remarks, which are being put in place for St Patrick's Day 2010 by the students' union, the universities and many other people in the area. I hope that in 2010, people will be responsible and will listen to what the various agencies are saying. I hope that the new camera system, and so on, will bring added bonuses and benefits.

If similar misbehaviour occurs, the police must deal with it robustly. They must deal with it at

an early stage and take people to court. People must learn their lesson.

The sort of behaviour that took place on St Patrick's Day 2009 is not acceptable in any part of our city, any village, any town or anywhere else in the Province. I urge the police to ensure that they have the necessary resources in place. Alex Maskey and I raised that issue at a previous meeting of the Policing Board. I will be speaking to the police this Thursday to ensure that the proper resources will be available from a community and every other perspective on St Patrick's Day. I thank the Member again for securing the debate.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also thank Anna Lo for securing the debate. As she said, it is, regrettably, getting late in the evening, so we are not playing to a large gallery. Nevertheless, this is an important and timely issue.

I implore anyone who lives in the Holylands and anyone who wants to visit the area on St Patrick's Day to behave responsibly and to remember that people, whether students or non-students, live in the area. They should also remember that there are long-standing residents in the area who are trying to raise families, and so on. Anyone who is planning to go into the area should remember to treat such people and the community with respect.

As Jimmy Spratt and Anna Lo rightly said, some of the scenes that erupted in that area in recent years were disgraceful. No community should have to endure that. As Jimmy said, such incidents do not happen only on St Patrick's Day. Unfortunately, they take place regularly. That is a sad reflection on the people who are involved in that sort of antisocial behaviour. It is also a gross burden on the people who reside in the Holylands. Their homes are there, it is their area, they owe their lives to that community and they want to remain there.

It is fair to say that, in the past, the Holylands has been a highly desirable residential area. It always had a healthy mix of residents, including long-term residents who raised families there and professionals who moved to the area for relatively short periods. Such people were particularly associated with university or Health Service facilities in the locality. Of course, students also live in the area. Therefore, for many years, a healthy mix existed in that area, and it functioned very well as a thriving and

much sought after area in which to live. Many of the properties were desirable; in fact, many had considerable architectural merit. However, over the past number of years, for a variety of reasons, the area has been dramatically transformed to the point where what goes on is a burden on many people who live there. Many of the students who live there also have to endure some of the antisocial behaviour that takes place because by no means are all students in the area involved in such behaviour.

Ms Lo said that a longer-term plan is required for the area, and I agree. Unfortunately, too many people, whether government officials, people from other bodies or agencies, or, indeed, some elected representatives, regularly refer to the Holylands as "gone". Let us be honest: a lot of people will say that the area is lost and cannot be fixed or sorted out. I do not subscribe to that view.

As Jimmy Spratt and Anna Lo said, the problems are not confined to the Holylands. The problems associated with houses in multiple occupation and the existence of such a dense population with no management and no proper regulation have spread to the lower Ormeau area, Stranmillis, Ballynafeigh, the Lisburn Road, the lower Malone Road, and so on. The list is endless. Not only is it possible to reclaim the Holylands as a residential community, it is imperative that we do so. Not only would that help to fix and alleviate the difficulties that people in that area suffer from, but it would prevent problems from continuing to spiral out of control in other areas.

7.30 pm

I have been a representative of that area for the past nine years and, in truth, all the various stakeholders and agencies involved have done better at one time than at others. Frequently, people will be critical of the universities. At other times, they will be critical of landlords, while at other times, they will be critical of the universities or the Departments. During the past few years, if truth be told, each and every agency has, from time to time, done more and done better. That includes the police, who have been referred to.

Many people and many agencies — from the universities through to the students' union, the police and the various Departments with responsibility for aspects of work in that area — have done their best. I also commend Belfast City Council, which convened the inter-agency

group that has tried to manage the day-to-day problems. Over the past few years, the university has tried harder to tackle the problem at source, not just by enforcement but by encouraging students, if they are the target audience, to behave more responsibly. In that regard, I welcome the implementation plan designed to counteract or prevent any problems next week.

However, those are all short-term measures. It is unfortunate that we have to keep referring to the Holylands as a problem area. Most of the solutions put forward are about enforcement and about law and order, which play an important role. However, outsiders looking at the documentation would see that the actions that have been talked about and which are, unfortunately, necessary, involve powers of seizure, fixed penalty notices, alcohol-disorder zones, banning orders and confiscation orders. The list of enforcement measures is endless. Unfortunately, from time to time, they all have to be implemented.

Surely, it is a sad reflection when the bulk of what we are doing is trying to enforce some sense of law and order on St Patrick's Day. All the Members here this evening, and others who are not, accept the fact that people understand that there needs to be a much more comprehensive approach taken to the problem, and that is also true for all the stakeholders.

Several Departments are responsible, and I commend Minister Reg Empey for taking the lead on the establishment of the stakeholders' forum. However, Reg acknowledges that there is a limit to what he can do in his bailiwick. I call on all the Ministers who have a responsibility for the situation to co-ordinate their efforts. We must have a comprehensive, radical plan because the area is in crisis. It is not just about the antisocial element, although it is important and timely that we talk about that.

A radical, comprehensive approach must be taken. We must look at a compulsory requirement on first-year students living away from home to stay in university-regulated accommodation — whoever may supply that — as it has been demonstrated elsewhere that it moderates their behaviour. It is about changing the behaviour of people in the area. However, we must remind ourselves that those first-year students may move on somewhere else next year, while the residents who live in the area must suffer year

on year from those first-year students who, unfortunately, misbehave.

The Holylands encapsulate the fact that there is a wider problem in that area, which is likely to get worse if the University of Ulster moves into Belfast. I welcome those plans, but it must be stated that we need to manage that situation in the years ahead so that we do not burden other parts of the city with the same problems. We must prevent the same situation from happening elsewhere.

All Members present are committed to improving the situation. All the stakeholders who have been working with the Minister on the stakeholders' forum need to up their game and increase their response to the difficulties in that community. It has been said already that the Assembly has inherited the problems associated with the Holylands, but if we do not take the necessary radical approach in the years ahead, we will have failed. I do not want to stand here as a representative of that area at the end of this term and say that we did not do much about the problem. We owe it to that community to do much more than we are doing.

Mr McDevitt: In my opinion, the Holylands is a particularly nice part of Belfast. It is a place in which I first arrived in the early 1990s when it was the destination for weekends to meet friends in Belfast. Ironically, in the days before the ceasefire, it was a safe part of the city. The accommodation may have been dire and the standards poor, but it was a place to which young people could come to enjoy positive social interactions and to party with other young people in a community that had not been lost on streets that were considered to be safer than those in many other parts of Belfast. It was a place in which no one would ask where someone was from or where they were going to. People simply wanted to be part of a community that was diverse, deep and interesting. It is a terrible tragedy that the Holylands is not such a place in 2010.

The irony is that the accommodation is much better. A house in the Holylands now is not the sort of house that I remember walking into. It is a house in multiple occupation (HMO) that, generally speaking, has been built to a certain standard. However, by any stretch of the imagination, the area is overpopulated, and the original community has been squeezed to the point of practical destruction.

I hope that, this St Patrick's Day, Irishmen — be they nationalist Irish, unionist Irish, Hindu Irish or whatever — will come out and celebrate a shared festival. However, there is nothing positively Irish in behaving in the way in which some people behaved last year. That is not a positive expression of identity. It is not the right way to celebrate this island, and it is not the sort of image that this island should be portraying to itself or to the outside world.

I welcome the many and significant steps that have been taken since last year to better manage St Patrick's Day this year. I commend Minister Empey for taking the leadership on the issue, even though not everything that has fallen to the inter-agency group is directly within his remit. There is no question in my mind but that we will have a better experience this year than last. I know that because, in the past couple of weeks, I have met with the police, Belfast City Council and residents. I have attended a PACT meeting. I have met representatives from Queen's University at a university and a students' union level. I have also had conversations with the University of Ulster team. To say that all those groups are throwing the kitchen sink at trying to contain any potential issues this year would not be an understatement. Every possible and conceivable measure that could be taken is being taken. As a public representative, I join my colleagues from South Belfast in wishing those groups all the best and in saying that we will, of course, support the statutory agencies in doing what they can to make sure that we do not have a repeat of last year's behaviour.

That is great, but what we really need in South Belfast is a change in culture. We need to be able to reclaim the community for those people who wish to be part of it not for one or two years but for their lifetimes. We need to be able to bring the streets back into the ownership of our great city and to make them be what they used to be: a safe, interesting and diverse part of Belfast. We will have to take a few tough decisions in order to do that.

Some day the Assembly will have to come to terms with the problem of the "HMOisation" of the Holylands. I agree with Ms Lo, Mr Spratt and Mr Alex Maskey that that problem is not contained to the Holylands. It is creeping out of the Holylands, down the Ormeau Road, the lower Lisburn Road, the lower Malone Road, and into Stranmillis. We will have to reflect on how we

can unpick the mistake of a previous direct rule government. I do not know what the solution will be, but I do know that we cannot turn our backs on the community, fence it off into a pseudo-student village and tell the landlords, universities and transient population that it is theirs to do what they like with.

In the short term, there is much that we could do. We could continue to put pressure on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to enforce its regulatory powers over HMOs, including its powers to control health and safety, fire escapes and bins, and to enforce tidiness and general conditions in front gardens.

I have asked the Minister for Social Development to give those issues some attention in the next few months. We must be careful that the matter does not fall between two stools in the run-up to the implementation of the review of public administration, because that power will be transferred from the Housing Executive to the councils, so it would be easy for the regional agency to wait for the councils to pick up that responsibility. That should not be so, and we should continue to pressure the Housing Executive to deal with those problems today.

We could also have serious conversations about the incorporation of antisocial behaviour clauses into tenancy agreements. That relates to a motion that Alex Maskey brought to the House in January 2010, in my first week as an MLA, about the registration and greater regulation of landlords. Those conversations have not yet happened, and most landlords are resisting the incorporation of antisocial behaviour clauses into their tenancy agreements. That would be an obvious way to put a young person, a not-so-young person or any tenant on notice that when they live in a certain place, they must live by certain rules.

This evening's Adjournment debate, which Ms Lo commendably secured, relates to general antisocial behaviour in the Holylands, and it is worth acknowledging that there has been some serious antisocial behaviour in the past few weeks. Two weekends ago, on a Friday night, there was a disturbing incident in which three young people were stabbed. On the Sunday night, another person was stabbed. The police are concerned because the incidents came out of the blue. There had been no pattern of knife crime in that part of the city, and we must all resolve to ensure that a pattern does not

develop and that those incidents do not become a sign of things to come.

At a lower level, all sorts of irritable behaviour impact not only on long-term residents but on students who are trying to enjoy a quality of life in the Holylands. I am thinking of the noise of taxi horns in the middle of the night. In the Holylands, taxi drivers think that it is OK to pull up outside a house and blow the taxi's horn. They do not do that on my street; I guess that they do not do it on Mr Maskey's street, Ms Lo's street, Mr Spratt's street, the Minister's street or, indeed, the streets of any of the officials sitting here. However, they do it in the Holylands. That is antisocial not only because drunk students are running amok but because the cabbie who insists on doing that will not get out of a car to ring a doorbell.

It does not stop there. Dial-a-drink services are rife in the Holylands, and the police are playing cat and mouse with the few firms that insist on continuing to make that service available to thirsty students at 3.00 am. Yet again, that impacts not only on long-term residents but on students who are trying not to spend the entire night awake and who are looking forward to a good social life, followed by some good rest.

Litter is an ongoing problem, and there is an onus on landlords to tackle that problem and to enforce their duties under tenancy agreements.

I will not go on for much longer, except to say that I would be happy if we returned to this topic in a year or so to talk about how we had reclaimed that part of Belfast and to think, in a structured way, about how to tackle the HMO problem. That should be done on a cross-party basis because people should not make party politics out of the issue. We could debate how to begin to unpick the mistakes of the past and how, ultimately, to provide a place for students to stay, for families to grow and for residents to remain in an area that we can all still call part of this city and not a separate place for a separate group.

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I thank the Members who contributed to the debate for their comments about my Department and its activities. Last year, I was in the Holylands on the night of St Patrick's Day and saw the situation for myself. For residents, there were very distressing scenes. Most residents had been moved from the area, but for those who remained, and for

students and other tenants who were trying to have a normal life on a day of celebration, the situation was utterly impossible. It was a riot scene. The place was a filthy mess, with glass everywhere and people in a very disorderly state. Generally, the area had been turned into a hellhole.

7.45 pm

Although I accept all that Members have said, my Department does not have exclusive opportunities to deal with those matters. However, it does have a role in higher education, and I felt that my Department was responsible because the public see the problems in the area as a student issue, even though, as Mr Spratt said, other people have come into the area and, indeed, other people have been prosecuted. The addresses that were given by many of those people were well outside the area.

I commend Belfast City Council and all the groups that prepared the plan. Two forum meetings have taken place, and people have come in to be part of editorial groups to work up the plan. We have tried to broaden the base of people who are involved, so students, residents, landlords, Departments and others are being brought in. It is a multi-departmental issue. I have been in touch with the Minister of the Environment, the Minister for Social Development, Minister Goggins and others.

I have spent many years on Belfast City Council's planning committee, and, year after year, we warned planners about what was happening in the area. You could not talk to them. They did not listen, and they have allowed the situation to get to an extreme point. The guidelines on HMOs reflect the situation that has been created. The question now is how will we fix the situation?

It is a long-term issue, but we took the view that something had to be done this year to try to avoid the terrible situation that developed last year. I commend the work of the people who have been trying to find a solution for many years, and we know that Belfast City Council contributes large resources to that effort. Every week of every year, the council puts substantial resources into cleaning the place up. Around 15% or 18% of the council's cleansing budget is spent in that area. That is totally unreasonable and unacceptable. As Mr McDevitt and Anna Lo said, landlords may be resisting the inclusion of certain measures in tenancy agreements,

and there are issues to do with front gardens. Everyone will have to put their shoulders to the wheel to get a solution, because there are so many different facets.

I totally disagree with the idea that has been floating around that the area should be cleansed of residents. It is a stupid idea, because it goes against people's human rights. We want to do what we can physically to try to at least make the area habitable for as many people as possible. It should be one of the most sought after residential areas in Belfast. It is a beautiful setting. It is extremely convenient in that it is close to educational facilities, social life and the city centre. In any other part of the world, it would be one of the most sought after areas of the city. It is one of the few areas that has a real sense of potential for a community to be developed and which has potentially high quality housing stock. We should be concentrating on the area.

I have never seen the issue primarily as a law-and-order problem. I do not want the problem to be solved by sending in Land Rovers at 7.00 am to occupy and to hold the ground and make people's lives a misery as well as making life a misery for police officers. No one wants that, but, as Mr Spratt said, if people refuse to conform to reasonable social norms, there has to be a response. I know that the police do not want to get involved if they can avoid it, and I do not want to see lines of Land Rovers parked across the street with people chucking stones at them. That is not where we are or where we should be going.

Anna Lo raised the issue of first-year students living in university-owned accommodation, and that point has been raised before. We know that both universities have a stock of accommodation. Given that Northern Ireland is a relatively small place, people who attend university here, particularly those who live in the Belfast area, have the option of going home at the weekends. I do not know how successful we would be in enforcing a policy with regard to residential university accommodation. However, if the universities come to us with suggestions, we will, of course, consider them. The issue affects not only students of the two universities but students of Belfast Metropolitan College. Moreover, there are non-student tenants in the area who work in the hospitals and other agencies. Therefore, it is not entirely a student issue.

Last year, I was asked what action the police and universities had taken against the people who were involved in the disturbances. During the day's trouble, 35 persons were identified, 16 of whom were students. Those are my figures, and they might be similar to those of other Members. So far, there have been 16 prosecutions. Six prosecutions directed by the Public Prosecution Service are still in the system and there is no result as yet. In three cases, it was directed that there would be no prosecution, and one individual was found not guilty. In addition, I believe that there were nine cautions, informed warnings or advice and warnings. The University of Ulster disciplined 15 students who were found to have breached the university's ordinances, and Queen's University disciplined 23 students as a result of complaints that were received between 16 March and 20 March 2009. That is the stick of the carrot-and-stick approach.

I have been working with, and have had meetings with, the student representatives. I took the view that students should take on as much responsibility for dealing with their peers as possible, and I must say that they responded positively and showed interest in doing that. They were prepared to take responsibility, and we were prepared to offer some modest financial assistance to help them. Any reasonable person would say that everybody in the statutory sector has stepped up to the plate to try to make St Patrick's Day a day of real celebration for the people in that area rather than one of dread. That is what we are trying to do through the substantial range of engagement that is taking place.

I commend my colleagues in the Department and in other agencies who have worked so hard throughout the year to achieve as much as we have achieved. CCTV may prove instrumental in ensuring that people realise that there is a high risk of their being prosecuted. I agree with Conall McDevitt that people who ring dial-a-drink to get alcohol delivered into that area in the middle of the night during those celebrations are grossly irresponsible. The licensing trade has said that it is prepared to participate in addressing the issue. We have got the right mix of people to tackle that type of behaviour, so I can only hope that, with the support of all those organisations, especially the students' union, we can ensure that the day is one of celebration, not destruction.

Mr McDevitt spoke about finding long-term solutions to the problem, such as planning, and I hope that the House will return to that issue at a later date. I hope and pray that people in the Holylands have a happy St Patrick's Day.

Adjourned at 7.54 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 8 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Points of Order

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to today's business, I will refer briefly to some points of order that were raised during last week's sittings. I remind the House that, in the past, I have encouraged Members to raise matters of concern with me outside the Chamber rather than on the Floor of the House.

Over the past number of weeks, there has been an abuse of points of order in the House to the point where Members are using them to have debates on points of order. Rather than raising issues through points of order in the House, Members would be better off talking to me outside the Chamber, because they would achieve so much more.

I also caution Members not to seek to use points of order to start debates on points of order either with me or with other Members. I have already spoken to some of the Members who raised points of order last week, and I intend to speak to others today or tomorrow.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I warn the Member not to raise any point of order that he has already raised in the House. I have given the Member quite a bit of latitude. I have had two face-to-face meetings with him, and I have allowed him to raise the same point of order on at least four occasions. If it is a totally different point of order, I am happy to take it, provided that it is a point of order.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You may recall that, beyond the matter that I have raised on four separate occasions, I raised a separate point of order last week with you in relation to the comment made by a Member who referred to the "stigma" in relation to applicants to the PSNI. I invited you to make a ruling on

that matter because it impacted not necessarily on Members but on —

Mr Speaker: Order. I made a very clear ruling on 24 November 2009 that we needed to move away from examining specific words that are used in the Chamber, because, when it comes to unparliamentary language, it means different things to different Members. On 24 November 2009, my ruling was absolutely clear. Members might believe that that is a weakening of my position; I assure them that it is not. I assure Members who still believe that they can cross the line that they will be dealt with, albeit in a different way, in the hope that we can bring dignity to the House.

The Member should not go there. I had a discussion with him and Mr McDevitt this morning about a range of issues and how I intend to deal with them in the future. I have sympathy with what the Member has said to me privately this morning and with his comments in the House. However, I ask the Member and the whole House to allow me to develop this issue.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]* Some Members might yawn in relation to the authority and integrity of the House; that is a reflection on them. This morning's conversations were about comments that Members have made about other Members. This is about —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming very close to challenging my authority and ruling on the issue. I ask the Member to reflect on and be careful about what he is saying. I will not take any further points of order on the issue, and I will now move on.

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Cobain: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 8 March 2010.

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 8 March 2010.

Mr Speaker: As the motion has been agreed, today's sitting may go beyond 7.00 pm, if required.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I note that the House was in enthusiastic form this morning for that first vote.

The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) met in special EU programmes sectoral format in Dublin on 17 February 2010. The Council last met in that format in September 2009. The Government of the Republic of Ireland were represented by Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan, who chaired the meeting. I represented the Northern Ireland Executive and was accompanied by the Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie.

Mr Pat Colgan, chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), provided an update on the progress of its work since September 2008. He advised that the Peace II and INTERREG IIIa programmes, which relate to the 2000-06 EU funding period, are now in the final stages of closure. SEUPB remains confident that both programmes will earn all the relevant EU receipts.

Mr Colgan advised us of the progress of the current Peace III programme and the cross-border INTERREG IVa programme. Since 2007, both programmes have been receiving and assessing funding applications from throughout their respective eligible areas. Mr Colgan reported that both programmes were performing well. Between them, the two programmes have approved 139 projects, representing funding of around €265 million. He reported that in 2009 Peace III had spent €21 million and INTERREG IVa had spent €16 million, both comfortably above the relevant EU spending targets. As a result of that expenditure, neither programme will have any of its budget deducted by Brussels.

The Council noted SEUPB's progress on a number of issues relating to the Peace III and INTERREG IV programmes. Peace III projects included efforts to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors of the terrorist campaign are properly addressed. The Peace III theme of acknowledging and dealing with the past has

a particular focus on victims and survivors. To date, it has approved 55 projects, representing €23 million in funding. Ministers emphasised how important it is that that work continues over the remaining years of the programme and that the direct focus on victims and survivors is maintained.

Ministers also agreed that it is essential that both communities participate in the Peace III programme, and they noted and welcomed the work that SEUPB is doing to encourage applications from the Protestant community. Research expected towards the end of this year will provide the first indication of community participation in the Peace III programme. The Council noted that implementation of the local peace and reconciliation action plans has begun.

The Council noted that concerns raised by the five local authority-based groups regarding the approval of their multiannual plans for INTERREG IVa are being addressed. Pat Colgan reported to us that individual projects based on the plans are being progressed through the INTERREG programme selection procedures. There are 63 such projects across the five groups. Each will need to demonstrate its relevance to the agreed INTERREG aims and objectives and to demonstrate value for money in exactly the same way as any other application for INTERREG funding. It was reported that nine projects that were submitted by the groups have already been approved for INTERREG funding and that a further 37 remained under assessment. According to SEUPB's indicative timetable, all 37 should have their decision — either way — by July. The remaining 17 projects have so far submitted too little information to allow assessment to begin.

Ministers noted the following key activities and priorities for SEUPB in 2010: the management and delivery of the 2007-2013 Peace III and INTERREG programmes, ensuring that all targets are achieved; ensuring that SEUPB services are delivered efficiently; supporting North/South engagement with the EU-funded transnational and inter-regional programmes; and ensuring a successful closure of the Peace II and INTERREG IIIa programmes.

The Council noted that SEUPB had applied efficiency savings of £262,000 in the 2010 budget. In addition to those savings, SEUPB will reduce EU programme running costs, mostly for technical assistance, by €2.4 million in

2009 and 2010 and €3.1million for 2011-15. Those savings will enable higher expenditure on projects.

The Council approved the 2010 business plan of the SEUPB and recommended a budget provision for administration costs of £2.254 million and EU programme expenditure of £67.659 million. The Council aims to meet again in special EU programmes sectoral format in October 2010.

12.15 pm

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Weir): I thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned the previous under-representation of applications from the unionist community. I appreciate that an evaluation of measures taken will be carried out at a later stage, but will the Minister outline what proactive measures have been taken to encourage and facilitate greater representation from the unionist community and to increase the number of applications from it?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Quite an amount of work has been done. As I said in the statement, we will not know how effective that has been until the evaluation of the work has been carried out. There has been direct contact with, for example, the Orange Order and institutions therein and with community associations that are representative of and exclusively in the unionist community. I visited some of the projects that received funding, and we hope to see an end to the under-representation of the Protestant community in the applications.

One of the problems has been that fewer applications have been received from groups in the unionist community than from the nationalist community. As a result, fewer applications are going through. That is where the under-representation has occurred. We have been working with those groups. There has been direct contact with them, and I have received good feedback from some of the groups that feel that they got a sympathetic hearing and that they received good advice and guidance on the projects that they are applying for. At the end of the day, they have to meet the criteria. The more capacity there is in the unionist/Protestant community, the more effective that work will be.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Ms J McCann): Go raibh maith

agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He will be aware that the five partnerships raised concerns about INTERREG IVa funding. Will he assure the House that those five partnerships will still receive the €60 million for the multi-area plans that they submitted to INTERREG IVa?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There was some difficulty with the five local authority partnerships. The first action that we took was to make some changes to the application process so that the selection criteria are clearer. The selection criteria have not changed, but we provided clarification on the information that needs to be provided in support of the applications to enable them to be processed.

Nine applications worth €5.5 million have been received by the steering committee in respect of which approval has been given and letters of offer issued. There are 37 applications in the system on which we hope and expect a decision to be made by July 2010. That does not mean that a positive decision will be made on them, but they will be assessed by July. There are 17 applications for which insufficient information has been provided and on which no assessment or final decision can be made.

There is no guarantee that all 63 projects will succeed. However, we are happy that we are working apace to ensure that the money is spent and spent on time and that the help and clarification that may not have been there at the start is now available to the groups.

Mr Cree: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. I thank the Minister for his timely report. Is he aware that the multiagency plans suffered significant delay largely because of the board's changing advice to the various councils? Five local authority-based partnerships expressed no confidence in the programmes body. Is the Minister satisfied that enough has been done to restore the confidence of the local authorities involved?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The multiannual plans that the local authority-based groups developed were agreed some time ago. There may have been a misunderstanding that the multiannual plans were all that was needed, but they provided too little detail to allow funding decisions to be made. That is one of the reasons why we have now given clarification and explained the process, what has to be done

and what information has to accompany the applications so that they can be processed.

That message seems to have got through because, as I said to the Chairperson of the Committee, we have approved nine applications worth £5.5 million, and there are others in the pipeline that we should approve by July 2010. I hope that that is an indication that the local authority-based groups now understand and are doing what has to be done. We are determined to process applications as quickly as possible.

I met two local authority-based groups and got an understanding of the difficulties that they face and their misapprehensions about the multiannual plans. I hope that the issue has been sorted out. However, it is a complex area, and we do not want to give any money back. If Members are aware of any difficulties, I want to hear about them so that we can keep on top of the matter.

Mr O'Loan: INTERREG IVa, which is overseen by the Department, is progressing well. Having said that, I do not overlook the concerns that were expressed by the local authority-based groups, and I am hopeful that they are being addressed properly. Officials from the SEUPB present themselves extremely well when they come before the Committee, and they give me a lot of confidence about how the programmes are being operated. Departmental officials, who also come before the Committee, also engage well with the programmes. Given the success of INTERREG IVa, does the Minister, when reading from a wider script, feel that there are lessons to be learned about the immense benefits that the adoption of an inter-regional approach can bring for our economy and public service delivery?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have never made any secret of my belief that, because we share a land boundary with the Irish Republic, it makes sense to co-operate, where possible, to bring about a better use of resources. Any Finance Minister would want to achieve the best value for money and avoid duplication. Of course, where possible, we should marry plans on one side of the border with those on the other side of the border to avoid costly delays and so on.

Some of the programmes illustrate that sensible co-operation can lead to a better delivery of service. I am not saying that that is true all the time or that INTERREG IVa always represents

the best method of delivery, because there may well be other ways in which that can be done. However, any sensible person would want plans to be married so that we do not have unnecessary overlap.

Dr Farry: I commend the Minister for fitting in the NSMC meeting in Dublin, given all the long Budget debates that we had in the Chamber in February. Does the Minister agree that the real way in which we test the success of the programmes is not by the amount or efficiency of spend but by the impact of the schemes on the ground? Similarly, the quality of the projects will not be best measured by examining what side of the community they come from. If we are genuinely addressing good relations, the projects, by definition, will embrace both the Protestant and the Catholic sections of the community.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Let me take the Member's last point first. It is important that the money is spent as the Member describes within the theme that is designed to produce a greater understanding. It is valuable to spend it in that way.

I visited the headquarters of the Orange Order, which has benefited from some of this money for educational projects. Two points emerged from that meeting. First, a significant number of Catholic schools are invited to visit and to have explained to them the Order's background and what the Order is about. That is designed to try to destroy some of the myths that there are around the Orange Order and a whole lot of things associated with the unionist community. If that bears fruit, some of the contention around what many unionists see as a cultural event but what — as a result, sometimes, of the activities of mischievous people — is seen in the nationalist community as a bit of political coat-trailing will abate. The money will have been well spent, for it will have an impact on the security situation and on community relations. The Orange Order is to be commended for its work, as is SEUPB for the way that it has financed that. I use that as an illustration, but there are many other examples and that is just one that I am familiar with from conversations that I have had in the last couple of weeks.

The other point that the Member made related to impact on local communities. One of the changes in this funding is that we are now going for larger projects, some of which will have a

more lasting impact and leave a legacy. People sometimes look back at INTERREG IIIa and Peace II and ask what has been their long-term effect. I am probably off script here, but I do not mind. Some of the money could perhaps have been spent more wisely and made a greater impact. Members are concerned about delays or what they perceive as delays. However, they must accept that, when we target larger, more complicated projects, a lot more work is involved in getting them processed and assessed. There is an up-front cost in that but, in the long term, the benefits are greater.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his statement. What is being done to help the 17 groups that submitted too little information?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In all cases where groups have submitted too little information, they are made aware of what information is outstanding. They are told what has to be done to enable the projects to progress. In some cases, the reason why too little information has been sent is that the outstanding information is not there, and the projects may fail at the end of the day. However, it is not a case of our sending the application back and saying, "Tough. There is not enough information here". It is explained to them what additional information is needed and what is needed for the process. Hopefully, then, they will come back. For some of the 37 applications that are currently being assessed, some additional information was required. That was supplied, and they are now being processed.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. My question follows on from Adrian's. We must wait until July to discover how many of the 37 applications being processed and evaluated will succeed. The Minister referred to efficiency savings and technical support: will they have a detrimental impact on applications that have not come up to scratch or not satisfied the criteria?

A matter of more serious concern was not reflected in the statement, but I would be surprised if it did not arise during the sectoral meeting. Projects have had to be withdrawn not because they do not satisfy the criteria or are unable to draw down the European money but because they could not access, in the current economic downturn, the necessary matching funding. Has there been any discussion on how

to address that problem? The tentacles of the recession affect all sorts of programmes.

12.30 pm

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Technical assistance efficiency savings between now and 2015 should amount to £5 million, all of which will be poured into new projects. We identified superfluous technical assistance, which means that savings can be made that will not harm efficiency. The Member is right that there is no point in making savings only to find that projects cannot go ahead. We believe that administrative savings can be made, and extra money can be ploughed into projects.

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

The Member raised the issue of the financial difficulties in the Irish Republic, where some Departments had spent their full capital allocation, resulting in moratoriums being placed on projects. Peace III funding is offered to Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, so there are cross-border elements. If match funding cannot be found, a project cannot go ahead.

After discussions with Minister Lenihan, my understanding is that priority for new capital allocations will be given to projects that are already in the system. When capital allocations are made to departmental budgets next year, priority will be given to projects that are in the system or are required to meet international commitments. Rather than projects being halted, they will probably be delayed until those capital allocations are made in the next financial year.

Mr Bell: I declare my membership of the Committee of the Regions and an SEUPB funding body.

I welcome the Minister's positive statement. Will he join me in welcoming the good stewardship that means that there has been no reduction in finance from Brussels and that, at a time of unparalleled recession in Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland is receiving direct finance? Will he ensure that his statement underlines the fact that the direct focus on victims and survivors, who have suffered so much, is maintained and, if possible, enhanced? Given that the evidence base shows a lower application rate from the Protestant community, will the Minister ensure that SEUPB officials continue to encourage applications from the Protestant community

and that they monitor the effectiveness of that encouragement?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will have to take that boy aside and tell him that he is allowed only one question, not three, on ministerial statements. I will try to answer all three questions.

We still need to evaluate whether the efforts that have been made so far have been effective. At the very least, more applications are being made, more help is being given and more attention is being paid to the under-represented section of the community. It remains to be seen what the outcome will be, but the SEUPB has not pulled back. The Minister for Finance in the Irish Republic, Brian Lenihan, supports the issue as much as I do. At the meeting, he emphasised that he wants a more even spread of money. The pressure comes not only from the unionist side but from the Irish Republic.

The Member's second question was on victims and survivors. I should have the figures somewhere in my big black book of answers. However, I will write to the Member with the precise figure. Peace III money places an emphasis on victims and survivors, and that will continue.

With regard to money's not being returned to Europe, there have been discussions about the N+2 targets for Peace III and INTERREG IVa. Given that other parts of the EU were not meeting some of the targets, there was discussion about whether they should be relaxed. We are meeting those targets, so that does not apply to us. Therefore, there is no danger of money being lost or sent back to Brussels. If anything, consideration is being given to changing the targets because other Administrations have failed to spend the money. However, we are well on target.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the Minister said, Members should ask one question.

Mr Kinahan: I would love to ask the Minister many questions, but I have just one. I declare an interest as a member of Antrim Borough Council, which is part of the North East Partnership.

I am concerned that the advice and guidelines keep changing. I know that the Minister said that things are more complex, but will he consider some form of fast-tracking or dynamism to get the applications that were

mentioned in the statement processed before the end of July, or will we have to wait until then?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Some things have happened already. Perhaps I did not make myself clear: the deadline for the receipt of the 37 applications is between now and the end of July. The steering committee will process some applications before July, but the deadline to have all 37 processed is the end of July. I am sorry if I did not make myself clear about that.

I am interested in what the Member said. I know that people say that Members of the Assembly should not be members of local councils; however, the Member illustrated a very important issue in bringing to the Assembly some knowledge of what happens at local level. If there is still some confusion about what is required, especially for the local authority groups, I would like to hear from the Member. As I said, I listened to two of the groups concerned, and we sought to make the criteria and the selection process much clearer to them. If there is still contradictory advice, changing rules or changing selection criteria, I would be more than happy to speak to the Member or to receive a delegation from his council or the group of councils in which he is involved so that we can ensure that there is no misunderstanding.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. Returning to the issue that his party colleague Mr Bell raised, will the Minister provide to Members or lodge in the Assembly Library the details of the 55 projects that have been approved under the theme of acknowledging and dealing with the past? When it comes to funding those 55 projects and addressing that theme, is the Minister satisfied that the overall balance of that funding among groups, organisations, communities, and victims and survivors is appropriate?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As I am sure the Member knows, I do not have the details either in my head or in my papers of all the projects that have been funded. However, there should be transparency in the matter, so I am more than happy to provide that information. I suspect that the Member was alluding to the amount of money that goes to ex-prisoner groups as opposed to victims' groups. We should not forget that prisoners' groups qualify under all three themes. Before I took up my position, I was unhappy that the rules that were set perhaps favoured groups that many

people thought should not get such favourable treatment. Indeed, now that I am in the post, I remain unhappy with that situation.

However, the rules have been established, and applications must be processed on the basis of those rules. I think that we can supply information on the balance of the groups that have applied, the groups that have been successful and the total amounts of money awarded.

Ministerial Statement

Draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have received notification from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. If the Finance Minister were to move from his position on the Front Bench, I would start, but with your permission —

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): The Minister may regret chasing me from my seat so quickly if he is looking for money. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of the Environment: We are not looking for his money on this occasion, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I wish to make a statement about the draft clean neighbourhoods and environment Bill, which I issued for public consultation on 1 March. I am delighted to have received Executive clearance to proceed with the draft Bill, and I appreciate the many supportive comments that I have received from ministerial colleagues in respect of it.

It is very important to understand the magnitude of the draft clean neighbourhoods and environment Bill. It is about much more than the individual elements of the Bill, important though those elements are. It is about more than litter, graffiti, fly-posting, noise, nuisance or dog litter. Although those issues and others addressed in the Bill merit our attention, taken together, they have a cumulative impact on people and communities that goes far beyond tidy streets.

First and foremost, the Bill is about promoting quality of life by taking care of the environment. Clean neighbourhoods are healthier, safer and happier neighbourhoods. Litter, noise, nuisance vehicles and vandalism attract antisocial behaviour, crime, long-term illness and all of the social problems that have a high cost for communities, the ratepayer and the taxpayer. That is the context in which the Bill's purpose must be seen and welcomed.

Since the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 was introduced by the UK Government in England and Wales in May

of that year, my Department has been receiving calls from many quarters about the introduction of corresponding legislation in Northern Ireland. MLAs, MPs, district councils, Tidy Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), the chief environmental health officers' group and other interested parties have called for the introduction of clean neighbourhoods legislation in Northern Ireland.

Until now, we have been unable to respond positively to those calls because of resource pressures. However, following a review, and despite the challenging financial circumstances that we face across the Executive, I have made a point of finding the necessary staff resources to look at the issue. We must now consider the task of how, with the support of appropriate legislation, we can help district councils in Northern Ireland to deal more effectively with a range of problems associated with local environmental quality.

My view, informed by representations from the local government sector in particular, is that we should aim to provide councils here with broadly the same powers that their counterparts in England and Wales have under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. Those powers are important, because they will enable councils to tackle the issues directly and because they will allow them to do so in a more streamlined and less resource-intensive way. Used properly, the powers proposed in the draft Bill should cut red tape and enable councils to do more with their resources to make a serious impact on the full range of issues addressed in the Bill.

The Bill will address the following issues: litter of all forms, including, for example, chewing gum litter that blights the appearance of the footpaths in our towns and cities; cigarettes and other litter that is casually cast aside; illegal fly-posting and graffiti, which degrade local environments; and irresponsible dog ownership and dog-fouling, which further degrade our public spaces and, at best, present an unpleasant hazard for young and old alike. There are other, no less important issues that affect the quality of life in our local neighbourhoods, such as noise levels, nuisance or abandoned vehicles and problems caused by poorly directed domestic artificial lighting.

The Bill deals with all those matters, which is why I say that it is important. It deals with a

wide range of local environmental quality issues, and, as a complete package, it is a significant piece of legislation. However, before seeking to introduce the Bill in the Assembly, I am consulting on the detailed proposals to ensure that they address our local circumstances properly. I am grateful to the Environment Committee, which has already expressed its support for the Bill, for its encouragement to make progress quickly.

In fact, I am not aware of any opposition to the legislation, which is not surprising. No one wants to live in a neighbourhood that is affected by a poor-quality local environment. Good local environments reduce antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime. They attract more investment and have a positive impact on our health, well-being, confidence and civic pride, and they help to promote tourism.

12.45 pm

I believe that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland will accept that the Bill, which is designed to improve the appearance of local neighbourhoods and enhance our quality of life, is necessary and long overdue. That is because despite district councils' excellent endeavours to tackle the problems and despite ongoing campaigns that are designed to encourage those who create the problems to change their ways, those problems cost Northern Ireland councils millions of pounds to clean up.

Just last month, for example, I joined a local group of dedicated conservation volunteers and Tidy Northern Ireland to see for myself the incredible extent of the littering problem in a particular open space; a space that is by no means unique. What should have been a beautiful and scenic open space for the local community to enjoy was completely spoiled by excessive littering. Plastic bags, paper bags, broken glass, empty bottles, used nappies and crisp packets were clearly visible. In a very short time, we collected more than 30 black bin bags of litter. One could come up with all kinds of reasons and excuses for that, but the bottom line is that that sort of mess is not good enough. People have a right to expect more care and consideration from others in their community.

In this statement, I cannot cover every detail of the draft Bill. As Members will appreciate, the legislation is sizeable and complex, and it contains detailed amendments to several pieces of existing legislation, such as the Litter

(Northern Ireland) Order 1994. However, I shall summarise the draft Bill's key provisions.

As I said, for many people in Northern Ireland, litter continues to be a major concern. If left unchecked, litter in all its forms — such as chewing gum, cigarette butts, fast food, drink containers and wrapping paper — is an eyesore that leads to dirty streets and unhealthy and unsightly local environments. The Bill will strengthen existing law to enable district councils to deal more effectively with litter problems. The Bill will amend the offence of dropping litter in a lake, pond or watercourse; strengthen provisions to deal with people who fail to provide their name and address; give councils new powers to require businesses and individuals to clear litter from their land; strengthen existing powers for councils to require local businesses to help to clear up litter that they generate; and enable councils to restrict the distribution of flyers, handouts and pamphlets, which can end up as litter.

Fly-posting and graffiti are visual signs of neglect and degradation in a local environment. Therefore, to enable district councils to deal more effectively with fly-posting and graffiti, the Bill will strengthen existing law to give councils the ability to issue fixed-penalty notices to graffiti and fly-posting offenders; enable councils to serve defacement removal notices in respect of graffiti and fly-posting; make it an offence to sell spray paint to children; and make it harder for the beneficiaries of fly-posting to evade prosecution.

Irresponsible dog ownership gives rise to complaints from the public, and dog fouling contributes to the spread of harmful infections. The Bill will introduce new arrangements for controlling dogs by replacing the local by-law system with a system that is more streamlined, straightforward and easier for district councils to operate. It will replace dog by-laws with a new, simplified system of dog control Orders, which will enable councils to deal with dog fouling; ban dogs from designated areas; require dogs to be kept on a lead; and restrict the number of dogs that can be walked by one person.

Noise is a form of nuisance that the public still regard as a major problem. The Bill will give district councils new powers to deal with audible intruder alarms, and it will extend the provisions of the Noise Act 1996 relating to noise from private premises to cover noise from licensed

premises. Those provisions are designed to deal with noise nuisance problems that are caused by false alarms when keyholders are away and deal with the owners of licensed premises who ignore warnings to reduce excessive noise.

The existing statutory nuisance law is 131 years old and, despite its having been amended from time to time, the definition of what may be considered a statutory nuisance and the enforcement powers that are available to district councils have not kept pace with developments in statutory nuisance legislation applying outside Northern Ireland. The Bill will update the archaic law on statutory nuisance by bringing it into line with that which applies in England and Wales, as amended by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

Fixed-penalty notices are a simple and visible way in which to deal with environmental offences. If used properly, they provide an effective deterrent and avoid the cost of court action. At present, fixed-penalty notices can be issued for littering and dog-fouling offences and also for some noise-violation offences. The draft Bill makes greater use of fixed-penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution and gives councils the flexibility, subject to upper and lower limits, to set their own fixed rates. The draft Bill's proposals extend the use of fixed-penalty notices for offences relating to nuisance and abandoned vehicles, litter controls, other dog controls and additional noise controls.

Back alleys and entries can attract a range of antisocial and environmental problems that reduce the quality of life in our local neighbourhoods. They can be magnets for litter, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and graffiti. They can increase the risk of domestic burglary and provide cover for those engaged in drug dealing, and, as a result, they can make the lives of local residents a misery. The Bill will contain proposals to make the existing procedure for closing off nuisance back alleys more effective. The Bill will contain amendments to the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 to give effect to gating order provisions. The Bill will give councils new powers, with the Department for Regional Development's approval, to make gating orders to deal with problem alleyways. The Minister for Regional Development has policy responsibility for the legislation and agrees with the proposals.

The Bill will give councils new powers to deal with businesses that sell or repair cars on the road. Such parked vehicles can be a nuisance. They can reduce parking opportunities and cause pollution; for example, where oil has spilled or leaked. Two new offences will be created: offering for sale two or more vehicles; and repairing a vehicle on the road as part of a business. Abandoned cars degrade streets and can become targets for antisocial behaviour and arson. The Bill will give councils the power to remove abandoned cars from streets immediately.

Abandoned trolleys can be a visible problem and a hazard, and when dumped in watercourses, they can cause a range of problems that may harm wildlife. The Bill will give councils the power to recover the costs of retrieving abandoned shopping trolleys from the trolleys' owners.

The draft Bill increases the maximum fine, from £30,000 to £50,000, on summary conviction that may be provided for in regulations made under pollution prevention and control provisions in the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. That will enable maximum fines on summary conviction in the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 — concerning, for example, contravention of the requirement for a permit to operate an installation or mobile plant; failure to comply with, or to contravene, a condition of a permit; and failure to comply with the requirements of an enforcement notice or a suspension notice — to be brought into line with the equivalent maximum fines for illegal waste activity that are set out in the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, in order to ensure consistency. The increase to £50,000 will also bring the level of fine into line with that which applies in England and Wales.

As Minister of the Environment, I deal with many large-scale environmental issues daily. Major challenges, such as waste management, air quality, climate change, water quality, marine planning and built heritage are all very important, and my Department's work is rightly targeted at alleviating major environmental concerns in those areas. However, it is clear to me, through my work as a local councillor, and more so since I became Minister of the Environment, how important the state and appearance of our local neighbourhoods and public spaces are to most people in Northern Ireland.

People want to live in areas that are clean and safe, and free from antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime. That is people's number one priority, and it must also be ours. Therefore, I am sure that Members will agree that the draft Bill is a very welcome development and will wish to see it enacted as quickly as possible to help bring about cleaner neighbourhoods for all our local communities.

The consultation period runs from 1 March to 23 April, and the consultation document may be viewed on, and downloaded from, the Department of the Environment website.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mrs D Kelly): If it is the guidance of the Chair that I need to declare an interest as a member of a local council, I hereby declare. The Minister is right: this will be welcomed across the 26 council areas. In fact, my party colleague Alasdair McDonnell was going to bring it forward as a private Member's Bill, and he is grateful to the Minister for bringing forward this legislation.

What are the timescales for the implementation of the amendments that relate to alley-gating? Will they be carried out in parallel? The Minister is right in saying that alley-gating is a major concern. Alleyways are a haven for antisocial behaviour, and there is an increased risk of domestic burglaries for people who live close to alley gates. Members of the community are also concerned about the proliferation of illegal flags flying from lampposts, and about kerb painting. Will the Minister, in consultation with the Regional Development Minister, bring forward any amendments in relation to those eyesores?

The Minister of the Environment: A number of orders have been made by the Department for Regional Development (DRD) as a result of the Belfast alley-gating pilot project. An independent evaluation of that scheme indicated that it has been effective in addressing crime, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour in those areas, and that it has led to increased requests for alley-gating to be extended to other areas. However, the existing regime for making gating orders has proved to be cumbersome, and it is felt that a more streamlined approach is required. It was also felt that responsibility for making gating orders would be better placed with local government, rather than central government, although it is proposed that district councils

will need the approval of DRD to make or vary a gating order. That is positive news on that issue.

The Bill is similar to what has been produced in England and Wales. I suspect that flags, the painting of kerbs and so forth are not such issues there, so I look forward to seeing what the Committee brings forward on those issues.

Mr Weir: I join other Members in welcoming the proposals; the Bill will be of great benefit to people across Northern Ireland. Will the Bill be self-sufficient with regard to costings, or will it end up with a certain level of charge? I know that the consultation is due to run until 23 April, but what does the Minister see as being the timescale for the legislation itself?

The Minister of the Environment: There are a number of ways of dealing with costs. Litter is a district council issue, as is the legislation that deals with dog fouling, etc. What we are doing is enhancing the powers of councils to ensure that they can carry out that work more effectively. A lot of these powers have already been vested in local authorities. A number of the issues that have been mentioned today are issues on which councils have a degree of discretion in how their money is spent. It is important that the fines that are levied go back to local authorities. If councils set up an effective and tough regime, they will, therefore, benefit in two ways. First, they will have considerably cleaner neighbourhoods, which I think the local community will appreciate; and secondly, they will bring in a degree of income from those individuals who will not learn and who will not co-operate in keeping their areas as clean as they should.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I remind Members that they are to ask a question on the Minister's statement, not to make another statement.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. Is it the intention of the Bill to provide resources to residents' groups or local community groups to assist them in keeping their neighbourhoods clean and tidy? There is a case and a need for alley-gating, but some alleys are walkways, and there does not seem to be proper consultation in that respect; consultation is, generally, held in specific areas. Is there any provision to expand the consultation in relation to alley-gating?

The Minister of the Environment: I have indicated that litter is the responsibility of local authorities.

It is up to local authorities to identify best practice schemes to ensure that local neighbourhoods are kept clean and tidy and to institute a regime in which people who do not co-operate are punished.

Giving local authorities the powers to deal with and to introduce alley-gating, in consultation with DRD, brings the matter to a much more local level. Local councillors are generally far more accountable in dealing with such issues and identifying a community's needs than — with no disrespect — a Roads Service official.

1.00 pm

Mr Beggs: I, too, declare an interest as a local councillor. I welcome the Minister's decision to overturn his predecessors' decision not to progress with this legislation. Will he advise the House why it has taken five years since the legislation was introduced successfully in England for it to be introduced in Northern Ireland? Why has it taken so long for it to be prioritised here and for the necessary resources and commitment to be found to introduce it?

The Minister of the Environment: Of course, during a number of those years, there was direct rule. When this Assembly came into being, Ministers had to bring forward various pressing issues. Considerable work was done on planning reform, for example. Does the Member suggest that a clean neighbourhoods and environment Bill is more important than planning reform, the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill or planning policy statement (PPS) 21? I am not saying that it is less important. However, I am not sure whether the Member is saying that it is more important.

Ministers have to prioritise a wide range of issues. When I came into office, I looked at this issue and was aware that there was considerable pressure to bring it forward. I decided that I would find the necessary resources to do so. It is not as though other Ministers decided not to do that; resources were not available to do it. I decided to identify and take resources from other areas to allow that to happen.

Mr Bell: I welcome the Minister's comprehensive and progressive statement. I want to ask him specifically about graffiti and fly-posting, which

are the scourge of my Strangford constituency. Will he assure the House that those measures will be effective and that their effectiveness will be monitored in order to ensure that the blight of graffiti and fly-posting in Strangford is brought to an end?

The Minister of the Environment: District councils indicate that existing legislation needs to be strengthened. I propose to do that by giving councils power to issue fixed-penalty notices in respect of certain fly-posting and graffiti offences, to issue defacement removal notices and to recover costs from the person on whom a notice is served. I propose to make it an offence to sell aerosol spray paint to a person who is under 16 years of age. Other changes that are being made enable councils to seek the removal of illegally displayed posters or placards by the people who displayed them or caused them to be displayed and make it easier for councils to remove posters or placards if necessary and to recover the cost of doing so.

One problem with the current legislation is that, if an advertisement for a certain nightclub, circus or event is illegally displayed, a council must prove that that person had given his or her approval for that advertisement to be displayed in the first instance. It is easy for people to get out of that. As a result of the new legislation, the burden of proof will change considerably. Individuals will have to prove that they took all reasonable measures to ensure that they did not act in defiance of the legislation. That could, potentially, have huge impact, particularly on the fly-posting that is often seen on our streets.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I declare that I am a member of Ards Borough Council.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also declare an interest as a member of Ballymoney Borough Council. I welcome the proposals on fly-posting. Fly-posting for concerts and other major social events is a common problem in my community. Does the Minister believe that there are alternative, affordable ways in which some organisations that are currently involved in fly-posting could advertise events publicly without degrading an area or making it look untidy?

The Minister of the Environment: I am surprised that an old boy like me should have to educate someone who is relatively young on the opportunities that are available in communication

nowadays — for example, various websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and so on. There are huge opportunities to spread the message, particularly for concerts and such events.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement, which I welcome. I declare an interest as a councillor in the south Antrim area. Like others, I long to see a tidier Northern Ireland. If I may make one little statement, I congratulate everyone who has helped to pick up litter throughout Northern Ireland, whether they are members of the public, councillors or Ministers.

How will the Bill deal with councils that have to work together? For example, rubbish from various council areas gathers at the south Antrim corner of Lough Neagh and will need to be dealt with jointly. How will that be managed and financed?

The Minister of the Environment: That ties in with my vision for local government in the future: there must be greater collaboration among local councils. There must be greater connectivity among councils, and they must work together in the best and wider interests of the public. That might involve cost-saving measures by councils to ensure that rates are kept low or ensuring that the environment in which we live is kept in the pristine condition that the public want. We will seek to encourage, persuade, cajole and, on occasions, legislate for that.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for getting us this far. I am concerned about a range of these issues, and I congratulate him on what he has done. The Minister mentioned nuisance parking and abandoned vehicles. I am worried that “abandoned vehicles” refers only to vehicles on the roads. I am just as concerned about vehicles abandoned adjacent to a road, near a road or on a public space other than a road. It is important that abandoned vehicles are not allowed to be left on any public space.

Secondly, if I might indulge myself, the Minister made no mention of hedges. High hedges and wide hedges are a serious issue. As a holy — or religious — person, I hate nothing more than the slap of a wet branch as I make my way to church on a Sunday morning. I believe that it is the Minister's responsibility to ensure that that problem is avoided.

The Minister of the Environment: I return the Member's tribute. He was one of those who pressed this issue and sought to have the

legislation introduced. It is good to see that the Assembly can work on a cross-party and a cross-community basis and that it is not as dysfunctional as some people make it out to be. We can work and co-operate with one another in the best interests of the public of Northern Ireland. Therefore, I pay tribute to Dr McDonnell for bringing this matter to my attention and for urging me to bring forward measures. That is one of the reasons why we are where we are today.

The requirement to give notice to the occupier of the land on which a vehicle has been abandoned will be removed. That will include private roads that pass through housing estates that are managed by registered social landlords as well as other housing estates, and it will, effectively, enable vehicles to be removed immediately from any road to which the public have access. When an abandoned vehicle is fit only for destruction, a district council will no longer be required to affix a notice to the vehicle prior to its removal, such as a van in Custom House Square, and will be able to remove it immediately.

The rules on the disposal of abandoned vehicles will be simplified. Councils will no longer have to wait for the vehicle licence to expire before disposing of the vehicle. Abandoned vehicles that are fit only for destruction can be destroyed immediately, and vehicles that do not display a licence or number plate can be disposed of immediately. In all other cases, district councils will have to try to find the owner. If they are unable to find the owner or if the owner does not collect the vehicle within seven days of being contacted, it can be disposed of.

Similar amendments will be made to the road traffic regulations, which give powers to constables and the Department for Regional Development to deal with abandoned vehicles. The aim of those changes is to provide a more efficient way to clear abandoned vehicles from streets and reduce the instances of antisocial behaviour, such as vandalism and arson, which such vehicles can attract. This will also reduce the additional storage costs incurred by district councils while waiting for the expiration of the licence; where a vehicle is fit only for destruction; or where the owner cannot be traced or has chosen not to collect it.

As regards nuisance hedges, if the Member is saying that hedges are growing over the footpaths where he walks, that matter can be

dealt with by the DRD. If a hedge is growing over a footway or road, the DRD has the powers to instruct the owner of the hedge to cut it back. The high hedges legislation is separate and is going through the House. We are bringing forward that new legislation because the community in Northern Ireland wants it to be introduced. We are doing that in the community's best interests.

Mr McCarthy: I fully support and welcome the statement that the Minister has made. I think he will agree that, although his is the lead Department, this is a cross-departmental issue. He has just mentioned the DRD. Does he agree that education has an important role to play in that youngsters coming through the school system should be educated not to be litter louts when they grow up?

I wish to make two points; I know that the Minister could not have included them all in the statement. It is going to be difficult for councils to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must ask a question.

Mr McCarthy: — catch the people who drive along in their car and fire out a bag full of stuff from a fast food outlet. The litter lying along our foreshores is also a disgrace. When the legislation is implemented — I do not know when that will be — will the Minister be able to monitor whether the position has been greatly enhanced six months or a year later by the legislation that we all welcome this morning?

The Minister of the Environment: Unless Big Brother is at every telegraph pole, we will not catch every individual who tosses litter out of their car. Nonetheless, community responsibility should mean that, when people see someone throwing litter out of a car, they should take the car number and pass it on to the local authorities and allow them to deal with it. These individuals are despoiling our countryside and should be punished for doing so.

The Member is right to say that it needs to be instilled in our young people from the earliest age that it is wrong to drop litter, throw litter out of cars or spit chewing gum out on the streets. All those things detract from the environment that they and, at some point, their children will grow up in and take away from the healthy well-being and the good environment that young people need to grow up in. Education needs to continue. Our job is to enhance the legislation

to deal with the people who refuse to be educated.

Mr I McCrea: I congratulate the Minister on bringing the consultation forward. There is no doubt that since he has become Minister his priority has been to bring forward legislation that deals with local issues. As regards fly-posting, posters are placed by church-based and charity-based organisations. Will those organisations be given a time exemption to remove their posters after an event, rather than having them removed as soon as they go up?

The Minister of the Environment: We want to stop fly-posters going up all over the place. We want to stop posters being pasted to telegraph poles and bridges, where a lot of vehicles pass, and then abandoned. If people want to advertise particular events in a responsible way, I want my Department and other Departments to co-operate with them. Some people are pasting up posters in a most irresponsible way and are leaving the mess for someone else to clean up. That is wholly unacceptable.

1.15 pm

Mr McDevitt: As other Members have done, I welcome the Minister's statement. What financial implications does he envisage? Undoubtedly, those will be quite significant for local authorities. Does he expect that local authorities will have to absorb the costs, or will extra provision be made? Does the Minister anticipate that the Bill will require local authorities to be proactive in fulfilling their new commitments, or will that be a reactive requirement?

The Minister of the Environment: It is in the interests of local government to be proactive. At some point, we could consider creating an index that would show how clean an area is and identify the local authorities across Northern Ireland that are being proactive in dealing with litter, deposits of chewing gum on the streets and graffiti. Such a measure would show up the councils that are not being as proactive as they should be.

I have discussed with Minister Ritchie and Minister Wilson the potential for introducing business improvement districts (BIDs). BID funding would be attractive to local authorities, particularly in the townscapes. Local businesses would pay a modest supplement to their rates, but, in return, they would get a considerably

cleaner and graffiti-free environment. That could bring additional money to local authorities. Additional money will come through higher fines and, hopefully, the easier enforcement of those fines. I do not expect that the resource that is being asked of councils will be particularly cost-intensive. Where it is properly implemented, it will be hugely beneficial to local authorities at a modest cost.

Committee Business

Statutory Committee Membership: Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Statutory Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr P J Bradley replace Mr Patsy McGlone as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Housing: Savills Report

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

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

That this Assembly notes the findings of the Savills report; calls on the Minister for Social Development to ensure equity in the delivery of new social housing and the maintenance of existing Housing Executive stock; and further calls on the Minister to limit the reduction in funding for Housing Executive maintenance contractors, in view of the adverse economic situation.

At the Committee's meeting of 25 February 2009, it was agreed that this motion on the Savills report should be tabled for debate in the House. It is only the second Social Development Committee motion of the current mandate, and, similar to our motion of June 2009, it reflects the Committee's concerns about maintaining and improving social housing.

The challenges that the Department for Social Development (DSD) faces in funding social housing have been well set out by the Minister and by others on a number of occasions. Although that is important, recent debate on the subject has been characterised by some as tired and the arguments as rather worn. The Committee, therefore, noted with great interest the findings of the Savills report, which the Minister referenced during her response to

the Committee motion on 22 June 2009. The Committee looked forward to the publication of the Savills report as a way of injecting new ideas and reinvigorating the necessary and important debate on social housing.

The Committee was disappointed that the Department did not make the Savills report available despite repeated requests. However, I am pleased to say that, after further correspondence, the Department subsequently agreed to bring the Savills report to the Committee. The Committee for Social Development is, therefore, happy to have the opportunity of this debate to air many important questions in the House.

Some Members may ask what the Savills report is about — it is not to be confused with something else that bears the name “Saville” — so I will tell the House about it briefly. The Savills report refers to the housing stock that the Housing Executive owns. The report was based on a large sample — some 9,000 — of Housing Executive homes, which is equivalent to about 10% of the overall stock that the Housing Executive possesses. Savills found that the housing stock was generally of very good quality. In fact, in the round, the Housing Executive stock probably represents the best social housing that Savills has reviewed in the whole of the United Kingdom. It is estimated that around 17% of Housing Executive homes do not meet the decent homes standard. In comparison with the housing stock of other social landlords, that is a remarkable claim and one that is worthy of note by the House. That said, members of the Committee took issue with that part of the report. Members highlighted examples of homes in their constituencies that were in severe disrepair and said that they found it difficult to reconcile those with the report’s findings. However, the Committee will give that issue further serious consideration and will feed back more detail on it to the Department shortly.

The Savills report suggested that the Housing Executive had achieved a quality of stock maintenance that exceeded even the decent homes plus standard and that it had done so while keeping procurement costs at levels that compared well when benchmarked with the rest of the UK. Notwithstanding the Committee’s concerns that I mentioned earlier, that is an achievement that deserves much praise.

Savills further characterised the Housing Executive stock by identifying groups of

properties that required significantly more maintenance and improvement than was currently provided by the single-element works that Egan contractors have undertaken. That characterisation showed that the difference between improvement costs and rental income was quite significant. It also illustrated how pockets of housing that amounted to several thousand so-called poor- and very poor-performing homes will certainly need significant improvements now or in the not too distant future.

The Committee recognises that there are, of course, major social housing budget challenges in respect of capital works for existing stock and building new homes. The Committee, therefore, calls on the Minister to address those challenges as equitably as she can. The Committee has spent a lot of time considering the equitable distribution of new homes built under the social housing development programme. It is, of course, vital that fairness and equality be maintained in the allocation process for new and existing homes. Additionally, the Committee suggested that there must be equity in the balance that is struck between capital improvements and the development of new homes.

Savills’ findings, of which there were many, may be interpreted in many different ways. It is possible that the proposed curtailment of Housing Executive capital works may disadvantage certain communities. A departmental investment strategy that is entirely weighted towards new social housing may not benefit those communities. The issue of equity is complex and does not appear to have been considered by Savills. The Committee believes that further study is required on the equality implications of the Savills report, and I look forward to the Minister’s response to that point today.

Having spoken about information, quality and equity, I turn to the issue of money, to which we tend to revert at some stage in debates such as this. How big are the proposed reductions to capital expenditure for poorer Housing Executive stock? The Savills report appears to suggest that a reduction of some £40 million should be made immediately. In light of that figure, the House can expect to hear today from Members from across Northern Ireland who are worried about delayed or cancelled Housing Executive capital works projects in their area. From Dunclug to New Lodge and

from Bangor to Banbridge, the message of concern will be the same. Those projects can have a hugely favourable impact by helping communities to rebuild and regenerate areas and turn them around. Aside from the impact on tenants living in poorer accommodation, a reduction of around £40 million in capital works expenditure will surely have a detrimental effect on the construction industry in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Department estimates that every £1 million of investment protects 30 jobs in the construction industry, including its suppliers. Therefore, even using the Department's figures, the suggested cutbacks could endanger perhaps as many as 1,200 jobs.

The Committee recognises that many of these difficult decisions reflect the loss of capital receipts owing to the contraction of the housing market. Nonetheless, the Committee urges the Minister to reconsider the significant changes to the Housing Executive capital works budget so as to limit the ill effects for tenants in run-down estates and the impact on our beleaguered construction industry.

The Savills report included suggestions relating to above-inflation increases in Housing Executive rents over a sustained period. The Committee considered proposals for the establishment of an independent body, free from political interference, to set fair social rents and other related charges. The Committee believes that further study is required on that so as to ensure that any rent regime does not disadvantage the working poor. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the Minister's proposed review of social rents and invite her to set out the relevant terms of reference for that today.

The Committee was deeply disappointed by the Department's apparent initial reluctance to share the Savills report and the Ford report with the Committee. The latter document would facilitate an informed debate on the contentious issue of social rent convergence. I again repeat the Committee's long-standing request that the Ford report be placed in the public domain to allow for scrutiny by the Committee and debate in the House.

I look forward to hearing Members' contributions and, in particular, the Minister's response to the debate.

I take one hat off and put my DUP MLA hat on. The DUP, as a party, wants to underline its belief in the need for equity and balance in the

funding of social housing newbuild and capital maintenance works, including the works that I have outlined. We echo the Committee's view that sensitivity and sympathy must be shown to the construction industry in the handling of any curtailment of funding for capital works programmes. From experiences in our constituencies, we all know just how difficult the downturn has been in Northern Ireland, in particular for the construction industry. Indeed, one reason why Northern Ireland has suffered is the impact that there has been on the construction industry.

I stress the issue of equality and, if there is a curtailment of funding for capital works programmes, the need for a proper assessment of precisely where that will hit. Looking at the extracts from the Savills report that deal with poor- and very poor-performing houses, Members will quickly come to the conclusion that, although the list includes housing in all parts of Northern Ireland with no favour one way or the other, the majority of homes listed are in what may be deemed Protestant, unionist or loyalist areas.

As others call for a fair and equitable distribution of social housing newbuild, I call on the Minister to be mindful and careful in dealing with any possible curtailment of funding and precisely where that will impact hardest. Some of the houses listed are in areas that I know which are run-down and in need of urgent regeneration. Perhaps my colleagues will be better able to speak from personal experience about areas that they know. Although there may be a need for significant investment, we cannot allow those areas to continue to degrade in the way that they have in the past. I urge the Minister to be careful in considering where and upon whom the impact of curtailment of funding would be most severe.

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

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: On behalf of the DUP, I have no qualms in supporting the motion.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In September 2008, the Department commissioned Savills to undertake a stock condition survey of Housing Executive housing stock and to provide information on its maintenance investment strategy and asset planning. The objectives were to support

strategic planning for Housing Executive stock; to enable the best use of resources in effecting the repair, maintenance and improvement of Housing Executive stock; to provide information to enable the achievement of the decent homes standard within a future five-year business plan; and to inform the evaluation of maintenance and improvement planning in Housing Executive stock over a 30-year term.

The report includes a comparison of Housing Executive stock with the decent homes plus standard, which is defined as a house complying with statutory minimum requirements; being in a reasonable state of repair; having reasonably modern facilities; having a reasonable degree of thermal comfort; and having its kitchens and bathrooms replaced when required.

1.30 pm

The social rented sector in the North comprises approximately 114,400 dwellings, 90,000 of which are owned and managed by the Housing Executive. Savills surveyed a representative sample of 10% of the existing Housing Executive stock across different property types, ages and locations, and its report concluded that the quality of the Housing Executive's stock was very good and was among the best that it had inspected. The Minister, for her part, stated that the report will allow her:

"to direct capital and revenue resources to ensure we get the best value regarding the repair, maintenance and improvement of the homes."

However, the survey also found that approximately 17% of Housing Executive stock failed the decent homes plus standard. The most significant reason for failure was thermal inefficiency, which is directly attributable to inefficient heating systems. Interestingly, we are to have a debate later on the proposed introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme, which could have some impact on that finding.

The secret of maintaining existing housing stock to a proper level is planned and effective maintenance. Savills recommended that the Housing Executive adopts a 30-year business plan model, which should be associated with the costs of meeting and maintaining properties to the decent homes plus standard. According to Savills, expenditure should be relatively low during the next five years because of the good condition of the existing housing stock, but will increase as time goes on and the housing stock

gets older. If the Housing Executive continues to maintain its housing stock properly, overall costs will logically decrease. The report suggests that the Executive should focus on areas that must be maintained and not necessarily on multi-element improvements. However, disabled facilities, such as ramps, must not be jeopardised in that plan. The reduction in expenditure will also have an impact on the existing Egan framework partnership contracts, and will inevitably impact on jobs in the construction industry as it is reliant on work from the Housing Executive.

There must be some reservations to the Savills report. It suggests raising NIHE rents, which will impact on those low-income households that rely on social housing. Also, the report must not be used as an excuse for cutting essential maintenance but should be utilised for the purpose of maintaining homes to an existing standard, and those standards must not be allowed to fall. Equality in the delivery of social housing and maintenance should be the key.

Mr Burns: I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on the Savills report and on other issues mentioned in the motion. I am sure that all Members will agree that those are very important matters.

As was previously stated, the findings of the Savills report were presented to the Committee for Social Development in February. The Chairperson of the Committee and others outlined those findings very well to the House today, and I will not spend too much time going over the fine detail of the report. However, it is worth stating that the report concludes:

"The NIHE stock is by far the best quality housing stock that we have inspected. NIHE has maintained the stock to a high standard and the work undertaken has been completed to a high quality."

That is quite a good report in anyone's book, and we should pay tribute to the Minister for Social Development, her predecessors and the Housing Executive for their dedication and hard work. We should also be grateful that so much money and hard work has been invested in maintaining our public housing stock.

Some shortfalls were highlighted in the report, the main one being that a sizeable minority of 17% of houses fell below the decent homes plus standard, which was mainly as a result of poor heating or insulation. Every Member would

agree that the warm homes scheme is the proper way to address that issue and that it has done a good job so far. Some Members have been critical of that scheme in recent debates, but it is a scheme that the Minister and I support 100%.

The main substance of the motion highlights the issue of newbuild housing versus maintenance and repairs. The Assembly has had many debates on that issue in various forms. In an ideal world, we would build new houses and upgrade the existing stock to the highest possible standard. However, as the money is simply not available for everything, newbuild housing is the priority. We have debated the matter countless times, and newbuild social housing is one of the best ways to give the local economy and the construction industry the help that they need.

The experts do not state that the best way to kick-start the economy and lift us out of recession is to install kitchens, paint fences, plant trees or build roads. Although there is no doubt that winning contracts for such work helps local firms, newbuild social housing is the best way forward. All Members have seen the report for themselves and have read that newbuild housing achieves better value for money and a greater economic multiplying effect, so it must be the priority. If anything, the Savills report adds further weight to that argument. The report states that the majority of public housing stock is in "excellent" condition.

I do not suggest that all maintenance, upgrades and repairs should stop. Many houses still require such work, on which DSD spends millions and millions of pounds each year. However, I repeat that the time is right to prioritise newbuilds. I accept that such an approach would have a negative impact on the Egan contractors, but they know that, in any one year, there is no guarantee of a certain volume of work. However, people who live in Housing Executive houses should know that money will always be available for home maintenance on which, this year alone, some £170 million was spent.

I say to those DUP Members who spoke today that, in recent days in the House and in the media, the Finance Minister, Mr Wilson, issued a public challenge to the Minister for Social Development.

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

Mr Burns: He challenged her to read, review and carefully evaluate all the evidence and advice that is received to ensure that value for money is achieved and no resources are wasted. That is exactly what the Minister for Social Development is doing.

Mr Armstrong: It is worth highlighting two statistics from the Savills report: some 17% of Housing Executive stock, which equates to about 15,000 homes, fall below the decent homes plus standard, and 31,500 homes in the Housing Executive stock cost more to maintain than is made from their rental income. The figure of 31,500 represents a massive proportion of that stock, and, in the long term, that must be investigated by the Minister and the Executive. It is not sustainable, or at least it should not be considered as such, because it is a huge drain on the Department's resources and affects the ability of the Housing Executive to reduce housing pressure.

I support the principles that people should have decent homes and resources should be available to contractors to enable them to get homes up to the standard required. A strategic examination of the stock is required, with a view to finding a new way to fix it. However, the problem that is faced at every turn is a lack of money.

The Assembly is superb at pointing out the problems and demanding action by a Minister or a Department. We are great at highlighting problems and saying that something must be done, but we are, unfortunately, not as good at coming up with workable solutions. All Ministers in the Executive would say that with more resources, in the form of money to throw at problems or more staff, they could tackle the problems that face their Departments. As we all know, in the current economic climate, more money is not forthcoming, and, therefore, what is required is a redoubling of efforts to ensure that the scarce and precious resources are deployed as effectively as possible. That will require a strategic look at the public finances, with a view to solving the problems that we face in that area.

There is a problem with the Housing Executive stock. However, there is also a problem with the public finances, which restricts the ability of the Minister to achieve what we want, and no doubt what she wants, in the short term.

However, the problem is not a short-term one; it is a long-term one that requires a radical

solution. I hope that the Minister is considering how she might solve the problem, because doing so would go a long way to achieving efficiency savings in her Department. Although those savings might not be made in the comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, they are savings that the Department could be required to make.

The waste in DSD that the report highlights is not the Minister's fault, but it would be to her long-term credit if she could do something about it. That, more than the much needed additional funding, is perhaps a more realistic prospect.

Ms Lo: I support the motion and welcome the report.

The Savills stock condition survey was the first independent survey undertaken in Northern Ireland to assess requirements for maintenance investment and asset planning in social housing in light of budget restrictions that the Department will face over the coming years. I commend the Department for taking on that initiative as part of its forward planning.

The report found that Housing Executive homes are in a better condition than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK. The report stated that our housing stock was:

"by far the best quality housing stock that we have inspected."

That is something that we should be proud of, and I commend the Housing Executive for that excellent achievement. The quality of our housing stock is obviously a result of properly resourcing maintenance work.

The total cost of maintaining all 90,000 Housing Executive properties over the next 30 years is estimated to be £5.1 million; £1,887 each year for every property. The survey estimated that only 15,000 Housing Executive homes did not comply with the decent homes plus standard; about 11,000 of those homes failed due to inefficient heating systems. During an evidence session to the Committee, I was pleased that since the report's publication, thousands of central-heating upgrades or replacements had been undertaken in Housing Executive homes.

In previous years, the Housing Executive spent about £200 million on property maintenance. In the current financial year, that has come down to about £170 million. The Savills report stated that that could come down to about

£134 million if the Housing Executive focuses on areas that need to be maintained rather than carrying out multi-element improvement work, as was done in the past.

If the Housing Executive adopts the proposed cost profile, as recommended, there will be an impact on the existing Egan framework, as the Egan contractors are heavily reliant on Housing Executive work to sustain their businesses. Withdrawing a proportion of that work could affect the viability of many contractors, particularly during the economic downturn. The Housing Executive faces a difficult balancing act.

Mr F McCann: There have been a number of debates on the Egan contracts in the Chamber. During the course of those debates, we found out that there are also hundreds of other small contractors who employ three and four people and who rely heavily on maintenance contracts to survive. Any reduction in those contracts, whether they are for the replacement of kitchens or something else, will have a detrimental effect on many communities. Does the Member agree?

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

Ms Lo: I agree with the Member and thank him for his intervention.

As I said, the Minister faces a difficult balancing act, as does the Department, which faces a shortfall of £100 million or more per annum over the next few years. However, it is important to bear in mind that we cannot be complacent with our well-maintained stock for ever. Adequate maintenance of the housing stock will save us money in the long run and will enable us to avoid the necessity of knocking down properties and rebuilding them, which is what we are seeing in the Village area of south Belfast now.

1.45 pm

Instead of cutting expenditure, we perhaps need to consider increasing our income to maintain the same level of output. Savills found that since 2007, rent levels in proportion to earnings in Northern Ireland have fallen behind those in the rest of the UK. He estimated that the maintenance costs for around 31,000 Housing Executive homes, which is one third of our stock, will exceed the rental income over a 30-year period. It is clear that that is not sustainable. We need an independent body that

has no political influence to set a realistic level for social rent in Northern Ireland that is in line with that in Britain. Over 80% of rent is paid by the Treasury through housing benefits anyway, and, therefore, the proposal will not negatively impact on the majority of our tenants.

The report also indicated that the Housing Executive undertakes environmental and security works, such as ground maintenance and fencing, that are considered to be outside its landlord functions and that are the responsibility of local authorities in Great Britain. We should take up Savills's recommendation to agree with other bodies a joint funding mechanism to share the costs.

Savills highlighted the difficulties with the Housing Executive's redevelopment of properties. Those difficulties are due partly to interface issues. That is further evidence of the cost of division, and we can only hope that, under the new community relations strategy —

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

Ms Lo: — and the strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration, the Department will have a strategic direction —

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

Ms Lo: — in tackling housing segregation in Northern Ireland.

Mr Craig: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion.

I admit that I have a number of concerns about the Savills report. If we are to meet the decent homes standards, the report estimates that we need to spend about £157 million a year over the next 30 years. That spend is against the current estimate of £200 million a year. When I look at the existing maintenance budget but then see an estimated reduction of more than £40 million, I must admit that I have difficulty working out where we will find the necessary balance between newbuilds and maintenance. Other Members talked about how essential newbuilds are. I do not disagree with that assertion, but we must find the balance between newbuilds and maintenance of existing housing stock.

I have taken the Minister to see a number of projects in Lagan Valley, one of which, the Dales flats, does not even meet health and safety

maintenance requirements. She knows about that situation, and, in fairness to her, she found some maintenance budgets to try to deal with some of the more critical health and safety issues that exist there. However, not all those problems have been dealt with. I have taken that up with the Minister, and she knows about the problems. Therefore, I am struggling with the concept that reducing the budget by another £40 million a year will deal with such issues. I find that situation inconceivable, and it will lead only to further reduction to the existing housing stock. If we fail to maintain that stock, it will fall into disrepair and the number of newbuilds will increase. In the end, that is counterproductive.

Furthermore, I took the Minister to visit some pensioners' bungalows in Hillhall that have been waiting almost seven years for a major maintenance scheme. In fact, the Minister was taken to a bungalow in which the kitchen ceiling had fallen in. It had been that way for over a year, because the maintenance budget was not available to repair it.

That is why I am struggling with the idea that, by the wave of some magic wand, reducing the existing maintenance budget will allow us to continue to maintain our existing housing stock to the decent homes standard. The Savills report is all well and good. It looked at a 10% sample of the existing housing stock, but that is like looking at 10% of anything — where did it look for that 10% sample? I do not have the answer to that, nor am I accusing Savills of picking and choosing the areas that it looked at. Did it look at the worst examples or the best examples? I do not know.

The figures in the report say that 17% of homes — some 15,000 — do not comply with the decent homes standard, and that 11,000 of those homes failed to meet that standard because of inefficient heating systems. Should we believe that a £40 million reduction in the maintenance budget will deal with that? Are we really condemning the people who live in those homes to wait for another three, four or five years? If we fully implement the recommendations of the Savills report, those people will have to live for 11 to 15 years with what they have already got. I do not believe that the Minister or any member of the Committee wants that. However, I struggle with the concept that reducing a budget does not have an impact on existing maintenance schemes. I believe

that such a reduction will, unfortunately, have a detrimental effect.

I have looked at some of the figures in the report, and unfortunately, there is an area that the Minister will need to look at. It is clear that almost 70% of the areas in which maintenance performance was poorest were in unionist areas. Those are the areas that will feel the most detrimental effect of any reduction in the maintenance budget.

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

Mr Craig: There is an equality issue there that must be looked at and addressed. I support the motion.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tacaím leis an rún seo inniu.

I support the motion, which asks the Assembly to note the findings of the Savills Report. The motion is timely, and I hope that the Minister for Social Development will take its sentiments on board.

I will outline a number of serious aspects of the report that must be addressed because of possible grave consequences for the maintenance of housing stock in the medium to long term. No matter how one tries to dress up the report, it will have far-reaching implications for Housing Executive tenants, many of whom live in homes that are situated in the most deprived areas of the North.

The report points out that it surveyed 10% of the existing housing stock against the decent homes plus standard and found that, in comparison with other jurisdictions, our social housing stock was well maintained by the Housing Executive. It goes on to say that 15,000 homes, or 17% of the stock, did not comply with the decent homes standard, 11,000 of which failed because of inefficient heating systems.

One has to ask what the real purpose of the report was. It says that Housing Executive stock is of a good standard, but it recommends that we cut back across a whole range of environmental, security and maintenance programmes, and that huge savings could be made if we went down that road. I believe that the Minister intends to move ahead with the report's recommendations regardless of the consequences. I say that on the back of a

question that I put to departmental officials at a Committee meeting a couple of weeks ago.

How can the changes that are recommended in the Savills report be implemented, given the detrimental effect that they could have on what remains of the social housing stock? The report says that the average rent here is £51.89 a week, which is lower than in other jurisdictions, and goes on to say that rents should be increased over a number of years. That would raise a considerable amount of financial resources. What the report fails to take into account, however, is that, on average, people here are on lower wages but have to pay more for their fuel, travel and insurance, and for a range of household items.

Under the heading of low value units and high maintenance costs, the report states that 31,500 homes have a negative worth because of the cost of maintenance over rental income over a 30-year period. The report states that 10% are very poor, and goes on to mention poor performers in housing. It mentions Ballymena, Craigavon, Belfast, Derry, Carrickfergus, Larne and Coleraine. Those areas already suffer the worst social deprivation.

The report touches on the Housing Executive's maintenance of amenity land, grounds and trees, saying that it is excessive. However, that programme is essential in ensuring that land does not become overgrown and that trees do not grow out of control.

The report also targets disabled adaptation, and states that costs are much higher, especially for one-bedroom bungalows, than in other jurisdictions. If the Minister is to implement the recommendations in the report, she must spell out what the impact will be on adaptations, whether unit costs will be reduced and what that will do to the quality of work.

We in Sinn Féin have serious concerns. It does not matter that we do things better than in other places. We should be proud of the fact that we provide good housing and that we have a good policy of maintaining that stock. Any departure from that, based on a report that compares what happens in other jurisdictions with the way that we do things here, is a backwards step.

Can the Minister tell us how many people will lose their jobs in the maintenance sector? Egan contractors employ over 1,000 people, not to mention the suppliers and shops that

depend on their spend. Hundreds of small builders employ several thousand people, and they have told us that any reduction in work levels will hit them hard. We could be storing up trouble for the future if there is a reduction in the level to which multi-element improvements are carried out. Thousands of people could be out of work if the Minister pushes through the recommendations.

There must be a breathing space in which to work out the medium- to long-term impact that the implementation of the report would have on the quality of housing. The British Chancellor has called for more investment in housing stock as a way of creating employment and keeping our housing to a good standard, but we seem to be going in the other direction.

Many people are waiting for the Minister to answer the questions that I have outlined. Their livelihoods depend on it, as does the future of our housing stock. To take up one of Simon's points, one of the bywords that we often use is equality.

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

Mr F McCann: Money must be allocated according to need. To do otherwise is to store up trouble for the future, especially in the maintenance or the provision of housing.

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

Mr F McCann: One of the other myths is that most people would say that there are more people employed in maintenance than in social rebuild.

Mr Easton: I support the motion. Demand for modern, purpose-built, suitable social housing is on the increase. We must meet that demand in order to provide housing fit for the twenty-first century. However, that does not necessarily mean building new houses. I was concerned to read in the Savills report that 17% of the current housing stock, out of a sample of 10%, did not conform to the decent homes standard. Before my colleague Mr Craig gets ahead of me, I will mention that there are pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield estate that have been in need of repair for 10 years. I hope that the Minister takes that on board.

The report found that 12% of the housing stock has insufficient heating systems. That statistic is worrying, and it is relevant given that we will debate a boiler scrappage scheme later today.

It also raises questions about the Department, given that it operates the warm homes scheme, which seeks to combat fuel poverty. Heating inefficiencies are directly linked to fuel poverty as they raise the costs of heating one's home. We must remember that people in social housing have been granted homes because they are in poverty or have a need, be it medical or other.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Savills report argues that the cost of maintaining the current housing stock for the next 30 years will be much lower than was previously expected. How accurate can that assessment be? I am concerned about the proposal to use the tendering process to gain value-for-money benefits. Are we to see the Department squeeze contractors for everything that they have got? In other words, get them to do more work for less money. Contractors are struggling because the Minister has not provided them with the necessary financial guarantees. That is not good enough for any business. They have to plan for the future, especially with regards to staff. I would not want to see anyone lose their job in the current climate, particularly because of financial mismanagement. A Department should not be responsible for that.

The report lacks a detailed breakdown and assessment of current housing stock.

The report involves a sample of 10%, which I feel is not representative. Some 17% of houses were found not to meet the decent homes standard, but what is the real figure? Could it be much higher?

2.00 pm

I also have questions about the decent homes standard. I note that the Housing Executive strives to work to standards above those that are established. However, what if those standards change? We always strive to raise housing standards, so it is likely that the bar will be raised over the next 30 years. Surely that will have an impact on costs.

I support the need for new houses, and I accept that a considerable number of houses need to be replaced, because maintenance costs will outweigh newbuild costs. Having said that, many houses are in need of maintenance. However, the Department is loath to carry out the work and, instead, focuses on newbuilds for the sake

of them. I am concerned that that approach is linked to the Minister's policy of promoting shared housing.

We must watch costs, because the budget is tight. We must not forget about people who live in houses that are not up to scratch. As is stated in the motion, there must be equity in the newbuild and maintenance budgets. One cannot fix something just by buying a new one, nor is it always cost-effective to do so. I commend the motion to the House and make known my concerns about the Savills report. The Minister's Department may use it to reduce funding for maintaining existing Housing Executive stock.

The Minister for Social Development (Ms Ritchie):

I thank Members who have contributed to the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to, and clarify, some of the issues that have been raised. I will try to address all the points that Members raised. I assure them that I will study the Hansard report, and if I find that I have left any questions unanswered, I will write directly to the Member concerned.

There can be no Member who, by now, is not aware of the shortfall that the housing budget suffered as a result of the land and property market's collapse. With so much of my budget predicated on land and property sales, it was inevitable that the downturn in the market would have a more savage impact on housing than on elsewhere. I have been asked to find further savings of more than £30 million from my budget next year. If I am to continue to protect vulnerable people and those in greatest need, it is vital that I have reliable and up-to-date information on how best I can do it. That is precisely why I commissioned the Savills report.

Savills undertook the work between November 2008 and March 2009. With the support of the Housing Executive, it visited more than 9,000 homes and analysed data for all 90,000-plus homes that were in Housing Executive ownership at the time. The survey is the most comprehensive of its kind ever to be undertaken on Housing Executive stock. The conclusions reached, and the recommendations made, provide a detailed evidence base on which I, and future Ministers with responsibility for housing, can make informed decisions.

As an aside, Members may be interested to note the conclusion that Housing Executive stock was by far the best-quality housing stock in Britain and Northern Ireland that Savills had

ever inspected. The maintenance standard that the Housing Executive adopted is well above the decent homes plus standard. Only 17% of the stock failed that standard, and the majority of those properties failed only because of the lack of an efficient heating system.

The motion calls on me to ensure equity in our newbuild and maintenance programmes. I often hear suggestions that, as Minister, I am focused only on the newbuild programme, to the detriment of other programmes. That is absolute nonsense, and it ignores reality. In the past five years, we have spent £975 million on maintaining the existing stock. In that time, only £686 million was spent on building new homes. This year alone, we will spend more on maintenance than on newbuilds. I have not stopped our maintenance programmes: far from it.

I make no apology for wanting to increase our housing stock. I am proud that we will build more new homes this year than at any time in the past decade. It is a fact that, today, almost 40,000 people are waiting for social housing. The latest housing needs assessment from the Housing Executive suggests the requirement to build 3,000 new homes per year to meet housing need. At the same time, the quality of the housing stock has never been better.

Informed choices need to be made. There is the need to know that every pound spent makes the biggest possible impact on those in greatest need. That is why the fact can no longer be ignored that, although we have a housing stock that we can be proud of, there are record numbers of people on waiting lists. Over the past five years, there has not been equity in how the various housing programmes have been funded, and that is why there is now an imbalance that must be addressed.

The fact must not be lost sight of that my resources are intended, first and foremost, to help those in greatest housing need: I fear sometimes that Members might not grasp that. Whether my budget is focused on newbuild or maintenance, it generates work across the construction industry. The motion may have Members believing that only investment in maintenance helps the beleaguered construction industry. That is clearly not the case. Professor Mike Smyth of the University of Ulster produced a report last June that evaluated the case for public investment in social housing. He noted that this was a

particularly good time to increase investment in the social housing development programme, given the falling costs of acquiring materials, labour and, most importantly, land. Members with a genuine interest in the work of the wider construction industry, rather than in that of a few firms, will take comfort in that report and realise that my resources are already indirectly supporting the industry, irrespective of the programmes chosen for prioritisation.

Let me touch on some of the other issues mentioned. The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development referred to dwelling unfitness. The preliminary findings of the house condition survey for 2009 will be made available on the Housing Executive's website next week. Some interesting statistics have been compiled by that survey. In 2009, the total dwelling stock was approximately 740,000. That represents a net increase of 35,000 since 2006 and the high number of dwelling completions at the height of the housing boom.

Interestingly, the rate of dwelling unfitness has continued to decline. In 2009, it stood at 2.4%, compared to 3.4% in 2006 and 4.9% in 2001. The 2009 dwelling unfitness rates for social housing were 0.1% and 0.2% for the Housing Executive and the housing associations respectively. I ask Members to place this debate in that context. It demonstrates that we have been tackling the issue of dwelling unfitness and we have the best quality social housing stock in the Housing Executive sector in these islands.

Simon Hamilton also raised the issue that the reduction in the Housing Executive capital works will have a detrimental impact on minority communities. The Savills report does not recommend a complete halt to all capital works; rather, it suggests that the full multi-element works, where front door to back door replacements are carried out, should be replaced by elemental improvements to kitchens, windows and bathrooms. Those should be replaced when they reach the end of their useful life.

Simon also raised the issue of the terms of reference for the review of rent setting or rent convergence. That is still under consideration, and I will bring the report, on completion and following evaluation, to the Committee for its consideration.

Mickey Brady asked whether the reductions in expenditure will affect Egan contractors. It will not affect them. Savills recommended that there

be an expansion of the Egan-type contractors to make efficiencies. Billy Armstrong said that we should take a strategic look at how maintenance is carried out. The report recommends a new asset management strategy to best-plan for future maintenance of the Housing Executive stock.

That should address Mr Armstrong's concerns. Anna Lo raised the issue of a reduction in work for Egan contractors if the budgets are reduced. That is not the case.

Jonathan Craig raised the issue of what property Savills looked at. The Savills survey was based on a representative sample of all house types in a broad geographical area, and the 10% sample is considered by the Department for Communities and Local Government to be sufficiently robust. If one takes on board other recent samples, that is broadly representative of the number of houses or people that are usually sampled in opinion polling. Mr Craig also mentioned Dales Flats and Hillhall, which I was happy to visit and saw examples of the work.

Fra McCann raised the issue of the impact of the recommendations on disabled adaptations. My officials are working with colleagues in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to improve the systems for adaptations. However, the Savills report does not suggest or recommend a reduction in adaptations; it just says that it should be researched further, and that is what we are doing. Other issues were raised about environmental works in estates and on amenity lands. The Savills report raises concern about the £10 million annual cost of ground maintenance. I share that concern, but we are looking at all those issues in the round.

I thank Members for their contributions and for providing us with a platform to debate the very real challenges that we now face in delivering housing in Northern Ireland. I trust that the Committee for Social Development, which brought the motion, will be reassured to learn that my scarce resources are being targeted at those in greatest housing need, and I am sure that they would want it no other way.

The Savills report presents us, for the first time, with a clear picture of what we need to invest in, and when, if we are to maintain the quality of our housing stock. Together with Mike Smith's report, it allows us to look more closely at those housing programmes that have, perhaps, not been as fully funded as they needed to

be. The report is to help to bring about that better balance in the allocation of funding, notwithstanding the housing budget constraints, over which no one in the House or Northern Ireland has any control. However, we now have the chance in the years ahead to redress that problem and provide for those most in need.

Finally, if nothing else today, we can dispel the myth that there is no money to maintain homes. There will always be a budget to maintain homes, and this year alone it will be almost £170 million.

I suppose that being a Minister is about making decisions, and sometimes they are difficult decisions. Those decisions are always easier when they are informed by reality, an evidence base and research. The Savills report now provides that reality. I made the report available to members of the Committee for Social Development, and I have placed a copy in the Assembly Library so that all Members can acquaint themselves with its findings. I would have appreciated more Members being in the House for the debate, because such reports are informative, but they also have far-reaching long-term implications. Naturally, I am anxious to get the views of all Members.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hilditch): On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I thank the Members who contributed to the debate and, in particular, the Minister for her answers.

Much of the Savills report shows the Housing Executive in a positive and, indeed debatably, commendable light. I hope that the House will agree that, regardless of the controversial nature of some of its findings, the report has injected the social housing debate with a much-needed fresh impetus.

2.15 pm

The challenges that face the Department for Social Development in respect of the funding of social housing, both for newbuilds and capital works improvements, have been well set out by Members. The Social Development Committee has previously brought issues of concern relating to Egan contractors before the House. Today, however, our focus was on social houses that need more than a modest investment and on estates that require significant capital expenditure.

Everyone accepts that the decisions that flowed from the collapse of the property market were never going to be easy or welcomed universally. The Committee cannot provide the answers today, but this debate has set out some guiding principles, the first of which is one of transparency. The ramifications of significant changes in housing policy, be they related to rent convergence or capital expenditure profiles, should be debated and scrutinised by the Committee. The outworking of decisions about where money is or is not spent must be demonstrably equitable, and cannot, through error or omission, disadvantage parts of our community. Where substantial housing policy changes are to be made, primary consideration must be given to tenants, and then to the impact on the construction industry and the wider economy.

Today's debate was characterised by many insightful and forthright contributions. I will take a little time to remind the House of the key thoughts of the Members who spoke. Mickey Brady highlighted the possible adverse impact on tenants and contactors of the proposed reductions to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive maintenance and improvement works. Thomas Burns spoke about the aspects of the Savills report that highlighted the achievement of the decent homes standard in a large percentage of Housing Executive homes. He also identified the benefits of new social house-building for the local economy and indicated that that should be a priority for the Department.

Billy Armstrong called for a strategic review of housing planning and the effective use of existing resources. He also identified longer term issues that related to public finance. Anna Lo commended the Department for commissioning the report and for its achievements in respect of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's stock quality to date. She highlighted fears about the impact of the proposed reductions in expenditure for Egan contractors and others, and warned the House of the danger of complacency with regard to the Housing Executive stock quality. She also called for an independent body to set social rents and for a new funding mechanism for other housing costs.

Jonathan Craig spoke about the balance between newbuild and maintenance in social housing, and the danger of further disrepair in the social housing sector. He questioned the findings of the report and indicated his

difficulty in reconciling the Savills report's recommendations with the impact on Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants. Like other Members, he raised the question of equality in respect of the strategic housing decisions. He also gave some examples of areas of concern in his constituency.

Fra McCann questioned the report's recommendations on raising social rents and the impact that that would have on deprived areas in Northern Ireland. He called for the Minister to continue the Housing Executive's maintenance policy, particularly the multi-element improvements, at least until equality consideration was undertaken. Alex Easton highlighted disrepair issues in his constituency. He spoke about how the adverse economic impact of the proposed reductions in expenditure would affect contractors. He suggested that equality was important in respect of the balance between newbuild and maintenance.

I thank the Minister for her response. She reminded the House of the background to the financial difficulties that face social housing in Northern Ireland. She also pointed out that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has adopted a maintenance standard that is well above that in the rest of the UK.

She further advised Members of the breakdown in spend between newbuild and maintenance and how she intended to address what she deems existing inequities. The Minister told the House of the benefit of newbuild to the construction industry, and detailed the general reduction in unfitness levels in the social housing stock. She said that she would advise the Committee of the outcome of the rent review being conducted by her Department.

The Minister refuted that Egan contractors would be adversely affected and defended the statistical basis of the Savills report. She highlighted that her Department is also to review environmental and grounds maintenance costs and concluded that the Savills report would create an opportunity to deliver future funding allocations to housing based on better evidence.

It has been a very good debate, during which Members spoke about or touched upon most of the issues of concern. I commend the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the findings of the Savills report; calls on the Minister for Social Development to ensure equity in the delivery of new social housing and the maintenance of existing Housing Executive stock; and further calls on the Minister to limit the reduction in funding for Housing Executive maintenance contractors, in view of the adverse economic situation.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Maternity Services

1. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which hospitals with maternity units will exceed capacity limitations as a result of the planned maternity closures at hospitals such as Lagan Valley; and for his assessment of any possible health and safety implications for patients. (AQO 879/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr McGimpsey): Safe, sustainable maternity services are a top priority for my Department. It is precisely because of the need to ensure safe services that the obstetrics unit at Lagan Valley Hospital will close. Work is already under way to ensure that any hospital affected by the withdrawal of obstetric services from Lagan Valley Hospital will have the extra capacity to meet any increase in demand.

I recently invested £4.2 million in maternity services at the Royal and £3.5 million at Craigavon Area Hospital. A community midwifery unit has opened in Downpatrick, and there will be a midwifery-led unit in place in Lagan Valley Hospital before the withdrawal of obstetric services. I also have plans to increase maternity capacity at the Ulster Hospital.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an freagra sin. I welcome the Minister's answer. In the Developing Better Services document, the trust stated that people from Lisburn who need to avail of maternity services will travel to the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald. However, there is a view held by many, in particular the Royal College of Nursing, that that will not happen and that most women travelling from Lisburn will go to Craigavon Area Hospital or to the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service. Given that those hospitals are under increasing pressure, does the Minister accept that they will not have the capacity to deliver a quality maternity service?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As far as capacity is concerned,

the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust operates Lagan Valley Hospital, and expectant mums in that trust area will go to that hospital. I also anticipate that they will avail of Craigavon Area Hospital and the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service, which is why, as I said in my previous answer, I have invested in maternity services at those hospitals to address the point that Mr Butler makes.

Mr Craig: From answers to questions a number of months ago it was clear that there was a lack of capacity of around 700 births, and I know that the birth rate in Lagan Valley Hospital is 1,200 at present. Will the Minister give us some assurances that the new midwifery-led unit will be in open and in place before any reduction in numbers takes place in Lagan Valley Hospital, which would cause a major issue around capacity in the whole South Eastern Trust region?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I said in my previous answer, there will be a midwifery-led unit in place in Lagan Valley Hospital before the withdrawal of obstetric services. That is my intention, and we will go forward with that. There is capacity in the entire system, but getting the capacity to match the demand is always an issue, particularly with the dramatic rise in the birth rate over the past number of years. However, there is still spare capacity in the system to deal with demand, particularly following the investment that I referred to today, as well as the new midwifery units at Downe Hospital and at Lagan Valley Hospital.

Mr Gardiner: Does the Minister agree that further investment is needed in the maternity units due to the increase in demand for our hospitals' maternity services? Is there any reason why the health budget should be cut, as advocated by the DUP and Sinn Féin, when finances are needed?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can only make the argument that the health budget should not be cut, and I have made that argument repeatedly, particularly because demand has risen so dramatically over the past few years, not just in maternity services but in services generally.

At the weekend, I listened to the president of Sinn Féin say at his party's ard fheis that Sinn Féin would not accept cuts to the Health Service, or words to that effect. There was an irony to those remarks, bearing in mind the stance of Sinn Féin in the Chamber.

Mr McDevitt: In light of the further pressure that the current budget will place on maternity services, will the Minister explain to the House how he can stand over the payment of £11 million in bonuses to consultants, including obstetric consultants, this year? Will he follow the lead of his Scottish counterpart in seeking to have that controversial consultants' bonus scheme suspended until the economic situation improves?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have never regarded that award as controversial; it is viewed as controversial by some who have a desire for consultants' pay to be cut. I note that Mr McDevitt has talked along those lines on a number of occasions, as he did at a Health Committee meeting, where he spoke about cutting low pay and ensuring that low-paid workers would see a pay freeze.

The merit award is for exceptional personal contributions made by individual doctors who show commitment to achieving the delivery of high-quality care and continuous improvement of the health and social care service. It also helps to ensure that Northern Ireland remains competitive in the international consultant labour market. A consultant in Northern Ireland could double his or her salary by moving to a job south of the border or in Scotland. One paediatrician is currently doing that, and, recently, we lost a consultant from Altnagelvin Area Hospital to the Irish Republic. Consultants can quadruple their salary if they go to the United States. The awards are for the best performers in the consultancy teams. We have some of the best doctors in Europe. Our service depends on them, and we must do what we can to hold on to them and to benefit from their knowledge, skills and experience.

A recent review of the scheme found that the recognition and reward of the achievements of the consultant workforce continues to be appropriate. Scotland has a different merit award system, and, since it has a larger workforce, its merit award scheme is more expensive. Our scheme costs less than 0.3% of the relevant budget.

Carrickfergus and Larne: Health Centres

2. **Mr Neeson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to improve health centre facilities in Carrickfergus and Larne. (AQO 880/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In November 2008, I announced a significant capital investment of £175 million to improve health and social care services and facilities in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. That investment will enable key projects to be taken forward, including new health and care centres for Larne and Carrickfergus. The Northern Trust is developing business cases for new health and care centres, and they are due to be submitted to my Department later in the year.

Mr Neeson: I thank the Minister for his response. Is he aware that Carrickfergus Borough Council has spent millions of pounds on a new leisure centre in Carrickfergus and that Larne Borough Council is spending a substantial amount of money on its recreational facilities? When does the Minister hope that work on those projects will commence?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, as it stands, I have allowed for new health and care centres in Larne and Carrickfergus. I am not in a position to announce the date on which that work will commence. Much will depend on announcements about the money, capital and resource available to my Department. We are also developing a health and care centre in Ballymena, which is also in the Northern Trust. There are, therefore, three important primary care developments planned for the Northern Trust area, among others. Much depends on capital and resource. I hope to be in a position to make a definitive date known, as far as I can.

Mr Hilditch: I declare an interest as a co-author of the health village concept in Carrickfergus. We have received a good interagency response. We have also received a good response from the Minister. Will the Minister and the Department initiate further talks on that joined-up and innovative way to deliver related aspects of well-being in Carrickfergus? Perhaps, they will stumble upon some of the extra resources that are required.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In pursuit of that development, I met Mr Hilditch at Carrickfergus Borough Council. I also met other Members, such as Mr Neeson and Mr Ken Robinson. It is a good idea to form a brigade of units, such as leisure facilities, libraries and health-and-care centres. In particular, I look to the Grove Wellbeing Centre on the York

Road in Belfast, which is the result of work between the Belfast Trust, Belfast City Council and the library authority. There are savings on the cost of site acquisition and build. The centre fosters good working and symbiotic relationships between staff and people who visit it. It all works together. I am keen to do that in Carrickfergus, as I am keen to do it in other places. That is very much part of the calculation.

Mr K Robinson: I thank the Minister for his positive comments about health provision in Carrickfergus and Larne. I want to draw his attention to the third element of the East Antrim constituency, Newtownabbey, where people feel somewhat neglected because they have lost certain facilities from Whiteabbey Hospital. Will the Minister tell the House what facilities will be brought to the Whiteabbey/Newtownabbey area that will enhance its health provision?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mr Ken Robinson will be aware that the Department has plans for a health-and-care centre to take forward primary care provision on the Whiteabbey Hospital site, as well as other plans for Whiteabbey.

We are moving towards the Developing Better Services model. That will require changes on a number of hospital sites, rather than closures. I hope to be able to announce some exciting changes for Whiteabbey, which are part of planning that is going forward. The Whiteabbey and Newtownabbey area has certainly not been overlooked. I consider it to be another key area for development.

Swine Flu

3. **Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if and when he will launch a review into the response of his Department and the Health Service to the swine flu outbreak. (AQO 881/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Northern Ireland has been one of the best prepared countries in the world. My Department's response has been proportionate, appropriate and robust. That has been part of a UK-wide response to the pandemic. At all times, Health Ministers have collectively based decisions on the best scientific advice from national expert groups. I have already commenced a review of Northern Ireland's pandemic response. The review's findings will

contribute to wider assessment of the overall UK response proposals, which are currently under consideration.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer, in which he referred to a review. Does he agree that there is a need to co-ordinate a regional response to epidemics, such as swine flu, given that his Department holds a considerable stockpile of unused vaccines?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The pandemic response was very much a UK-wide response. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland operated on the best scientific advice that was available from the World Health Organization, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. I have set out a number of steps that were taken as we progressed through treatment into containment, such as strategies for communications, surge capacity, hospitals, community services, critical care, equipment, vaccines and so on.

It is important that the response is reviewed because that is not the last pandemic that Northern Ireland will see. The swine flu virus is still circulating. There is still a possibility of a third wave of infection. It is also anticipated that swine flu will make up the bulk of the seasonal flu virus in 2010 and in some years to come. Therefore, the virus will stay with us.

Northern Ireland got its share of vaccines according to the UK-wide order. At present, the bulk of those vaccines is with primary care providers and trusts. The vaccination programme continues. It is important that a strategic reserve is kept in Northern Ireland and in the UK.

The reviews that I am announcing for Northern Ireland and the review that I anticipate being announced in due course for the UK as a whole will better inform us all.

2.45 pm

Lord Morrow: I listened carefully to what the Minister said when he was cross-examined about the £11 million bonuses. I understand that the Minister recently made a statement in which he said that he had overestimated the swine flu vaccine to the tune of £61 million. Will he give an undertaking to the House that when he carries out the review that he spoke of he will also carry out a financial review? Does he

accept that he made a gross overestimation in this financial year? Will he assure the House that that will not be repeated?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No doubt, the benefit of hindsight is a key entry requirement for the House of Lords. The health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland are foremost in my mind. All the way through the pandemic, we followed every piece of advice that we were given on swine flu. We began with estimates from epidemiologists, who made particular estimates on our ability to cope. The £61 million was an estimate. However, that estimate came down, and, before moneys were ever allocated, it was well down. Indeed, there is a long story to be told about the money for swine flu. I am quite sure that the review will take that story on board and have a good look at it and that individuals in the Executive who deal with finance will not come out of it particularly well.

The review will be as wide-ranging as I can make it, because this is not the last pandemic that Northern Ireland will see, and it will certainly not be the last worldwide pandemic that we will have to deal with. The lessons that we learned in dealing with the pandemic will be important. However, a key element was getting the vaccine in place while the swine flu was surging, because that had a strong effect on reducing the surge.

Podiatry

4. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can provide an assurance that there will be long-term investment in podiatry services despite public spending cuts. (AQO 882/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am fully committed to providing a high-quality, safe and effective Health Service for the population of Northern Ireland. However, it is proposed to cut my budget by £92 million, which is more than the total £76 million budget for new services. I can give no assurances about long-term investment in podiatry or other services at this stage. The current financial uncertainty requires creative thinking, and, therefore, all services in health and social care will be required to ensure an effective use of services that maximises outcomes and provides value for money. In that regard, podiatry services are no different to any other service, and trusts will need to ensure that the services

that they provide are targeted at those who need them most.

Mr Spratt: I partly thank the Minister for his answer. Some very good work is ongoing in health centres etc on diseases such as diabetes and on podiatry services and the preventative measures that they provide. Does the Minister agree that spending money on preventative medicine reduces the burden on the main health budget at a later stage?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I could have written Mr Spratt's comment about spending money on preventative medicine. Clearly, he has been reading and listening to what I have been saying in here for the past three years. The need to press down on demand on the Health Service is about working upstream rather than always working downstream, which is about prevention. That is why I decided to set up the Public Health Agency, the establishment of which the DUP decided to oppose. Indeed, it was the only party in the House to do so. However, I agree with the Member's sentiments about allied health. Podiatry, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dietetics and so on all have a significant role to play in ensuring that we keep people out of hospital.

Mr O'Loan: The question refers to cuts in public spending. I understand that the Minister has not yet briefed the Committee on his plans to address the reduction in his budget for next year. Will he care to outline his plans on this occasion? To what extent does he feel that he can address the pressures on his budget through efficiency savings without reducing front line services in any way?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am sure that Mr O'Loan is aware that we have several hundred lines of service in health and social care, and all of that has to be carefully balanced to maintain, as far as possible, a service that addresses the needs of the population of Northern Ireland. However, currently, because there is not enough money available, we are providing health and social care according to budget, money and resource, rather than according to need. I recall that Mr O'Loan was one of those who voted for those cuts and those efficiencies.

We are in a situation that is largely created by a rise in demand and the inability of the House to see a way forward to meet that demand. Therefore, we have a Health Service that is not

entirely meeting need, so I have to make very careful decisions. I will make the plans known in due course, but I hope that I will not be listening to a chorus of people telling me that I should not be doing something or other, when the very people who will make up that chorus will be those who engineered the situation in the first place.

Pharmaceutical List

5. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the fairness of the application and appeal process, known as “control of entry”, for inclusion on the pharmaceutical list. (AQO 883/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has been contacted on several occasions recently by pharmacists aggrieved at the refusal of their application to join the pharmaceutical list and the failure of their appeal to the national appeal panel. I am aware that officials in England and Wales have looked at the issue of control of entry and have made changes to the application process. A review is planned in Scotland. My officials will look at the issue as part of the development of a new contract for community pharmacy.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that he has been slated for previous answers, but it is to be welcomed that his officials are looking at what is happening in England and Scotland. I have also raised concerns indirectly with the Minister’s office about that issue, and there is genuine concern about the involvement of people on that list. I welcome the fact that the Minister is considering the possibility of a review. If possible, will he tell the House whether he will do that and, perhaps, give a timescale for it? There is genuine concern about that matter in constituencies.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Pharmacy is clearly an important area because of the cost of the drugs budget. The issue is that the bulk of the drugs budget goes through community pharmacy, so I am looking at procurement and the provision of generic drugs. The Member will be aware that the percentage of generic drugs used here has risen in the last three years from 43% to 64%. We are rapidly catching up on England, where

59% of drugs were generic at the time when it was 43% here. The percentage there is now 68%, so we have a wee bit to go, but we can catch up, and that will make major savings.

There are other savings to be made in relation to procurement, and I am considering that. On the key point that the Member makes, which relates to control of entry, one of the issues is that, pro rata, there are far more pharmacies here than in England, Scotland or Wales. In fact, we have 524 pharmacies; working roughly on a benchmark with England, Scotland or Wales that number would be around 340 or 350. We have an oversupply and overprovision, so the people who are carrying out control of entry are clearly looking at that and wondering about the need. That does not actually address the central issue for the Member, which is that community pharmacies should be placed in areas of disadvantage where there is need. That is all part of the mix as far as I am concerned.

Community pharmacy plays an important role in prevention, which relates to Mr Spratt’s point earlier. I am looking at that issue very closely.

Mr Shannon: The Minister’s response to that question was very positive. In relation to the control of entry and drug procurement, we are all keen that savings be made through drug procurement. Those savings could, in turn, be used to ensure that some other drugs that are not currently available are made available. Can the Minister assure us that the savings that will be made will be used for other drugs, such as the cancer drugs?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Mr Shannon makes a good point. Drugs that generate important advances in the treatment of conditions are coming on the market constantly, and I invest and have been investing in that, year on year. Part of my resources for new service developments for the coming financial year, budget cuts permitting, is for new drugs. I am always looking to make savings, and I will continue to do so. However, one issue that arises is resistance in the industry, and I have to be able to work with the industry and take it with me as far as possible.

Although significant savings have been made to the drugs budget and significant advances have been made in the use of generic medicines, much more progress can be made. I shall continue to do my best to make that progress, because every penny that we save in that area

will, as Mr Shannon said, be made available for important new drug treatments on the market.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Family Restoration Fund

7. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he or his Department has had with British ministerial counterparts in relation to the operation of and access to the family restoration fund, announced by the Prime Minister on Wednesday 24 February 2010. (AQO 885/10)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: The family restoration fund will benefit child migrants from the whole of the UK. Discussions are taking place among officials from the Northern Ireland Office, my Department and the Department of Health in London on how the fund will operate. The detail has not yet been finalised.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. As the details are worked through, I encourage him to take account not only of the needs of the people who went to Australia and elsewhere and who know that they are child migrants but of those of the many people who were left here in all-too-abusive care who believe that their siblings and friends were transported. Those people have been trying to make enquiries but have been told that information and records are not available. Will those people also be able to seek assistance and support through the family restoration fund?

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: Mr Durkan's question indicates that he is aware that the family restoration fund was announced by the Prime Minister on 24 February. I had no advance knowledge of the detail of the fund, and I am asking questions to find out how it will affect Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The fund will support travel and other costs for former migrants who wish to be reunited with their families.

When I examined the statistics and the background, I was shocked to learn the number of children who were involved in the process over 150 years. We will obviously be considering the more recent cases. Between 1947 and 1967, between 7,000 and 10,000 children were sent to Australia from the UK. Before that, Canada was the main reception country, but the

Canadian Government stopped and banned the practice through an Order in Council in 1925.

Between 1938 and 1956, Catholic agencies sent a total of 1,109 children from the UK to Australia, 103 of whom are known to have come from Catholic agencies in Northern Ireland. The detail is as sparse as that. I am also aware that a number of other voluntary agencies, such as Dr Barnardo's, played a role.

It is a question of tracking down the families of migrant children and trying to make a connection. It seems that it will prove quite a stretch for £6 million to deal with the numbers concerned.

Mr McCarthy: I apologise for being late, but I have had a last-minute thought. The Minister mentioned the years between 1947 and 1967, and I know that a Government were in this Building during that period. The statistics may be somewhere in Northern Ireland, so the buck may not need to be passed to Westminster.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and

Public Safety: Mr McCarthy has had a last-minute thought on passing the buck. It is a serious issue, and I am not aware of any records outside of, perhaps, the Public Record Office. All of that must be considered, and we have to determine how best to find the information, particularly by using the organisations that dispatched the children. Those organisations will be the first port of call.

It is very difficult. I think that the onus is on the migrant children who are seeking to come back rather than on us, because some of those affected might not be interested in coming back. The process is complex and is at a very early stage.

3.00 pm

Regional Development

Northern Ireland Water: Investment

1. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the long-term investment plan for NI Water, given that its existing strategic business plan ends this month. (AQO 892/10)

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): Northern Ireland Water's (NIW) investment plan for the next three years has

been developed in light of draft ministerial guidance that I consulted on last spring. That was informed by research on customers' views conducted by the Consumer Council. The key themes of the research were: improving service quality for customers; meeting EU obligations; promoting sustainability; and delivering efficiency. The priorities for investment have been agreed with stakeholders in the water sector, including the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Environment Agency and the Consumer Council. NIW issued a draft business plan in June 2008 setting out its plans and the costs involved. That has been scrutinised by the Utility Regulator, which issued its recommendations last month. I am considering those recommendations, and I will put my proposals to the Executive shortly.

Mr McNarry: I appreciate the Minister's reply. The existing NIW business plan states that the objective for the period ending this month was to build a business that delivers efficient, sustainable water and waste water services for its customers. However, does the Minister agree that Northern Ireland Water's billing systems were not up to scratch during that period? Does he intend to monitor the business more closely in the next period to achieve a service that is fit for purpose? If so, does he expect to see an immediate improvement?

The Minister for Regional Development: I agree with the Member that there were difficulties with the billing system. The information systems that NIW inherited from the Water Service contained difficulties that became apparent during the course of that business plan. I scrutinise closely the operations and workings of NIW, as an entity, and I intend to do so to ensure that it continues to improve. There have been improvements since that error was discovered, but we need to continue to strive for further improvements across all aspects of its functions.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin agus as an cheann eile.

Has the Minister received the independent report examining governance issues within NIW?

The Minister for Regional Development: I received the report last week. It brought to light a number of serious issues, and I am considering its recommendations. I have been in consultation with officials from NIW and the Department about the report, and I will take a decision on its recommendations in the near future.

Mr Shannon: It is important that we have some idea about NIW's long-term investment plan. There has been long-term investment in my constituency of Strangford, and yet NIW has not returned to fix the roads and to finish the system as it should have done. Will the Minister, therefore, assure the House that NIW's long-term investment extends to a monitoring system that ensures that it actually finishes the work that it starts?

The Minister for Regional Development: I would have been surprised if the Member had not raised an issue relating to Ards.

There is a statutory requirement on the water company and all utilities to restore roads to the state in which they found them. A recent Public Accounts Committee report on the issue contained a series of recommendations with which the Department agreed, and I expect that scrutiny of that type of work will improve accordingly. Although a requirement already existed, the Public Accounts Committee felt that that needed to be tightened up substantially, and the Department intends to do that.

Mr Gallagher: Given that Northern Ireland Water will have £527 million to spend on capital expenditure schemes over the next three years, will the Minister tell us whether he will take steps to amend and widen the procurement framework for contracts in order to provide greater opportunities for Northern Ireland companies to participate and, indeed, for their employees to have more stability and security in their jobs?

The Minister for Regional Development: The general sense in the Executive, not just in my Department, is that we must ensure that public money spent by the Executive, particularly on capital projects, is used to maximise the benefit for the local economy. Certainly, in any of my discussions with NIW, I have repeated that advice. I asked NIW to invite in all the contractors that are on its books, big and small, to ensure that they are fully au fait with how procurement will operate and fully informed of all the information necessary, so that they can bid for work and be quite sure that they stand as good a chance as anyone of getting it. It is not just a matter for NIW. All Departments and government agencies that spend public money must try to maximise the benefit for the local economy, particularly in these difficult times.

Road Repairs

2. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the total cost of repairing potholes caused by the recent bad weather. (AQO 893/10)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Roads Service has advised that a repeated freezing and thawing cycle, as experienced during the recent spell of cold weather, has a damaging effect on the roads network, causing carriageway to split and potholes to form. Due to the size of the roads network, it may be some time before assessments are completed and the full extent of the damage and cost of carrying out repairs is known. Additionally, as it would not be practical to diagnose every individual failure that led to the formation of the indentified potholes, one cannot say with any certainty whether they were caused by the recent bad weather or by other factors. For those reasons, an estimated total cost of repairing the potholes caused by the recent cold spell cannot be provided.

However, I can confirm that, since the beginning of January, additional funding of approximately £16.6 million has been allocated to Roads Service divisions. That money will be used to progress predetermined programmes of work targeting the worst roads and to deal with the effects of the recent cold spell.

Mr Lunn: The Minister will probably agree with the rest of us that the greatest frost damage this year, caused by an exceptional winter, has been to minor and rural roads. Therefore, can he confirm that he will allow Roads Service to give some priority to those minor roads?

The Minister for Regional Development: We attempted to get additional money, and have received approximately £16.6 million. That will be allocated fairly across Roads Service divisions and applied on the basis of which roads have been most damaged and need the most attention. I have stated many times in the Chamber, and the Member will be aware, that the budget for structural maintenance is not sufficient and, therefore, the roads are more susceptible. However, we accept that this was an exceptionally cold winter — the most protracted cold spell since 1981 — and one which caused a substantial amount of damage to the roads. Nonetheless, it is recognised that there is not enough money in structural maintenance and that means that, in

spells of weather such as this, the roads get a particular pounding.

Lord Morrow: I was interested in the Minister's reply concerning the severe winter. Is the Minister prepared to commission a report in relation to roads in the Dungannon, Aughnacloy and Caledon area, which have suffered severely as a result of the construction of the A4? Heavy vehicles, which would not normally use those roads, are using the roads, and they are in a deplorable condition. Can the Minister give assurances that he will carry out a survey of that area to ascertain the damage that has been caused?

The Minister for Regional Development:

I advise the Member that a broader report was commissioned on structural maintenance and the effect on the roads of the shortfall in structural maintenance. I recommend that the Member take the opportunity to study that report, which was conducted by Professor Snaith. In relation to the roads that the Member mentioned, I have the opportunity this week to visit that project and I will certainly take up with Roads Service managers the matters that he raised.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister said that he needs additional money for the roads structural maintenance budget. How does he go about trying to secure additional funding for that very necessary project? Will he encourage the divisional Roads Service managers to carry out a PR initiative aimed at explaining what people should do when they come across potholes? They should not just ring elected representatives; they should ring Roads Service directly. I would like that to be said. Give out the phone numbers, please.

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department commissioned the Snaith review of structural maintenance funding, which underlined what Roads Service, the Department and I had been saying for some time. Based on 2009 prices, it is estimated that £108 million will be required for structural maintenance this year. Roads Service has received only £85 million, which equates to a shortfall of £23 million for 2009-2010 alone. The Snaith review reinforced the message that more money is required for investment in structural maintenance here, but Roads Service and the Department are competing with other Departments' very worthy demands for Executive resources for areas such

as education and health. The Department bats as best as it can to secure the money that is required, and I have said in the House on many occasions that the single biggest asset owned by the Executive is the roads network and that it needs investment.

Information is available to the public, and I can ensure that it is made more prominent. However, the telephone numbers of Roads Service divisional offices are quite easily available to the public. I accept that the Member would prefer that Roads Service managers were bothered about potholes rather than him, and I will ensure that people are made aware of that.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister clarify whether roads are being repaired well enough? We have had a really bad winter, and we will probably have more bad winters in the future. Therefore, should we review how we repair roads so that they stay in good condition when we have such appalling weather?

The Minister for Regional Development: Again, I recommend the Snaith review to the Member. It provides evidence that it is necessary for some repair work to be carried out on our roads so that they do not become dangerous or a hazard for drivers. However, the resources are not there to carry out all the longer-term repairs that are needed and the roads are suffering as a result. The patching work that is carried out is necessary because the safety of the travelling public is paramount. However, it does not do the job of addressing the long-term interests of the roads structure.

Road Gritting

3. **Mr P J Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the expenditure for the current winter gritting programme for rural roads. (AQO 894/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service has advised that it is unable to provide specific details of expenditure on rural roads but that the overall expenditure on the current winter service programme up to 31 January 2010 was £5.1 million. Some 67,123 tons of salt were used up to 31 January 2010, of which 8,677 were targeted at secondary salting of roads in the vicinity of the 46 rural schools that were identified as being most affected by the winter weather conditions, as well as at filling salt boxes and replenishing grit supplies.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I note the answers that he gave to questions from Mr Lunn, Mr McElduff and other Members. Does the Minister agree that the ever-increasing severity of our winter weather means that some level of preparation should be undertaken to deal with the worst long-term scenarios, which are more likely to occur in the winters ahead?

The Minister for Regional Development: It is not always easy to predict the winters that we get. This winter was the coldest since 1981, but previous winters were not as bad. We suffered more from heavy rain and flooding than from freezing conditions.

Roads Service was probably better prepared than any other service across these islands. It was the only service that did not get into a panic over salt supplies; it had a full stock. There was an early cold spell around October when some of the salt was used, but Roads Service topped up its supplies and kept a regular supply coming from the salt mines in Carrickfergus. Roads Service was alone among roads service operators across these islands, in either Ireland or Britain, in being well prepared. It had adequate supplies of salt while others were running short. As I said when I answered the Member's initial question, not only did it salt the main road network but it put a substantial amount of salt on secondary routes and in and around the schools that we identified last year as having difficulties in the cold weather and which had to close as a result.

Just like with structural maintenance, Departments argue and bid for as much money as possible and compete with other Executive demands on a range of other issues. As the Member will know, the Minister from his party has focused on the need for more money to be allocated for social housing. All Departments argue for money so that they have better resources to help them to prepare for whatever situations they face. Roads Service did a very good job this year with the resources that it had.

3.15 pm

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister assure the House that if there is a continual cold spell, the weather worsens or next year turns out to be as bad as this year, Roads Service will work with local councils to ensure that grit is available to local communities, particularly those in a rural setting?

The Minister for Regional Development: The issue of replenishing grit piles and salt boxes

can be tackled through elected representatives or by rural communities and Roads Service. Local councils do not necessarily need to be involved. Roads Service is willing to work with all local representatives and councils to ensure a proper supply of grit and salt.

I suggest to the Member that the best option is to identify the location of grit piles and salt boxes in the summer and to ensure that Roads Service comes out to replenish them. People often report, in the middle of a cold spell, that it is impossible to drive up a particular road, but it is also impossible to drive up that road to replenish a grit pile. People should ensure that the key work is done before the winter by identifying problem areas and talking to their local divisional managers to ensure that grit piles and salt boxes are topped up. There are about 4,500 grit piles across rural areas, and Roads Service is willing to ensure that local communities can use them.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister intend to use local farmers to clear blocked roads during adverse weather conditions?

The Minister for Regional Development: On occasions, a provision has been used for local farmers to clear snow from blocked roads. If that is the provision to which the Member refers, it is ongoing, and some farmers are engaged on an as-needed basis. The question has been raised of whether farmers could be involved in gritting, and I discussed that with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and officials from both Departments. Our conclusion was that the best option, for a range of reasons, was for Roads Service to continue its operation of the gritting service. The arrangement will continue whereby local farmers become involved in clearing roads that have become blocked by snow.

Speed Limits: Schools

4. **Miss McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to extend the 20 mph speed limit pilot project that is in place outside school premises. (AQO 895/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: In September 2008, Roads Service introduced part-time 20 mph speed limit pilot projects at two rural schools. In September 2009, a further pilot project at an urban school was added. Roads Service has been monitoring the pilot

projects over the school year and is finalising its report on the findings to date. I expect that the board of Roads Service will consider the final report in the near future.

Roads Service is also reviewing its speed management policy, and it is expected that the details of that review, which includes the use of variable speed limits at schools, will be published shortly. Should it be decided to extend the initiative beyond the pilot projects, each site will be considered on its merits, and appropriate criteria will be developed to determine the priorities. In the current financial climate, any possible future implementation of such a programme will depend on the availability of additional capital funding.

Miss McIlveen: I welcome the Minister's response to my question. I have a specific concern about schools that sit on the periphery of rural towns and thus are neither in the countryside nor within a built-up conurbation. Will he include such schools in his deliberations? How much has he allocated to the project?

The Minister for Regional Development: The first of the two ongoing studies is the pilot project on the use of variable signs. Those signs activate at particular times, such as when children arrive at or leave school, and they can be switched off in the school holidays. The pilot runs at two locations in the northern division of Roads Service, one of which is an urban area. The initial findings have been extremely positive, as the signs have reduced the speed of passing vehicles. I expect the confirmed results to lead to requests from other schools in urban and urban/rural settings for similar projects. That will depend on the availability of funding. The results of the speed management survey, which also examines speed management outside primary schools, should be published soon.

Mr McDavitt: The Minister will know that the chance of being killed when hit by a car travelling at 30 mph is about one in five. That reduces to one in 40 when hit by a car travelling at 20 mph. Does the Minister agree that it is time for a serious region-wide conversation about extending the 20 mph speed limit to all urban residential streets?

The Minister for Regional Development: That conversation is ongoing. As I said, I hope to publish the final policy document within the next month and I am quite happy to hear the views of elected representatives on it. The draft speed management

policy is based on guidance produced by the Department for Transport and the regional Administrations. That guidance was subject to public consultation in 2009 and, based on the comments submitted, received considerable support. The new policy will also contain the latest thinking on encouraging a greater take-up of 20 mph limits and zones in residential areas.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

5. **Mr B Wilson** asked the Minister for Regional Development why the public consultation on the preferred routes for the Belfast rapid transit system is being deferred until after the primary legislation has completed its Assembly stages. (AQO 896/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department sought advice from a number of sources, including the Office of the Legislative Counsel and the Departmental Solicitor's Office, on the timelines for the proposed rapid transit legislation. Those discussions identified the need for accurate timetabling of legislation to enable it to be delivered within the mandate of this Assembly. In addition, there was a possibility of confusion arising if the public were also being consulted on the details of route alignment options during the enabling legislation process.

As a result, my Department decided not to engage with the public on route options until early 2011. That will also allow greater detail on route options to be made available to the public during the consultation phase. Belfast rapid transit is a key priority in the Programme for Government and in the investment strategy, and it is the subject of an important commitment from me and the Department.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his response. I am disappointed, because there seems to be some slippage. I hope that that does not reflect commitment to the rapid-transit project. When the legislation comes to the Assembly, will it include route options beyond the three that we have already?

The Minister for Regional Development: I assure Members that there has been no slippage. The reason why we have held back the consultation on route options is so as not to confuse people. The legislation coming before the Assembly is enabling legislation, and it does not specify routes. It does not even specify Belfast. The

legislation will enable the roll-out of rapid transit anywhere in the North.

A number of route options are being looked at as part of the three pilot schemes. Further work to be done prior to the consultation will allow for greater information to be provided on the pros and cons of each of the route options.

As I said, the scheme is a priority for me. It is a key part of the Programme for Government and a priority for the Department. I do not see there being any slippage.

Mr Burns: Will the Minister assure the House that it will be possible for the routes selected for the scheme to be easily upgraded, so that they can serve commuter towns outside Belfast in the future?

The Minister for Regional Development: The pilot routes that we are looking at will serve the Belfast area. They will not serve rural areas or other towns. The enabling legislation that is being brought forward applies to anywhere. It is not location specific.

If the Member had looked at the report by Atkins and the follow-up publications, he would have seen that three route options are being looked at specifically as part of the pilot scheme, which will be developed in the first instance.

Roads Service: Compensation Claims

6. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many pothole-related claims were made against Roads Service in 2008-09 and 2009-2010 to date; and the total compensation paid during each period. (AQO 897/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: In 2008-09, my Department's central claims unit received 1,472 pothole-related claims. The figure for 2009-2010, up to 26 February 2010, is 1,530. In 2008-09, £371,979.66 was paid in compensation for pothole-related claims. The corresponding figure for 2009-2010, up to the end of February 2010, is £382,295.83. As it takes a minimum of a few months to investigate and conclude compensation claims, the amount of compensation paid in any year will not relate solely to claims received in that year.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given that my question was the second one that he received about potholes today, and given the high level of pothole-related claims and

the quantity of money paid out over the past number of years, what roll-out has there been by Roads Service of the Jetpatcher vehicle, which is immensely popular in Great Britain, not just because it fills in potholes very quickly but because it is cost-effective?

The Minister for Regional Development: The jet-patching vehicle is used extensively here, and, as I said in response to earlier questions on structural maintenance, an additional £16.6 million has been allocated to that area since January. However, that money, which has been allocated across the divisions, still does not bring us to the level that is required for structural maintenance this year. Roads Service, the Department and I continue to argue that we need the required funds for structural maintenance to ensure that we not only patch the roads but repair their full structure. Some of the methods that are used to keep the roads safe are effective in the immediate term. However, in the longer term, ongoing structural damage will cause even greater problems.

Mr Cree: Is the Minister satisfied with the speed with which Roads Service carries out repairs, and is there scope for contracting more small firms to assist with the work?

The Minister for Regional Development: I am sure that areas for improvement can be found in any service. However, few organisations can take receipt of £16 million in January, spread it across their divisions on a need basis and spend it before the end of the financial year. Roads Service is used to spending properly the money that it receives, and it responds as quickly as it can.

The Member will know — as all Members, whether they represent rural or urban constituencies, will know — that this year's cold spell has had a very severe effect on roads. Demand on Roads Service to fix roads has been high, and it approaches that on a priority basis. It found that it has enough resources at its disposal to spend that money.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister assure the House that the £16 million that we have heard so much about this afternoon will be used to fill in the massive number of potholes in rural areas? I raised that matter with Sammy Wilson last week, and he was doubtful whether the money will be spent on such repairs.

The Minister for Regional Development: Perhaps he was hopeful rather than doubtful

because he wants the money back. However, from the information that I have received, I understand that Roads Service fully intends to use the money for that purpose. Roads Service has experience of receiving money that other Departments have not spent late in the financial year, and it has always been good at ensuring that that money is spread equitably across all divisions and put to use very quickly on roads. I have no doubt that, were it available, much more money could be spent on roads. However, the intention is, based on any evidence that I have seen to date, that Roads Service will spend the money that was made available in the December monitoring round.

Mr Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Residential Car Parking

8. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an outline of progress on residential parking schemes. (AQO 899/10)

The Minister for Regional Development: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I had intended to take questions 7 and 8 together. Nonetheless, my response will cover both eventualities.

First, I will provide an update on the progress of residential parking schemes in general. Members will be aware that I amended the policy on the introduction of residents' parking schemes to address residents' concerns during the first phase of residents' parking schemes in Belfast. However, following the most recent public consultation exercise, those schemes have again failed to obtain the support required to allow them to be implemented.

In response to that and to subsequent requests from elected representatives for further consideration, I have decided to re-engage with the local community in three areas, namely Barrack Street, the Markets East and the Markets West. Officials from Roads Service will have further meetings with community representatives to discuss the issue and to gauge the likely support for our proposals. If the response is positive and the community representatives agree to promote the benefits of the scheme actively, I will instruct Roads Service to resurvey the residents to confirm whether support is sufficient with a view to finalising details and implementing the schemes.

In addition, I have asked officials to begin to engage with residents in the lower Malone and

Stranmillis areas of Belfast with the intention of developing schemes. Following meetings with residents and representatives from Queen's University, my Department has established a joint group to consider parking management in the lower Malone area. The group will soon produce a short report that sets out a range of options. There are plans to pilot similar schemes in other towns, and a consultation exercise has just been successfully completed on a proposal for a scheme in the Bogside area of Derry, and details are being finalised in preparation for the necessary legislative procedures.

Mr Durkan: The Minister will be aware that some people who have been through the pilots and consultations find them convoluted. However, people who have a clear demand for such schemes are particularly frustrated, not least, as the Minister is well aware, those in Aberfoyle Crescent and Aberfoyle Crescent South in Derry and in Clarence Avenue and Lawrence Hill.

Can the Minister give the people in those areas any hope that his Department will move to accede to their reasonable demands, given the pressures that they face?

3.30 pm

The Minister for Regional Development: My colleague beside me, and others in Derry, have raised the issue of the Aberfoyle residents on a number of occasions, and I am aware of it. The Member will know that the situation there is different from that in which all-day commuter parking prevents people from parking outside their own houses. In Aberfoyle and in some parts of the lower Malone area of Belfast, people have driveways, so it is not the case that they cannot park outside their homes. The difficulty lies in getting access to and from their homes, which is the case in and around the Magee campus. I have assured the people there, and the elected representatives who have written to me, that when the pilot scheme is launched in the Bogside, we can look clearly and more urgently at the situation in Aberfoyle, and at the report on a similar problem in the lower Malone area relating to parking at Queen's University. That situation does not prevent people from parking outside their own doors, but it creates hazards and difficulties for people who have driveways to park in. There may be lessons from that situation that can be applied in the Magee area.

Private Members' Business

Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Ms Purvis: I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/09] be agreed.

In accordance with Standing Order 32, I would like to outline the general principles of the Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to end the practice of dual mandates between the Assembly and local district councils. Dual mandates occur when an individual holds more than one level of elected public office at the same time. The Bill will disqualify any individual who is elected, appointed or otherwise selected as a local councillor from holding the position of MLA. The Bill will come into effect at the next local district elections after Royal Assent is granted. According to the calendar, that will be the local elections anticipated in 2011.

It is important to note that the Bill does not create any new prohibitions on candidacy. It will not prevent an individual from standing for a local council and the Assembly at the same time, if, for example, local and Assembly elections were to be held on the same day. Although that form of spreading the odds, as it were, was distasteful to some who responded to the public consultation on the Bill, most felt that creating a prohibition to stand limited choice and the principles of political participation. If a sitting councillor stands for, and is elected to, the Assembly, or vice versa, when local and Assembly elections are held on different dates, that individual will be disqualified from holding the local council seat.

That is the extent of the legislation. I know that, customarily, Members are given four weeks to familiarise themselves with new legislation. It is my sincere hope that it did not take as long to read through the three clauses that comprise the Bill. Its brevity speaks to its effectiveness, and it says exactly what it will do.

The original proposal for the legislation contained two additional provisions: one would have changed the way in which vacant seats are filled in local councils outside an election to mirror the arrangements that are in place for the Assembly; the other would have created a body to co-ordinate the work of local and regional

government. The provisions for local council vacancies would have permitted political parties to co-opt another party member into a council seat if that seat were made vacant by the departure of a party member. That course of action would prevent costly by-elections, ensure that the make-up of local councils reflected the mandates given by the voters on the day of the election, and give political parties the opportunity to prepare new individuals for the work of government. However, that was deemed to be an excepted matter and that proposal was subsequently removed. Nonetheless, I am pleased to see that that issue is being addressed.

Following the consultation on filling vacancies in local councils, Minister Paul Goggins recently laid a Bill at Westminster that will alter the manner in which vacancies in local councils are filled to match the arrangements that are in place in the Assembly. It is hoped that that will be completed by the end of March.

The final provision of the original proposal, the co-ordination body, was designed to ensure effective communication, complementary efforts, and shared visions and agenda between local and regional government, particularly if the review of public administration is to be realised and councils are to be given enhanced responsibilities. Such systems are used in a number of countries, including Wales and Australia, where dual mandates are not the norm. It would also address the assertion that there are benefits in efficiency and information flow when the same people are MLAs and local councillors. However, efficiencies should not have to rely on individual personalities and capabilities; they should be systemic. Any value in that arrangement is outweighed by larger more serious problems that occur when the flow of information and access to government are limited to a small, narrow pool of individuals.

The wording in the proposed Bill about the co-ordination body was ultimately removed when the Environment Minister informed me of his intention to bring proposals to the Executive to create such a body. I look forward to seeing that progress.

The rationale behind the Bill is simple but compelling. The legislation is about making the principles of good governance part not only of the rules but of the dominant culture of politics in Northern Ireland. That means making inclusion, transparency and accountability

part of the daily operating principles of our governing structures and promoting regulations that ensure that decisions that are made by elected officials are taken with the needs and interests of the public first. It means ensuring that this nascent Assembly strives to achieve the gold standard for good governance and public representation, even when it is personally inconvenient or uncomfortable for those elected to the House. This is a post-conflict Government, and instilling the highest values in all that we do is paramount not just to having peace but to keeping it.

Northern Ireland has the worst record in the UK and one of the worst in Europe on dual mandates. Out of 108 Members of the Assembly, 67 hold mandates as local councillors. That equates to 62% — the vast majority. That is a problem. Having power, decision-making and public representation concentrated among the same limited number of people is preventing the growth of a culture of inclusion, transparency and openness. Rather than working to bring new people in, we are striving to maintain a system that keeps new people out. That has been the dominant political culture in Northern Ireland for decades. Ending dual mandates has the potential to bring at least 67 new voices into our government structures, give or take what actually happens with the review of public administration. It will force us, the political parties, which are meant to be a mechanism for public expression, to work harder at reaching out to the public, to do a better job appealing to and involving more people, and to present the work of elected government as worthwhile and valuable.

There is an opportunity to bring in under-represented voices with new recruits. Of the 67 Members holding dual mandates, 55 are men. That is to say that 88% of dual mandates between the Assembly and local government are held by men. That highlights the startlingly low number of women in the House, despite the leadership of women in every other aspect of our society. The end of dual mandates would create an opportunity for all parties to bring women into decision-making positions. The same is true for young people, those with disabilities, members of minority ethnic communities and those from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds. All those groups make real contributions to our communities every day, but are sadly under-represented in our elected bodies.

When government more accurately reflects the make-up of its population, it delivers better policy, more accountable governance and engenders higher levels of public confidence. Confidence is a key component of this legislation. Public sentiment towards the Assembly sometimes fluctuates between frustration and fury. This body is too often perceived as bickering, ineffective and self-interested. I hope that those Members of the Assembly who are genuinely concerned with public confidence will see the Bill as an opportunity to demonstrate that the Assembly puts the interests of people first and that Assembly Members are willing to make what may seem like personal sacrifices in the name of better, more transparent and participatory government.

There is also the issue of conflict of interest, which could potentially become even more of a concern if the review of public administration comes into effect and councils are given enhanced responsibilities. It is a fact that different levels of government make decisions about each other. Indeed, there have been prime examples of potential conflicts of interest in the past year in particular. Members of the Assembly took on ministerial portfolios and retained their seats as local councillors. They went on to be involved in decisions that undeniably violated standards for transparency in government decision-making.

If councils are given enhanced responsibilities under the changes proposed in the review of public administration (RPA), it will be much more difficult to make the case that the roles of MLA and councillor are complementary rather than conflicting. That was clear in the responses to the public consultation on the Bill. The members of the public who responded do not see the roles of councillor and MLA as complementary. Rather, they see one individual taking both roles as excessive and unwarranted. Local councillors also raised concerns and indicated their support for an end to dual mandates. One councillor stated that, on a number of occasions, he or she had worked diligently on an initiative to benefit the local area only to have those efforts derailed by MLAs who are also councillors working to a different agenda.

The consultation solicited the opinions of more than 140 organisations and individuals on the matter of dual mandates. All responses favoured an end to the practice, and only one objection was raised by a local council. That

concern is that the legislation should not create barriers or restrictions that make it difficult for elected officials to move from local government to regional government to national government, and so on. The idea is that local government can, of course, provide upcoming politicians and political leaders with important experience of how governance works. I am sensitive and sympathetic to that argument, and the Bill has been intentionally constructed so as not to diminish or inhibit the importance of local government as a training ground or stepping stone to higher office.

The single consultation response in opposition to the proposal suggests that ending dual mandates should be done voluntarily by political parties; I could not agree more. That is what happened in Scotland, Wales and many other societies in which dual mandates are aberrant, and that should be the case in Northern Ireland as well. However, we see little meaningful progress towards the achievement of a voluntary end to dual mandates.

All the parties in the Chamber have put on record that they favour an end to dual mandates, and most have held that position for some time. However, little has happened to make it a reality. I welcome the small steps that have been taken recently, but the deadline for full implementation keeps moving, or parties seem to take a step forward in ending dual mandates only to take a big step backwards. Therefore, an achievable reform remains merely aspirational, and our pace towards political maturity remains painfully slow. Legislating for the change will create a firm deadline for parties to work to. It will make the change irreversible and set an important, permanent standard and principle for our democracy.

Outside the consultation, others have argued that although they see a case for the prohibition of dual mandates between the Assembly and Westminster because both are full-time jobs, they find the case for ending dual mandates that concern the Assembly and local councils less compelling. Those jobs are viewed as complementary, and the workload at council level is regarded as decidedly part-time.

Allow me to make it clear: although elected Members may see a difference between those two levels of government, the public do not. The consultation found no perception of difference between those levels of government and a

strong sense that individuals who have been selected for the privilege of public office should focus fully on doing that job well no matter what, rather than seeking to use the position to amass further power, as that can give the appearance that individuals are working harder for personal gain than for the representation of the public.

3.45 pm

The consultation also indicates that the public believes that a higher standard of conduct is required when a person holds public office and is in receipt of public money; that it is not appropriate for one person to draw multiple salaries as an elected official; and that there is a degree of unfairness in elected officials holding more than one elected position at a time when many of those whom they represent are losing or struggling to hold on to the only job that they have.

Let me be clear that the perceived problem is with dual mandates, or holding more than one elected position, and not with double-jobbing whereby a person may hold an elected position as well another job that may also be supported by public funds, such as a doctor or a teacher. The difference in those cases of drawing two salaries from the public purse — for example, someone who is a doctor or a teacher and a local councillor, as distinct from someone who is an MLA and a councillor — is partially one of perception. The voters know what a doctor or a teacher does on the job. They know how such individuals earn their money and what they do to earn it. They understand the contribution that those professionals make to society, the essential nature of their work and how to hold them to account if they have a problem or complaint with their work. The same is not true of elected officials. Ask anyone on the street what an MLA or councillor does all day, and you will be hard pressed to get a positive answer. The dominant image involves attending receptions, making speeches, and that is about all.

Ask voters what can be done if they have a problem with, or a complaint against, an elected official and you will encounter an immense level of frustration and, possibly, a few adjectives unfit for children's ears. Whether or not that perception is accurate, voters consider most elected officials to be less effective, less essential and less accountable than their doctor or teacher. When it comes to good governance,

perception is important. Voters perceive a real conflict with dual mandates, and, therefore, there is one.

The other problem is the concentration of power and decision-making in the hands of a few, at a time when we need new people with good ideas to refresh and revitalise our political institutions and leadership. We tend to overvalue experience in that assessment, and want to keep or reward people who have been involved in politics for a long time. Many politicians and political leaders deserve accolades for their courage and involvement over the years, but let us not pretend that all experience is valuable, or that experience has always meant that positive contributions are made.

I have also heard proponents of the status quo argue that the voters elect the folks with dual mandates and that, therefore, the voters do not mind. The logic is that if the voters did not want those people to be elected, they would not vote for them. That suggestion is both inaccurate and disingenuous. Political parties, not voters, select who will be on the ballot paper on election day, and whom the voters get to select. The parties then appeal to the voters, in the name of party loyalty, to support their candidates on the ticket. The parties put forward the double-dippers, not the voters, and the parties lobby the voters to support the double-dippers. In such a situation, do voters have a genuine freedom of choice?

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Ms Purvis: No. You are up next.

Dissenting opinions are the exception. I have received extensive expressions of support for this legislation, not only through the public consultation but from Members, and I am grateful for that.

I have discussed the mechanisms for implementation in detail with several Members. Some suggested the addition of a waiting period or a period of grace after an election to allow an individual who may have been elected to both the Assembly and to local office to decide which seat he or she will take up, and to allow the party to decide whom to co-opt into the vacant seat. I am sympathetic to that idea, and it was considered in the early stages of drafting the Bill. However, it was not incorporated because it will add complexities and delays to newly elected bodies when they start their work. I believe that Northern Ireland's political parties

have the strategic capacity to plan for those decisions well in advance of election day.

Another Member expressed the concern that parties will intentionally place high-profile individuals on the ballot for local elections for the sole purpose of increasing the party's vote and that they will then allow that person to be disqualified to co-opt a lesser-known individual on to that seat. Indeed, that is a possibility, and any system, if it is approached with cynicism, is open to abuse. However, voters would also be aware that any individual who is in receipt of a dual mandate will have to surrender one of those seats, and voters may have a sense of what is coming before they cast their votes.

Some responses to the proposed legislation were a bit more disconcerting. More than one Member argued that it is necessary to retain dual mandates as a form of employment insurance in case the Assembly collapses. That is troubling on a number of levels. For the past few years, as the economic downturn has hit, thousands of our citizens have been made redundant without such a luxury as employment insurance. If the Assembly falls, or if an election is lost, Members should find themselves in exactly the same situation as any member of the public who is faced with redundancy. That argument also has an impact on public confidence, in that if Members are not confident about the continuation of the Assembly, how can we expect the public to have confidence in it? Ending dual mandates is an indication of our confidence that the Assembly is here to stay.

I thank Members for their time and for their consideration of the Bill. I hope that its implications and intentions are compelling and convincing and that they match the system of values that they feel should be in place in Northern Ireland politics. I am grateful to those members of the Assembly secretariat who have been extraordinarily helpful throughout the process, which began in December 2008. I am also grateful to those Members who have been supportive of the Bill and of the process of political growth and maturation to which the Assembly strives to make a real contribution.

I also offer gratitude to those politicians who have dedicated years to public service even in the darkest and most desperate times. Let us ensure that the experience of the past few decades and the contributions that those individuals made are used as lessons in moving forward.

Mr Weir: I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council and as a vice-president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. However, I will not make my remarks in either capacity.

The Member who proposed the legislation congratulated the work that councillors have done over the years, and I echo those comments. Her remarks are true of councillors of all parties in the Chamber. There was virtually no money at all involved in being in local government, particularly in the 1970s, 1980s and into the 1990s, so for many years, people became involved for reasons other than financial reward. Even at present, the public responsibility that comes with being involved with local government is not particularly well paid. Many councillors acted more out of a sense of service and for no real remuneration. We should also remember that elected representatives from across the political divide, particularly councillors, were on the front line of democracy at the height of the Troubles. Indeed, members from different parties paid the supreme sacrifice, being murdered during the Troubles. Therefore, we need to put this issue into context and ensure that we do not treat it lightly.

I also thank the Member for consulting with each party about the proposed legislation. We had a productive session, if not one in which we necessarily saw eye to eye. However, the Member had a useful exchange of views with our party and with other parties, and we thank her for taking the time to speak to the parties.

I understand, at least in theory, some of the thinking behind examining the real issue of public confidence in the system. The Member peppered much of what she said with statements about public perception. We need to move beyond perception and towards reality. It is not simply a question of how we deal with issues of public confidence or perceptions of roles; rather, we must ensure that we offer leadership and that we do the right thing. Although the DUP has sympathy with the Bill's general thrust, we have a number of reservations, which I will outline.

I have a philosophical difficulty with the legislation. The Member does not support the argument that it is up to the people to decide whom their representatives will be. She said that people do not have a fair chance to vote for whom they want to represent them. I reject that

analysis. Parties should voluntarily tackle the issue of double-jobbing, because they decide who runs for them and where. The public then determine whether candidates are right for particular areas. Similarly, I have a philosophical problem with term limits in America, where there is a cut-off point after which people are not entitled to run again. Ultimately, it is up to the people to choose.

The Member told us that the public, because they are given the choice of voting only for the particular incumbent, who happens to be an MLA, do not really have a fair choice. The larger parties provide a slate of candidates for whom people have the opportunity to vote. I acknowledge that the smaller parties may be an exception. Nine times out of 10 or more, however, people vote for the person whom they believe to have the most experience.

There are occasions when incumbency can be a major detraction. I suspect that Mr Farry will speak about that later. I am old enough to remember a time in North Down — I think that it was in 1989 — when the council was very unpopular, owing to decisions that it had made. On that occasion, people voted with their feet. As a result of a backlash against the council, parties chose new candidates ahead of councillors who had served for a number of terms. Fundamentally, however, people judge whether to back incumbents or MLAs. Equally, they can decide that they want to see a fresh face or to elect someone who is unencumbered by the pressures of being an MLA. That is a choice for the electorate to make. People are not stupid.

The Member mentioned voluntary movement by parties. There has been a certain level of voluntary movement, although it has been quite slow. The DUP is committed to reducing the number of its MLAs who are also councillors. Sammy Wilson recently stood down from Belfast City Council and Peter Robinson from Castlereagh Borough Council.

Up until now, co-options in this proportional representation (PR) system have been possible only when the council unanimously agrees to them, so political parties have been able to try to gain an advantage by forcing a by-election. All parties have probably been guilty of attempting that at some stage, and I do not claim sainthood on behalf of my party. Fortunately, however, there has been greater movement

away from doing that. When Peter O'Hagan, the distinguished Lisburn councillor, died, a co-option was agreed. In the past, however, we have not always been so fortunate. Parties may have restricted some of their senior members from standing down from councils because of the threat of a resulting by-election.

As was indicated, it was originally intended that the Bill would allow co-option. Fortunately, events have somewhat overtaken that, and the British Government are progressing legislation that will mean that, by the end of the month, co-option will become automatic. That will provide some reassurance for parties to move some of their representatives out of local government, because, to use Lisburn as an example — a council area that, I think, at one point, had only one nationalist seat — parties will be less tempted to take advantage of that situation for their own party political ends.

4.00 pm

The public perception of dual mandates was mentioned, and I also have reservations about that. Whatever arguments and time frame are used, comparing MPs with MLAs — clearly two full-time and, to some extent, overlapping and complementary jobs — is not the same as comparing MLAs with councillors. I can speak if not from a unique perspective in the House then a slightly unusual one, in that I served purely as an MLA for some seven years. For five years, I have served as an MLA and a councillor, whereas most Members of the House tend to be councillors when they are first elected to the House to serve a dual purpose. Personal experience has shown me that there is a high level of complementarity and that the two posts marry.

My being a councillor at the same time as being an MLA has been an advantage to me in giving me a wider perspective. That cuts both ways. In North Down Borough Council, five of the 25 councillors are MLAs. That means that the MLAs can bring a useful central government perspective to the council chamber. It also means that, in reflecting local concerns and issues, I freely admit that, as a councillor, I am much better informed as an MLA than I previously was. On that basis, I am able to convey attitudes from the council to the Assembly. My perspectives from the council and the Assembly have been advantageous to me in my wider local government work, as, I suspect, they have been to others.

I question the idea that the Bill's sponsor may have had at least one disgruntled councillor complain about MLAs having different agendas and so on. However, the idea that some brilliant local initiative can be stymied by MLAs' being members of a particular council does not hold water. No council in Northern Ireland has a majority of MLA members. In every case, councillors who are MLAs are in the minority. Therefore, the idea that MLAs can veto council matters simply does not add up.

I have reservations about the distinction that is drawn between the public purse and dual mandates. Anyone who has served in local government will know that all councillors, unless retired, have other jobs. The sponsor of the Bill may not have that perspective because, to the best of my knowledge, she has never served in local government, so the advantages of doing so may be lost to her. However, it is a financial necessity for all councillors to have other jobs. I find it a little bit odd for someone to say that one can be a councillor and a doctor or a councillor and a teacher, but one cannot be a councillor and a professional politician. That proposition seems illogical.

There are also practical reservations. Mention was made, for example, of a situation where council and Assembly elections take place at the same time. If, on election to the Assembly, a person automatically lost his or her council seat, there would be certain practical implications which must be looked at in a wider context.

Under the RPA process, which achieved cross-party agreement among all five major parties, at the first council meeting after an election responsibilities and key positions will be allocated, probably through d'Hondt or another form of proportionality, according to party strength. If people are automatically removed from council seats, there would be two unforeseen circumstances. First, do we weaken that party by one seat on the council? The first council meeting after an election will probably take place before any co-option, albeit compulsory, has taken place. There are practical difficulties with that.

Secondly, unlike the present situation, whereby in the next few months in the run-up to the RPA a number of councillors will vacate their seats to make way for others, if, on the same day, people vote for someone who is running as an MLA and as a councillor — this will create a dilemma for

a lot of individuals who are not in secure seats — they may elect Joe Bloggs on a Thursday only to find that, within a month, he is replaced by another councillor. That is another practical difficulty. This is where the exploration between the parties has to happen, and perhaps this is a vehicle that can be used so that this is progressed by agreement between the parties as to the best way forward.

I am not claiming any particular special knowledge, but I do not foresee the conflict of interest and friction that the proposer of the motion suggested will exist in 2011. In my 12 years in the Assembly, that has not been my experience. As part of the RPA process, severance arrangements will be put in place for the many long-serving councillors who will be leaving office. Under this Bill, in 2011 we will all be stripping out all 67 councillors who are also MLAs.

There will be additional powers for councils but also a high level of cultural change because of the division of responsibilities between parties but also because, to take one example, when planning comes to councils, instead of all of us who are on councils throwing rocks at the planners and using it as a vehicle to object to particular things, we will become judge, jury and executioner. That is going to be a huge cultural change, and there needs to be a high level of capacity building. In 2011, will we simply remove everyone who has served in the Assembly, along with a wide range of serving councillors who have been there for many years? On any council, the best team is a blend of youth and experience.

Mr Simpson: Yes.

Mr Weir: I hear Mr Simpson saying yes. I am not sure whether he counts himself as youthful or experienced. I think that he was claiming both. I suspect that, in politics, the older one gets, the higher one tends to raise the bar of what counts as youthful.

I want to see new blood coming into councils, but I want that to be balanced. That is the best way to bring people on, and the present system affords us the opportunity to do that. The challenge, therefore, under RPA, is to balance bringing in new talent with retaining people who have a degree of experience in local government.

The DUP has a range of reservations about how the Bill is drafted. Consequently, we have a degree of scepticism about it. However, we

will see whether the Bill can be improved and worked on. Therefore, if the Bill passes its Second Stage today, we will work proactively on whatever Committee is charged with dealing with it. From that perspective, although we have major reservations about the Bill, which we have highlighted, we believe that it indicates some level of motivation to rebuild public confidence. Consequently, although we have a lot of scepticism towards the Bill, we will not divide the House. If the Bill passes this stage, we look forward to working in Committee to see whether something can be salvaged from it that will benefit our democracy in Northern Ireland.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the principles of the Bill. The Bill is short and contains only three clauses, but its implementation and outworkings will lead to proper, transparent representation in public office and should instil confidence in local communities and the general public.

Mr Weir talked about public perception, but he knows the reality. Irrespective of how people try to cover over the issue of MLAs being local councillors — the work of a councillor is presented as a part-time job — some people still see them as two jobs. A lot of people, especially in the construction industry, do not have a job, and in relation to the whole debacle —

Lord Morrow: I would like the Member to explain whether he is saying that he is opposed to double mandates or to double-jobbing, because, in my book, there is a fundamental difference. We listened to the proposer of the motion state that she was opposed to double mandates. She was not opposed, for example, to a doctor also being a councillor, but she voiced great opposition to an MLA being a councillor. However, those of us who have been sitting on councils — some since the early 1970s — always had another job. In fact, at that time, there was no remuneration for councillors. Furthermore, those were the bad old days when we were going through a horrendous period in the history of this Province. Indeed, at that time it was not popular for someone even to put their name forward for election, and I suspect that all parties had that difficulty. Therefore, some of what has been said smacks a bit of jumping on the bandwagon. Perhaps it is more popular to be in politics now than it was then. Should some recognition not be given to that?

Mr Boylan: To clarify, I am talking about mandates. I am responding to what Mr Weir said. We are talking about representing the public and leading from the front. I have spoken about the perception that is out there, and that is the point that I am trying to get across. We recognise the good work that local councils have done in the past; I am not arguing about that. The key point that I want to make is about public perception.

Sinn Féin supported the recommendation under the review of public administration that a Member of the Assembly cannot stand for election under the proposed new council structures, and we believe that it is a matter for individual parties to regulate on the issue of dual mandates. My party has already taken steps to support the ending of dual mandates. Sinn Féin has seen a number of local councillors — myself included, I am pleased to point out — who have been co-opted out of local councils to give someone else that opportunity.

In most cases, the Bill will remove the issue of conflict of interest, which, at present, may be inhibiting the decision-making process, and, therefore, impacting on local ratepayers and local communities, whether people want to recognise that or not. It would address the present situation in which a Minister who is a local councillor is legislating on planning, the review of public administration and all other aspects of their ministerial role and then sitting on a local council making a decision as part of a corporate council, which may be contrary to policy or to that ministerial role. Therefore, there can be conflicts of interest. Members should not fail to recognise that

4.15 pm

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree that, in the argument over a potential conflict of interest, there is a difference between someone who is both a Minister and councillor and someone who is both a Member and a councillor, where the position is a lot less acute? From a practical point of view, it is difficult to find many cases of conflict of interest on that basis. Does the Member agree that there will be occasions when conflicts of interest arise in councils? I have been present when a person has declared a conflict of interest. An example occurred recently in my council when a potential grant for a primary school of which I am a governor was debated. I declared an interest and left

the meeting for the duration of the discussion. Such conflicts of interest will be taken care of by a mandatory code of conduct, which will be put in place as part of the review of public administration. Its objective will be to ensure that councillors will not have conflicts of interest.

Mr Boylan: I accept the Member's point. However, Mr Weir will be aware that, if we are legislating for the planning process to be part of local councils, for example, the Minister will have made that decision based on a recommendation from his Department. If, when the new responsibilities are being rolled out in council, the Minister is sitting as a councillor, it will not do for him merely to declare an interest and walk out of the room.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: No, I have given way already.

It is about public perception. It is not enough for the individual merely to walk out of the room and say that he or she will not take part in the conversation, because, in essence, the individual has sat in the House, has gone through the legislation and knows what is there. There are opportunities for conflicts of interest, and they need to be removed.

Sinn Féin supports the Bill. The removal of the dual mandate will ensure that there is public confidence, and it will lead to open and proper representation that will be of benefit to the communities that we represent.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as a serving local councillor.

I commend Dawn Purvis for the brevity of the Bill and for introducing it as a private Member's Bill. The brevity of the Bill helps to concentrate our minds on the issues, without allowing others to add red herrings. The Bill is concentrated and short, and Ms Purvis referred to the length of the Bill in her opening speech. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the principle of the Bill.

Northern Ireland has suffered, perhaps more than any other region, as a result of double, even triple, mandates. With regard to the regional assemblies and Westminster, I understand that it is only the First Minister in the Scottish Parliament who retains a double mandate, and no Members of the Welsh Assembly hold double mandates. The number of MSPs and Welsh Assembly Members who are also local councillors is in single figures.

Can an individual effectively serve on a council, in a fully functioning Assembly and even at ministerial level at the same time? At the same time, can they effectively participate at Westminster, in their local Assembly and in their local council? Or are they in danger of giving the perception that they are active on all three but are not effective in any of them? There is a danger that, the thinner individuals spread themselves, the more they will simply cover a number of issues fleetingly. Dual mandates may give huge office cost allowances that allow one's staff to pump out press releases, but, in reality, the public representative can be in only one place at one time and can deal with only one issue at one time.

Dr Farry: Does the Member think that his father did a poor job as an MP and a councillor, given that he could be in only one place at a time?

Mr Beggs: I was referring to the situation that may have occurred in the past and to the things that may have happened. However, we have to plan to do things better in the future, particularly in light of the super-councils, where local councillors will have considerably increased roles. There will be increased responsibilities. Active participation in dual mandates will become increasingly difficult. In addition, the Ulster Unionist Party has made it clear that our Members of Parliament will be full-time MPs.

My dad served as a Member of Parliament and a councillor for a considerable period. He did so at considerable expense to himself and his family. If people run for election to councils, the Assembly or Parliament and are, perhaps, also Ministers, are they ever at home? What is the cost to their personal life? Can they be rounded individuals if they have multiple mandates? That is another issue that must be carefully considered. I have learnt from the past that there are dangers in trying to do too many things. Even when local councils had limited responsibilities, there were dangers in trying to hold down too many jobs.

Lord Morrow: I am interested in what the Member is saying. However, I am also slightly confused. Perhaps he will clarify his position. He has tried to explain where he stands on dual mandates. Does he speak as Roy Beggs the Assembly Member or on behalf of his party? He has been at pains to say, for instance, that it may not be compatible for a Minister to also be a councillor. I understand that his party's two

Ministers are also councillors. Therefore, is he saying that they will, effectively, step down? Now that his father has stepped down, the Member seems to be saying that he would have been stepping down anyway. Was his father, in fact, stepped down? Which was it?

Mr Beggs: The Ulster Unionist Party's position is clear and will become increasingly apparent in the forthcoming Westminster elections. If elected, all my party's candidates will be full-time Members of Parliament. They will not attempt to temporarily fly in and out of Westminster for public relations opportunities. Any of my party's successful candidates will be full-time MPs at Westminster. That is unequivocal.

As regards future public representation, we are moving towards super-councils that will have increased powers and responsibilities. I foresee that, going forward, people will have individual mandates. That is a much healthier system, which will produce more rounded individuals, decisions and policies. Otherwise, there is a danger that individuals will live in a political bubble. They will not understand issues in the wider world because they are encompassed by the world of politics. If they are not in the Assembly, they will be in their council chamber or at Westminster. There is a danger that because they have too many meetings they will have limited time to experience real issues and to be available for their constituents.

Dr W McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I have given way numerous times. I want to proceed with the rest of my comments. I may allow someone the opportunity to intervene later.

The Assembly cannot make determinations that affect Westminster with regard to dual mandates. However, it can take decisions about councils because they fall under local government matters, for which the Assembly has responsibility. It is right that the Bill concentrates on that limited area of dual mandates between the Assembly and councils. As I said earlier, someone cannot be in two places at once. Clearly, through the review of public administration, it is planned that more powers will go to local government. That increased role will place additional pressures on individual councillors.

Why is it that the some Assembly Members have poor Committee attendance? They are

meant to be full-time Assembly Members. Clearly, that is supposed to be a full-time job that pays a full-time wage. Some Members' attendance is not good. Others pass in and out of meetings fleetingly for a brief period and get marked as present.

Dr W McCrea: Like yourself.

Mr Beggs: If the Member examines my record on both the Public Accounts Committee and the Environment Committee, he will find that, generally, I attend meetings from start to finish. He will also find someone who misses very few meetings. I ask the Member to consider that and to verify what he is saying, because I think that he will find that it is incorrect.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I had the privilege of serving with him on the Finance Committee, and I can testify that he is a dedicated attender.

Has the Member done any analysis to compare the attendance in Committee and in the Chamber of Members who are also councillors and those who are not? He has made the point that Members who are MLAs only seem to be better attenders overall. I have not looked at any figures, but, anecdotally, I do not see a pattern. I am aware of MLAs who are also councillors and who are extremely dedicated to the Chamber and to their Committees. Has the Member done any analysis to back up his point that an MLA without a council role is a far better attender in the Chamber?

Mr Beggs: I am sorry, but I have not done any detailed analysis; it is merely anecdotal evidence. However, one hears Members saying that they are going to a council planning subcommittee and skipping part of their Assembly Committee meeting, but, to my mind, it would need to be a major process at local government level for me to miss my Assembly Committee. If my full-time job is being an Assembly Member, then that is where my priority lies.

Dr W McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I am trying to proceed with my speech, if I may.

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

The Environment Minister has advised that individual planning decisions, area plans and the wider and important issue of community planning will devolve to local councils, and

that will be a huge area of work for local councillors. That will be on top of their existing responsibilities, and it will place an increasingly intolerable burden on those who wish to retain multiple mandates. As I said, there is the issue of the sort of individuals that we are creating through the multiple mandate ability that exists, and the situation will become even more troublesome. Councillors will have further new responsibilities. Today, we heard about the clean neighbourhoods and environment Bill, the provisions of which will be introduced into local government. There are other areas of work, including regeneration and increased local economic development roles, which will enable local councillors to have a greater involvement in improving their communities.

Clearly, a change point is coming with the local government reorganisation that is planned for 2011. That presents an opportune time to bring about that change. I appreciate the wording that the Member has included in the Bill, in that that would coincide with the next local government elections and, again, that is the right sort of ballpark.

At this early stage, I flag up the precise trigger mechanism. The Member who presented the Bill indicated that the chosen mechanism came from the consultation. However, I have some concern about allowing someone to be nominated and to go forward for election and then to be dismissed. If that person were an independent and was unable to nominate someone else in the process, another election might be required. Therefore, there is a danger of public moneys being wasted. I would be looking to see whether there could be a better mechanism, and I would be happy to engage with the Member and others to try to come up with a more appropriate trigger mechanism if it is available.

Why is there a need to legislate? It must be remembered that MPs and MLAs have office cost allowances, and that may be why they are popular at local government level. They have public resources, and they have a secretary and other staff who can assist them, which gives them a significant advantage over other public representatives who may be councillors only. MPs and MLAs have public resources that strengthen their position, and I accept that that would apply to me as it does to others. Is it appropriate for that to continue, or should we

open the system up and no longer allow power to be concentrated in limited hands?

There is a danger when those who are responsible for policy development, and who may even control Departments, also work at a local council level on individual planning applications. We have seen in recent times the difficulties with planning and developers because of power being concentrated in too few hands and those individuals being led astray and ignoring the Nolan principles.

4.30 pm

It is unfortunate that that has been the case, but the likelihood of that happening would be lessened if dual mandates came to an end, because there would not be councillors who were also Assembly Members and MPs. The concentration of power and the concentration of attention from planning officials would not be there to the same extent. They would have to appreciate that there were a range of views.

As others said, we even have a ridiculous situation ongoing in the Assembly in that the Minister who is responsible for local government, planning, boundaries and the RPA process continues to be a local councillor. What an impossible situation that we put our officials in. Take, for example, a planning official who gets lobbied by a Minister wearing a different hat. Officials can easily get confused about who they are to please. Are they to please the planning Minister or to consistently work according to the policies that have been developed over time? Which hat is the Minister wearing when he writes to and lobbies an official on an issue? We are placing our civil servants in an impossible situation when there is a dual mandate.

On 31 March 2008, Minister Foster said:

"I intend to work with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office in order to introduce legislative proposals to end the dual mandate of those councillors who are also Members of the Assembly and/or Parliament." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 29, p3, col 1].

That was almost two years ago. In the intervening time, there was a new Minister, who apparently adopted a different policy, and was not minded to end the dual mandate. Now we have another Minister, Minister Poots, and I have yet to hear where he stands on the issue. There was certainly a clear commitment given by the Minister of the Environment in March 2008, and

I am not aware of how the issue has progressed since then. It appears to me that some may simply have made some of their comments at the height of the expenses row, just as Peter Robinson promised the end of dual mandates at one point during that row, only to roll back a few months later when some members of his party decided that they were not ending their dual mandates when the heat was off.

A commitment was made to address the issue, yet I am not aware of anything coming forward from the Department. That is why I am grateful to Dawn Purvis for bringing forward the private Members' legislation. It is clear that some will need to be weaned off their dual mandates, which is why I am happy to support the principle of the Bill. It is clear that we must move forward with a mechanism that will increase transparency and accountability and give the public confidence in how democratic politics work. I support the principle of the Bill.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for bringing forward the legislation, which the SDLP can broadly support. However, we have some concerns, which I will try to outline during my contribution. It is right and fitting that the Member pointed out that today is International Women's Day. There is a real need for all political parties to have representation that more truly reflects the community at large, and we all know that more than 51% of the community is female. I also look forward to a greater participation of representatives from ethnic minorities. If we were to see such changes across the political parties, it would all add to the rich diversity of this House and others.

I also support the Member in saying that there is a need to grow the next generation of political representatives, and I pay tribute to all those who stood for office over many years when it was not easy to do so and when there was nothing to be gained financially. In fact, it often cost people money to be representatives. Our party thanks the many people who allowed their names to go forward for election to local councils, which, as we all know, were the only democratic platforms for people in the North at one point. That must be recognised. There is a real need for greater participation in democracy in Northern Ireland, and local councils provide good grounding and are good places in which people can cut their teeth in representational politics.

Unfortunately, a number of DUP Members who spoke have left the Chamber. They seemed to be rolling back from their position. Mr Weir said that some of Ms Purvis' comments were a little bit odd. I found some of Mr Weir's comments to be a little bit odd, given the fact that, as Mr Beggs said, the DUP was categoric in its wish to end dual mandates and that it had said that it would do so by the end of last year. Many Members of the House are MPs and councillors and, as others have pointed out, some are also Ministers.

I am grateful to Mr Beggs for sourcing the comments of the former Environment Minister Arlene Foster who clearly saw that there was a conflict of interests between her roles as councillor and as Minister with responsibility for local government, and she stood down. The fact that she ended up running for election to Fermanagh District Council was a little bit odd, but we are where we are.

Over recent months, the SDLP has made moves to end dual mandates. We have done so in areas where we know that there will not be the expensive necessity of by-elections. Mr Weir mentioned the co-option to Lisburn City Council following the death of Councillor Peter O'Hagan. We are grateful to the councillors on Craigavon Borough Council, who, following the death of my esteemed colleague Councillor Ignatius Fox, allowed for a co-option. That pays tribute to their contributions in local government during many years in the wilderness.

As we all know, legislation is going through Westminster that will do away with the argument that many have tried to articulate about by-elections, co-options and expense. That will take the ground from under many Members.

Ms Purvis said that experience is overvalued. I support the need for youth and experience, but, in some cases, people went to council chambers to oppose something rather than to vote for it. Many people should ask themselves about their records in local councils. Did they represent their communities well and make the councils better places for everyone, or did the old slogan, "what we have we hold" prevail in many council chambers?

Mr Boylan said that the wider public had a perception about politicians and dual mandates. That is true, but, unfortunately, the issue has been viewed as being a plague on all our houses, and each of us has a huge piece of

work to do to overcome that. Although that was highlighted initially during the expenses row that began at Westminster, it had an effect on the North. The SDLP wants to end dual mandates. We want to grow the next generation of politicians, but we want to consider closely the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill. In our private discussions with Ms Purvis we said that when the Bill is scrutinised at Committee Stage we will discuss further the period of grace and whether a local councillor who stood for election to the Assembly would have to stand down in advance of the election or after it.

The SDLP broadly supports the Bill, but other parties are rolling back from the positions that they stated last year. I do not accept Mr Weir's arguments; I find many of them a little bit odd. There is a real need to encourage more people to come into councils and into representational politics. However, that will require attitudinal changes, because, unfortunately, very few people put their name forward, even in today's relatively peaceful times. There is a question mark over why that is the case.

I know that some Members of this House are also Members of the House of Lords. What barriers and dilemmas do they face in their decision-making? Perhaps there is no conflict, but many people will wonder what is going on in that regard.

I wish to address the issue of people finding jobs as councillors. When I started out as a local councillor, I also worked full-time and raised a very young family, and I do not think that people were confused about what I did. The role of local councillor has always been seen as a voluntary role that people never made much money from. After RPA, there may be better salary provision for local councillors, but the scenario will have changed by then because local councils will have additional powers and responsibilities, so such a move would be right and fitting.

Although the SDLP broadly welcomes the Bill, we have some concerns, and we may seek to either table amendments or, at least, seek clarifications from Ms Purvis at a later stage.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as member of North Down Borough Council.

The Alliance Party also has considerable reservations about the Bill. Indeed, we view it as a populist measure that is set in the context of

wider concerns about conduct in public life that exist at the moment. We believe that the issue is a soft target in comparison with some of the more difficult and pressing issues that we face in re-establishing public confidence in elected representatives. Like others, we will not divide the House at this stage, but we will consider the Bill at its subsequent Committee Stage.

There are two issues to consider in discussing the principles of the Bill. The first issue is whether the dual mandate of those serving as both a councillor and an MLA is a problem. The second is whether it is appropriate to legislate on that, if it is, indeed, a problem. I will deal with the second issue first. Given that there has not been a full local government election since the last Assembly election in 2007, the matter may be resolved naturally in 2011, without the need for legislation. It may, therefore, be more appropriate for us to consider addressing the issue of dual mandates after 2011, if we still judge it to be an issue of public concern, rather than legislating at this stage. We should follow the principle that says that government should not legislate to address particular circumstances that exist at a particular time but that it should, rather, legislate to put in place measures that are required to address problems at a more general and sustained level. We should not, therefore, rush to legislate on issues that do not require legislation. However, we will see how the matter develops.

The Member who proposed the legislation argued for the importance of encouraging diversity among elected representatives. I am sure that few Members disagree with that. She pointed out that the Bill would free up a number of places for new representatives to fill. However, it is important to set that in the context of a potential reduction in the number of councillors after the implementation of the RPA and a campaign from some parties in the Chamber to reduce the overall size of the Assembly. Given the sheer number of elected representatives here, Northern Ireland is already viewed as being over-governed in comparison with other similar jurisdictions. Therefore, I do not think that much argument exists about the number of places and how we can encourage diversity.

Political parties are being fundamentally challenged to ensure that they have a diverse field of candidates. I can speak only for the Alliance Party in that regard. We stand as an Assembly party and as a group of councillors

that have a mix of Protestants, Catholics and other religious traditions. Almost 30% of our Assembly group is female, and a similar percentage of females work for our councillor group. We are far from perfect, but our figures stand up well by comparison. The Alliance Party also had the first ethnic Chinese legislator anywhere in Europe, of which not only the Alliance Party but the Assembly can be extremely proud.

Not that we advertise it, but we run a diverse field of candidates based on sexual orientation also. Therefore, we feel that we achieve diversity in what we do. However, we recognise that there is much more that we could do.

4.45 pm

There is perhaps a slight flaw in the argument that Dawn Purvis set out, in that the replacement of a councillor would follow the point at which they were elected as an MLA. At that stage, under Westminster legislation, it would fall back to the parties to fill the vacancy. Therefore, the idea that diversity would be delivered by the electorate outside the context of the parties does not stand up; it would be the selfsame parties that have been identified as the problem that would be asked to fill any vacancy that arises.

There is a wider issue around the desirability or otherwise of councillors being MLAs and vice versa, and that needs to be looked at in the context of conflicts of time and of interest. I agree that there are conflicts of interest. I can readily identify conflicts of interest for MLAs who are also Ministers, which is a problem that has not worked itself out quickly enough. On Belfast City Council there is a very clear, established policy of co-option. Therefore, there is no excuse for any Minister to stay on as a councillor at the same time as exercising Executive power.

There are issues and questions around potential conflicts of interest with respect to the current situation regarding the local government blockage and the RPA. That being said, the conflict of interest in Executive matters is much more acute than it is in legislative matters. However, I concede that it is a potential issue that needs to be raised and thought through.

Until now, the system has worked reasonably well and Members have declared their membership of councils. I do not necessarily buy the argument that there is a fundamental

clash of interests between a regional Assembly perspective and that of local government. On many occasions, the two can be in harmony. That conflict has the potential to be exaggerated, although I concede that it is an area on which we need to focus.

Conflict of time is most clearly an issue for those who are both MPs and MLAs, both of which are quite clearly full-time elected posts. One cannot do justice to both at the same time as full-time posts. It is further complicated by the travel issues between Northern Ireland and London, and is something that will have to be resolved rather quickly. The issue has, perhaps, evolved over time. My understanding, as someone who is still young, is that, historically, being an MP was seen as an adjunct to a job. MPs were very London-based, perhaps practising at the Bar in the morning and the early afternoon before popping down to the House of Commons for the late afternoon and evening sessions. Visits to constituencies happened on rare occasions and with great fanfare. However, in the modern world, being an MP is very much seen in professional terms and as a full-time post.

I am disturbed that the focus is solely on the MP/MLA aspect of double-jobbing, without wider consideration being given to the problems that arise from MPs having other paid commitments outside Parliament. It is there that the much greater risk for clashes of interest lies, in particular for clashes of financial interests, but also for clashes of time. If someone has significant outside commitments to other forms of employment or business, then, by definition, they cannot give full account to their job as an MP. That is certainly an area where I see the need for much greater consideration. The same logic applies to MLAs with outside paid interests.

However, there is a line to be drawn between trying to be a full-time MLA while doing additional voluntary work, work in certain community organisations, being a silent partner or having residual business interests, and actively engaging in what are significant private sector pursuits.

However, the position of councillor needs to be seen in a different light. As other Members have said, councillors are not full-time employees. Indeed, it is even debatable whether they are technically considered as part-time employees, because they receive allowances and not

salaries for the work they do on behalf of their constituents. When proposing the Second Stage of the Bill, Dawn Purvis flipped between viewing councillors as jobholders and as holders of a purely elective office. Although, I fully recognise that a councillor's workload can be extremely heavy and that people come to it with a very committed attitude; nonetheless, it is not considered to be a job, and that point applies in the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and, largely speaking, the rest of the world. Being elected to local government is not seen as holding a job, and we are in danger of sending out a dangerous message if we start talking about councillors as jobholders. If that perception exists at the moment, we should seek to correct it, not feed it.

Essentially, there are two reasons why we need to make those clarifications. First, if we treat the role of a councillor as a job, there will be cost implications relating to the salary that will have to be paid to them. There are already cost/benefit issues concerning the local government aspect of the review of public administration, and moving to fully-paid, full-time councillors, at a salary level that would need to be competitive to attract people, would add significantly to those costs.

Mr McCartney: The Member has talked about the definition of the role of a councillor. Should we not be looking at this from the public's perspective of Assembly Members? When people elect a person to the Assembly, they expected that person to carry out the role exclusively and not have something, whatever that might be, as a backdrop.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCartney for his intervention. I will address that point fully in a moment.

The other implication, if we speak about the role of a councillor as being a job, is that we will be sending out a message about the type of people that we want to recruit to local government. We will be saying that we want senior citizens, students, housewives or househusbands, the unemployed or those who are otherwise economically inactive. We need to attract professionals, businesspeople, and people at all levels of the public sector into local government, where they can make a contribution and potentially bring experience to decision-making.

Mr Beggs: I agree with the Member's point that it is beneficial for those in full-time employment to bring their experience to local government.

Does he accept that it is also useful for professionals and those with wider interests to become an MP? It is not possible for people who are doctors to give up their professional status to become a full-time MP, because they only have a four- or five-year guaranteed period of employment and, thereafter, will probably not qualify to go back to their jobs and will have to retrain. Does the Member agree that some amount of paid employment should be tolerated to bring in wider knowledge and experience?

Dr Farry: I do not disagree with that necessarily. I fully appreciate that people will want to have the ability to return to a profession in which the law, in practice, can move rapidly even during the course of one Westminster term.

However, a balance must be struck and common sense applied. There cannot be a situation in which people try to combine a full-time job with being a full-time public representative. That was the sense in which I made that comment.

Other people, to keep their future options open, may wish to keep their professional knowledge up to date and maintain a level of participation. That same argument could be applied to local government: someone who has a long track record in local government and is committed to local service may enter the Assembly for a brief period of one term, or even for part of one term, and wish to return to local government thereafter. The proposed legislation would arbitrarily cut off that option.

To ensure that people are attracted to working in local government, councils must hold their meetings during family friendly hours. An attempt must also be made to avoid clashes between the normal working day and the holding of council meetings. Proper investment must be made in childcare for councillors. Some people whom we are trying to attract to local government are starting families and feel that it is not feasible for them to commit to serving the community.

I can speak from my considerable experience as an MLA and a councillor. Unlike Peter Weir, I served as a councillor for 14 years before being elected to the Assembly three years ago. I have, therefore, a total of 17 years' experience in local government. When it comes to youth versus experience, it may be that I combine the two, because I was first elected to council at the age of 22, which is another mark of the diversity in local government.

I have found that being a councillor, particularly the way in which it increased my knowledge of local issues, has added to my understanding and helped me as an MLA. Councillors tend to have a much more rounded appreciation of local issues. I recall a time when members of my party who had been both councillors and MLAs stepped down from council. During their subsequent experience as MLAs, they sensed that they had, to some extent, lost touch with some aspects of local issues. In some respects, they missed having their previous breadth of knowledge.

Equally, as an MLA I feel that I can help my council with local issues. I do not particularly regard that as a conflict of interest, because there is no financial gain to me or my family. Essentially, councillors and MLAs serve the same constituents, and we try to provide them with the best well-rounded service that we can. I do not ask people whether they approach me in my capacity as a councillor or an MLA. People approach me because they want to find a solution to a problem, and it is helpful that, in seeking to resolve their problem, I can look in both directions and consider whether a regional agency, a Minister or a local council official is best placed to help. Rather than having to refer people to someone else who must then be briefed by me or the constituent on the relevant first principles, I have the ability to turn quickly in either direction to find a remedy. Thus, someone who is a councillor and an MLA can, in certain situations, provide a more efficient local service to his or her constituents.

From a council perspective, our experience as councillors means that we can have some input into the rates process. In particular, we made a strong case for the introduction of transitional relief in connection with the £400,000 cap on rateable values. That had a considerable impact on the amount that people in my community had to pay through their rates. The process of building the new Olympic swimming pool and leisure centre in Bangor has been made smoother by councillors who are also MLAs. Their ability to engage with the Minister in trying to overcome some of the inevitable bureaucracy that is involved in such projects ensures that we keep to the timetable for completion. If the project had come off the wheels and was not going to be delivered on time, that tangible benefit to the local community would not be felt.

5.00 pm

I recognise the point that Mr Beggs made about the problem of people who are both MLAs and councillors sometimes giving priority to their local government duties over their MLA duties. Councillors who are also doctors or teachers cannot leave their day jobs to go to council meetings or council events; their first obligation is to their employers. In our case, our employer is the Assembly. I concede that that is a problem.

However, it is fair to say that some people who are MLAs and councillors give very dedicated and dutiful service to both aspects of their elected mandates. I know people who are MLAs and councillors who are very dedicated to attending and speaking in debates in the Chamber. Those MLAs have very good voting records and good Committee attendance records, and they table questions, develop policy and act on behalf of their constituents. Equally, there are people who are only MLAs and who do not have the same good attendance records or the same commitment to the job.

The 108 of us are a very mixed bunch, and it is dangerous to make the broad generalisation that people who are only MLAs do the job better than those who are MLAs and councillors. The evidence is, at best, mixed. If anything, the performance figures for those who are committed to the Assembly and a council could be surprising. As the saying goes, "If you want something done, ask a busy person".

I was honoured to be the Mayor of North Down during the first term of the current Assembly mandate. I gave my full commitment to being a Member of the Assembly during that time, and my voting record, my speaking record, my participation in Committees and my service to my constituents would bear that out. I also attended and hosted over 400 events as mayor, as well as fulfilling other council duties.

Naomi Long is a Member of the Assembly and is also the Lord Mayor of Belfast. Very few people would disagree with me when I say that she is doing an outstanding job on behalf of all the citizens of Belfast.

We will see where the process goes. There is a wider debate to be held. There are issues to be considered at Committee Stage, such as whether the disqualification should apply to all MLAs or only to those who are Ministers. The discussion on the detail of the Bill is for another

day. We look forward with interest to the rest of the debate.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as a member of Ballymoney Borough Council.

I welcome the Bill and support the principles outlined in it. As far as I am aware, this is the first time that a private Member's Bill has reached Second Stage in the current mandate of the Assembly, and the Member for East Belfast Dawn Purvis should be commended for her work. I am in the process of putting together a private Member's Bill, and the amount of work required is considerable, so I commend her and the Assembly staff involved in compiling the Bill.

My party and I support the ending of dual mandates. Sinn Féin supported the recommendation in the review of public administration that a Member of the Assembly should not be allowed to stand for election to the new council structures. We did that because membership of both could have a negative impact on the smooth and efficient running of the Assembly and the new councils. The Member for East Belfast Dawn Purvis is correct to argue that we need to see new faces coming through, especially women and, as the Member for North Down Dr Farry said, people from under-represented groups.

Sinn Féin has already taken, and is taking, measures to ensure that under-represented groups in society are better represented in our party, on our Front Benches in the Assembly and on local district councils. Other parties, especially the Ulster Unionist Party, should take note of and learn from that.

Structures and procedures are in place in the South in the Dáil to ensure that when members of local town and county councils are elected to that House, co-option can take place without a by-election. We should learn from that. A number of Sinn Féin TDs in Dublin had roles as councillors, and when they were elected to the Dáil, they gave up those posts and allowed other colleagues to take their places. I look forward to the next council elections in the North and to an end to the parallel holding of seats in the Assembly and on local councils.

The legislation is short and simple. Nonetheless, it will be extremely effective. Peter Weir recognised the benefits of being a council member as well as a Member of the Assembly.

As a member of a council, I recognise those, too. However, I know of other elected representatives in the House who have agreed to co-opt someone of equal measure to their place on the council. Those MLAs are aware of the detail of council work because of good communication practices with their party colleagues on councils. That is a way to ensure that MLAs know what is happening in their local council areas.

Like other Members, I recognise the work that councillors have done in the past. However, local government needs a new beginning with new responsibilities and roles. That is why local government needs a new face, of which the dual mandate is not a part. Roy Beggs and Dolores Kelly referred to comments that Arlene Foster made a number of years ago, when she committed to introduce legislation to address the matter. I sincerely hope that the DUP follows through with that message, acts in the spirit of Arlene Foster's words from that time and commits to supporting the legislation to bring dual mandates between the Assembly and councils to an end.

In conclusion, I look forward to the legislation's Committee Stage. It represents an important change and will help to make local governance much more effective and robust. It offers an absolutely great opportunity to change the make-up of councils as regards gender, race and sexual orientation, among other things. I firmly support the principles of the Bill and look forward to its further consideration and eventual adoption.

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased to be able to speak on the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill and congratulate Dawn Purvis for bringing it to the House. However, before I start, I think that some of you have come here today to listen to another debate and might like to know where we are. I understand that three Members are left to speak. That is the good news. The bad news is that they can speak for as long as they want. I hope that you will bear with us.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should refer all remarks through the Chair and should not refer to the Galleries.

Mr Kinahan: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I said, I am pleased to speak in the debate. I declare an interest as a councillor on Antrim Borough Council. That is relevant in that it is the one council in Northern Ireland that meets

during the day. I will stand down the moment that the co-option laws are enacted, because I cannot organise it through the council myself, and I do not feel that I can do my council job and MLA job at the same time.

I am glad that we are concentrating on limiting dual mandates; we should all concentrate on our jobs here. However, we need the workplace experience that people outside politics provide, be they doctors, businessmen, farmers or whatever. They could all bring their experience to bear on what is said in this Building.

We need new blood. I salute all the experienced councillors who worked for many years for nothing, and all those who worked through Northern Ireland's more difficult years. Like Dawn Purvis, I wish to see 67 councillors change. I want to see more women, people from ethnic backgrounds and other groups get involved in politics. Another Member said recently that Northern Ireland is not as divided as the politicians make it out to be. Bringing in new blood may demonstrate that. We do not want that to happen all at once, but I am confident that if we enact the Bill, it will not happen like that. We will work through the process, and each party will find plenty of people willing to fill the spaces.

The Bill does not deal with MPs' dual mandates but seeks to disqualify MLAs from being elected, or being, councillors. That is why we are focusing only on that clash of interests today. However, I have a concern that a big name will be used simply to win an election, after which he will stand down immediately. A common-sense balance needs to be found. For example, someone might be elected, spend some time in the job and then stand down to let in new blood. We should try to find a way to stop the big names from being run all the time so that new people can be brought in behind them.

Much in our electoral system needs to be changed. Such changes are linked to this debate, and I referred to them in the recent debate on compulsory voting. MLAs' offices should be made more open so that MLAs can work with councillors or publicise the fact that councillors are working from those offices. At present, that is not legally possible. We need government bodies and others that make it difficult for people to get interested or to participate in politics to change their ways. We

need to see a change in public attitudes, and we need more people to get involved in politics.

A problem exists for people who, in many cases, have to resign from their government job before standing for election. How many people will give up a job before they know whether they will be elected? We also need to change our approach to schools. We need to teach children about the politics of this country and about the parties and personnel involved. Everyone in school should know those details, not just politics students.

Mr Weir said that we should not go on public perception alone. However, perception is what matters, for that is what the electorate sees of us. We know that his party does not want to see changes until 2015, and it may even roll back from that decision. Many Members have made the point that we need to ensure changes in the operation of dual mandates. Similarly, recent events, from the expenses scandal to the council scandal, add to the very poor perception that there is of politicians. All are linked.

If the RPA goes through and works, councillors will have much more work to do. They cannot do all the new jobs that the RPA will put their way and continue to be MLAs at the same time. Alliance Party Members talked about not legislating when we do not need to. I was brought up to do what I can today and not to put it off until tomorrow. As I said, it is good to have elected representatives who have outside jobs.

We were told how Minister Foster said that she was going to legislate yet has not. I want to touch on some remarks made by the Minister of Finance and Personnel, who said that that is a party matter and should be left to parties to sort out. I see the vital way in which an MLA works: it is good to be on a council and to be in touch with the public, but the onus is on us as MLAs to work with our councillors to build good teams and to talk to one another all the time. At present, however, we are split: one person is a councillor, while another is an MLA. Even in instances in which people hold two positions, they are not speaking to everyone. The onus is on us to get a good team guideline and to work together.

5.15 pm

Ultimately, as Mr Wilson said, the electorate will decide. I look forward to that; Westminster elections are coming up, and we might even have Assembly elections, when one looks at what is going to happen tomorrow. I welcome

the Bill and look forward to everyone being honest with the electorate. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the motion.

Mr Dallat: Mr Deputy Speaker, I assure you before I begin that this is not a party political broadcast about my previous wonders as a mayor. Nevertheless, I declare an interest as I have been a member of Coleraine Borough Council for the past 33 years, which is exactly the length of time Our Lord lived on this earth, but I am not planning to depart just yet. The Bill has a great deal of credibility, and my party will broadly support it.

As Members have said, it is time to recognise that councillors played a major role down the years in trying to keep democracy alive. The name of Senator Paddy Wilson is recorded in one of the Rotundas in this Building. He was one of the first public representatives to lose his life in the dreadful times that we have gone through. As my colleague Mrs Kelly said, legislation is going through Westminster at the moment, to which we will look with interest. On a personal basis, I want to implement what I say, and since it is International Women's Day, I can tell Members that my replacement will be a woman.

The Bill is important because it provides the basis for discussion. There will be an opportunity for political parties to make whatever amendments that they feel appropriate. The fact that we are discussing double-jobbing means that progress has been made. When I set out in public life, it was virtually impossible to get anyone to stand for election such was the fear at that time. Also, there was no joy in living behind bulletproof glass and changing one's route to work every day.

On a positive note, things have moved on. I hope that today's discussion will be the preparation for a new generation who will, hopefully, have things easier than some of us did in the past and that democracy can be bedded down in a way that allows for enough flexibility for co-options. That is what we need more than anything at the moment. At times, those of us who are in councils where we are not the majority party take the word of other people before hearing about a by-election somewhere else. That makes one wonder. I think people know what I am saying. It is not entirely straightforward.

I am sure that every political party will apply itself positively to the Bill. I congratulate Dawn on bringing it forward. It is a piece of history.

Let us hope that many more private Member's Bills will come through this tortuous system successfully. This is another tier of the cake of democracy that we have all striven to work for and achieve.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Dawn Purvis as an Bhille seo a chur os ár gcomhair inniu. Beidh Sinn Féin ag tabhairt tacaíochta don Bhille seo.

I thank Dawn Purvis for proposing her private Member's Bill today. As other Members have said, it is a good piece of work by an individual MLA. It has brought an issue of great public debate to the Floor. As previously outlined by my party colleagues Cathal Boylan and Daithí McKay, Sinn Féin is broadly supportive of the Bill. We agree with the principle that there should be no dual mandates and that people should not be councillors and Members of the Assembly.

As a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, the issue of dual and multiple mandates is part of the Committee's forward work programme. I ask the proposer to be conscious of that Committee and to work closely with it and with the Environment Committee.

As has been said, the matter formed a large part of the discussion in the review of public administration. Therefore, we need to work with everyone involved to avoid any duplication or waste of public resources.

Arguments have been put forward about why there should not be an end to dual mandates now or in the future. We heard that councils are the first rung on the ladder, where the young and the inexperienced can cut their teeth. However, as Daithí McKay pointed out, an individual cannot be both a councillor and a TD in the Twenty-six Counties. All the same arguments were trotted out when that decision was made, and we have to avoid using them as a cover.

It may have been acceptable for people in the North to not want to give up their council jobs because of the fragility of the institutions. However, we need to have confidence in this institution and, indeed, in our party colleagues. It is not fair, right or proper for people to argue that they have to let go in order to give other people an opportunity. There are people within our party who are able and willing to do the job of a councillor and who do not see that role as

part of a graduation towards being an Assembly Member or whatever. They see it as part of the political work and programme in which we are involved. It may have been unintentional, but Members were almost patronising when they seemed to suggest that they could not let go of their jobs as councillors because the people coming behind them may not be good enough or experienced enough. We have to avoid that type of language, because it only adds to the sense that people want to hold on to their council jobs for the sake of holding on.

Members talked about lack of attendance, but that is a matter that parties have to be on top of. I listened to Stephen Farry talk about his previous role as Mayor of North Down Borough Council, Naomi Long's role as the Lord Mayor of Belfast and the good jobs that they have done. No one doubts that, and, indeed, my party colleagues have held similar roles. However, when people seek a mandate, they must be able to confidently say that the political representation will continue to be of the highest standards possible and that representative roles do not necessarily have to be carried out by the same people in each of the different institutions.

It will be better for all Members, all parties and everyone whom we represent when we have the confidence to say that our candidate is the best person to do the job. Danny Kinahan spoke about putting up big names for election. Any party that has to rely on the tactic of putting up a candidate who has to stand down three weeks later displays a lack of confidence. Indeed, the electorate will see through such a tactic and vote accordingly.

The Bill, in principle, captures what is right; it is not just a matter of capturing the popular mood. Members spoke about double-jobbing, expenses and other issues. Ending dual mandates is the right thing to do. Some representatives say that they work 18 hours a day when they are in the Assembly and then try to convince people that they have the other six hours to work as a councillor. We must provide the best representation possible, and that means representatives having single jobs.

Ms Purvis: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, from all sides of the House, for their consideration of the Bill, their supportive comments and the concerns that they expressed about the Bill.

I approached the Bill on the premise of every party in the House having committed itself to ending dual mandates. When I listened to Peter Weir, I wondered whether his party is still committed to the end of dual mandates. However, Mr Weir did raise issues about the practical implications of the Bill, particularly a situation in which someone might wish to stand in two elections that are held on the same day and find themselves disqualified from one of those. Indeed, I mentioned that possibility in my opening comments and I share concerns about that.

I said that, originally, I had considered a period of grace being a part of that, but it would have complicated the Bill. However, that can be considered at Committee Stage. I look forward to working with the Committee in trying to improve the Bill.

Mr Weir spoke about standards of democracy, and I spoke about public confidence and perceptions. He said — I paraphrase his words — that we should not allow public perception to dictate our policy. However, public perception is at the core of the health of our democracy. If the public have a negative perception of what Members try to do, it impacts on the level of public confidence in political institutions, including the Assembly and local government. Public perception is absolutely real. There is a problem with dual mandates, and if the majority of voters perceive that to be so, there is a problem.

Mr Weir spoke about co-option being an opportunity and the complementarity between the roles of councillor and MLA. He saw that as an advantage, which might be so. However, the public see no advantage in someone holding two elected positions at the same time. He misses the point of the dual mandate issue, which is about political power being held in a limited number of hands.

Mr Farry also missed the point when he spoke about a conflict of time, whereby one part-time job is not a job at all whereas the other job is full-time. The issue is that the public perceive two elected positions being held by the same person as being a concentration of power in that person.

Cathal Boylan rightly said that the issue is still about two jobs. He said that the public perception is important because it is extremely negative, and it affects the level of confidence in our institutions. He made a strong case based on conflict of interest.

Lord Morrow rightly spoke about the role that councillors played in the past. He recognised, as did other Members, the importance of that role and councillors' contributions to democracy in Northern Ireland. However, do we not want the opposite for our future? We are concerned about the here and now, and the building of public confidence in our political institutions so that we can bring in new blood and new people who are under-represented. That is what we are trying to work towards. It is not about harking back to the past but trying to create a better future.

Roy Beggs commended the brevity of the Bill and said that Northern Ireland's credibility has suffered because of dual and triple mandates. He pointed to the devolved institutions of Scotland and Wales, which brought in mechanisms to end dual mandates. He said that there are few elected representatives in Scotland and Wales who hold dual mandates. He asked how Members who hold down two jobs and spread themselves thinly can be effective. He outlined the personal cost for those who choose to do so. He also talked about the new super-councils and the increased responsibility for local councillors and how it would become more difficult to do two jobs. He said that it is better for elected representatives to be more rounded, and although we cannot legislate to end dual mandates between the Assembly and Westminster, it is right to concentrate on ending the dual mandates for which we can legislate.

5.30 pm

Roy Beggs rightly pointed out Arlene Foster's statement in March 2008 about ending dual mandates. The commitment was given, but no action was taken. This private Member's Bill came about because there was no action from the Minister responsible. The commitment was given in March 2008, and by December 2008 I decided to look at legislating against dual mandates, because there was no action.

Although some may argue that the Bill is populist, it has been in process — Daithí McKay spoke about the process of bringing forward a private Member's Bill — since December 2008. That shows how long and drawn-out a process it is to get a Bill to this stage. It is not a populist measure, as Stephen Farry said: wanting inclusive, transparent, participative democracy is not populist. The Bill is about the principles and values that we want to uphold in our democratic system.

Mrs D Kelly: I suppose it should come as no surprise that the Alliance Party is not currently for inclusive democracy, given that it signed up to the transfer of policing and justice powers on the basis of 'A Shared Future' document, which no one has seen.

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is this a discussion on local government or a discussion on policing and justice?

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, Dr Farry.

Ms Purvis: I thank Mrs Kelly for her intervention; she sums the matter up well. SDLP Members, as Mrs Kelly said, are broadly supportive of the Bill, although they raised concerns with which I have a great deal of sympathy. I look forward to working with the Committee on those concerns.

Mrs Kelly spoke about the greater representation of women and minorities, including young people, by opening up our politics and making it more representative. She appreciated, as did others, the service of local councillors but believed that co-option and the co-option mechanism, which we will, hopefully, have by the end of the month, will do away with expensive by-elections and help the passage of the Bill.

Mrs Kelly said that public perception in this place was a huge piece of work and she understood the levels to which we have to go to build public confidence. She raised an important point about the Committee looking at those who sit in the House of Lords, for example; that may be something for the Committee to examine with regard to ending dual mandates between local government and the Lords, MEPs and those at Westminster. I look forward to working with Mrs Kelly and others through the Committee.

Mr Farry said that he thought that there may not be a need to legislate in advance of the next election, although I was unclear about his argument why. He talked about his party's achievements in its representative nature in selecting people for election and the number of people whom they have elected. However, I notice an absence of those from a disadvantaged social and economic background.

Dr Farry: For the Member's information, my father worked in a factory and was unemployed for many years, and Naomi Long comes from a single-parent family in Mersey Street. Therefore I wonder whether the Member wishes to

retract that comment about the breadth of the advantage or disadvantage among Alliance representatives.

Ms Purvis: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I have absolutely no intention of retracting that comment. I probably enforce the perception that others have about the Alliance Party being a middle-class party.

Stephen Farry said that there was a flaw in the Bill in that if a vacancy arose it would fall back to the party initially to fill. I do not see why that is a flaw when it is up to the party to select the candidates in the first place, and if the party was committed to achieving a diverse group of candidates for election, surely it would be committed to filling a place with like?

That is a matter for parties, not for this Bill. He talked about conflicts of interest, and rightly agreed that an MLA who is also a Minister and a councillor has a conflict of interest because they could be involved in decisions that concern local councils. However, he said that the roles of MLA and councillor could be in harmony.

The Member also talked about a conflict of time, which I have addressed already. He said that he does not see being a councillor in local government as a job, but I have difficulty with that. If a person receives benefits through their elected office, they receive benefits in kind. Therefore, it is seen as a job. Mr Farry misses the point of this Bill. If his party is committed to ending dual mandates, it should support the Bill.

Daithí McKay talked about the importance of ending dual mandates as it would bring forward under-represented groups. He talked about legislation in the Republic of Ireland that allows councillors to become TDs to vacant council seats and allow co-option. He said that this is a short but important piece of legislation that will herald a new beginning for local government with new responsibilities, which is what we are trying to achieve by ending dual mandates. It is an opportunity for change.

Danny Kinahan stated his intention to stand down from council as soon as the co-option becomes law. He does not believe that he would be able to do both jobs. I appreciate his honesty. He said that we need new blood, and he paid tribute to councillors and their work. Like many others, he would like to see more women and ethnic groups involved in politics. He said that that would show that Northern Ireland is not as divided as

it is perceived. Like others, he was concerned that a big name could be used to stand and then stand down to let in a new and unknown person. That is the potential in this Bill. Mr Kinahan also talked about the need for change in our electoral system. He said that MLAs' offices should be opened up to partnership working with councils. He talked about the need to encourage more people, particularly young people, into politics, and he criticised the fact that those who work for government are not allowed to stand for election. He said that that needs to be reviewed.

Raymond McCartney said that Sinn Féin was broadly supportive of the Bill. The issue of dual mandates is part of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's forward work programme, and he highlighted the need for me and others to work closely together, particularly with the Environment Committee, to ensure that there is no overlap. He said that that would get the best out of this Bill as regards any amendments.

Mr McCartney also raised the same issue as Daithí McKay: that a person in the Republic of Ireland cannot be a councillor as well as a TD. In addition, he raised the issue of employment insurance, which I brought up at the very start. There is a need to have confidence in this institution. Holding on to another mandate does not demonstrate a sense of confidence; it demonstrates a lack of confidence in moving forward. He said that when people seek a mandate, they have confidence that they will carry out their duties to the best of their ability. In addition, he said that the Bill catches what is right, and that it is the right thing to do.

I really appreciate the points that were made by everyone today. This Bill shows what is good about our institutions and our Assembly. It shows that politics can work. There is an opportunity to show our voters and the public that we are serious about ending the practice of dual mandates, within a specific time frame towards which every party is committed to working. All parties are on record as favouring the end of dual mandates. My question is: why the delay? I look forward to working with the Committee, and I thank Members for their consideration.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Local Government (Disqualification) (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/09] be agreed.

Private Members' Business

Farm Modernisation Programme

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee previously agreed that when two or more amendments have been selected, additional time may be allocated at the Speaker's discretion. As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes 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 Elliott: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to bring forward fair and practical criteria for implementation of tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme.

As the day moves on, people may lose interest in some of the matters that we debate, but this is a very important issue for a wide range of our people, particularly in the agriculture and farming community. I declare an interest as a farmer and a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU). My declaration comes from a slightly different angle: sometimes, one declares an advantageous interest, but, in common with those surrounding it, my farm is in a severely disadvantaged area. I am not sure whether Members want to refer to me as a severely disadvantaged farmer, but that is the classification of the area from which I come.

We must first look at tranche 1 of the farm modernisation scheme, which is part of the rural development programme. When we saw queues lasting for at least one full night for applications for tranche 1, most people realised that the delivery mechanism was pretty much an abysmal failure. That is not to say that the Minister and the Department were not warned. Months previously, I had warned that the application process for the farm modernisation scheme would be like the January sales queues. That spectacle disappointed farmers, because our community got a lot of very bad press at the time, with some media commentators likening the application process to soup kitchen queues. Others questioned how desperate farmers must be to queue up all night for a few thousand

pounds. That is how the event was portrayed in the media.

The mechanism that was used resulted in a large section of the farming community not getting any support or help at all. I am sure that the Minister will put me right when she speaks, but, from memory, I think that of the more than 9,000 applications for tranche 1 of the farm modernisation scheme, something over 1,200 — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. If Members wish to carry on private conversations, they should do so outside the Chamber. It is difficult enough to hear what the Member is saying.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was saying that of the more than 9,000 applications for tranche 1, I think that only around 1,200 applicants got letters of offer. That was a huge disappointment for the nearly 8,000 farmers who submitted unsuccessful applications. Those farmers feel that a better system must be put in place.

I was accused here last week by the Minister's party colleague Mr McElduff of never saying anything positive in the Chamber. However, on this matter, I felt much more positive that the Department was bringing forward criteria-based proposals as part of a fairly simplified process that was not laden with bureaucracy, as so often happens with such applications.

I felt that that was helpful and positive. However, when we saw the criteria, we felt somewhat differently. Out of a total of 95 marks, one criterion — farming in a severely disadvantaged area — produced 36 marks, which equates to more than 36% of the marks that one could possibly get for being in a single land classification. We did not believe that that was fair or practical. When we raised the matter with the Minister, at first, she proposed awarding nil marks for lowland farmers. Eventually, she raised that to 10 marks.

5.45 pm

I am not saying that land classification should not be a criterion at all. Some people think that it should not, but I believe that land classification should be included in the mechanism, although in a much smaller range. For example, submitting one's application by e-mail is a criterion for which one is awarded five marks; whereas, delivering it by hand or

posting it do not qualify for any marks. That is a difference of only five marks. If the difference between severely disadvantaged areas and lowland areas ranged from five to 10 marks, most farmers could live with it. We want further engagement and consultation about such outcomes. When an organisation such as the Ulster Farmers' Union, which represents a wide and varied range of farmers from throughout the community, including hill farmers, who, incidentally, come mainly from severely disadvantaged areas, supports the farmers' view that the proposals are not fair or right, the Minister must appreciate the community's enormous opposition to them.

An equality impact assessment (EQIA) should be carried out on the proposals. The Department carried out an equality impact assessment on the rural development programme. The farm modernisation programme will severely affect one section of the farming community — lowland farmers — and we can assess from which community the majority of those farmers come. I have heard it suggested that it amounts to sectarian discrimination. Therefore, an equality impact assessment must be carried out on the proposed scheme.

I am also disappointed that the Minister has yet to tell the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development whether the scheme is past the post. Will there be no turning back? We need to know — I hope that the Minister will address the point — whether there is still room for discussion and consultation. In order to establish a fairer way forward, we want discussions to involve the Ulster Farmers' Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association (NIAPA), the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and, indeed, all other interested groups.

The age of the farmer is another criterion that has been used. To be fair, I support that, because young farmers need such assistance. They are the farmers of the future. Compared to other businesses, the average age of farmers in Northern Ireland is very high. Therefore, we must do all that we can to encourage the young farmer. E-communication and submitting applications by e-mail is a positive move. Hopefully, that will cut bureaucracy and paperwork for the farming community.

The degree of modernisation is another criterion that gives me concern. How will that

be calculated? Is a yard sweeper a less modern piece of equipment than a cow cubicle, or is a tractor sprayer more modern than a grass topper? It will be interesting to see how all that is worked out. I do not believe that there should be a 20-point difference between top- and low-level equipment. That gap is much too wide. If the money is for modernisation, it should be for modernisation: full stop. I do not know where the top level and low level come in.

I wonder whether the Minister has clearly thought through the matter with the union, the Committee and NIAPA, in order to explore all the other avenues fully, because I am aware that other proposals were put forward that the Department has not accepted. For example, one suggestion was that people engaged in full-time farming would be one criterion, and that, perhaps, there could be a bracket for full-time and part-time farmers. Many farmers come from lowland areas, and a lot of them rely on farming and agriculture for their sole income; those people need help.

The Minister has indicated that one of the reasons for using the severely disadvantaged area land classification is that she wants to target disadvantaged areas, but surely the less-favoured area compensatory allowance does that, because there is a payment for severely disadvantaged and disadvantaged areas. However, there is no payment for lowland areas. In fact, severely disadvantaged areas get more than £40 per hectare and disadvantaged areas get in the region of £20 per hectare. I ask the Minister and the Department to review the decision urgently.

Mr P J Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "Development" and insert

'to re-engage immediately in discussions with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association with a view to bringing forward fair and practical criteria for implementation of tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme.'

I have no difficulty with the motion and with amendment No 2. It is a pity that we did not get together and draft one motion, because I can live with the motion and both amendments.

The last two decades have seen a marked decline in farming activities across the North, and nowhere is it more in evidence than on farms located in severely disadvantaged areas

and less-favoured areas (LFAs). On a drive through the countryside, it is clear to see that everything is not as it should be. Farm buildings and farm land are in a dilapidated state as a result of inactivity. The decline began when many farmers of small farms could no longer make a living from their holdings. Therefore, to supplement their income, they took up employment mainly in the construction industry, in quarries and in construction related businesses. As we all know, such opportunities are no longer available; but, if such farmers were sufficiently encouraged, I know that many of them would only be too willing to reactivate their small farms. They are located mostly in less-favoured areas. They are not looking to purchase combine harvesters, John Deere 8RT series tractors, or top-of-the-range machinery; but, given a sufficient level of encouragement and financial support, they could become active again.

As I have said, the lack of farming activity on many small farms has resulted in the deterioration of sheds, farmyards and out-offices. It should be the aim of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and all interested parties to make some preparation that would encourage part-time farmers and farmers of small farms to become active in farming activities. That appears to be what the Minister is planning to do, and I have no difficulty with it. Indeed, I welcome such an incentive. However, there is one thing that we must not do in the process, and that is to ignore the full-time, more productive, farmers who form the backbone of the agriculture industry that we are all so proud of and that so many people depend on. I look back to the nights of 15 February and 16 February 2009 when farmers queued for up to 60 hours outside DARD offices hoping to get a slice of the farm modernisation programme. Many of them were unsuccessful. The vast majority simply had to accept what happened then and be prepared to wait for the announcement of tranche 2.

Had the Minister made some effort this time to assist those disappointed farmers, we might not be having this debate today. However, by her proposal for tranche 2, the Minister is walking along the line to single people out in a "you", "not you" manner, which is a totally unacceptable manner of selection.

In February 2009, and as the old saying goes, many were called but few were chosen. It should not happen like that again. I accept that getting

the balance right might be difficult to achieve, but some form of pro-rata arrangement must be agreed. I am aware that the Minister met with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association and that no agreement was reached.

I believe that the SDLP amendment is the road to follow, as it will introduce further professional debate to the issue. I say "professional", as both unions referred to in the amendment have played active roles on behalf of their members, and they deserve praise from everyone for their dedication to the farming industry.

I do not wish to be told by anyone today that we have no money. Recently, I sent the Minister a question for written answer in which I questioned her on the amount of money that has been deducted from the single farm payment cheques. She informed me that the sums collected in the past three years were: €28.7 million in 2007; €34.25 million in 2008; and €38.7 million in 2009. In 2004-05, when the Minister was determined to increase the sums being deducted from the single farm payment, we were told that a large percentage of the funding would be returned to the farming community via improvement schemes. Given that €101.6 million has been collected as a result of the modulation process in the past three years, surely sufficient funding should be available to allow the Minister not only to deliver on the proposals for the less-favoured areas but to make an accommodation for lowland farmers who have been denied equality.

Other questions could be raised about the €101.6 million and about how it has been allocated. For example, how much of it has gone to full-time farmers? How much has gone on non-farming projects? How much has gone towards administration? However, those questions provide material for another debate on another day.

I have a number of questions for the Minister on her proposals. Will she confirm that her proposals were equality proofed? Mr Elliott touched on that. Is the Minister certain that her proposals are beyond legal challenge? If she is, will she provide the Chairperson or the Committee Clerk of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development with a copy of the advice that she was given?

I note that points are to be given under the heading "Succession opportunity". I have some

difficulty with that element of the proposal. Perhaps the Minister will explain her thinking behind the succession benefits. I agree that all of us must support young farmers. In fact, most people would describe a farmer who is in his or her 40s as a relatively young or even middle-aged person, who, perhaps, has children of primary school age. I could accept the age of 60 being given in this instance, but I fail to understand why those who have crossed their fortieth birthday are to be denied points solely because they are considered too old.

I recognise that the Minister does not always carry out the wishes of the House or, for that matter, those of the Committee. Therefore, it is important that she meets immediately with the Ulster Farmers' Union and NIAPA in an effort to reach an agreement that will be acceptable to the farming community in general. The Minister must listen closely to the voices of the industry.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, lest there be any confusion, and for your clarification, regardless of whether amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 can still be made.

Mr Irwin: I beg to move amendment No 2: At end insert

“; and to ensure that, following the underspend in the manure efficiency technology subprogramme (METS) in tranche 1, more farmers are given an opportunity to access the METS element in tranche 2.”

In moving amendment No 2, I should say that we support the motion, and I am assured that the proposers of the motion support our amendment.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I declare an interest as a farmer. The farm modernisation programme has been a welcome benefit to those farmers in Northern Ireland who were successful in the first round of funding. At its core, the programme has the capacity to help farming here to improve its competitiveness and to meet new challenges in the sector. However, we have heard and are aware of a number of important issues that have come to light following the administration of the first tranche. We have grave concerns over the proposals that the Minister has issued on criteria for the second tranche.

I have received many calls from concerned farmers stating that they are unhappy with the Minister's proposals at this time. The Minister

stated her desire to target less-favoured areas in the second tranche. Although I have no problem with the scheme being open to farmers in less-favoured areas, it is wrong to focus the majority of the scoring on land classification.

For a Minister who regularly triumphs the word “equality”, this is an inequality for lowland farmers. Making the second tranche open, fair and based on equal opportunity must be addressed. The current proposed criteria effectively close the door to lowland farmers by weighing the scoring heavily towards severely disadvantaged areas, and the negative message that that will send out to lowland farmers will be damaging to the industry. That has to be addressed through the Department's use of criteria, based on equality.

6.00 pm

As regards my party's amendment, which concerns the manure efficiency technology subprogramme, many lessons are there to be learned on how the Department could greatly improve administrative procedures in order to better spend available cash and, of course, assist more farmers. Figures that I obtained in a written answer from the Minister show that £1.68 million was allocated to that subprogramme. A commendable 853 applications were received. Of those 853 applications, 176 were considered successful. However, just 117 of those applicants accessed the available funding, which left a clear underspend. The Minister confirmed to me that 59 applicants would not be proceeding with their investment, for a variety of reasons.

We all realise that plans can change rapidly in the agriculture business, especially in the current economic climate, in which banks are ever more cautious. I understand fully why some farmers did not go through with their METS projects. The important fact is that a significant amount of METS funding has not been spent. Ultimately, the Department should have had a system in place that went to the next applicant and invited him or her to draw down that funding. Of course, that did not happen. Unfortunately, other applicants had their applications sent back, rather than held in a queue, which meant that, in order to spend the unspent cash, the Department would have to reinstate applications, which would incur yet more administration costs.

In her written response, the Minister suggested to me that farmers are reluctant to make substantial investments in that type of equipment in the current economic climate. I argue that the Minister's conclusion is not reflective of the situation, given the vast number of applications that were received — 853, to be precise.

There is also concern that removing the METS element will mean that the hundreds of unsuccessful farmers who have waited patiently to avail themselves of the second tranche will be unable to do so and will, undoubtedly, feel short-changed by the Department. The level of interest that has been shown in the subprogramme has been proven by the number of applications to the first tranche. I ask the Minister to reopen the METS element in tranche 2 and, through better administration practices, to ensure that the allocation is fully spent.

The Minister and her Department must go back to the drawing board and address deep concerns about the proposed criteria and inequalities in the second tranche. She must also ensure that the many farmers who have been waiting for the reopening of the METS programme in the next tranche are given the opportunity to avail themselves of that important funding element.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has brought forward fair and practical criteria for the implementation of tranche 2 of the farm modernisation scheme. I contend that it is the duty of the Department and the Minister to target disadvantage and to deal with inequality in her sector of responsibility. That does not mean that the Department should hand out the same sum of money to every applicant; it means that there is a responsibility to create a level playing field for everybody concerned. The Minister and her Department have attempted to do that in the delivery of tranche 2 of the farm modernisation scheme.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member agree that giving 35 points, which is well over a third of the total number of points, to someone who farms in a severely disadvantaged area is a fair and equal way to do that?

Mr Doherty: I thought that I covered that when I made my point about a level playing field. Perhaps, in time, the Member will understand what that means.

I also note that NIAPA and the National Beef Association support the scheme. The Ulster Farmers' Union has some concerns. However, in the second last paragraph of its letter to Minister Gildernew, dated 5 February 2009, which was copied to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, it states:

"Despite our concerns around the delivery of tranche 2 of the Farm Modernisation Scheme the UFU recognises that there are some very positive aspects of the scheme; most notably that it represents a significant amount of support to help farmers modernise their businesses, and promotes substantial expenditure in the rural economy. The simple application form used in tranche 1 should also be commended."

Although the UFU was concerned, at least it saw some solid value in the proposals. The Committee met members of the Ulster Farmers' Union on 9 February and asked questions on their submission. They talked about awarding at least five marks for lowland farmers. In the event, the Minister listened, took their advice and went on to award 10 marks. Therefore, there has been consultation and a degree of listening.

I draw the attention of the House to a letter that everyone in the Committee agreed to send to the Department on 2 July 2009, which highlighted the following possibilities for inclusion in tranche 2. I will not read out the content of the letter, but I will highlight the six key points. The first is aid to encourage young farmers to enter or remain in the industry; that has been covered. The second is support to poultry farmers; that has also been covered. The third is grants to fruit growers; again, that has been covered. The fourth is targeting small farmers; that has most certainly been covered. The fifth is modernisation of energy provision, and the sixth is modernisation of facilities for pig farmers.

Mr Irwin: Fruit farmers are, in the main, in the Loughgall/Armagh area. I am not aware of any in the less-favoured areas.

Mr Doherty: That is fair enough, and I believe that the Minister has responded to that. However, when the Committee wrote to the Minister and the Department in July 2009, they took account of all that it said. As they have gone through that process, it is unfair to try to accuse the Minister and the Department of not creating a level playing field. I support the motion, even though the Members opposite have yet to consider why.

Mr Ford: At the outset, I declare my wife's shared interest in a family farm, which is in an original LFA or severely disadvantaged area (SDA), and, therefore, probably much of what I will say will be seen as arguing against her personal interests.

I congratulate Tom Elliott and his colleagues on tabling the motion. My initial response was something the same as that given by P J Bradley when he proposed his amendment and said that he supported the original motion as amended by him to refer to consultation issues and with the addition of the DUP amendment. Having just heard Mr Doherty's response to that, I advise the proposer of the motion to accept the SDLP's amendment or he will be seen as not having stated what needs to be stated: that there has been insufficient consultation and that there needs to be much greater consultation, particularly with the Ulster Farmers' Union and NIAPA, to ensure that the matter is dealt with properly.

If we look at the criteria in the most recent revision of the scheme — this scheme has been through a number of different revisions — it is clear that no one could object to the notion of a small number of marks being awarded for encouraging e-communications. That is part of modernisation. However, broadband communication is less easy in more remote rural areas than it is in other areas. By the same token, the concept of handling succession issues by awarding a modest number of marks seems entirely reasonable. However, whether a 40-year-old is young, middle-aged or old is a matter that will generate some discussion.

Once we hit the modernisation marks, an issue arises that will create difficulties. As someone said, what is modern on one farm may still be something that is to be aimed for on another. There are real issues as to whether modernisation can be seen in such a simplistic, cut-off way, in which points are awarded for certain items but not for others. I am not entirely surprised that that seems to be one of the reasons why the UFU was unhappy to engage with the Department in dealing with the issue. I am not sure how one can categorise what is more modernising and what is less modernising on a simplistic basis across the whole region, when, clearly, some farms are already more modern and advanced than others.

The major issue that has caused so much concern is the issue that I referred to at the beginning: the fact that land classification

carries such a substantial number of marks. That effectively means that, even if someone is getting marks for e-communications, youthfulness and the most modernising equipment, if they do not fall within a disadvantaged area (DA) — potentially even a severely disadvantaged area — they will have major difficulties in getting any money at all under the scheme. That is the point where the scheme is fundamentally unfair and is failing to meet the aim of modernising farming across every part of Northern Ireland, not just in one particular area. I believe it is wrong, simply because every farmer has had money taken from him or her through so-called voluntary modulation, which may be voluntary according to the determination of government but is certainly not voluntary according to the determination of the farm.

There are real issues about the way in which the scheme appears to be attempting to balance out other schemes in a way that is fundamentally unfair. There are other schemes that are more likely to benefit people in less-favoured areas but do not completely rule out applications from lowland farmers. It seems that it is easier to get countryside management grants or some of the forestry grants in less-favoured areas than it is in the lowland. Yet, those schemes do not rule out applications from lowland farmers; they are simply schemes that deliver in such a way. To attempt to compensate for those schemes by twisting this scheme seems to be fundamentally wrong, because the way to compensate for those schemes is to ensure that grants are given fairly in every scheme, regardless of how to apply.

It seems that the Minister has questions to answer as to why there was so little consultation. If there was no proper consultation with the stakeholders, that would seem to be fundamentally at variance with what we would expect. In particular, when we consider all that went wrong with the first tranche of the scheme, those ludicrous pictures of people queuing endlessly in order to apply for the scheme have surely highlighted the absolute need to get tranche 2 right —

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

Mr Ford: — and not to go through a further and difficult decision on the way in which this tranche operates.

Dr W McCrea: I wish to express my grave concern at the decision of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to deliver tranche 2 of the farm modernisation scheme in the manner that she has proposed. I accept that the manner in which the first tranche was delivered was not acceptable to Europe and that, therefore, relevant and necessary changes had to be made. We all acknowledge that. However, the steps taken by the Minister to change the scheme are, in my opinion, unacceptable to many in the agriculture industry and are looked upon by many as discriminatory.

I am not saying that there is nothing in the scheme that is worthy to be kept; many things are, but changes need to be made. Should the Minister be permitted to proceed with her present proposals, they would be detrimental to a large number of farmers from whom the money was taken in the first place. The lowland farmers would be disadvantaged significantly and denied a fair and equitable opportunity to access limited funding for farm modernisation.

One of the major faults with the proposed scheme is the manner in which the Minister decided and announced it without proper and meaningful consultation with stakeholders, the unions or even the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. To present a scheme that is a fait accompli is scandalous, and one must ask why there was so much secrecy. The Committee has asked for certain papers; we will wait to see whether those and all the relevant documents have actually been presented to the Committee.

Let me make it clear: I do not wish to discriminate against any sector of the farming industry, whether it is in less favoured, severely disadvantaged or lowland areas. All I wish to do is ensure that all farmers have an equal opportunity to modernise their farm and be eligible to do so. What is wrong with such a position? The Minister's scheme, as it stands, will deliberately disadvantage many people simply because they happen not to be in a particular area. To virtually exclude such people from a modernisation programme would surely be detrimental to the future of the industry and would be an act of open discrimination.

6.15 pm

I had hoped that a way forward could have been found that would satisfy the vast majority of farmers in the Province. Unfortunately, however,

that has not been possible because of the Minister's intransigence. The Ulster Farmers' Union has proposed a greater number of criteria than have been selected by the Department, and the outworking of that would provide a more acceptable spread. The real sting in the tail from the Minister has been the fact that one single criterion, land classification, has been allocated such a high percentage of overall marks.

I understand the right of any individual to hold political aspirations, but those cannot be carried into a scheme in the agriculture industry. Farmers throughout Northern Ireland have given so much to the Province and to its prosperity in good times and in difficult times over the years that I cannot allow party politics to influence the right of a Minister to discriminate against farmers. The issue is sensitive, and it strikes at the heart of equality. Reducing equity of opportunity is against the Programme for Government and the other fundamentals that have been proclaimed and are supposedly held sacred by the Assembly, although, it seems, only when it suits.

I therefore call on the Assembly to demand that the Minister takes back the proposal and the present scheme and that she not only assists a particular grouping in the farming industry but allows equity of treatment and opportunity for all farmers. That is in the best interests of the Province's greatest industry.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the modernisation proposals that have been put forward under tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme. Members complained about the way that tranche 1 was administered at the time, said that it was embarrassing and raised other issues.

The Ulster Farmers' Union raised a number of points in its briefing paper that I wish to question. It said that lower land is virtually excluded from assessment under the modernisation programme. As my colleague Pat Doherty pointed out, the Ulster Farmers' Union proposed that five marks be allocated for that group of farmers in a specific area. The Minister accepted that and has, in fact, doubled that by allocating 10 marks.

We have not heard complaints about those who were excluded in the past. When the dairy sector and the beef sector received funding, we did not hear about farmers in less-favoured areas who had not received funding. No one spoke on their behalf to ensure that they

received funding. The Ulster Farmers' Union has proposed six criteria that it feels could be part of the programme. It appears that the Minister and the Department have taken on board a number of those points, excluded some and added others, and they have done so to create equality and a level playing field.

Equality does not mean that everyone gets the same when privilege and rank already exist. Equality means trying to create a level playing field, not dealing with it by making double payments to others. One of the proposals from the Ulster Farmers' Union is that those who are getting single farm payments should get another payment. Those people already get a single farm payment, and some of them get an amount that is in excess of what they would have ever got from business. Double payments are not a way of doing it.

Young farmers are included in the scheme, as is the option to apply online. Full-time farmers already get the payment, and some are farming in less-favoured areas. Those people would not be excluded from that position.

DARD's census figures show that 58% of dairy farms, 77% of beef and sheep farms, 76% of suckler cows and 80% of all sheep are in less-favoured areas. Given those figures, it is clear why the farm modernisation programme targets farms in those areas.

We must move on. It should no longer be said that the people who applied for a grant the last time but failed should get a second chance before those who were excluded in the past and who have yet to get a chance to apply for the first time. I am sure that the debate about the farm modernisation programme will continue, because different people have different interpretations. Some people view the provision of a machine on a farm in a less-favoured area as modernisation. Such people would also like those who are well off to get even more money. That goes back to the point about 20% of people owning 80% of the wealth; that is not equality. Therefore, when we talk about equality, we need to deal with it. The advice from Europe is that those who work in difficult areas of farming should be supported in any new tranche of funding, and the scheme is in keeping with that recommendation.

Some Members said that the programme discriminates against certain areas. Those Members cannot have it both ways. You cannot

drive people up hills and into bogs, as Cromwell did, and then say, when those people start to make money, that they should not get funding. Those who were discriminated against by the old Stormont regime, driven off good land and put into debt cannot be excluded again from receiving money. We must be fair. We are long past the stage when advisers from the Agriculture Department went round Orange Halls advising the Protestant and unionist community of what they were entitled to, while excluding the broad community from the funding to which they were entitled. Those days are over, and change has happened. We are now moving to —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Continue, Mr Molloy.

Mr Molloy: We are now moving to real equality, where everyone is treated equally and where everyone has the same opportunities.

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

Mr Molloy: Everyone will get the same opportunity to apply for funding. The programme recognises those in less-favoured areas so that they can get funding to modernise their farms.

Mr Shannon: I wish to make it clear and put it on the record that I am not aware of any Agriculture Department officials going round Orange Halls to encourage people to do that. That did not happen. What the Member said is more akin to 'Jackanory' than factual evidence.

I must have missed the memo that said that Camelot has taken over the allocation of funding from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. I was unaware that we are advocating a postcode lottery system in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Make no mistake: that is exactly what is being proposed, which is why we are concerned about it.

I have consulted the Ulster Farmers' Union about the issue, and I declare an interest as a member of that union for some 25 years. I live on a modern farm within a farming community, and I have seen at first hand the need for modernisation on all farms in the Province. There is a strong farming tradition in Northern Ireland. Given that farms have been handed down through the generations and that it is currently difficult to turn a profit on a farm, it is obvious that paying a mortgage and the food bills, buying a new tractor when the old one

finally quits and ensuring that the farm meets health and safety standards while still paying for normal day-to-day bills ensures that the improvement and modernisation of farms, while important, is far down the list of what can be done with present funds.

We are all aware of the reasons why issues arose with the first tranche of the scheme and why the second tranche needed to be different. However, it is clear that the Minister, for whatever reasons, has not grasped the need for equitable and fair criteria.

The UFU haes allooeed at Aa fairmers wha pit catter intae the scheme maun bae fit tae access hit. Hit bes unnerpinned bae thair catter niver min' airt ir cless o' fairmin. Thon bes a notion at A gree wi completely, fundin' maun bae thair fer ivrieboadie at hes need fer hit an' no oan a poast code lottery at bes what the Minister bes indicatin' micht happen bae targetin' airts o' specific need onie.

The Ulster Farmers' Union has said that all farmers who contribute financially must be able to access a scheme that is underpinned by that money, irrespective of location or sector. I totally agree with that. Funding must be made available to all who need it and must not be based on a postcode lottery, which is what may happen if only areas of specific need are targeted. All farms in the Province should be allowed to apply for a grant no matter where they are located, and criteria should be based on a fair points system that does not automatically exclude a farm simply because it is located beside other thriving farms.

The Minister has not taken into consideration the views of the farming community or elected representatives in that no meaningful consultation has taken place. The Ulster Farmers' Union consulted its internal policy committees, which are made up of 400 members from all sectors and all areas, including the less-favoured areas, to discuss possible options for the delivery of tranche 2, bearing in mind the need for new selection criteria. A clear recommendation came from the broad church of the Ulster Farmers' Union. At a meeting on 23 September, a final position was agreed on the six criteria that, it was felt, would allow all farmers a fair opportunity to access funding but, at the same time, would allow a selection process to be carried out. The top six criteria — that sounds similar to something from 'Top of the Pops',

which I remember from long ago — are farmers who were successful in tranche 1; younger farmers; full-time farmers; farmers with any simple management records; farmers with agricultural qualifications; and farmers who submit online. The Ulster Farmers' Union is concerned that only four eligibility criteria have been selected by DARD as a greater number of criteria would provide a more equitable spread of opportunity. The Ulster Farmers' Union has clearly indicated where the problems are.

The points system that the Department plans to implement will mean that more than 36% of the overall marks will be allocated to the land classification category. We request that that be changed. The farm modernisation scheme is not the way to do that. Instead, it should be done through the existing less-favoured area compensatory allowances. Some 13,000 LFA farmers avail themselves of that scheme, and that is the system that should be used.

I also express concern over the METS scheme, as was mentioned by my colleague when he moved our amendment. The scheme is necessary to deliver environmental objectives and, through tranche 2, should be open to all who need access to it. The need for modernisation is not confined simply to severely disadvantaged areas but applies to disadvantaged farms no matter what their allocation. That is the point that we make in our amendment.

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

Mr Shannon: I ask Members to support the DUP amendment and, by so doing, support the Ulster farmer.

Mr Savage: I declare an interest. I support the motion in my name and the names of two of my party colleagues. We are happy to accept the DUP amendment, as it raises a relevant issue that needs to be explored. However, we have concerns about the SDLP amendment, as it only suggests re-engagement:

"with a view to bringing forward fair and practical criteria".

The reality is that criteria must be brought forward urgently.

The motion concerns an issue around which there is tremendous strength and depth of feeling, especially following the events surrounding tranche 1. We trust that the Department has

learnt many lessons in that regard, and I remind the Minister of her duty to serve and support all farmers across Northern Ireland.

Members should take note of the farm modernisation programme's purpose. It is designed to provide financial support for existing farm businesses to improve overall performance on their farms through modernisation. That, in turn, may lead to farm expansion, which is to be welcomed.

On 12 January 2009, in a DARD press release, the Minister outlined tranche 1 and stated that £15.25 million would be made available in funding. The press release went on to say that that £15.25 million would include administration costs. I ask the Minister to give a breakdown of how that £15.25 million was spent, detailing how much went to farmers across Northern Ireland and how much was spent on administration costs. My concern is that the funds were from the modulation money, which was given up voluntarily and in good faith by farmers from their single farm payment. The funds ought to be used to benefit farms across Northern Ireland and not spent on administration. Modulation money should not be squandered, and it was not meant to be used in that way.

I am concerned that, under tranche 2 plans, more than 36% of the overall marks have been allocated to land classification. That decision may disadvantage other applicants, and that may leave tranche 2 open to legal challenge and thus to further delay. That is an avenue that we do not want to go down.

To ensure that an equitable spread of opportunity exists, our party, along with the House, shares the objectives of the Ulster Farmers' Union.

All farmers who contribute via voluntary modulations should be able to access the programme, which, after all, is underpinned by their money.

6.30 pm

It appears that DARD has failed to properly consult on this issue. Indeed, I have been told that the approach taken by the Department towards the Ulster Farmers' Union has been nothing short of appalling. DARD must not only invite stakeholders to its offices, but must allow them to have their say. The Ulster Farmers'

Union has told me that between October 2009 and 20 January 2010, the Department refused to facilitate a meeting to discuss tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme. If that is true, I am most concerned at the Department treating farmers' representatives with such contempt.

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

All sides of the House want to see the farm modernisation programme delivering for farmers across Northern Ireland. To that end, I call on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to introduce fair and practical criteria for the implementation of tranche 2 of the programme. I ask Members to give the matter the consideration that it deserves and to support the motion and amendment No 2.

On a personal note, farmers want to work with and not against the Minister —

Mr P J Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Savage: No; I am nearly finished.

We do not want to put obstacles in the Minister's way, but I plead with her to allow the farmers to do what they do best, which is to farm. If the Minister supports farmers, we will support her.

Mr Burns: I support the amendment tabled by the SDLP. I am not a farmer nor do I belong to any of the farming unions. However, I live in the countryside and I want to make a brief contribution to the debate.

I am glad that the motion is before the House, because many farmers seem to be very unhappy with the Minister's proposals. I will not get into the fine detail of every criterion, how each is applied, and the different sets of circumstances, but everyone agrees that there is a need for modernisation on every farm, and that we must do everything that we can to make the farming industry as competitive as possible. The recession has hit us all hard, the farming industry always seems to be struggling even in the best of times, and we must not make life even more difficult for farmers. However, that is what the farmers are saying is happening, and they are saying it very loudly.

On a personal note, I agree with the position of the Ulster Farmers' Union. It has been very critical of the Minister's handling of tranche 2 of the programme, and all of us with an interest

in the topic will be aware of the very public disagreements that have been aired in the media. The farmers have argued strongly that the scoring system that the Minister wants to introduce will rule out lowland farmers, and we have heard many complaints about the manure technology system and how farmers will not be able to apply for extra money to bring in the latest technology. I understand the points that farmers have made. They are very angry, they feel that there was a lack of proper consultation, they claim that the ideas that they put forward were ignored, and they protest that hundreds of farmers have made applications for grants and only a few have been successful. They also feel that they have been personally snubbed by the Minister and her Department.

Farmers have told me that the decisions that the Minister has made on the farm modernisation programme have been poor and that if she wants to support farmers in less-favoured areas, it could be done through an enhancement of the EU's farmers in less-favoured areas payment scheme, rather than through the farm modernisation programme. They also feel that if that programme does not allow farmers in certain areas to get access to the latest equipment, it will send out the wrong message about the benefits of embracing and using new technology, which will put us dangerously out of step with EU policies.

The Minister, in common with all Members, wants to do her best for all farmers, particularly those who experience genuine hardship and disadvantage. However, we must avoid a repeat of the shambles of the first tranche, when farmers with blankets queued overnight on deckchairs outside DARD offices. Lessons must be learned from that. The Minister and her officials must take time to listen to the farmers, take their concerns on board and take their opinions seriously. The farmers are best placed to know what it will take for the agriculture industry to become and remain more competitive. I support the SDLP amendment.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The entire House shares the view that it has been a difficult period for all sectors of the agriculture and horticulture industries and for society as a whole. The programme will provide farm businesses with fiscal support to invest in new technology to modernise their holdings, and it will provide a stimulus to the local economy.

We should bear in mind that 70% of farms are located in disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged areas and that some schemes are better suited to certain areas than to others. In many instances, farmers cannot avail themselves of the grants under the farm modernisation programme. Many farmers from less-favoured areas could not avail themselves of the METS scheme in the first tranche. Their ground was simply not suitable for the utilisation of such specialised equipment, either because it was in bad condition or was too steep, and, therefore, it had to be farmed. For the record, financial support of up to £10,000 was made available for a limited list of advanced slurry-handling equipment.

In my South Down constituency, I continually hear from farmers that not enough is being done to support small farm businesses. I tried to illustrate that general point to the Department's officials in Committee. The figures on farm make-up from the recent agriculture census show that 76% of farms are very small, 13% are small, 5% are medium and 6% are large. Therefore, 89% of farms are small or very small. When Members take into account that 70% of all farms are in less-favoured areas, they will see what the Department, the Minister and, indeed, Sinn Féin are trying to do.

The promotion of equality of opportunity requires proactive measures to ensure such equality among the groups that are identified in section 75. The equality duty should not hold back action to tackle disadvantage among certain sections of society. It is not enough simply to treat everyone equally; the inequalities must be eradicated first. In tackling disadvantage through neighbourhood renewal or fuel poverty through the warm homes scheme, for example, disadvantage is targeted while many other groups in society are excluded. The Minister and Sinn Féin are eager that the second tranche targets disadvantage by focusing on farms that are situated in less-favoured areas. In those areas, there is a great need for modernisation, and farmers there face an even bigger challenge to eke out a living from the land than those in the lowlands.

Tom Elliott said that full-time, as opposed to part-time, farmers should be prioritised. However, farmers work part-time because they cannot earn a living from their land. The current recession makes their situation even worse because they cannot fall back on their second jobs.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member accept that the inability of part-time farmers to earn a living from their farms also applies to some full-time farmers?

Mr W Clarke: I accept that, but the current recession means that the need in the part-time sector is greater. Many part-time farmers had a second job in construction or manufacturing, but those jobs no longer exist, and they are in dire straits now than they were a year ago.

Discrimination was mentioned earlier, and it is a very topical issue. There is very little that farmers can do about where they live. Many farms and farm families are where they are because, as was said, they were driven into the mountains at the time of the Plantation. Many Protestants, too, were driven from the lowlands into poor, mountainous wetlands. Those people were mainly Presbyterians and dissenters who would not join the Church of Ireland. I put that on record, because Jim Shannon had an argument with me about that before. I recognise that many Protestants as well as Catholics were driven into the mountains.

The agricultural census for 2009 gives some interesting statistics, which can put to bed the argument about discrimination. In Ballymena, 66% of farms are in less-favoured areas; in Belfast, that figure is 68%; in Carrickfergus, it is 96%; in Fermanagh, it is 99%; in Larne, it is 98%; in Moyle, it is 93%; and in Newtownabbey, it is 57%. That is a funny sort of discrimination, because a large majority of those areas have unionist-dominated councils. Therefore, I find the Department's criteria for the scheme to be a very strange way of discriminating against Protestants. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr G Robinson: I still have visions of freezing farmers queuing outside DARD offices for the launch of the first tranche of funding. From that day, the entire method that was used to roll out the scheme has been rightly condemned by those who are in the industry and those who speak for it.

My major concern is that there is an obvious exclusion for lowland farmers, which results in their having little prospect of being treated with equality. All farmers are having a difficult time due to the recession, and they should all be treated equitably. When the European money was made available for farm modernisation, criteria should have been imposed to ensure that there would be no disparity between

farmers. The scheme was not administered properly, and that has created bad feeling between neighbouring farmers. That is understandable, when farmers perceive that they are being discriminated against.

On 23 February, the Ulster Farmers' Union described one of the Minister's recent announcements about the scheme as "a very poor decision". Again, that was due to the negative effect that it would have on lowland farmers. The decision to remove funding for the manure efficiency technology scheme has also been condemned by the Ulster Farmers' Union, which described it as "incomprehensible". It is obvious that DARD has not fully consulted the farming industry; had it done so, the condemnation that is coming from all quarters would not be warranted.

The Minister got the criteria for the implementation of tranche 1 funding disastrously wrong. I urge her to ensure that there are fair and practical criteria for the implementation of tranche 2 funding so that there is equality of opportunity for all farmers to avail themselves of that welcome funding. I support the motion.

Mr Armstrong: I declare an interest as a farmer and a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union.

All our farms, whether they are large or small, are important and contribute to our local food industry, the countryside and the economy. Farmers are a vital source of jobs in rural areas, whether they provide full-time employment, as is the case with larger farms, or part-time work, as is often the case with smaller enterprises in which the farmer often has a second job.

As other Members said, there was criticism the last time that applications for the scheme were taken, because there was a first come, first served policy. The method of distribution this time has also come in for criticism, because priority is being given to smaller farmers in less-favoured areas. I do not dispute that farms in less-favoured areas are in need of modernisation, but the same is true of all farms. By their very nature, larger farms tend to be more productive, and it could be argued that the resources should be spent on them, because that would have a greater impact on production and on our economy.

I would rather see the Minister opening the scheme to those farmers who were

unsuccessful last year to ensure that everyone has the chance to benefit from at least one tranche of the funding.

6.45 pm

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, which I support. I am completely confident that the criteria that I am minded to bring forward for tranche 2 are fair and practical and will deliver a good scheme that will impact positively on the rural community, particularly on those farmers who suffer permanent hardship.

Most of the proposed criteria that I have decided on reflect what consultees said that they want to be introduced. For example, the average age of farmers is higher than that of people in other industries in the North of Ireland, and I suggest the awarding of marks to members of farm businesses who are under 40 years of age in order to encourage young people to continue with a career in farming. P J Bradley asked why I decided on people under the age of 40; that is the EU definition of a young farmer. I particularly want an emphasis on young farmers, and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and farming representatives have said that succession planning should be a key criterion of this tranche, which it is.

Stakeholders have warmly welcomed e-communication, and people realise that it will make the grant application quicker and easier. It reflects our desire to make use of technology to further modernise the way that we do business.

I have asked my officials to meet industry representatives to discuss the list of eligible items to ensure that it best reflects what farm businesses want and need to help their farms to remain competitive. Those meetings are scheduled to take place next week, and I hope that the industry grasps the opportunity for consultation on eligible items, participates in discussions and puts forward its views.

Although I am pleased that NIAPA has agreed to attend, I am disappointed to have received a letter from the president of the UFU on 3 March 2010 to indicate that it will disengage from assisting our discussion on the banding of items for modernisation. However, I am pleased that the letter suggests an additional 120 items for consideration at the meeting. With

reference to amendment No 1, I look forward to the UFU's reconsideration of its position and its re-engagement with the process, and I support that amendment.

During the consultation process, my officials had discussions with farming representatives and sought proposals for tranche 2 at quite an early stage. Thereafter, they sought further views as soon as they were able to clarify proposals and to put them to the monitoring committee and other groups. We believe that consultation with the committee, the industry and Europe was adequate. The fact that they do not agree with all aspects of the scheme does not mean that they were not consulted. The EU Commission was informed about the selection criteria before Christmas and raised no objections to the proposals.

I have listened to today's debate, and it seems that we have forgotten the purpose of the scheme. It is a small grant scheme to help farm businesses to modernise. It will not, and was never intended to, resolve every difficulty that our farming industry faces. However, I hope that the list of eligible items will offer some useful measures to help all sectors, especially our hard-pressed poultry sector. It is a scheme to help farmers to remain competitive.

Tranche 1 focused on introducing equipment for new technologies and innovation. It included items to improve animal health and welfare, to increase hygiene control and product storage, and to enhance occupational safety, business efficiency and environmental status. A few of the most purchased items were rubber slat mats, cow cubicles, cattle crush gates, vermin-proof bulk feed bins, grass toppers, creep feeders and animal identification collars. That is the reality of what the grant can provide. That is what our farmers need for their businesses, and that is what I want to provide again and to provide more of. I want this tranche to be opened as soon as possible, because farmers need that help now, not next year. Therefore, let us keep focusing on what is important: offering financial support to those who need it most.

Members have said that my intended focus on businesses in severely disadvantaged areas is unfair and may be discriminatory. Perhaps it would be helpful to reflect on the facts. Over 70% of all land that is farmed in the North of Ireland is in a severely disadvantaged area or a disadvantaged area, and many farms have a mix

of land in areas that are severely disadvantaged, disadvantaged and lowland. The markings that I consider should be allocated to SDA, DA and lowland will enable all farmers to obtain marks through working in a wide range of situations.

There is no discrimination, no sectarianism and no unfairness. Indeed, Members will be aware that following consultation with the rural development programme monitoring committee, the Agriculture Committee and other stakeholders, I increased the suggested score for lowland areas from nought to 10 marks.

I also want to focus on some of the remarks that were made in the media by an MLA who said that the scheme is in some way sectarian. I totally reject that allegation. Others are trying to sectarianise the issue, not me. As I said, 70% of our farmers live in less-favoured areas, and, as Members have heard, farmers of small holdings come from all religions and none. Let me be clear: my strongly held belief is that, in today's difficult economic circumstances, tranche 2 is an opportunity for me to target disadvantage through modernisation and to help smaller farm businesses that are working in a very challenging environment, and facing poor agricultural conditions, to remain competitive.

Without that type of targeted support, it will be very hard for those farmers to sustain agricultural activity. For example, between 2002-03 and 2006-07, the level of farm income on SDA farms, after the LFA payment, ranged between 54% and 61% of the farm income that was achieved on lowland farms. That finding clearly demonstrates that the earning capacity of SDA farms is much lower than that of farms in other areas. Therefore, those SDA farmers require a boost to modernise and to help them to earn a better living. To my mind, that is fair and practical. However, it is not true to say that lowland farms will not benefit from tranche 2. Those farmers will attract a score under tranche 2 for land classification and could score well on the modernisation criteria and those relating to young farmers and e-communication. No farmer in the North is prevented from applying to the scheme.

In the past, some grants, such as the new entrants' scheme, benefited lowland farmers. Larger farm businesses, particularly dairy farms, received aid from that scheme. I agree with Tom Elliott and other Members; the word "shambles" was used to describe the first come, first served approach that was taken last year, and it did not

work well. Tom knows, as a UFU member, that that approach was taken at the industry's request.

I want to clarify a point that was made by Willie McCrea. The first tranche was not changed. Although the European spokesman made certain comments about it, that tranche went ahead exactly as envisaged. Farmers for whom more than 50% of their farm lay within an LFA accounted for 6,025 applications to tranche 1, but of those, only 713 were successful — a ratio of 8.45 applications received to 1 successful application grant aided. If success was in direct proportion to applications received, well over 100 more applications would have come through. Although it was down to the luck of the draw last time, it clearly demonstrates the need to be fair to those farm businesses and to provide the financial support that they need. Furthermore, it needs to be pointed out, as many Members have done today, that LFA farmers contribute financially to the scheme through modulation. Their contribution of voluntary modulation is estimated at around 65%. There is no question that those farmers are entitled to benefit from the scheme.

Let us think a little more about the actual effect of the funding from tranche 2. It was proposed that we should offer more farmers the opportunity to avail themselves of a grant and the lower threshold. The average farmer took up £3,400 in tranche 1. Therefore, I feel that to meet the evidence from tranche 1 and the views of stakeholders, tranche 2 should be limited to a £4,000 grant. Stakeholders also requested that the current minimum expenditure be lowered. Therefore, I propose to lower it from £1,000 to £500. Depending on how much of the £4,000 on offer each successful applicant takes up, at least 1,600 farmers will be able to avail themselves of the scheme. That is a 40% grant, so farmers have to find their 60% contribution. Overall, that will mean that over £15 million will be spent in total in rural areas. That will be of huge assistance to a wide range of businesses in the North of Ireland, which is very good news for the entire rural economy. We need to ensure that that enormous benefit is secured as soon as possible. When the spend on tranche 1 is completed, I hope that a figure of over £10 million will have gone into the economy.

I am aware that the funding in tranches 1 and 2 will not satisfy all the demand that exists. Much as I would like to, I do not have the funds to give a grant to all 27,000 farm businesses in the

North, as some press articles have claimed that I should. However, if we focus tranche 2 on SDA and DA, we can at least assist small farmers in real need.

I hope that there will be funds for a tranche 3, and I am considering the opportunity for a further METS scheme this year that will focus on where the need for that equipment and aid is greatest. Although there was a high number of applicants to the METS scheme in the first tranche of the farm modernisation programme, the actual take-up of financial support by those who were awarded grants has been disappointing. The latest figures suggest that over half of those farmers who received a letter of offer will not proceed with the investment.

The method of spread of slurry is an important factor in addressing environmental commitments under the nitrates directive and the water framework directive. I am prepared to consider the merits of a further tranche of funding for METS and, subject to affordability, I hope that that might open later this year. That would satisfy amendment No 2.

To some of the larger farmers, grant aid of £4,000 may not seem like a lot. However, for the smaller farmer, it can be a lifeline. To put that in context, some of our larger farmers have over £100,000 of single farm payments, and a £4,000 grant equates to around a fortnight's worth of single farm payment. To the people who will apply for that funding and who need it most — that is, the smaller farmers who are in hardship — it will be a lifeline. They will still have to find the other 60% — £6,000 — which will not be easy for them in these challenging times, but they want to do that.

I want all farming areas, particularly those in the LFA, to have the opportunity to develop and play their role in providing high-quality raw material for the processing sectors. We need to try to keep our agricultural sector buoyant and viable. It is important for everyone with an interest in the farm modernisation programme to realise its potential benefit, not just to farms but to manufacturers and suppliers of the equipment that will be grant-aided. All that helps our economy: money will be in circulation and jobs will be secured, perhaps even created. It is up to all of us to ensure that we do not miss an opportunity and delay the opening of a scheme that can deliver benefits, directly on the farm

and to the manufacturing industry, and indirectly to rural commerce.

Some time ago, I met with the five local banks to ask them to be more aware of the need to open up their loan portfolio to small rural businesses that are trying to survive. I hope that that discussion will prove useful. I want tranche 2 of the farm modernisation scheme to open in the spring. As I said, it is my intention to try to fund another tranche next year.

Finally, an equality impact assessment was carried out on the whole of axis 1 at the beginning of the programme, which includes the farm modernisation programme. The formal consultation period for the EQIA began on 10 August 2007 and ended on 2 November 2007. Fourteen responses were received from groups and individuals. In addition, rural development division met 18 equality groups during the pre-consultation stage to inform them about the EQIA and the rural development programme generally.

In total, 108 separate comments or recommendations were received during consultation. Five EQIA roadshows, each comprising two information sessions, were held at locations across the North of Ireland during October 2007 to provide more information about the EQIA and to encourage responses. Copies of the EQIA document were sent out to organisations representing all aspects of society. The EQIA was also widely advertised in the media, and copies of the document could be downloaded from the DARD website or requested in hard copy over the phone.

The final report of the EQIA, which covers axes 1 and 3, was published on 17 July 2009. That is available to download from the Department's website. During the recent consultation period on the proposed tranche 2 selection criteria, concerns were expressed that lowland farmers — the majority of whom are Protestants and likely to be of a unionist political opinion — would be excluded from funding. There were also concerns that older farmers may be disadvantaged through the proposed succession opportunity criterion. I requested that my officials carry out an equality screening exercise on the selection criteria of tranche 2. That will be brought to the attention of our section 75 consultees and stakeholders.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister to draw her remarks to a close.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: If there are any significant equality issues that we are unaware of, I would like the consultees to bring them to our attention before the end of the consultation period, and we will take their concerns on board.

7.00 pm

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

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: My proposals provide a fair and practical scheme that will deliver many benefits for those living and working in the rural community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Ian Paisley Jnr to wind up on amendment No 1.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I congratulate the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Mr Elliott for getting this motion on the Order Paper, and my colleague and Mr Bradley for their amendments, which we welcome as they add to the substance of the motion.

The matter that we are discussing ought not to be a contentious issue. Indeed, we should be able to welcome unanimously the Department's position in any debate on it. At the end of the day, the money should be about developing farms and helping farms to move forward. It should not be divisive in any way, and, therefore, it is unfortunate that we are in a position in which division exists.

Mr Ford indicated the nub of the issue and the reason why there is division: there has been a breakdown in consultation. If tonight's debate is about anything, it is about consultation or the lack thereof. It is about a breakdown in the relationship with one of the key stakeholders involved in that consultation, namely the Ulster Farmers' Union.

I welcome the Minister's saying that she will support the motion and the amendments. However, I urge the Minister to move beyond supporting the principles that are outlined in the motion. They are good principles and issues that we should not be divided on, but she should go further and open afresh the consultation with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Committee to try to take matters forward to a more positive and unanimous conclusion.

We have members of the Ulster Farmers' Union — indeed, its executive committee — in the

Public Gallery. How much better would their time be spent negotiating with the officials and the Minister to find a way forward on which we have unanimity? That would be time well spent. I hope that the words that we have heard tonight from the Minister, on behalf of the Department, are words of encouragement that that consultation can be opened up, that there is a chink of light, that we can move forward and that we can get a more positive conclusion.

When all the talk and debate is cut aside, all that is being asked for is a narrowing of the gap between those in SDAs, DAs and lowlands. I say that as a Member who represents an area, North Antrim, that benefits from the way that the Minister has cut her cloth on this matter. If that gap could be narrowed, we would have a position in which the breakdown in communication and consultation could be healed and we could move forward on a positive footing. Therefore, I welcome the positive approach that the Minister and her party have taken in responding to the matter positively by saying that they want to get a fair outcome. We want that fair outcome, but let us make it a practical move that brings about agreement on a way forward.

I call on the Minister to look at two matters. The first is negotiations with the UFU on the METS scheme, which she has already identified. I welcome that. I also want her to see whether there is another way of getting more money into the scheme in the first instance. We should be able to welcome the scheme, because it is a benefit in bringing about modernisation.

I am not speaking as Chairman of the Committee but as a member of the Committee and a Member of the Assembly. The Committee has a good working relationship with DARD, with the Minister and the officials. There is also a good working relationship between DARD officials and the Ulster Farmers' Union. However, there is a healthy tension, and that is good. We should get to a position where that healthy tension results in a positive outcome and an agreement. I would like to see that, and, therefore, I urge the Minister to try to close the gap between the lowland farmers, the SDAs and the DAs.

Finally, I would like to put on record a note that appeared in 'Farm Week' from one of the farmers in an SDA in my constituency. He outlines very clearly the controversy and division among the farming community that happens

when money has to be rationed. I support young farmers and the advantages that they should receive, but we need a scheme that gives all farmers a chance to claim back money that has been appropriated from them. If we could get to that point, we could get some sort of agreement. We could learn from the breakdown that has occurred over this scheme and move forward on a healthy basis.

I thank the Member for proposing the motion, and I look forward to this matter getting a fair wind in the days ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Paisley was making a winding-up speech in support of amendment No 2, not amendment No 1, as I said. I call Patsy McGlone to make a winding-up speech for amendment No 1.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Ulster Unionist Party for introducing the motion. My party entirely supports the bringing forward of:

“fair and practical criteria for the implementation”,

not “with a view to” doing something about the situation, but to actually do something about it. I hope that that clarifies the point to that party’s satisfaction.

I listened carefully to Mr Elliott as he outlined the problems and difficulties that occurred last year. No one in this Chamber or elsewhere wants to see people queuing outside DARD offices, waiting for money that never comes, as happened then. That episode was referred to as “the soup kitchens”. Large sections of the community got no support from the scheme. Farmers and their families were disappointed. However, Mr Elliott referred also to the criteria for the severely disadvantaged areas, the proposed classifications and the disadvantages arising from them, the degree of modernisation, and the exploration of other avenues.

A consistent theme throughout the debate has been the need for further dialogue with the farming organisations. That is the purpose and basis of my party’s amendment, which was proposed very eloquently by my colleague P J Bradley, who suggested that such consultation was in line. I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Paisley Jnr, for drawing that to our attention and conceding that point.

I pay tribute to P J Bradley, who was with the farmers in his area and witnessed at first hand the difficulties that the previous funding episode created. People spent up to 60 hours queuing outside DARD offices, and that is not a place that anyone would want to be. It could be entirely summed up by the quotation:

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

P J Bradley stressed the need for further consultation with UFU/NIAPA and especially with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, which should be rather more than a statutory consultee. That point needs to be stressed: the Committee is the legislative consultee and the elected consultee of the people of the North. All Departments should work more closely with their Assembly Committees and consult them, rather than dump such matters on them at the last minute.

Among other issues raised was the question of whether the measure had been equality proofed. The Minister did not clarify that point. If legal advice was provided to the Department, can it be shared with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee? The Minister ought to use such information to assure Members that advice was sought and to give elected Members confidence that the project has been given some thought and that we will not find ourselves in unwelcome territory as we did last year.

Mr Irwin referred to the need for the programme to be a success and to unhappiness with tranche 2 of the programme in his constituency. I heard the word “equality” bounced around this Chamber as never before. If the debate on this programme leads to equality becoming a linchpin of the Assembly, that is to be welcomed. Perhaps we can hear more of it. However, I am sure that that will arise in other contexts, particularly in tomorrow’s debate on the devolution of policing and justice.

In support of the motion, reference was made to creating a level playing field. Mr Doherty referred to the meeting with the UFU on 9 February 2010, at which issues were raised. Mr Ford called for further consultation, and he supported the motion and the amendments. Mr W McCrea outlined the steps and requirements needed to deal with this issue, and he emphasised the need for re-engagement with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and stakeholders’ groups. He, too, referred to the need for equality.

We then heard from Mr Molloy, and the issue of equality again emerged. We received a wee bit of a necessary history lesson, which I accept. When he moved on to the redistribution of wealth, however, I was not too sure whether I was listening to Mr Molloy or Mr Marx.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr McGlone: However, I am sure that we could listen to that again. Something was mentioned —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up. I am sorry, Mr McGlone.

Mr McGlone: During the course —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr McGlone: I am sorry. OK. Thank you very much.

Mr McCallister: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, which was wide ranging. I start by declaring an interest in some of the matters that were raised. I am a member of the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and of the Ulster Farmers' Union. I am under 40, I am a Presbyterian, and I received money from the new entrants' scheme. I did not receive any money from tranche 1, and because I am a lowland farmer, I am not likely to receive any from tranche 2. However, I do not think that I was moved anywhere during the Plantation, which also got a mention.

My colleague Mr Elliott opened the debate by criticising how tranche 1 was handled. The Minister agreed with and accepted that point, and admitted that there were difficulties. Mr Elliott went on to talk about an equality impact assessment. As other Members mentioned, equality was talked about a lot today. It is strange that the very party that prides itself in always talking about equality seems to be doing the least about it today. The Minister may have to be sent back to Connolly House for retraining.

Mr Elliott mentioned other groups, including the hill farming group, which were opposed to the programme because of some of the payments to less-favoured areas. He mentioned the under-40 group, which I personally support. I have already declared that I am in that age bracket. He also questioned some of the scoring for the eligible items, which the Minister said would be looked at.

Mr Elliott: Although we appreciate that the Minister indicated that she will consult on the eligible

items, there was no indication that she would consult on any of the rest of the issues. That gives me concern, and, I am sure, my colleague.

Mr McCallister: I share those concerns. If, at any point, the Minister wants to make a clarification, I will happily take an intervention from her.

P J Bradley spoke about the state of farming, and said that we need to contribute much to farm modernisation. It is always worth reminding the House that agrifood is the biggest private-sector employer in Northern Ireland, makes a huge contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland, and is, obviously, the backbone of our rural communities. Farms do, therefore, need that support. Mr Bradley mentioned the huge sums that were taken from single farm payments via modulation, both the voluntary — well, the not-so voluntary — and the completely compulsory.

Mr Irwin, in moving amendment No 1, welcomed the programme and its contribution to rural areas. He spoke about inequality for lowland farmers, and I agree that such inequality exists. He spoke about METS funding, and getting a better system in place to deal with the second tranche of the programme.

Mr Doherty, in support of the motion, wanted a level playing field, but it seems that how level the playing field is depends on whether the field is in a less-favoured area or a lowland area. There was broad support for the marking and weighting system to be looked at again. The points system weighs too heavily against lowland farmers.

7.15 pm

Mr Ford said that there has been insufficient consultation on the matter. He welcomed some of the modernisation elements of the programme, including those that award marks to the under 40s and online applications. Dr McCrea expressed grave concerns about the unacceptable and discriminatory nature of the proposals, and he said that they need to be looked at.

Although the debate has been fairly good-natured, Mr Molloy's remarks about meetings in Orange Halls somehow gearing up unionist and Protestant communities were particularly offensive and unhelpful. Mr Shannon spoke about a postcode lottery, which is what the scheme will become if we do not do something to narrow the gap in the scoring system. Mr Savage and Mr Burns were

unhappy with the scoring system in the land classification element of the programme. It comes back to the very crux of the land classification issue, which is that the gap in the scoring is too wide. Indeed, that matter keeps coming up.

Willie Clarke spoke about the need to get money into rural areas. There was general agreement that that is right and very important. However, he went on to defend the way in which funds are targeted at disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged areas. That comes back to our view that the current criteria need to be wider, because under the current plans, it is almost impossible for a lowland farmer to meet them.

We are always hoping to hear some good news from the Minister. At least she held the door open for some of the issues. I hope that she takes the opportunity to do whatever she can to engage with stakeholders where possible to get the problem sorted. We have a good programme that is worthwhile for our industry. Of course, we would all like to see more money dedicated to the programme and sent quickly to farms so that they can be helped. The Minister spoke about helping smaller farms and how such help can be almost like a lifeline for them. Everyone in this House will welcome getting money into the rural communities and the farming sector, but we have to do that in the best possible way. I am afraid that we do not agree with the weighting that has been given to land classification. Therefore, it has to be changed.

Some of the Minister's comments, such as the speed at which the scheme will move, were welcome. It is good that the application forms will be kept as simple and as easy to manage as possible. That was very welcome in the tranche 1 funding. The Minister said that an equality impact assessment was carried out on the rural development programme, but no equality impact assessment was carried out on the farm modernisation scheme.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I said that an EQIA was carried out. The Member asserted that mine is the party that defends equality. That is absolutely right: we do defend equality, and we will do so to the hilt. We have a situation in which the gap in farming is wide, and we want to address that. We also have an obligation to tackle disadvantage and inequality. I make no apology for wanting to do that.

I reiterate that consultation took place. Although the UFU does not support the proposals, as the Member heard already, NIAPA and the National Beef Association do support them.

We have consulted widely. In fact, in its evidence to the Agriculture Committee, the UFU said that even five points in the assessment would help. I responded by giving 10 points to lowland farmers. Therefore, I have been listening to and engaging with our stakeholders. I welcome and respect the fact that they do have a very —

Mr Elliott: Your time is up.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have a very listening ear. I do not think that anyone has —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCallister: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not think that I said that the Minister defended equality. I said that her party talked most about equality. However, I do not think that its members are the only people to defend equality.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up, Mr McCallister.

Mr McCallister: I thank the Minister for her intervention, although we think that she is wrong on this. Move a wee bit further, Minister, and close the gap.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr McCallister, your time is up.

Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that whether or not amendment No 1 is made, the Question on amendment No 2 can still be put.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to re-engage immediately in discussions with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association with a view to bringing forward fair and practical criteria

for implementation of tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme; and to ensure that, following the underspend in the manure efficiency technology subprogramme (METS) in tranche 1, more farmers are given an opportunity to access the METS element in tranche 2.

Private Members' Business

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next motion is on the boiler scrappage scheme. 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. 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme by HM Government and calls on the Minister for Social Development to examine the scope for the future introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland.

[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Members should leave the Chamber quietly.

Mr Hamilton: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

To set the debate in context, I acknowledge that between the motion being tabled and the Business Committee choosing it for debate, the Department for Social Development (DSD) has responded positively to a request from the Social Development Committee, of which I am Chairperson, for a boiler scrappage scheme for Northern Ireland to be examined. I want to put that on record, and also that correspondence from the Department to the Committee outlines:

"The Department is currently working on a review of the fuel poverty strategy, and one of the areas they are looking at is a boiler replacement or boiler scrappage scheme."

Therefore, I acknowledge and commend the progress that the Department is making.

Most Members will recall that the boiler scrappage scheme was one of the few positive headline-grabbing initiatives in the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement in December 2009. Most Members should also be aware that the scheme proposed a payment in England of £400 to

help people to convert from energy efficiency G-rated boilers to A-rated boilers. That was widely heralded at the time and it received much positive press coverage. However, the nature of our devolved arrangements meant that the initiative would not automatically be rolled out to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

As I said, I acknowledge the progress that the Department has already made on the issue. The debate affords Members an opportunity to support the idea of a boiler scrappage scheme and to encourage the Department to introduce such a scheme in Northern Ireland.

Undoubtedly, a boiler scrappage scheme would provide a plethora of benefits, many of which Her Majesty's Government outlined when they proposed their scheme for England. Broadly speaking, three key advantages can be identified: energy efficiency, carbon reduction, and enhancing the economy.

Replacing a G-rated boiler with an A-rated one improves energy efficiency. A G-rated boiler is the worst of the worst. For every £1 of oil that such a boiler consumes, around 50p is literally wasted. Money is being burned. On average, each household in England that has switched from a G-rated boiler to an A-rated boiler saves £235 a year, so one can see how the £400 cash incentive per household is recouped within two years. Moreover, energy-efficient boilers continue to perform at the optimum rate, so those reductions remain in subsequent years. In a climate in which erratic energy prices are the norm, having an energy-efficient boiler, which does not burn money, is of great assistance to people and affords them certainty and control over their energy bills.

It is anticipated that, in its lifetime, the English scheme will result in the replacement of approximately 125,000 boilers. That will reduce CO₂ emissions by approximately 14,000 tons, which, I am reliably informed, is equivalent to taking 45,000 cars off the road. That is the impact that the scheme will have on the environment, and we are all acutely aware of the importance of that argument.

The economic advantages of a boiler scrappage scheme are often overlooked but are equally important, because introducing such a scheme would boost and incentivise a certain sector of the economy. Not only are there a great number of boiler manufacturers in the United Kingdom, including some in Northern Ireland,

but there are a great many plumbers and boiler installers who such a scheme would advantage. Therefore, by investing a relatively small amount of money, as well as providing energy-efficiency and carbon-reduction benefits, a short-term, targeted boost to the economy can be achieved. The advantages of a boiler scrappage scheme are transparently obvious.

The real advantage of a boiler scrappage scheme, however, is in seeking to tackle fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. As I am sure the Minister will outline later, the Department is focusing its attention on how such a scheme might further reduce fuel poverty. I do not need to rehearse the arguments about fuel poverty. Members sit with a sense of shame as a result of Northern Ireland's having among the highest level of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom, if not in western Europe. Around one in three households here suffers from fuel poverty, and we all know the shocking headlines when one drills down to the figures: half of those who suffer from fuel poverty are pensioners, and around 40% of households in fuel poverty have children. Those statistics are a cause of shame for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Efforts have been made to reduce those numbers through the warm homes scheme and the Housing Executive's heating replacement scheme for its existing housing stock, and we acknowledge that positive work. However, a certain section of society is still very difficult to reach in order to help it out of, or, in some cases, to prevent it from slipping into, fuel poverty. The people who belong to that section of society can be described as the working poor: the great mass of people who, although they work hard, do not qualify for benefits and, therefore, are not entitled to benefit from the warm homes scheme. Nonetheless, they are in fuel poverty.

7.30 pm

The data in the 2006 house condition survey, which is where the 34% in fuel poverty figure comes from, show that around 12,000 households have a household income of £20,000 or more. Indeed, 4,390 households that are estimated to be in fuel poverty have an income of £30,000 or more. An income of £30,000 is well above the Northern Ireland average, yet those people are still in fuel poverty. I do not wish to make a sweeping generalisation, but I will hazard a guess that

the vast majority of those houses would not qualify or be in receipt of qualifying benefits that would entitle them to the warm homes scheme. Therefore, they are a difficult to reach group, but they are in fuel poverty. The reason that they are in fuel poverty is, by and large, that they are spending 10% of their income, which is in excess of £3,000, on fuel. People might feel sometimes that they are filling their oil tank every other week and that they are spending a clean fortune on their fuel, but £3,000 is a lot of money to spend in a year. Therefore, I suggest that the very reason that those individuals are in fuel poverty is that their boiler and heating system are inefficient. Therefore, a boiler scrappage scheme that is targeted particularly at those people would take them out of fuel poverty. Such a scheme could also be very effective for similar groups of people who may be at risk of slipping into fuel poverty.

I am not personally hung up on what sort of system we should introduce in Northern Ireland. We could replicate the system that is in place in England, which has now been adopted in Scotland, but that would not be particularly focused on fuel poverty. We could go for what the Welsh have done, which is to target the scheme at people who are over 60, or we could come up with a Northern Ireland innovation that suits our needs; and we have real needs in respect of fuel poverty. Therefore, a boiler scrappage scheme that is targeted at tackling fuel poverty could be quite successful.

Obviously, there is a resource issue. I understand that an amendment has been tabled. I am not sure whether it will be moved, but it calls for the scheme to be brought in immediately. I am not sure that the Minister has the money to introduce it immediately. She is shaking her head vigorously to indicate that she does not, but I would hazard a guess that the Minister needs time to develop a scheme as well as to find the money. I would not get particularly hung up about the quantum of money. If it is a good scheme and it is worth doing, even if we find a small pot that can be adapted to do some good work and to tackle that need, it is better than nothing.

There is an opportunity to do something off the back of the scheme that was introduced in England and adopted elsewhere in the other devolved regions of the UK. The warm homes scheme is in place for people who are on certain benefits and there are heating replacement

programmes for people in Housing Executive properties, but there is nothing for the working poor. That group of people do not qualify for the warm homes scheme, but they are every bit as much in fuel poverty as anybody else. There is a unique opportunity for the Assembly to endorse that principle today and let the Department analyse what is possible in Northern Ireland and bring forward a scheme that will help tackle fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

*Leave out "future" and insert "immediate". —
[Mr Armstrong.]*

Amendment not moved.

Mr F McCann: I had intended to say something about the amendment, but the Member has pulled the carpet from under my feet.

I support the motion. There has been quite a lot of debate about the boiler scrappage scheme since it was introduced elsewhere. I was going to say that, although the amendment calls on the Minister to implement the scheme immediately, we need to step back, take a deep breath and look at what is happening in other jurisdictions to ensure that we get a scheme that fits here. The offer of £400 for each household that wishes to change its heating system could, if used in the right way, help towards the replacement of outdated and environmentally unfriendly heating systems. The Savills report highlighted the fact that more than 14,000 houses do not reach the decent homes standard, and, of those, 11,000 failed the test due to inefficient heating systems.

We must ask what procedures will be put in place to ensure that the system is made easy for those who wish to tap into a grant and ensure that they are not bogged down in bureaucratic delays and application forms, which put off those who need assistance from applying. If the scheme is to be taken on, it needs to be targeted at those who are most in need and who, because of their financial situation, cannot afford to replace their heating system.

I was shocked but not surprised to find out from the information supplied that major energy companies had been involved in the superinflation of prices. The worst of those mentioned was British Gas. The research highlighted the fact that many of those major

companies also said that they would give an additional £400 towards the price of replacing the systems, but the prices quoted cancelled out the £400 grant and the additional £400 from the companies. An article in an English newspaper stated that a customer received a quote of £5,012 from British Gas and, after deducting both allowances, was asked to pay over £4,200. That is way outside the financial range of many people. Unless we get it right before the implementation of any scheme, confusion will reign. We need to ensure that people are not being asked to pay above the odds. The article said that there is already confusion about how the scheme works in England. Quotes that were received from local plumbers were almost £2,000 cheaper than those of the multinationals. We must ensure that major companies are not allowed to abuse the system.

We should examine the possibility of the boiler scrappage scheme being handled through the warm homes scheme. I take on board the Committee Chairperson's comments, but surely a scheme such as the warm homes scheme, which targets the systems towards those who are most in need, could be stretched to take in the working poor. The warm homes scheme deals with those who are most in need, and it would allow grants to be targeted at those people. That scheme is up and running. If we have control of the administration of the warm homes scheme, we can tailor it to allow it to administer the boiler scrappage scheme. Alternatively, could the Housing Executive not begin the process of not maintaining the out-of-date systems of people with medical problems who are refused help with the maintenance of their heating system and replacing them with environmentally safe systems, which will protect not only those in need but the environment?

Mr Burns: I support the motion, and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the boiler scrappage scheme. It was first introduced in England, and it has since been introduced in Scotland and Wales.

I support the introduction of a boiler replacement scheme. It came as a surprise to many when the plans for such a scheme were announced in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report. When I heard about the scheme, I thought that it was a good idea to give people £400 towards the cost of a new boiler, and I am fairly sure that there will not be much

disagreement on that in the House, especially if someone else is paying. If the Finance Minister gives the Minister for Social Development the required money, few people will disagree with his decision.

Other Members said that the scheme has been a great success in England, and they are right. It is a good idea. I can see the advantages of such a replacement scheme: the new technology is much better; new boilers increase fuel efficiency, reduce energy bills and have much lower emission levels; and there is the added bonus of a cash injection to the local plumbing and heating industry.

It is my understanding that we are not under any obligation to have exactly the same scheme as England, Scotland or Wales. If we were thinking about introducing the same scheme as in England, it would be only to help the environment. Would it be the responsibility of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and not DSD? If a scheme were to be introduced here, given the level of fuel poverty here, I would call for it to be targeted directly at the households that are in fuel poverty. It would be much better for the boiler replacement scheme to be part of the warm homes scheme, under the supervision of the Minister for Social Development.

I do not want a first come, first served voucher scheme for people who have a few thousand pounds to invest and are upgrading the underfloor heating in their second bathroom and need a more powerful boiler.

Mr F McCann: Is that your house, Tommy?

Mr Burns: No, it is not. Households in fuel poverty and on low incomes are not doing that sort of thing. They are far more likely to have a basic boiler that is on its last legs. Therefore, I say to the Minister that it would be better if her Department would make a much more significant contribution and pay at least half, if not all, of the cost to households that badly need new boilers but cannot afford them.

The idea of a boiler replacement scheme is worthy of careful consideration. I know that the Minister will give it the attention that it requires. The SDLP and, indeed, all parties in the House are strongly committed to helping the most needy and vulnerable people. I am sure that the Assembly will not miss the opportunity to help once again the people who need it most.

Ms Lo: I support the motion. In comparison with people in Great Britain, people in Northern Ireland are more likely to live in fuel poverty, because of the lower average income and the higher cost of energy.

Northern Ireland's fuel poverty strategy aims to eliminate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and in non-vulnerable households by 2016. The strategy is due to be reviewed shortly. It is imperative that meaningful ways are sought to help those who are most in need.

England introduced a boiler scrappage scheme in January to encourage homeowners to replace their old boilers with more efficient, A-rated boilers in order to reduce CO2 emissions and heating costs by up to a quarter. As with the car scrappage scheme, it also aims to boost the economy during the current recession. Likewise, in February, the Scottish and Welsh Governments announced their commitment to implement similar schemes, albeit with different criteria. In Wales, the scheme will be targeted at the over 60s. It is important that Northern Ireland's scheme replicates one of the models in England, Scotland and Wales so that households here are not left behind and benefit from that initiative.

The scheme in England does not aim to reduce fuel poverty; it benefits only people who can afford the large cost to install a new boiler, rather than people who struggle to meet their heating bills on low incomes or benefits. I support National Energy Action Northern Ireland's call for a boiler scrappage scheme that targets people who are at greatest risk of suffering fuel poverty: older people, young families, people with disabilities and people who are chronically ill.

The DSD warm homes plus scheme offers insulation and heating measures to homeowners and private tenants who receive qualifying benefits if they use Economy 7, solid fuel or bottled gas for heating or have no heating system at all. In Northern Ireland, more than 70% of homes use oil heating. The warm homes plus scheme can be extended to include a boiler scrappage element to help people who have oil-fired boilers that are now old and inefficient but who, under the current warm homes plus criteria, are not eligible to have their boiler replaced.

Housing Executive tenants would be omitted under the scheme as it exists in England, which

applies to homeowners or private tenants. Housing Executive tenants have presented themselves to my constituency office as suffering from fuel poverty due to the high cost of having to operate inefficient Economy 7 heating systems. A new boiler scrappage scheme should include Housing Executive tenants in order to reduce their heating bills. During winter, constituents came into my office whose boilers had totally broken down due to the cold weather. Under the scheme as it stands in England, those people would not benefit because applicants who are under 60 years of age must have boilers that are in full working order.

I received a briefing from the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation. It says that it has already received enquiries about those new initiatives. Obviously, it supports a scheme in Northern Ireland. However, it warns that we need to think about other costs, not just the cost to replace the boiler. That involves other costs, such as a new control panel. It also suggests that instead of just axing the lowest grade — the G grade — we should expand the range to include the E and F grades, as they are fairly inefficient. It is essential that we include a wider range in the scheme, and I would support such a proposal.

7.45 pm

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the motion. Along with the Chairperson, I acknowledge the Minister's commitment to the matter since the motion was tabled.

If we are serious about reducing fuel poverty and CO2 emissions, it is time for Northern Ireland to consider a boiler scrappage scheme similar to that initiated in England. The scheme there allows households with the least efficient boilers to claim £400 towards a new boiler. That scheme is targeting around 125,000 households who own or privately rent their homes. If such a scheme were introduced here, and I hope that it is, it would have the potential to benefit around 75,000 homes throughout Northern Ireland.

The scheme is designed to encourage people to replace inefficient boilers that are likely to be around 15 years old. New boilers have rated efficiencies of 90% or more, meaning that they use less fuel, which results in lower CO2 emissions and running costs. Renewable heat technologies do not use fossil fuels. If we upgrade a G-rated boiler to an A-rated boiler,

household heating bills should drop by about one quarter, which is an average saving of around £235 a year.

In England, people under 60 years of age can apply for the scheme if their boiler is in working order and it is the main source of heat for their home. Those who are over 60 years of age can apply for the scheme regardless of whether their boiler works or not. However, it still needs to be the main boiler used in the home. I am not sure whether I agree entirely with those criteria. I see no reason why people over 60 years of age should be eligible for the scheme if their boiler is in perfectly good working order. However, that is a matter for England. To apply, one must either be a homeowner or a private tenant. Landlords of multiple properties can apply, as long as each voucher is assigned to a different property. Registered social landlords and housing associations cannot apply as they are covered by alternative support in the English scheme.

Replacing old boilers has the potential to slash household energy bills and carbon emissions, while providing an important boost to our heating industry. It will help to secure jobs in small and medium-sized businesses that form a vital component of Northern Ireland's low-carbon economy. The scheme will show how our Government continue to invest in our industries and in jobs for the future.

Given the fact that Northern Ireland has the highest rate of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom, with one in three households suffering its effects, I urge the Minister to consider the proposal seriously and to introduce it sooner rather than later. Our vulnerable households need most help. Higher energy prices have led to an increase in the number of households in fuel poverty. There are many benefits to Northern Ireland's economy if we reduce our heating costs. Effectively, if people are not paying for more gas or heating oil, that money is at their disposal and can help the local economy.

Small companies and businesses here are struggling for sales to survive, and the scheme has the potential to help them to boost their sales. The collapse in house building has hit our heating industries hard, and this is their chance to secure work. It will also help our unemployment figures, and it has the potential to increase the number of apprenticeship

placements. Companies will be encouraged to become more competitive, with special offers involving complementary deals to entice people to use them when scrapping or replacing a boiler.

However, we need to be mindful of the disadvantages of the scheme. Some companies in England have taken advantage of the scheme and have overpriced boilers and installation work. That puts our vulnerable people at even greater risk, and it makes a mockery of the proposal. Some modern boilers are not built to last in the way in which old boilers were, and it has been known for them to burn out after 10 years. Some boilers that are 15 years old work perfectly well and, therefore, there would be no need for some people over 60 years of age to replace their boiler. I encourage the Minister to be mindful of those flaws when looking at ways in which the scheme can be implemented.

This winter alone has taken its toll on those who cannot afford to heat their home sufficiently or, in some cases, at all. Northern Ireland still has at least 1,000 cold-related deaths every winter, and the figure is likely to be nearer 1,300. Being fuel poor seems to be worse than just being poor. To make matters worse, it will be 30 years before we address all the households that need to be in the warm homes scheme. The pace of the present assistance simply is not fast enough, and I urge the Minister to look at the daunting figures. The message is blunt: if people cannot afford to keep warm, they will get ill and die of cold. It is time to figure out fuel poverty once and for all, and the scheme is another way to help. We simply cannot wait any longer.

I had other comments to make on the amendment, which has now not been moved. I support the motion.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like everybody who spoke today, I am happy to see the motion brought before the House. Before I speak to the motion, I wish Margaret, Anna, Loretta, Mairead and any other women in the Assembly this evening a happy International Women's Day.

We were in the Long Gallery this morning at an International Women's Day event, meeting women from all sections of society. The main focus was on how the Assembly works, how politics works for them and how women can get involved in politics. During the round-table discussions, many of the women, who were of

all ages and from all backgrounds, raised the perception of this place and what is done about the issues that affect people's everyday lives. The feedback that I was given today — I am sure that members of other political parties received the same feedback — was that sometimes there is no business brought before the Assembly that can affect people's lives. This is one motion to which we can point — we used it today as an example — to say that, if a scoping exercise takes place and a scheme is implemented, it will indeed affect people's lives, for all the reasons that Members have outlined.

The North has extremely high levels of poverty as well as many people on disability benefits. David, in his final remarks, mentioned the links between poverty and ill health. I was talking to two ladies this morning who are carers. We have had a particularly bad winter. They would now consider themselves poor and living on the poverty line, even though they have worked all their lives. They are living on pensions. They were saying that, if it is bad enough for them trying to heat the house on their wages, what is it like for people who are less well off, particularly when they are looking after people who are unwell. Judging by the sound of the conditions, they are looking after people with long-term or perhaps terminal illnesses.

The other thing that has to be commended is that progress seems to have been made with the Minister and the Department taking the issue on board. I was pleased that the Ulster Unionist Party did not move its amendment, because — I just had a quick glance — it looked like an amendment for the sake of it. From the excellent information that we received from the Assembly research service, it is clear that it is very complex. There is some stuff on England. There are concerns in Scotland and Wales about what should be brought forward. There is a need to consider local issues and the conditions that people are living in locally and to feed that into any scheme that is introduced. I assume that the Minister will be feeding that into her comments. For example, some places here in the North do not have access to gas, which is a difficulty in itself. Anna spoke about Economy 7, and the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, Simon Hamilton, raised a point in relation to oil. That was one of the issues that came up today. It is a common conversation among most of us that it seems that only a matter of weeks after filling an oil tank it has to be refilled. The boiler replacement

scheme could save households at least £240. Even some of the stuff that NICVA brought forward suggested that up to 50% of households could benefit from that.

I am also intrigued about the local employment aspect of the scheme. Although there was some fraud in England among people who were working under the scheme, if there were local and social labour clauses included in the scheme, whereby there were strict criteria that there must be benefits for apprenticeships and training, that would certainly reduce the prospect of fraud and assist certain local opportunities.

This is a good motion. It is a pity that the debate has taken place late in the evening; nonetheless, all political parties have given their support to it. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on how the issue will be taken forward. I have no doubt that most of the women whom we spoke to today will read the Hansard report tomorrow, because they informed us that they will do so to find out how the debate went.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will, surely. This is one example of all Members speaking from the same page. I support the motion.

Mr Easton: I support the motion. In Northern Ireland, heating bills are approximately one third higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Fuel poverty is, therefore, more likely to be a factor here than in any other part of the United Kingdom. In addition, incomes in Northern Ireland are lower than those in the rest of the UK, and that heightens the prospect of fuel poverty here. People who are in fuel poverty are defined as people who spend more than 10% of their annual income on fuel. Given the recent cold weather, which is continuing, many people in Northern Ireland are suffering.

I praise the Minister and the Executive for providing people who are experiencing difficulties with their heating bills with some extra help this winter. The warm homes scheme in Northern Ireland is a good idea, and it has already helped thousands of people. However, the eligibility criteria are highly restrictive. To qualify, an applicant must be in receipt of one of the following benefits: income support, income-related employment and support allowance, income-based jobseeker's allowance, pension credit, child tax credit, working tax credit,

disability living allowance, attendance allowance, housing benefit and rates rebate. We must accept, therefore, that the scheme misses out many people who are not in receipt of benefits but are on a low income and are experiencing the effects of fuel poverty. In fact, in the current financial year, the number of successful applicants to the warm homes scheme has plummeted compared with previous years. That is because of the adoption of new criteria, which, as I stated earlier, are clearly restrictive. The warm homes scheme is proving to be ineffective, as take-up has fallen. How many people are being left out and are suffering from fuel poverty as a result?

The boiler scrappage scheme, which is currently available in England, offers many benefits. It reduces household carbon emissions, which helps to meet the emissions targets that are set in Europe and further afield. It reduces household heating bills and increases heating efficiency. In England, the Government invested £200 million to improve energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty by offering £400 to up to 125,000 households to upgrade their old boiler to the latest efficient models and to provide extra resources to tackle fuel poverty.

The boiler scrappage scheme in England is not means-tested, but it is based on the efficiency of the boiler. The scheme promotes fuel efficiency and seeks to reduce the loss of heat and carbon emissions. The scheme offers receipts of £400 off the price of a new boiler that meets those efficiency targets. We must tackle fuel poverty, and I am concerned that the warm homes scheme is missing out on many people who experience fuel poverty but are excluded because of the criteria. If this year's winter were to be repeated next year and the year after, people will be under extreme financial strain in a recession, especially as oil and gas prices continue to rocket. People are under considerable financial strain already because of an increase in food, travel and heating costs. The price of oil has almost doubled in two or three years, and people are struggling. That is why it is important that we assist people to reduce their heating bills and enhance heating efficiency. A boiler scrappage scheme can help people to achieve that. Therefore, I welcome the debate, and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr O'Loan: I support the motion, although I am slightly surprised by where it has come from. I will come back to that point later.

The English scheme offers £400 a household to 125,000 households at a total cost of £50 million. It is not designed as a fuel poverty measure; it is, essentially, a measure to reduce carbon emissions. It seeks to encourage the installation of fuel-efficient boilers. If it were introduced here, it would advantage and make more fuel-efficient homes that directly avail themselves of the scheme, and it would create a momentum of its own in that other households that did not receive the voucher subsidy would be more inclined to replace their boiler.

8.00 pm

Its second policy objective is to support boiler manufacturers, the industry and installers. Members might have received a communication today from the Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers' Federation in which it argued for a replication of the English scheme. The car scrappage scheme was designed for exactly that purpose, and it was very successful in stimulating that industry. Northern Ireland has a substantial boiler construction industry as well as an installation industry.

We should note that in the pre-Budget report, the boiler scrappage measure ran alongside improved fuel poverty measures that cost £150 million. The total package was, therefore, £200 million. However, as I say, the boiler scrappage scheme was not a fuel poverty measure. An equivalent Northern Ireland scheme would affect around 4,000 houses, perhaps a little more. At a cost of £400 a house, the total cost of the scheme would be £1.6 million. We received a Barnett consequential of £0.7 million. The English scheme was not totally funded with new money, and the Barnett consequential would not fully fund an equivalent scheme here. However, we had an option of doing something with that money in exactly the same terms as it was originally used for. It would have been much more imaginative to have topped that money up with the modest sum that was needed to replicate the English scheme.

For that reason, I find the motion a little bit disingenuous, particularly given my experience at the Finance Committee. When I raised the issue at the Committee, the strongest terms in which I could get it to write to the Department were to say that the Committee agreed that it

would be content for the additional funding to be used to create a similar boiler scrappage scheme for Northern Ireland, which I count as a lukewarm response. I would have welcomed a much stronger argument for the use of that Barnett consequential when the opportunity arose at the Committee. Of course, the Department replied to the Committee in the same terms that it replied to me on a question for written answer:

"all the addition Barnett consequentials from the 2009 PBR are used to offset the spending pressures for 2010-11."

As we heard, a different approach was taken in Scotland. My party has argued for measures to stimulate the economy at this time. The Scottish Parliament is committing the Barnett consequentials, in full, to support boiler scrappage. As far as I can see, that scheme is like the English one in that it is not merely a fuel poverty measure. However, a boiler scrappage scheme that is based on fuel poverty has been created in Wales. That scheme costs £2.5 million and will benefit up to 5,000 households. We must recognise what the Department for Social Development can and cannot do. I assume that, legally and according to its terms of reference, it can create only a fuel poverty targeted boiler scrappage scheme that is needs-based. DSD cannot create a general carbon reduction scheme. That can only be done through a different Department, probably the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I support the motion, but a better outcome could have been achieved. If DSD can do this within its own resources, and if it deems that to be a good use of the funds available for fuel poverty, I will be pleased to see that. However, we could have had both. We could have ensured that we used the Barnett consequential for the purpose from which it was derived and created a scheme that would have led to significantly more carbon reduction and stimulated the industry. I regret that we did not do that.

Lord Browne: Like most Members, I support the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme in Northern Ireland. The scheme currently operating in England has received a good response from the public, and many people, particularly pensioners on fixed incomes, have received the benefit of a new heating system at much more affordable prices. Other Members have already outlined the advantage that such

a scheme brings by stimulating the economy and reducing the environmental impact of heating homes. However, I believe that the real success of such a scrappage scheme would lie in the improvements that it would bring to the quality of life for Northern Ireland pensioners in particular, because they live on a fixed income and have been hit particularly hard by the increase in fuel prices over the past number of years. Although winter fuel payments have helped them, much of the additional money has been eaten up by inefficient boilers.

Indeed, as we heard, the Energy Saving Trust estimates that simply replacing an old boiler with a new energy-efficient one could result in savings of more than £200 a year on heating bills. That is a truly monumental figure, considering that many of our pensioners have very old and inefficient boilers. Any move to make new energy-efficient boilers more affordable to people on fixed incomes is to be welcomed.

However, I have one slight reservation about the scheme. In recent years, the growing trend has been for people to purchase gas boilers for home heating rather than oil boilers. That is understandable, because gas heating and hot water systems tend to cost less to run than traditional oil or electric hot water systems. Therefore, to be capable of providing a boiler scrappage scheme, we must be sure that Northern Ireland has enough fitters with the necessary qualifications to fit gas-powered boilers.

As Members are aware, from 1 April 2010 all gas appliance fitters must be on the Gas Safe register to be legally allowed to fit gas appliances. I recently checked the register and found that only four Northern Ireland firms are listed, and, therefore, able to install home heating systems. That figure is certainly not adequate to meet the demands that will come from homeowners wanting to take advantage of a boiler scrappage scheme. That concern should be addressed before a scrappage scheme is introduced.

The local contractor deficit is particularly pressing, considering that 'The Sunday Times' recently revealed that the larger gas companies in England are raising the price of new gas boilers in order to profit from the scheme rather than allowing customers to make savings. Members will also be aware of the problems experienced in England over the maintenance of boilers that were installed under the scheme. The problem was due mainly to installers being so busy

putting in new boilers that they did not have the manpower available simultaneously to perform maintenance on boilers that they had previously fitted. That led to considerable problems. The number of local Gas Safe registered fitters is a salient issue to be addressed if we are to avoid the problems experienced in England and deliver a scheme that would be to the overwhelming benefit of people here.

I am confident that, with good planning, those problems can be overcome. Therefore, I very much welcome the motion.

Mr G Robinson: I am glad to be able to contribute to the debate, as many of the complaints that I received in my constituency office this winter concerned the exclusion of boiler replacement from the warm homes scheme. The main questions asked were why some people got new boilers last year and others did not, and why people in England, Scotland and Wales got boiler scrappage schemes but people in Northern Ireland did not.

My colleagues who secured the debate referred to the scheme's potential to help the economy, and I concur with their remarks. At a time when the building trade is suffering from lack of work, the extension of the boiler scrappage scheme would provide work for plumbers, electricians and builders, and be an economic boost for the sector. However, the main reason for having such a scheme is to ensure that people can live in warm, cost-efficient homes. Older boilers use more fuel to heat the home and to heat water, and those boilers hit people where it hurts: in their pockets. A new boiler largely cures those problems and saves people money. Obviously, the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme would be an ideal way to ensure that more people are removed from fuel poverty, which, rightly, is an extremely important factor for the Assembly. However, at present, the warm homes scheme is very limited in what it can do. The scope is there for an extended programme to be introduced, and I ask the Minister to examine ways in which to do that.

Ironically, although a boiler scrappage scheme would lead to warmer homes, the more efficient new installations would have the knock-on effect of reducing greenhouse gases and global warming. At the scheme's launch in England, Labour's Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Miliband, said:

"The Boiler Scrappage Scheme will save around £200 off heating bills per year for families that are replacing their old boilers, and in total will save the same amount of carbon equivalent to taking around 45,000 cars off the road."

Minister, I foresee a three-way benefit from a boiler scrappage scheme for Northern Ireland: warmer homes for more people at less cost and reduced levels of fuel poverty; employment created in the construction industry at a time of recession; and a small step towards lowering carbon emissions and aiding the fight against climate change.

The motion is carefully worded, and states:

"to examine the scope for the future introduction of a...scheme in Northern Ireland."

I urge the Minister to examine that scope and, hopefully, we will see a scheme introduced in Northern Ireland equivalent to those in England, Scotland and Wales. I support the motion.

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): I thank the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee for tabling the motion, which examines the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme. I also thank all of the Members who have contributed to the debate.

The motion calls on me, as Minister for Social Development, to examine the scope for the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme in Northern Ireland similar to those that have been introduced in England, Scotland and Wales. The debate gives me the opportunity to clarify some of the issues that have been raised. I will try to deal with all of the concerns that Members have raised, and I assure Members that I will read the Hansard report of the debate and if I have left any question unanswered I will write directly to the Member concerned.

I feel the sense of urgency in the House regarding the boiler scrappage scheme very clearly, and I am aware that that was the import of the tabled amendment, which was withdrawn by Billy Armstrong of the Ulster Unionist Party.

In his pre-Budget report, the Chancellor announced that a boiler scrappage scheme was to be introduced in England. The aim of the scheme is to reduce carbon emissions by offering a financial incentive to householders to replace their inefficient boilers, and £400 has been made available for up to 125,000 privately owned or rented households across England on

a first-come, first-serve basis. The installation of a new boiler could cost householders in the region of £2,000 to £3,000. The Welsh and Scottish Governments have also announced similar boiler scrappage schemes.

The introduction of the boiler scrappage scheme in England has generated considerable interest from MLA colleagues and the wider public, and my officials have briefed the Social Development Committee on the matter. Therefore, the debate also gives me the opportunity to clarify some issues surrounding the scheme. I emphasise that the English scheme is aimed at reducing carbon emissions primarily and is not targeted at vulnerable groups or fuel-poor households. A scheme to mirror the English scheme would involve a much greater investment, and, as it would be cross-departmental in nature, it would likely require Executive consideration and would not be solely for my Department to deliver or take the lead on. The Department of the Environment has responsibility for climate change, and I would want my officials to discuss any potential boiler scrappage scheme with officials from that Department.

Although I support a local boiler scrappage scheme similar to the English model, my first concern, as Minister with responsibility for the fuel poverty strategy, is the alleviation of fuel poverty in vulnerable households. As all Members are aware, and has already been said during the debate, the definition of fuel poverty is when the cost of heating a home requires more than 10% of the household income, and there are various determinants in that, including low incomes, high fuel prices and energy efficiency measures. None of us in Government have any control over incomes or energy prices, but we do have control over energy efficiency measures.

8.15 pm

I accept that improving the energy efficiency of households that have old or inefficient boilers will contribute to the alleviation of fuel poverty. That is why I asked my officials to include proposals for a boiler replacement scheme in the new fuel poverty strategy that will be available for public consultation in the spring. However, any such scheme that I introduce will target vulnerable households in which people live in fuel poverty; it will not focus solely on reducing carbon emissions, as is the case with the scheme in England. The reduction of carbon

emissions is a welcome by-product of all the energy efficiency schemes.

A boiler replacement scheme should not be delivered on a first-come, first-served basis. Given the limited availability of resources in the current economic climate, I must ensure that resources are specifically targeted at those who are most in need. I have reservations about introducing a scheme that would require those on the lowest income to provide an additional £1,000, at the very least, towards the cost of installing a new and efficient boiler. The boiler replacement scheme that I will propose as part of the new fuel poverty strategy will not require households to make a financial contribution. I will take on board the comments made during the public consultation process in the spring.

Some Members expressed concern about the removal of repairs and upgrades of heating systems from the warm homes scheme, and they linked that to a boiler scrappage scheme. The removal of repairs and upgrades enabled DSD to open up the heating element of the warm homes scheme, for the first time, to families who receive working tax credit. Research has shown that there are long-term health benefits for children who live in a warm house. I should point out that a boiler can still be replaced under the warm homes scheme in the exceptional circumstances of there being a significant danger to the health and safety of the occupants. As the administrators of the contract, that decision is at the discretion of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I hope that I have provided some reassurance to Members who expressed concern about that issue.

Heating systems are one element of improving the energy efficiency of homes, but I want to highlight the importance of improving the insulation of our housing stock. Insulation plays a key role in improving the energy efficiency of homes. According to the Energy Saving Trust, about half the heat lost in a typical home is through the walls and loft. The warm homes scheme offers insulation to people on disability benefits and to those on income-related benefits. Given the current cold weather, there is no better time to make homes more energy-efficient by installing or improving insulation. I ask Members to encourage their constituents to apply to the warm homes scheme for assistance with insulation. They will feel the benefit of doing so through the increased warmth of their homes.

However, tackling fuel poverty is a cross-departmental issue that no Department can tackle on its own. All Departments have a role to play in alleviating fuel poverty, as will be emphasised in the proposals in the draft strategy. After public consultation, a strategy will be submitted to the Executive for their approval. I hope that my Executive colleagues will support the new strategy and ensure that all Departments play their part in the alleviation of fuel poverty.

I will touch on some of the issues that were raised during the debate. Some Members spoke about their abiding interest in, and repeated request for, the introduction of such a scheme, and I found that compelling.

Simon Hamilton raised the issue of the working fuel poor. I have extended the criteria of the warm homes scheme to capture those families who have young children and who are in receipt of working family tax credit. They are now eligible to apply for assistance.

Anna Lo referred to the Housing Executive tenants who live in homes with inefficient heating systems. The Housing Executive operates a rolling programme to replace old and inefficient heating systems. The warm homes scheme is different in that it targets owner occupiers and privately rented homes with inefficient heating.

My colleague Declan O'Loan made an interesting point about Barnett consequentials, and he was right: a Barnett consequential of £700,000 was received for boiler scrappage by the Department of Finance and Personnel, but all the additional Barnett consequentials from the 2009 PBR are being used to offset the spending pressures for 2010-11. Apart from Mr O'Loan, nobody referred to that issue, but it is interesting and worth amplifying. It is a matter of regret that that issue was not addressed by the Department of Finance and Personnel, and I would be happy to raise it again.

Alex Easton mentioned the criteria for the warm homes scheme being too narrow. The warm homes scheme has assisted more than 80,000 households in Northern Ireland with a range of heating and insulation measures. The scheme was amended following a Northern Ireland Audit Office report, because we needed to address need, disadvantage and poverty. I have given a commitment to review the scheme once it has been in operation for one year. To review it any

earlier would not give us the evidence base and the research base that we require.

I thank all Members for their contributions. I take on board the import and purpose of the amendment, and I want that to be conveyed to Ulster Unionist Party Members. I am charged with dealing with boiler scrappage, but it must be done on the basis of need. We must target the vulnerable and the disadvantaged so that we get to the people who need the facility the most.

I reaffirm my total commitment to the alleviation of fuel poverty and look forward to Members' support for our new fuel poverty strategy, which will include proposals for a boiler replacement scheme.

Mr Craig: I declare an interest. I was interested in boiler scrappage a long time before I was elected to the House. Purely because of some of the Ballymena blood in me, I wanted to reduce my home fuel bills. A number of years ago, I made the decision to replace the boiler in my house with a new super-efficient model. The effect of that was to increase the efficiency of my boiler from 60% to 97%, which is an efficiency improvement of more than 50%.

Some Members mentioned gas, but I do not have the luxury of getting gas where I live. Although there has been an increase of more than 50% in fuel prices over the past two or three years, the net effect of replacing my boiler has been that I am still paying the same fuel bills that I was paying five years ago. Such an effect would go a long way to tackling the fuel poverty that is felt by vulnerable individuals.

I had the luxury of being able to fund the replacement of my boiler myself, but not all people have that luxury. For that reason alone, it is only right that we support the motion and try to get something done as quickly as possible. I commend the Ulster Unionists for dropping the amendment, because we cannot just jump straight into a scrappage scheme. Members highlighted the difficulties that some of the schemes in England are experiencing.

The Chairperson of the Committee, Simon Hamilton, talked about the effect that those schemes are having on more than 40,000 homes in England, how they will improve the system and how, as the Minister highlighted, their main remit is to target carbon reduction. It is good that targeting carbon reduction can have

the wonderful side effect of targeting the fuel poor; I welcome that.

Mr McCann said that companies had abused the English scheme. Some emails that I have received have hinted at the inflated prices that people faced when taking up the £400 grant, and I know that the Minister will take that matter on board. We will not repeat that mistake in Northern Ireland; we are more canny than that. Thomas Burns rightly pointed out that another benefit of the scheme is the huge cash injection that it would give to local industry. We have all received emails from boiler installation companies and their representative bodies. Most companies in that industry are very small, perhaps comprising only two or three people, and such a scheme would have a huge benefit for locally based industry. David Hilditch hinted at those benefits.

Anna Lo queried whether the Housing Executive could be included in the scheme, and the Minister answered that question. Alex Easton said that heating bills in Northern Ireland are one third higher than those in the rest of the UK. That adds to the great difficulty that Northern Ireland faces, with the hugely inflated fuel prices in the world market at present.

Mr F McCann: Simon Hamilton mentioned hard-to-reach areas. One thread that has run through many of the Committee's discussions is the serious problem of fuel poverty in rural constituencies, where people may have obsolete boilers or terrible heating systems. I hope that the Minister takes that on board. Does the Member agree that we should put a special focus on rural areas to try to ensure that people receive the assistance that is required to change their boilers?

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I hope that the Minister takes that point on board. I was about to raise it.

Mr F McCann: I read your notes earlier.

Mr Craig: I will not comment on that.

It is a recognised fact that people who choose to live in rural areas, such as I do, do not have access to gas or other forms of heating. Therefore, we are stuck with the choice of oil, electricity or solid-fuel heating, and those heating systems have inbuilt additional costs. Another issue is that, because the population of rural areas tends to include more elderly people,

many heating systems in rural areas are much older than those in urban areas. Therefore, I plead with the Minister to consider that issue and address it in some of her proposals.

Lord Browne raised a most interesting point; he said that there may not be enough fitters to carry out a scheme, even in the urban areas of Northern Ireland where gas is more prevalent. That is slightly concerning. I have no idea why the standards were changed, but I know that the original gas-fitting scheme created huge difficulties for gas fitters. Therefore, I hope that that situation is not replicated. We need to keep a watching brief on that, because it could lead to huge difficulties in the gas boiler industry in Northern Ireland and could even have implications for the maintenance of existing boilers, not only in the private sector but in the public sector, because much of the Housing Executive stock has converted to gas.

8.30 pm

I noted with interest what the Minister had to say about the introduction of her proposed new fuel poverty scheme. I welcome that new scheme and the fact that it will be targeted at those who are most in need. No one will disagree with her about that, but I hope that any new scheme will also have an impact on those who fall just outside the criteria for receipt of benefits. Like most Members, I know that there are people who, because they have a relatively small pension income or choose to work in low-paid jobs rather than sit at home and take benefits, fall outside the benefits system and receive no support whatsoever from the Government. Can those people be targeted and helped? They have less money in their pockets than some people who are on benefits. The House has failed to address that issue sufficiently.

I also listened with interest to what the Minister had to say about some households not having to make any contribution whatsoever towards a new boiler. Although, in some circumstances, that is to be welcomed, I just hope that the gesture is not abused. I know that the Minister will put fail-safes into any such scheme to ensure that that will not be the case.

It is interesting, for a change, that my party, more than others, is supporting green issues in the House, and we look forward to the fuel-efficient benefits of the proposed scheme. More importantly, however, we look forward to tackling

the issue of fuel poverty by yet another means in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the introduction of a boiler scrappage scheme by HM Government and calls on the Minister for Social Development to examine the scope for the future introduction of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland.

Adjourned at 8.32 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 9 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has asked me to inform the House that he will be absent from Parliament Buildings on official Assembly business on Monday 15 March and Tuesday 16 March.

Executive Committee Business

Debt Relief Bill: First Stage

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): I beg to introduce the Debt Relief Bill [NIA 9/09], which is a Bill to make provision about the relief of debt of individuals and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

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

Housing (Amendment) Bill: Final Stage

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

That the Housing (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/08] do now pass.

The Bill is an important step forward in dealing with homelessness, and it aims to enhance and clarify housing law in a number of ways. It is appropriate that I briefly highlight the Bill's key elements.

Some of the Bill's most important provisions deal with homelessness and are commitments that I made in 'Including the Homeless', which is a strategy for improving the social inclusion of homeless people. The Bill ensures that tackling homelessness remains a top priority by placing a duty on the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy and on other government agencies to take that strategy into account when delivering their functions. The Bill also offers homeless applicants new rights of review and appeal and makes the Housing Executive's procedures for dealing with homelessness more transparent and accountable.

The provisions that relate to registered housing associations will ensure that my Department can regulate those associations sensibly and cost-effectively. If required, my Department will have the ability to take early and appropriate action to safeguard the interests of tenants and public funds. The Bill also improves existing law for dealing with antisocial behaviour and provides social landlords with new tools to regain possession more quickly of certain abandoned houses. The Bill's remaining provisions improve the operation of existing housing law, strengthen the voice of local government on housing matters and improve Assembly control on certain types of statutory rules.

I thank the Chairperson and members of the Social Development Committee for their positive contributions and support in progressing the Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton): On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I will make a few remarks as part of the Final Stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill. As the Minister said, the Housing (Amendment) Bill is designed to enhance the legislative framework in respect of a wide range of housing matters, from homelessness and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) to housing associations and introductory tenancies.

A key part of the Bill is the introduction of a legislative requirement for the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy. As the House will be aware, the Housing Executive currently has a range of anti-homelessness policies that form its 'Including the Homeless' strategy. The Bill puts the homelessness strategy on a statutory footing and makes its production and regular renewal a duty that the Housing Executive must undertake. The Bill also requires key organisations and Departments to take the strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

In its review of the 'Including the Homeless' strategy, the Committee indicated that it was pleased with the progress that had been made and with what had been achieved already. It welcomed the support that legislation will give to the battle against homelessness. The Bill also refers to the provision of homelessness advice. The form and type of advice was a great source of consternation to many witnesses who appeared before the Committee, particularly those from the voluntary sector. Following the passage of the Bill, the Committee looks forward to reviewing departmental guidance on the form and nature of homelessness advice to ensure the delivery of the right advice in the appropriate format.

Clause 10 of the Housing (Amendment) Bill deals with some aspects of how the challenge of antisocial behaviour can be dealt with in social tenancies. Committee members were concerned about the issues raised in that regard. Almost all members referred to concerns about antisocial behaviour in their own constituencies. Some were keen to discuss the issues involved, including the need for social landlords to have a duty of

care for existing tenants; improving information sharing among social landlords; withholding transfers from tenants who have been sanctioned for antisocial behaviour; and the provision of better guidance on the better management of antisocial behaviour issues for social landlords. The Committee looks forward to the Minister's next housing Bill, which it is understood will go some way to addressing members' concerns in that regard. Members also await with interest the planned modernisation of the common housing selection scheme. I am sure that that will be the subject of further discussion today. I do not look at any particular Members opposite for assurance that they will raise that; indeed, I will be surprised if they do not.

The Committee anticipates with interest the Department's review of the housing association guide. That guide is to be amended to require all social landlords to publish their antisocial behaviour policies and procedures. The Committee hopes that that will mark a further important stage in the debate on the alignment of Housing Executive and housing association tenures.

Members commented on the need to enhance the democratic accountability of the Housing Executive. Clause 12, which increases the Northern Ireland Housing Council's representation on the Housing Executive board, goes some way to allay members' concerns in that respect.

The amended Bill ensures that two cohabiting families retain the protection afforded by HMO registration and the consequent need to comply with important habitation quality standards. The Bill also includes a sensible widening of the definition of a family, which ensures that extended families living in the one house do not have to needlessly register it as an HMO. The Committee felt that those amendments to the Bill were a useful compromise but the Department should make further efforts to engage with all stakeholders on the best way to monitor and improve standards in all HMOs.

The greater part of the Bill refers to social tenancies. However, the Committee, as part of its consideration of the Bill, briefly considered issues relating to the mandatory registration of private landlords. Again, members look forward to the Minister's next housing Bill, which is expected to introduce measures in that regard. As the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, I thank the Minister, her Department

and the Committee's members and staff for their engagement and efforts during the passage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill.

I will make a few remarks about the Bill from personal and party perspectives. Like every Member and as I have done on behalf of the Committee, I welcome the fact that the homelessness strategy will be placed on a statutory footing. We know that the Department has not suddenly realised that there is a homelessness problem, because it has already been attempting to deal with it in policy, including the homelessness strategy. We used to pride ourselves on the fact that Northern Ireland did not have the visible manifestation of homelessness that existed in other major cities around the world. We did not have the large number of rough sleepers that one saw regularly on television in cities such as London. Sadly, visible homelessness has become more apparent on the streets of Northern Ireland, principally in the cities of Belfast and Londonderry. A representative of another city is sitting beside me, and he is too close for comfort, so I must mention that there are other cities in Northern Ireland.

The visible manifestation of rough sleeping, as it is referred to, is more evident. I am concerned that there is a problem, although facilities such as the Welcome Centre in Belfast and First Housing Aid and Support Services in Londonderry have put in great efforts to tackle rough sleeping. I submitted questions for written answer to the Minister at the end of last year, because particular problems with homelessness arise at Christmas. I am pleased to see that the strategy in Londonderry resulted in there being no engagements there over Christmas. That is very positive. Unfortunately, some 118 engagements took place in Belfast over the same period, although, historically, Belfast has had more of a homelessness problem than Londonderry.

A worrying trend in those 118 engagements was that 16 of them — 14% — were foreign nationals. That is a much higher percentage of foreign nationals than there is in the population of Northern Ireland and, as such, has to be a cause for concern. I do not want to open up a can of worms, but how we should engage foreign nationals has been debated and discussed at length in Committee. Legally, we find it difficult to do anything, yet conscience dictates that something must be done. Over the course of one month, 14% of engagements were foreign

nationals, and that represents a worrying trend. Over Christmas, we read in the newspapers the awful story of a foreign national who had died while sleeping rough. The Department is aware of the problem and needs to home in on it. I want to see the homelessness strategy deal with the wider issue of rough sleeping, no matter who is involved or where they come from. It does Northern Ireland no good to read headlines such as those that appeared over Christmas.

Much good work goes on. Before Christmas, the Committee visited the First Housing Aid and Support Services facility in Londonderry, and we were very encouraged by the efforts made there to tackle homelessness not just by putting a roof over people's head or giving them shelter but by trying to develop the life skills of those who, unfortunately, find themselves homeless. I visited the Salvation Army at Centenary House, where I discussed its report, titled 'The Seeds of Exclusion 2009', which was launched, with the Minister's assistance, in the Long Gallery at Parliament Buildings last July. It is a good report, which analyses the reasons why people find themselves homeless. Two important elements in trying to prevent homelessness are giving people purpose and building their relationships. The lessons learned from that report are useful in guiding the direction of a statutory homelessness strategy for Northern Ireland.

We all welcome the fact that the homelessness strategy will be put on a statutory footing and that the legislation requires a much wider engagement across other statutory agencies. All Members realise the importance of that from their experiences and from what they have seen in their constituencies. I know that I do. Thankfully, the problem of rough sleeping does not extend too far beyond Belfast and Londonderry. However, there are individuals who may fall into the trap. Good work is being done in my constituency by the Link Family and Community Centre in Newtownards, which identifies potential rough sleepers and works with them to try to stop them falling into that unfortunate trap.

10.45 am

Our experiences in our own areas tell us that there is a need for cross-cutting work on homelessness. That is why it is good to see that there is provision for homelessness strategies in the Bill. It is also good to see that all statutory agencies are involved in not only

developing homelessness strategies but in taking them into account.

Provisions to deal with antisocial behaviour are in the Bill. Indeed, the Committee took time to discuss wider aspects of antisocial behaviour, although I acknowledge that that matter will probably be better and more fully addressed in the second housing Bill. It is a bit like buses: we wait for a housing Bill, and two come along at once. No sooner will we have dealt with this Bill than the process on the second will start. That is good, however, and it is good that we are addressing those problems in the right way.

Antisocial behaviour was a common theme in the Committee's discussions. If any Member were asked about the problems that they have to face in their ordinary everyday constituency work, they would say that antisocial behaviour is a real problem in all housing tenures, particularly in social housing tenure. I welcome the provisions of this Bill, and look forward to seeing the provisions of the second. I do so as a result of information that I gleaned that underscores the fact that there are two types of problem. Responses to questions for written answer show that evictions from Housing Executive properties over the five years from 2004-05 to 2008-09 rose by 65%. That is an increase from 26 to 43, which is a pretty small number compared with the overall number of tenants. However, it is significant that there has been such a rise, and it obviously indicates that there are increasing problems with antisocial behaviour.

Mr F McCann: Every party has an interest in ensuring that there is legislation to deal with antisocial activity. However, the figures that the Member quoted hide the problem, because the vast majority of people who go to court for antisocial activity get a slap on the wrist. When we come to look at the next housing Bill, we will have to consider how to tighten the legislation so that people who push drugs or who are heavily involved in vandalism can be dealt with.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I welcome the Member's intervention, which was useful. I agree with him, in that even though it is in some ways encouraging that the number of evictions has gone up, showing that there is proactive activity, there is a concern that it may be masking what is going on. That is why it is important that the Housing (Amendment) Bill requires all social

housing landlords to publish their antisocial behaviour policies. That is an encouraging step. However, the Member is right: we would like to see more being done.

Mr Craig: The Member spoke about masking the difficulties of antisocial behaviour. As a member of the Committee for Social Development and of the Public Accounts Committee, I know that one issue that is raised time and again is that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, all bodies are playing safe, in that they are not sharing among themselves the appropriate information about tenants. Such bodies include housing associations and the Housing Executive. That may not be a legal constraint, but there is no legal imperative on them to share such information. As a result, a lot of antisocial behaviour problems go unanswered or are not dealt with. I would like to see that legal imperative put on housing associations and the Housing Executive so that the issue can be tackled. It should perhaps be not in this Bill but in the next housing Bill. Would the Member agree?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I certainly agree with anything that can be done, and the Housing (Amendment) Bill is an important first step in addressing antisocial behaviour by ensuring that all social landlords publish their policies on antisocial behaviour. As I said, that is an important move in better aligning different social landlords. Of course, there is more work to be done. That is acknowledged by the Department, which will produce another Bill to look at that issue. I look forward to examining that more closely in Committee.

I identified the first problem of the increase in evictions. In some respects, however, that is positive and negative. The other issue that I noticed from the same answer is that the number of evictions of housing association tenants over that same period was fewer than 20. Although there are more Housing Executive properties than housing association properties, the gap is closing all the time. However, there were no evictions for antisocial behaviour from housing association properties in 2004-05, and there were only two in 2006-07. I cannot believe that there were only two incidents of antisocial behaviour in those years when there were 26 and 17 evictions respectively from Housing Executive properties during the same period.

The Bill includes the important point that there needs to be a better alignment of social landlords, which, equally, has to carry forward into antisocial behaviour. The second Bill must ensure that there is better alignment and more power for the Housing Executive or housing associations to better deal with antisocial behaviour. I look forward to considering that Bill.

It sounds as though I am being critical of housing associations, but I am not. The Minister regularly reminds us of the growing number of housing association properties that are being built across Northern Ireland, which is good to see. I put it on record that, when I have dealt with housing associations at constituency level, I have only ever found them to be very good at dealing with antisocial behaviour problems. Likewise, the Housing Executive is very good and very responsive, although tenants do not always get the result that they want.

We had a debate yesterday about repairs and maintenance. That could be reflected today in that there is a particular duty on existing tenants. After all, they pay their rent. They nearly have a duty, in some people's minds, above and beyond those who are on the social housing waiting list because they are already in a property. I very much look forward to any enhancement of the powers and abilities of the Housing Executive and housing associations to tackle the problem of antisocial behaviour.

There has been a 65% increase in evictions over the past five years. That highlights the problem of which we are all aware. It is good and positive to see that the Housing Executive is able to use the mechanisms that it has available to tackle —

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for giving way for a second time. When it comes to dealing with major antisocial behaviour in a household, the housing associations and the Housing Executive have the remit only to rehouse those individuals elsewhere. Legislation has been looked at that states that, after three strikes, there is no more legal obligation to house such individuals. I support such legislation. What is the Chairperson's opinion? My experience of cases in which individuals refuse to reform is that we end up simply moving them about the countryside until we eventually get them far enough away. We almost find a field for them somewhere. That is not a great solution. There has to be a better way of dealing with the problem.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social

Development: I am not sure where that field would be located; I am sure that that would also be a problem. A Member for West Belfast on the opposite Benches, Fra McCann, always reminds us that 20% of his constituency is rural. I do not know whether he wants to offer part of Divis Mountain for that purpose.

Mr F McCann: I was talking about hill farmers in West Belfast yesterday.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social

Development: I suggest that that is a different type of hill farming, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I reiterate Mr Craig's point about the need for better alignment of antisocial behaviour policies between social landlords, and there is a requirement in the Bill for the publication of existing antisocial behaviour policies. In the past, it has sometimes been difficult to see exactly what those policies were. Publication is an important first step. I am open, as are other Committee members and, I hope, the Minister and her Department, to looking at all innovative ideas and trying to dream up some of our own to address antisocial behaviour while also considering experiences elsewhere.

Antisocial behaviour is a catch-all phrase for everything from kids playing football in the street — the sort of stuff that I did as a youngster without considering myself in any way antisocial; in fact, Members may consider the behaviour that the Deputy Speaker lets me get away with in the Chamber more antisocial — right up to really antisocial problems that we all recognise as a scourge on society.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that housing associations must share more information between themselves and with the Housing Executive? Differing guidelines often lead to a lack of information sharing and of understanding, which contributes to moving the problem of antisocial behaviour around. There is a serious need for clarification and joined-up thinking.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social

Development: I thank the Member for his intervention. I know that he has constituency concerns about antisocial behaviour addressed in the Bill. He has raised it a number of times inside and outside the Committee.

The information sharing that he refers to is one of the more basic elements that the Committee

and I, as a Member, would be looking for in a future housing Bill. That relates to the point relayed by our colleague Mr Craig, who said that the problem can be moved around because there is a lack of information sharing. There is no legal requirement for information about somebody's past antisocial behaviour, convictions or sanctions to be passed, for example, from the Housing Executive to a housing association. The problem can be moved, but the information cannot. Understandably, that leads to all sorts of problems such as people who have a history of antisocial behaviour for which they have been sanctioned being moved to an utterly inappropriate area.

We can all think of examples. As I speak, I have an example in the forefront of my mind that involves exactly such a problem: a family with a history of antisocial behaviour being moved from one district to another and then another. The problem does not go away; it simply gets moved, and the only solution is to move it again. The argument comes back to Mr Craig's point that there must be some examination, if not adoption, of the idea that people should be given a limited number of chances. That, of itself, would move the problem around. A three-strike approach would mean that, ultimately, when somebody has a third strike they have to be moved somewhere else. That is a very emotive issue.

The Committee welcomed the inclusion of the clause in respect of the publication of all information. I regard that as a good, positive and necessary first step that I want to see delivered.

Clause 12 increases the democratic element of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's board by having four or more members of the Housing Council on it. That is positive. My colleagues and I held a personal view that that requirement could have been a bit more robust. Under the review of public administration (RPA), there is a trend towards institutions in health or libraries having a greater number of elected representatives on public bodies, such as the Housing Executive board, however that requirement is constituted. Nevertheless, what is included in the Bill is an important and positive move in the right direction. Granted, I would have preferred it to be more robust, but at least it is a positive move in the right direction.

11.00 am

I am about to steal another Member's thunder, but the housing selection scheme is another issue on which I wish to touch. During the Bill's various stages, the matter was raised at length in the Chamber and in Committee, and no doubt it will be raised in the future. The issue is being discussed a lot, particularly in light of suggestions made in the Commission on the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland's report, which challenged the housing selection scheme's orthodoxy. If one were to ask every Member in the Chamber, it would not take long for them all to identify problems with the housing selection scheme. Clearly, there must be some mechanism with which to allocate housing, and any mechanism must be fair, equitable and unbiased. Every Member is aware of and could hark back to problems that existed years ago, and those problems cannot and should not be repeated. However, having grown up and being a bit more mature, we are now able to look at the housing selection scheme and conclude that it is not working in the way that we would wish.

Mr Craig: The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development referred to homelessness and to the fact that people are living on the street. In my experience, it is normally young men who have to sleep rough. Frankly, if you are a single, young man, the housing selection scheme lets you down big time. You have no chance of being housed in a Housing Executive or housing association property. Instead, you will be directed towards one of the shelters, which may or may not be suitable. Does the Chairperson agree that that issue must be revisited?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: The homelessness strategy is a cornerstone achievement of the Bill. Earlier, I concentrated on people's automatic perception of homelessness, which is one of rough sleeping, but homelessness also exists in a broader sense. The Member raised an important point: tackling homelessness and the housing selection scheme is connected. As the Minister will no doubt remind us, while there are not enough houses to house those who are on the waiting list, homelessness will be a problem. Looking at how the housing selection scheme is constituted, we could all come up with various problems with it, including the fact that it does not give preferential treatment to people

who want to stay in their own area in order to retain and to build their community; it does not recognise people who have been on the waiting list for a long time; it sometimes puts people who are desperate for any house into one that is inappropriate —

Mrs D Kelly: The Member will excuse me for thinking that this debate is taking longer than the one at Consideration Stage. Some might even think that we are filibustering.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: Perhaps I should read out recipes. Given the seriousness of the issue that we are discussing, I regret that the Member should have made those comments. Everyone in the House who takes homelessness seriously would want to spend as much time on the subject as possible. The Member often talks about how dysfunctional we all are; yet, here we are debating a good piece of legislation that will tackle problems that are dear to my heart, other Members' hearts and the hearts of everyone in society, and the Member criticises and wants to stymie that debate. We should be proud that we are passing this legislation today.

The issue that Mr Craig raised highlights the need for reform of the selection scheme. Mr Deputy Speaker, I will not push your patience any further in respect of other issues that were raised, such as a mandatory registration scheme. However, I have spoken in other debates in the House of my view that although mandatory registration of private-sector landlords is desirable in a perfect environment, the light-touch scheme that the Minister seems to be heading towards is probably the optimum system that we can get at the moment.

In conclusion, on behalf of my DUP colleagues who sit on the Social Development Committee, I thank not only the Minister for her time, patience, effort and energy in bringing the Bill forward but the officials in her Department. I also thank all the witnesses who gave oral and written evidence on the Bill. We had very good legislation at the start, and it was enhanced by the contribution that was made through the Committee. That contribution could not have been made by the Committee alone; it was made because of the evidence that was gleaned from the many witnesses. We all, including the Minister, the Department, the Committee, the House and Northern Ireland, benefited from the efforts of stakeholders who take a keen

interest in housing issues. Their work helped us to enhance the Bill, and I wish to record my personal thanks and the thanks of my party colleagues for that.

Contrary to all the accusations that are made about what goes on in this place, or, rather, the accusations about what does not go on in this place, a piece of good legislation will be passed today. It will tackle an important issue that is fundamental to a good society by addressing homelessness through a statutory strategy to deal with a problem that afflicts not just Belfast and Londonderry but all towns. The Bill is important, and it makes significant progress in respect of antisocial behaviour, which I mentioned before at length, and other issues. Therefore, I welcome it. It is good legislation, and it is one example of the Assembly doing its best to make a difference for everyone in Northern Ireland.

As I said before, these Bills are like buses. Another housing Bill will come forward as soon as we finish this one. However, I welcome that, because it will take some of those issues that we have raised today and that the Committee raised during its deliberations —

Mr Easton: Will the Member give way?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I am trying to build to a crescendo, but I will give way.

Mr Easton: The Member mentioned private landlords having to register. What penalties will be in place for private landlords who fail to register?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I wish that I could use my phone to Google an answer to that question. At this stage, there is no requirement to register. I feel like giving way to the Minister to let her use her expertise to answer that question, but perhaps she can address it later through her officials. Nevertheless, there is no scheme in place at this stage, but there is a need to develop one. There is no point in having a scheme in place if it is not robustly backed up by fines of some kind. Indeed, any scheme would be belittled if there were no fines at all. However, the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 requires the registration of HMOs, and the suggestion is that there should be a £20,000 fine for failure to comply. Therefore, that is the sort of penalty that we would be looking at.

I will try to conclude again. I look forward to that further Bill, because it will address different issues, and it will further enhance —

Mr Donaldson: In addressing the issue of homelessness, is the housing allocation scheme brought into the frame? I have evidence that, in my constituency, homeless people have priority for housing, but people who live with their parents have difficulty in becoming registered as homeless, and that tends to discriminate against younger people. Is there anything in the Bill that will address that, or will it be dealt with in the next phase of legislation?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: I thank the Member for his intervention; he has raised an important issue. The homelessness strategy, which will build on the Including the Homeless strategy that is in place, needs to be mindful of that issue. The Department must also be mindful that the two are not separate in any way. Homelessness is a problem that does not stand on its own. Factors such as the housing allocation scheme or the common selection scheme play into it.

As I said before, there is no perfect scheme. There will always be people on the waiting list, but improvements can be made. I look to the Department to come up with ways to make improvements in its regular reviews of the common selection scheme. The Committee has put a lot of pressure on the Department to come forward with a more fundamental review than those that have been undertaken in the past. I am in favour of that, because some options, such as the scheme that was put forward by the Commission on the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland in its recent paper, are worth examining. I do not think that that scheme would totally eradicate the waiting list — the building or freeing up of houses is the only measure that will do that — but it may be able to give some attention to the problem that the Member raises, and, hopefully, tackle it more positively than it is being tackled now. I look forward to seeing how the next Bill that the Minister bring forwards will treat that issue and others, such as antisocial behaviour and the registration of private landlords.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to give my support to the Housing (Amendment) Bill, and I encourage Members to do likewise.

Mr F McCann: Minister, a LeasCheann Comhairle, a chairde. The Bill has been debated at Committee

and is now on its passage through the House. There was general acceptance by the Committee that it would support the Bill as it stands, and I hope that it makes life easier for those who find themselves homeless.

During Committee Stage, we discussed and debated the time frame in which a homelessness strategy should be formulated, and we eventually agreed, with some reservations, that it would be every five years, with a 12-month review to take account of any changes that may arise. After Committee discussion and debate on which bodies should be consulted on a homelessness strategy, the Department eventually accepted the proposal that local government and several other bodies be included. The Committee also raised the issue of translation services for those who do not speak English as their first language. The Department advised us that a range of interpreters was available and widely publicised in areas where ethnic minorities reside. That is a Housing Executive responsibility, and the Committee accepted departmental assurances on the matter.

The Committee also advised the Department that some groups were in favour of the removal of the intentionality and priority need clauses in homelessness cases. The Department pointed out that there were concerns that the removal of those clauses would have a detrimental impact on people who were applying under the common selection scheme and those who were declaring themselves homeless. The Committee accepted that explanation.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development spoke about the common selection scheme. I raised concerns about that scheme, and I have been assured that reviews are to be carried out into discriminatory practices. I am surprised that that was not dealt with before now, given that it condemns many people to years in hostels or overcrowded conditions.

Clause 10 places a duty on all housing associations and the Housing Executive to publish their policies on antisocial behaviour. We have asked for the addition of several amendments regarding antisocial activity. One of those relates to the duty of care, which, as it stands, takes no account of the wishes of local residents when antisocial people or families are being moved into an area. Housing authorities claim that their duty of care relates only to the applicant.

The Committee also wanted to table an amendment to allow for the sharing of information between housing associations and the Housing Executive to ensure that relevant and important facts about problem individuals and families are made known to all necessary authorities. We were assured that those issues would be picked up in the new housing Bill, which will soon come before the Committee.

Other issues that were raised and discussed include the legal definition of HMOs; homelessness advice and who should be giving it; the increase in the number of people from the Housing Council who are nominated to sit on the Housing Executive board; the rights of immigrants on arrival and the Housing Executive's responsibility to provide temporary accommodation for them; obligations under section 75; mandatory registration of the private-rented sector, which will be dealt with by the proposed housing Bill; the extension of the length of time for a review of a decision to refuse homeless status to someone from 21 days to 28 days; widening the remit of the Housing Executive to bring in others to deliver advice on its behalf; and the abandonment of introductory tenancies, which will allow landlords to claim back their properties.

11.15 am

The Committee agreed to support certain aspects of the Housing (Amendment) Bill, while others provoked heavy debate. Fortunately for both the Department and the Committee, we were able to reach compromise.

I thank the Committee Clerks and the Department for their work and the advice that they supplied to us throughout our consideration of the Bill. It is quite obvious that substantial work is done outside Committees to ensure that Bills become law. I support the Bill.

Mr Craig: I, too, support the Bill and its principles. It is important that the Bill deals with a lot of issues, such as the homelessness strategy, HMOs, and how to manage individuals who are homeless.

Although there is a lot of good stuff in the Bill, I share concerns that members raised during Committee Stage with regard to the common selection scheme. I want to reiterate the point that has been raised. The Chairman, quite rightly, stated that people now sleep rough on the streets. The issue is not just that those

people may have come from other countries. Although that is an issue, it is not predominant. Unfortunately, the problem is becoming more common in all our cities. I include all four of them in that statement.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development: Five — Armagh.

Mr Craig: Five cities.

Unfortunately, people are now sleeping on the streets. In my experience, many are young people, particularly men, who have fallen through the system. There is a huge problem. The system was designed to deal with past issues, and did so quite well. However, it needs to be looked at again and reformed in order to do away, if at all possible, with the problem of young people ending up sleeping on the streets.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that the Bill does not tackle the question of how we are going to get this information out to the people who sleep on the streets? Although there is a duty on the Housing Executive to provide that information for free, a substantial section of the community will not know about the new regulations and rules and will slip through the system.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for his intervention. One issue that was certainly dealt with at length in the Committee was how to share information with those who have, regrettably, slipped through the system in Northern Ireland. It is difficult to reach out to that group. I hope that the Department will look at how to deal more closely with organisations that specialise in reaching out to those individuals.

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that proper resourcing of the voluntary sector is needed in that regard? A number of community groups and women's groups are still waiting for confirmation on whether they are getting funding from the Department for Social Development (DSD) to continue their work. A number of those organisations give out information on homelessness prevention and other benefits issues. The Department must look at that.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for that thought-provoking intervention. She knows well and truly that that issue is close to my heart. I agree with her on the need to get funding out to such

groups that, perhaps, work more closely with those people than government organisations.

I was about to touch on that subject with regard to faith-based voluntary organisations. The Assembly needs to bury the hatchet and deal with that issue. A lot of those organisations reach out to homeless people in greater depth than government organisations or even independent voluntary organisations.

I will advertise here: I am speaking to such an organisation next week. Hopefully, in future, we will recognise the value of those organisations and get the Department to work that bit closer with them to solve the problem of people sleeping on the streets.

Mr F McCann: The Member is talking about the important subject of people sleeping rough. I agree with him, and the Committee discussed ways in which those people could be helped. Groups such as the Simon Community and the Salvation Army provide shelters. However, I agree that it is difficult, especially for young men, to find accommodation at night. As far as my area of Belfast is concerned, the Welcome Centre has a particular focus on helping people who are sleeping rough. Those organisations need to be brought on board, because they think outside the box when it comes to dealing with such problems and difficulties. If they were to appear before the Committee to share their wealth of information, we could start to build a strategy that would allow us to deal with the situation. Anna Lo is right; resources are needed to deliver those services.

Mr Craig: I concur fully with the Member's comments. I have personal experience of those issues. I have contact with a faith-based organisation in my constituency that deals with dropouts from society who have found themselves in that situation because of drug addition. That organisation has had to be very resourceful to find funding through all sorts of avenues. Unfortunately, Departments do not want to know. Once the involvement of the Church is mentioned, government seems to run a mile, which is unfortunate, because the Church is delivering an extremely effective service on the ground for those individuals. However, I hope that the Department will look at that matter further.

Clause 12, which concerns the make-up of the executive of the Housing Executive and its board, was raised again during Committee

Stage. Unfortunately, when I raised the issue, I did not get very far. Only four out of the 10 members on the board are elected.

Mr Ross: Obviously, one would like to think that elected members on the board act as advocates for tenants. Has there been any discussion by the Committee or the Department about having a tenants' advocate on the board, so that the many tenants throughout the country would have a voice and feel that they are being listened to? I know that it is not in the Bill, but has the Department pledged to reconsider the situation in the near future?

Mr Craig: There were two issues raised at the Committee. The first related to the number of elected members on the board, and I feel very strongly on that issue. There is a democratic deficit in all those outside boards, or quangos, as I properly call them. They are quasi-governmental and are responsible to the Department, yet they are independent. Elected members do not have the majority voice on the board. Unfortunately, the Minister did not agree with my arguments. Will she explain why there is disagreement on that issue, as I would like to bring democratic accountability to all those quasi-governmental organisations as it would be more beneficial to the community?

The other issue, which was raised by my colleague, is that of a tenants' advocate. There was a high degree of agreement in the Committee about having some form of tenants' advocate on the board, which would enable tenants to have a more direct way in which to raise the issues that they have with Housing Executive properties. Although there was widespread agreement that a tenants' advocate should be on the board, agreement has not yet been reached on how to deliver that, given that several issues must be taken into account. It involves not only Housing Executive tenants but an increasing number of tenants in the housing association sector. I hope that the Minister will take on board the point that, directly or indirectly, a tenants' advocate should feed into the board. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about all the issues that I have raised.

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Members for their contributions. I absolutely marvel at the filibustering devices that were used in the debate, obviously to cause obfuscation before we debate the devolution of policing and justice powers. I admire Members' interest in

housing issues, particularly homelessness and the need for proper inclusion, which is the very thing that I hope will be supported in the new housing agenda.

I now turn to the issues that Members raised. The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development, Simon Hamilton, raised several issues. He asked whether the Committee will have sight of the guidance on homelessness that will be produced under clause 2 of the Bill. I reassure the Chairperson that my officials will discuss any such draft guidance that is due to be produced after the Bill receives Royal Assent. He also asked whether DSD will consult on the improvement of standards in houses in multiple occupation. That issue was raised during Consideration Stage, when I stated quite clearly, and I confirm today, that my proposals for a further housing Bill include measures that are aimed at improving the regulation of houses in multiple occupation.

Will the Housing Executive deal with rough sleeping and foreign nationals? I am also aware of the problems that Mr Hamilton raised, and I am happy to work with the Housing Executive to ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to address the issue of rough sleeping through the Housing Executive's homelessness strategy. Members will recall all the actions that were taken in June 2009 during the crisis that was precipitated by Romanian families being intimidated out of their homes. We took every possible step to ensure that the families received emergency accommodation after the unwarranted attacks on them.

Jonathan Craig raised the issue of —

Ms Lo: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister for Social Development: No, I will continue; I may give way later.

Mr Craig spoke about the legislation on information sharing to deal with antisocial behaviour. I want Members to be absolutely clear about that matter. Measures to deal with antisocial behaviour are, in the first instance, policing measures. However, the consultation paper that was published on 7 December 2009 included proposals for new legislation to enable relevant organisations to share information about antisocial behaviour if that would allow the Housing Executive to refuse permission for an exchange of tenancies or a house sale. Future initiatives on information sharing are planned.

The Chairperson and Jonathan Craig talked about the “three strikes and you’re out” legislation to deal with antisocial behaviour. Existing legislation states that the Housing Executive is not required to provide housing for individuals who are not deemed to be suitable tenants because of their unacceptable behaviour. I emphasise that individuals are not permanently excluded from social housing under that legislation because it is possible that those who moderate their behaviour could be housed in the future. As Minister, I wish to be sensitive to all people who find themselves in such situations, including those who are homeless and those living in difficult circumstances on housing estates where there is antisocial behaviour. Alex Easton also raised the issues of antisocial behaviour and information sharing. I have amplified the issue clearly.

The Chairperson and Jonathan Craig talked about the common selection scheme and dealing with homelessness. As Committee members will be well aware, I am examining ways of modernising the common selection scheme to address a number of issues, including those raised by Committee members.

11.30 am

I am also examining a range of other innovative ways of addressing homelessness, including making greater use of the private rented sector in appropriate ways. It is worth noting that the private rented sector has an equal number of portfolios as are owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Yesterday, I referred to a useful statistic on unfitness in the private rented sector. As a result of research and a good evidence base from the house conditions survey of last year, it has now emerged that levels of unfitness have gradually decreased and are down to around 0.2% in the housing association sector and the Housing Executive sector. I am sure that all Members will welcome that information, and it shows clearly that we in DSD, the Housing Executive and the housing associations are doing everything in our power and authority to tackle the issue of unfitness and make houses fit for people to live in, particularly for people who find themselves homeless.

Alex Easton also raised the issue of landlord registration and of penalties for landlords who fail to register. I have signalled my intention already to bring forward legislation for a landlord

registration scheme, and I shall consider the issues that the Member raised about penalties for failure to register.

Jonathan Craig and Simon Hamilton raised the issue of rough sleeping and the sharing of information. I want Members to be aware of the fact that the Housing Executive monitors regularly patterns of rough sleeping in Belfast and Derry. Thankfully, the number of people who are sleeping rough remains small. However, I am not complacent on the issue.

Anna Lo raised the issue of funding to the voluntary sector, and work is done on the issue through funding programmes such as Supporting People and work with the Housing Executive on a new homelessness strategy. This time last year, I took a decision to increase the budget for Supporting People to ensure that vulnerable people were protected. That includes people who might otherwise find themselves in a more vulnerable position or who might otherwise find themselves homeless. I am leading the way on tackling the issue and ensuring that all homeless people receive the support and services that they require.

Jonathan Craig raised the issue of the Housing Executive's composition and the whole area of tenant representation through a tenant advocate. It may be useful for the House to know that appointments to the board of the Housing Executive are made in line with the code of practice that is issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and that the ultimate responsibility for appointments lies with the Minister. The process must be governed by the overriding principle of selection based on merit, and appointments must be made on the basis of the well-informed choice of applicants, who, through their abilities, experience and qualities, match the needs of the public body. That means that an individual could not simply be appointed to the board as an advocate.

However, there is nothing to prevent any person who feels that they are in a position to represent the interests of tenants from applying through the public appointments process. I have talked to the elected representatives on the board of the Housing Executive, who originate from the Housing Council, and the broad Housing Council. From that, I know that the people who we have appointed and who have been appointed by the respective district councils are ably qualified to act on

housing policy and on how they see the future of housing. As far as housing provision is concerned, they will be able to deliver the Minister's new housing agenda and act as very good tenants' advocates in their own way. They raise issues with me on the broad spectrum of planned maintenance, newbuild programmes, multi-element improvement schemes, homelessness and a whole range of housing matters.

Jonathan Craig also raised the issue of faith-based organisations. He will recall that during a debate some weeks ago on a motion that was tabled by Members of his party — in fact, it was tabled by the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee — I said that I had provided funding for a pilot research programme to undertake a survey into the good work that is being undertaken by faith-based organisations in Northern Ireland, both Christian and non-Christian, because I quickly realised that they do an excellent job in that respect.

I am grateful to the Committee for Social Development and Members for their positive contribution to the progress of the Housing (Amendment) Bill and for the high level of consensus that the Bill has enjoyed. I now look forward to taking forward the second housing Bill, which will deal with a plethora of issues, including the regulation of landlords, the private rented strategy and other issues relating to the further implementation of the new housing agenda. I commend the Housing (Amendment) Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Housing (Amendment) Bill [NIA 7/08] do now pass.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Policing and Justice Powers

Mr Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion that was tabled jointly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a resolution by the Assembly, under section 4(2A) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, that certain matters should cease to be reserved. The Business Committee has allowed up to three hours for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. Given that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's second report on the devolution of policing and justice has been published and is relevant to the motion, the Business Committee has also agreed that the Committee Chairperson will have up to 15 minutes to speak. All other contributions will be limited to five minutes.

The deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness): I beg to move

That this Assembly prays that the following matters, as set out in schedule 3 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, should cease to be reserved matters:

1. Those matters in paragraph 9 with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the following provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000—

(a) Chapter 1 of Part 1, so far as relating to the prevention or detection of serious crime (within the meaning of that Act), and

(b) so far as relating to the prevention or detection of crime (within the meaning of that Act) or the prevention of disorder—

(i) Chapter 2 of Part 1, and

(ii) Parts 2 and 3.

B. In relation to the prevention and detection of crime, the subject matter of Part 3 of the Police Act 1997.

C. The operation of—

(a) sections 21 to 40 of, and schedules 3 and 4 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, and

(b) section 102 of, and schedule 12 to, the Terrorism Act 2000.

D. In relation to terrorism, the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy.

E. The operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

F. So far as it was a policing and justice matter (within the meaning of section 4) immediately before the coming into force of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010—

(a) the subject matter of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971;

(b) the subject matter of sections 12 and 13 of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (substances useful for the manufacture of controlled drugs).

G. The Serious Organised Crime Agency.

H. In relation to prisons, the accommodation of persons in separated conditions on the grounds of security, safety or good order. (In relation to subparagraph H, "prisons" includes any institution for the detention of persons because of their involvement, or suspected involvement, in crime.)

2. Those matters in paragraph 9A (the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland).

3. Those matters in paragraph 10 (public order) with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

B. In relation to the maintenance of public order, the armed forces of the Crown (including the conferring of powers, authorities, privileges or immunities on members of the armed forces for the purposes of the maintenance of public order).

4. Those matters in paragraph 11 with the exception of the operation of the temporary provisions, as defined in section 47 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5. Those matters in paragraph 11A (co-operation between the PSNI and Garda Síochána with respect to certain matters).

6. Those matters in paragraph 12 with the exception of—

A. Items for the time being specified in article 45(1) or (2) of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004; and the subject matter of article 45(10) of that Order.

B. The security of explosives, including—

(a) the prevention of loss or theft of explosives,

(b) the prevention of the use of explosives for wrongful purposes, and

(c) the detection, identification and traceability of explosives.

(subparagraph B does not include the security of fireworks, or the licensing of shotfirers, or the subject matter of section 2 of the Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.)

7. Those matters in paragraph 14A (rights of appeal to the Supreme Court, and legal aid for such appeals).

8. Those matters in paragraph 15 (matters relating to the Courts) with the exception of the operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

9. Those matters in paragraph 15A (the Northern Ireland Law Commission).

10. Those matters in paragraph 17 (the Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners for Northern Ireland).

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Just over a month ago, the First Minister and I declared in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement that we would jointly table an Assembly motion for a resolution for this day, 9 March 2010. The motion, the debate and the vote that will conclude it are long overdue and are crucial to the Assembly's attainment of policing and justice responsibilities.

In November 2008, the First Minister and I made public a process paper setting out the steps towards devolution. We have now reached the final group of actions in that process paper. Since November 2008, we have witnessed the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's thorough and essential groundwork in preparing for policing and justice devolution. Its January 2009 report, which was endorsed by the Assembly, identified the necessary modalities for devolution, and those have shaped subsequent legislation. We have seen Westminster legislation to amend the Northern Ireland Act in line with the Committee's recommendations. We are indebted to the Committee for that work.

Today, the Committee is publishing its third comprehensive report on policing and justice within the space of two years. That is a considerable output for any Assembly Committee, and we hope that the latest volume, together with those that have gone before it, will inform the Assembly's deliberations today. We all owe a considerable debt of gratitude to the

Chairperson, Jimmy Spratt, to his predecessor, Jeffrey Donaldson, to the Deputy Chairperson, Raymond McCartney, and to all current and previous Committee members.

Last year, the House experienced long and comprehensive debates on the Department of Justice Bill. That Act will enable us to establish a Department. We also saw the successful outcome of the intensive negotiations that the First Minister and I held with Gordon Brown last autumn to address the financial pressures that the policing and justice agencies will face in the coming years. It is clear that the additional £800 million in finance is entirely dependent on the successful transfer of policing and justice responsibilities at this time.

The motion is long — some would say cumbersome — and there is a reason for that. It is designed to align closely with the Order that the Secretary of State will lay at Westminster. We have decided to err on the side of completeness and transparency in the motion to ensure that everyone understands what is being proposed.

There are some in the Chamber who have expressed concerns about the course of action on which we are embarked. That is understandable, as these are uncharted waters. However, we know that the transfer of these powers makes sense. The community knows it and supports this course of action.

Last night, the Ulster Unionist Party declared that it will not support the motion. That saddens and disappoints me. In my view, they are opposed to the transfer of policing and justice powers for cynical party political reasons. Since losing the leadership of unionism, and since the re-establishment of the Assembly and the Executive, the Ulster Unionist Party has set out to portray the Executive as dysfunctional. An Executive designed and agreed to serve all the people — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Every Member will have an opportunity to speak in the debate and should allow the deputy First Minister to proceed.

The deputy First Minister: An Executive designed and agreed to serve all the people. An Executive supported by public opinion, which wants to see them work and deliver.

The Ulster Unionist Party maintains that it is opposed to the Hillsborough agreement, an

agreement welcomed by its senior partners in the British Conservative Party. The Hillsborough agreement established a committee to determine how the Executive could function better, and that committee is co-chaired by the leader of the UUP. The position that the UUP has put forward to us in the past couple of days would give them a veto on the Executive and on the work of each Minister. That is a recipe for delay and disagreement. The Ulster Unionist Party's proposals seek to undermine the safeguards of the Good Friday Agreement and are designed to be unworkable and unsupportable. It is a party that complains about not being involved in decision-making, yet it refuses to make any contribution and boycotted the final session at Hillsborough with the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister. On top of that, the UUP is on record as stating that it will not support the election of a local Minister to oversee the administration of policing and justice until there is agreement to test 10- and 11-year-old children to determine which school they should attend. Those are the most dysfunctional political positions that I have ever come across.

Let me be the first to recognise that there have been difficulties in the Executive. My views on that were aired in the past and are a matter of public record. However, the Executive are a body made up of parties that have different political and national outlooks. That body has been in existence for only three years and can only work effectively with parties that want to contribute and to be involved. The Executive are relatively new and include some political leaders who had never spoken to me before the Executive were set up.

It was always going to be difficult to build and maintain relationships and working practices, and throughout the period, the institutions have continued to deliver. I would have preferred it if we had made and implemented agreements earlier, but we are where we are. The Hillsborough agreement provides an opportunity for a new start.

The process that we are engaged in is one that no single party can dominate and control. It demands that we all work together for the common good and to maintain the political stability that will deliver prosperity, quality public services and investment. I acknowledge that it is a challenge to us all, but it is one to which we all must rise.

We must put aside party political posturing and begin an era of joint and equal working.

11.45 am

I note that former Congressman Jim Walsh, who is a great friend of the peace process and Ireland, will be here with us today to witness the vote. Jim, like many other Congressmen, has supported the peace process and the search for prosperity and investment.

Next week, the First Minister and I will travel to the United States to meet political and business leaders. As we set about the task of delivering investment, I am conscious that the special economic envoy, Declan Kelly, has articulated the view of potential investors that political stability is crucial. Those investors cannot understand why any party would be opposed to having a politically accountable policing and justice service. Indeed, in the words of one commentator, it is a no-brainer. How can the Ulster Unionist Party argue that the Executive must address the pain of unemployment that is felt in communities across the North and, at the same time, undermine the institutions and our actions to promote investment, growth and jobs? As we prepare to travel to the United States, investors and political leaders, from President Obama down, are watching developments here very closely. We can send out a strong message to investors that the institutions are robust and stable and have the support of all and that we are open for business.

A process was agreed between the parties at Hillsborough, and it is a local agreement that is free from the patronage of the British and Irish Governments. It is our agreement, and, as a result, it is much stronger and more valuable. Parties set aside party political positions for the common good. It was a challenge, but it was one that we met. It is another step in the maturing of politics here, and it should mark a step change in which parties set aside party political positions for the common good. We must recommit to finding solutions rather than restating positions.

The Agreement at Hillsborough Castle is a good agreement for our entire community. Let us move on and address the challenges that we face to build prosperity and deliver for all of our people. It is time to get on with the job that we were elected to do. It is time for a new start and a new beginning. I commend the motion to the House.

The Chairperson of the Assembly and**Executive Review Committee (Mr Spratt):** I

declare an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I thank the Business Committee for its foresight in providing me with sufficient time to speak on the debate today at an early stage. I acknowledge the Business Committee's recognition that this is a unique situation and that the devolution of policing and justice powers is a matter of great significance to the House and the people whom we represent. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee believes that the work that it has done on the devolution of policing and justice matters will be of interest to Members and the wider public.

As the deputy First Minister said just a few moments ago, the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle included a timetable for the devolution of policing and justice matters. Throughout the negotiations that led up to that agreement, I had a sense that members of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee were among those most keenly interested in what might be in that agreement, and they had good reason to be.

Back in 2007, the Assembly agreed that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee should conduct an inquiry into the devolution of policing and justice matters. A report on that inquiry, which included details of the powers to be transferred, was endorsed by the Assembly on 11 March 2008. The Committee published its first report on the arrangements for the devolution of policing and justice matters on 6 January 2009. That report dealt with the structures for a Department of Justice and the arrangements for the appointment of a Justice Minister.

The Committee then turned its attention to the remaining matters that it considered needed to be addressed prior to any possible request for powers to be devolved. In light of the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, the Committee decided that it might be helpful to produce its 'Second Report on the Arrangements for the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters' in time to inform today's debate. Late last week, Members were provided with an advance and embargoed copy of the report. It is important that the report is read in conjunction with the other two related reports and the process paper, which was published by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 18 November 2008. A copy can be

found in appendix 5 to the second report, from page 215 onwards.

The motion refers to the powers to be transferred. They appear to be consistent with the powers identified in recommendations 2 to 17 of the Committee's 'Report on the Inquiry into the Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters', which was published in 2008. However, the House would find it helpful if the First Minister, in his closing remarks to the debate, would confirm that the request for the transfer of powers is entirely consistent with the earlier wish of the Assembly. If that is not the case, it is reasonable that the First Minister should explain why there is a divergence and what it is.

I want to give the Assembly some sense of the co-operation, and the occasional lack of co-operation, as the Committee went about its work. The four political parties that were represented on the Committee worked together on the report. We may not always have agreed on certain matters, as is evident from the report, but all the meetings were well attended, and members always had an opportunity to state their views. We also offered those parties that were not represented on the Committee observer status while we were discussing devolution.

The Committee made a submission to the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister to assist it in its scrutiny of the Department of Justice Bill, which was taken through the House last year and has since been granted Royal Assent. That Committee appreciated our assistance.

The Committee worked closely with the Committee on Procedures on the Standing Orders that were required to accommodate devolution. I will return to that point later.

The Committee did its best to keep the Committee for Finance and Personnel informed of its work, and, assuming that the motion receives the necessary support today, I wish that Committee well in its deliberations on the budget for the new Department.

The Committee gathered and examined a significant amount of written and oral evidence. I wish to thank the specialist adviser to the Committee, Victor Hewitt from the Economic Research Institute, for his work, which can be found in appendix 3 to the report, from page 141 onwards. On that note, and before I turn to

co-operation with others, I want to acknowledge, on behalf of all Committee members, the co-operation and commitment of the Committee Clerk and his staff. Their standards of professionalism, impartiality, integrity and organisational skills, together with their appreciation and understanding of the subject, which was often discussed in a politically charged atmosphere, served the Committee well.

As part of its deliberations, the Committee visited parliamentary colleagues and officials in London, Edinburgh and Dublin. We were warmly received, had helpful discussions and met each of the Justice Ministers and representatives of the Justice Committees. We also had a number of informal meetings with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, and we are grateful to all those who assisted us.

The Committee had regular discussions with the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Secretary of State. Perhaps those meetings were not frequent or long enough for some Committee members, but they were always cordial and constructive, if not always illuminating. Initially, the Secretary of State questioned why the Committee should involve itself in the financial implications of devolution and appeared to resist its interest. However, the Committee asserted its undoubted authority in such matters.

Similarly, the Committee insisted on seeing the seven key documents that are considered to underpin the arrangements for devolution. Members can find those documents in appendix 4 to the report. It is true to say that the NIO took its time in releasing those documents, some of which were found to be defective. The majority of the papers continue to be subject to review and revision.

The Committee is also frustrated that it has yet to see the paper commissioned from John Larkin QC, as well as the First Minister and deputy First Minister's response to it.

Pages 2 to 12 of the report deal with a number of key matters, including the financial implications of devolution; the role of the Attorney General; the arrangements for the appointment, and removal, of judicial office holders; North/South policing and justice agreements; parading; the Public Prosecution Service (PPS); and the Justice Minister's position in the Northern Ireland Executive.

There is also an executive summary on page 1 of the report which contains five conclusions. First, that there is merit in £1.328 billion being ring-fenced for policing and justice services within the Northern Ireland Executive's overall budget for 2010-11.

Secondly, in the interests of the good and proper regulation of the way in which the Assembly conducts its business, it is important to have an early resolution of matters relating to the role of the Attorney General.

Thirdly, it will be necessary to have appropriate arrangements in place to enable the Assembly to fulfil its scrutiny role on prosecutorial policy, spending and administration in the Public Prosecution Service.

Fourthly, the independence of the Public Prosecution Service should be maintained, and the accountability of the PPS should be examined by the justice Committee, once it is established.

Finally, subject to their compliance with all appropriate policing and justice legislation, the procedures and protocols between the Justice Minister, the justice Committee and the Department and its agencies should be the same as those that apply to other Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive.

I will elaborate on each of those conclusions in turn.

The £1.328 billion does not include the additional financial package, which is considered to be some £800 million in the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period and beyond. The Northern Ireland Office will retain £26 million to cover its own costs in 2010-11.

The additional financial package was the result of detailed financial negotiations, which were very much informed by the work of the Committee. The importance of that work has long been acknowledged, not least by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. The details of the package were first published in a letter from the Prime Minister on 21 October 2009. A second letter from the Prime Minister, also dated 21 October 2009, was provided to the Committee in confidence. That letter provides clarification on a number of points. The Committee subsequently sought and received permission to publish the second letter, which

it has done for the first time in the report. Both letters can be found in appendix 3.

On 10 November 2009, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister appeared before the Committee to discuss the correspondence from the Prime Minister. At that meeting, they declared that they regarded the additional financial package as acceptable.

Details of the distribution of the £1.328 billion across the headquarters functions of the Department of Justice, and of the sums to be made available to the range of executive NDPBs and executive agencies, can be found on page 355 of volume 1 of the report.

There is no denying that, in the short term, more work needs to be done urgently, especially on the role of the Attorney General.

The Committee expects to see John Larkin's paper, and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) response to it, in the coming days. That may pave the way for us to give some further direction to the Committee on Procedures.

12.00 noon

I understand that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister will appear before the Assembly and Executive Review Committee again before the end of March. That meeting may give us an opportunity to resolve the Attorney General's role and other outstanding issues, such as how the Public Prosecution Service will be properly scrutinised. The Committee recognises that the Assembly, and politicians generally, should not interfere in individual cases. However, the PPS is funded from public moneys and, therefore, should be subject to proper scrutiny by the Assembly. The Committee believes that the independence of the PPS should be maintained but that its accountability should be examined in more detail after devolution.

The report deals with a number of other matters, which I will touch on briefly. I want to draw Members' attention to the fact that the Northern Ireland Act 2009 provides for the initial arrangements for the appointment and removal of judicial office holders. The arrangements are subject to review by the Assembly by May 2012. Although the Committee discussed the relationships between the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and the security services and between

the Minister and the Assembly on a number of occasions, no consensus was reached on what those relationships should be. Similarly, although it considered the matter, the Committee did not reach consensus on the requirement for a justice sector of the North/South Ministerial Council.

The Committee had originally planned to address what consideration, if any, it wished to give to the Ashdown report on parading. Indeed, Lord Ashdown was invited to appear before the Committee but declined to do so, and the Committee acknowledges that parading is addressed in section 2 of the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle. The Committee also discussed the fact that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have an advisory role to play in the appointment of the Police Ombudsman, but no consensus was reached on any variation to the existing arrangements.

Finally, I remind Members that the Committee's first report on the arrangements for devolution identified a number of matters that a future justice Committee might want to examine, the first of which relates to the question of whether political parties should continue to appoint MLAs to the Policing Board. The second issue relates to the future status of the Probation Board, and the third and fourth issues relate to matters that the Northern Ireland Law Commission and the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission raised in the Committee's initial report.

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

The Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee: I hope that Members find the Committee's second report informative and helpful in dealing with matters today. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an LeasChéad Aire, agus éirím chun tacú leis an rún ar son Shinn Féin.

I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. I fully support the motion that the two Ministers tabled jointly and welcome the contribution that we heard from the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness. Martin outlined some reasons why it is very important to complete the transfer of policing and justice powers to here. Moreover, he set out what he thought were some negative responses from

other parties, particularly the Ulster Unionist Party. However, that party will be able to elaborate later if it so chooses.

It is very important to welcome the point that we are at, because it is clear that the transfer of policing and justice powers is a move forward for the entire community. Even at this stage, I urge all parties and all Members to vote for the motion, notwithstanding any reservations that they may have, some of which may even be justifiable. The single most important thing that the parties can do collectively today is to send out a solid and unanimous message. However, it remains to be seen whether that will happen as the day goes on.

As I said at a public engagement this morning, I am not a unionist, and I can have only a limited insight into the thinking of those unionists with whom I engage. However, I and my colleagues who have been members of the Policing Board for almost three years and other colleagues who sit on district policing partnerships have been working day in and day out with members of all the other parties. I defy any representative of any other political party to decry any of the work that we, and many others, have been engaged in over recent years as we have tried to tackle policing issues and to ensure that the police work in partnership with local communities.

Ultimately, all that we do is about making our communities safer. I and my party colleagues Martina Anderson and Daithí McKay have no doubt that there are people from every community, including Ulster Unionist Party members, its MLAs and their supporters, who work every day of the week to ensure that they not only engage on matters specifically related to policing but on wider criminal justice issues. We all know, if we reflect honestly, that there have been times in the recent past when families have come out of the courts crying their eyes out about the way in which they have been unfairly treated. They have been hurt by the lack of criminal convictions or inappropriate sentences for heinous killings and other crimes in our community. I urge the Ulster Unionist Party, even now, whatever its reservations, to come on board positively and work with the rest of us to iron out the difficulties that it believes exist.

The UUP knows that the vast majority of people whom it represents want the transfer of policing and justice powers, and, equally importantly, they want the parties to work together under

a collective mandate to resolve those issues and get on with the other important things that matter to the community.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maskey: I am sorry; I will not give way. I have listened to the Member in recent days, and although I may feel his pain, I do not want to contribute to it by giving him another shovel. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maskey: The Member may be vacuous on his own time, but not on mine.

Our communities are looking forward to a fresh opportunity to take part in an informed debate on how the complex issues of policing and criminal justice can be brought to a forum like this under the tutelage of a locally elected Minister who will engage with local communities and be accountable to them, as opposed to under the tutelage of a direct rule Minister. I look forward to a positive vote today so that the communities that we collectively represent will have a new opportunity to engage on the important criminal justice issues. Let us talk about the revolving-door system in the Magistrate's Court and the failure of the Public Prosecution Service to properly prosecute cases on behalf of victims and their families. I urge all parties to be positive and constructive and to take the opportunity that is before us today.

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

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. I declare an interest as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. I add my tribute to the Chairperson of the Committee, the other members of the Committee and the Committee Clerk and his staff for all their hard work.

The key decisions of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, it might be fairly and accurately said, took place elsewhere. It is clear that although the issue of policing and justice ought to have been dealt with in this House and at Stormont, it was instead, along with other issues such as the Irish language, the on-the-runs and the removal of the Army from Northern Ireland by October 2010, dealt

with at Hillsborough. In that coalition of loathing, that political carve-up —

The Chairperson of the Assembly and

Executive Review Committee: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I will give up — give way. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson of the Assembly and

Executive Review Committee: Will the Member inform the House when it was that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee discussed the removal of the Army, or when it was discussed in any other place?

Mr Kennedy: All I can say to the honourable Member is: wait and see. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: I want to make it absolutely clear, and I comprehensively reject the earlier remarks and accusation levelled by the deputy First Minister when he opened the debate, that the Ulster Unionist Party is not opposed to the devolution of policing and justice in principle. We place that firmly on record. The Ulster Unionist Party is not opposed to power sharing. It is thanks to the Ulster Unionist Party in large measure that the deputy First Minister and others, including the First Minister, enjoy their positions today.

The Ulster Unionist Party has always taken the hard decisions. It has always taken the right decisions for the right reasons and at the right time. We will continue to do so today. It was not an Ulster Unionist Party Member who said that policing and justice would never happen in our political lifetime. It was not an Ulster Unionist Party Member who said that it would not happen in the lifetime of this Assembly. There are people missing from the DUP Benches. Perhaps some of them are having grave doubts. Perhaps some of them are the “abominable no men”, as they were described, or perhaps they are just incredible snowmen. However, we shall see whether their principled opposition will melt away in the early spring sun.

I now come to those who have waxed loud about being the principled opposition in this House: the Alliance Party, the self-proclaimed defenders of the ordinary people. When I was a wee lad, my mother used to talk about a man — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Continue.

Mr Kennedy: My mother used to talk about a man who operated a stall in Smithfield market: Joseph Kavanagh. His slogan was “I buy anything”. David Ford is now the Joseph Kavanagh of Northern Ireland politics. *[Laughter.]* It seems that there is no cause too great, no issue too important and no core belief so vital that cannot be sacrificed for political expediency. The Alliance Party should be ashamed of itself. It is now an article of ridicule all over Northern Ireland.

From the “I buy anything” man, I move to the “I’ll do anything” man, Shaun Woodward, our esteemed Secretary of State; he of Sainsburys fame — and I can kiss goodbye to my Nectar points this week. *[Laughter.]* The Secretary of State, in my view, has behaved disgracefully, particularly over recent days. His attempts to bully, bribe and blackmail this party have abused the high political office that he holds. He should pack his bags well in advance of the forthcoming general election.

That brings me neatly to another person, the deputy First Minister. Recently, we had the long-awaited announcement of the publication of the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy.

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

Mr Kennedy: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I am very grateful.

That strategy is now on its way. We, as a party, got a taster of that yesterday in the deputy First Minister’s office: the way ahead, a shared future. We wanted to discuss the way forward, and instead we were shown the way out. *[Laughter.]* The mask slipped, and it was not make-over Martin, it was not the Martin of the ard fheis, the autocue, and the designer set of the RDS Dublin. It was more like the Martin from the Bogside. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that this party is not in the Lobbies with that man today.

The problem is not with policing and justice. The problem is that the Executive are not being properly run. They are being run for the two and the few, and not for the many. Therefore, we cannot endorse the motion. We need to address seriously the issues that confront the Assembly and our people; the issues of economy and jobs and education and health.

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

Mr Kennedy: The Ulster Unionist Party is right when it stands back and holds back its position today. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ritchie: The motion before us is very important. It will set in motion the procedure that will result in the transfer of policing and justice responsibilities from Westminster to Stormont next month. Therefore, the SDLP very much welcomes the motion. Indeed, we believe that it should have happened long ago.

What has made today possible is not the recent scrambling at Hillsborough but 10 years of dedicated policing and justice reform, which was spearheaded by people such as Chris Patten, Nuala O'Loan, Alex Attwood, the thousands who applied to, and the hundreds who joined, the new PSNI, and so many others. We will vote for it today. The devolution of policing and justice powers should never have brought the collapse of our devolved institutions so close a few weeks ago, and it should not be allowed to destabilise us now.

12.15 pm

The air of crisis that has surrounded policing and justice is the result of people not being honest about it. That began three years ago, when Sinn Féin claimed that it had secured the DUP's agreement to the devolution of policing and justice powers in the St Andrews Agreement. Sinn Féin asserted that claim repeatedly, and, as time passed, it accused the DUP of being in breach of the St Andrews Agreement. That situation was compounded by the silence of both Governments, who allowed Sinn Féin's inaccurate version of events to go unchallenged. Although I acknowledge the desire of the two Governments to deliver progress, they have not distinguished themselves on the issue.

More recently, we have had all the dissembling and gerrymandering around the appointment of a Justice Minister. A DUP concern about the possibility of a Sinn Féin Justice Minister has become a DUP veto on any nationalist Minister who has Sinn Féin's blessing. That situation continues despite the fact that the established system for appointing Ministers states that the next ministerial position could go to nationalists.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ritchie: No; I will not be giving way.

In the coming weeks, we will witness Sinn Féin trying to engineer a situation in which it appears to vote for Alban Maginness in the Chamber despite having designed a process that guarantees that he cannot be appointed. We will also see a display of phoney reluctance from others who have no democratic right to the position. To cap it all, the DUP will lecture us that a cross-community vote in the Assembly is the finest form of democracy or that the involvement of five parties is more democratic than four. Once again, carve-up politics is being disguised as inclusive government.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ritchie: No, I will not.

The DUP and Sinn Féin and their cheerleaders heralded the Hillsborough arrangement as yet another historic deal. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ritchie: Let me nail the latest spin. A vote for the transfer of policing and justice powers is not an endorsement of the Hillsborough package. Martin McGuinness has been making that claim all week, but he is wrong. The SDLP supports the devolution of policing and justice powers, but we think that aspects of the Hillsborough arrangement are unclear, uncertain and unhelpful. The Hillsborough arrangement is based on a distortion of democracy, and it could turn the clock back on parading. It is secretive while pretending to be open, and it is a carve-up that pretends to be inclusive.

Members need only look at the elements of the Hillsborough arrangement, which include a date for the devolution of policing and justice powers, which, for purely electoral reasons, is applicable only if the DUP is supported by the party that it has excluded and abused for years. There is a parading working group, to which the SDLP and the UUP need not apply. Elected Ministers are not allowed to see any papers, but Sinn Féin is happy to share them with the Orange Order. The Executive function and delivery working group has four-party involvement, but, after six meetings, it is going nowhere fast.

There is a St Andrews unfinished business working group and an Executive backlog working group, which is chaired by the DUP and Sinn Féin but struggles to make progress. At the Executive, I asked for a copy of the agreed cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, but

I was told that I cannot have it. Although David Ford made agreement to the CSI strategy the fig leaf that enabled him to claim the nomination for Justice Minister, he has not seen —

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

Ms Ritchie: David Ford has not seen the CSI strategy either. At least that is what I was told at the Executive.

The SDLP supports the devolution of policing and justice powers today, just as we always have.

Mr Speaker: Order. I must insist that the Member brings her remarks to a close. Time is up.

Ms Ritchie: We do that, without equivocation, for the greater good of our community. We need the devolution of policing and justice powers, because we need to stand with the many families who have been let down by the Public Prosecution Service and the many who live in fear of crime. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ford: As I rise to support the motion, I note the enormous wave of support that is either side of me.

There is no doubt that the devolution of justice powers is the last challenge that we face as an Assembly. The issue brought down the institutions of this place in 1972, it was too difficult to deal with in 1998, and agreeing to it will be a sign that we can start to make progress at this stage. In fact, it will be the biggest change since 1998 in the devolution arrangements in any of the three devolved nations.

Members need to listen to the community, particularly those who are involved in the justice system, about the importance of getting this devolution and to show that we can deliver in the Assembly for all our people.

I start by thanking Jimmy Spratt for his report. I also thank the members of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee for their work. I fear that their detailed report will not get the attention that it probably deserves, given the way in which it has been introduced. Mr Spratt certainly made some interesting points, particularly when he talked about the role of the Attorney General and the functions of the Public Prosecution Service, which will need to be addressed in coming weeks.

I believe that we need the devolution of justice powers for three key reasons. First, it is part of cementing the peace process. I speak as an MLA for South Antrim, a year after the shootings at Massereene Barracks when two soldiers were murdered and a couple of months after the car bomb that so seriously injured Peadar Heffron. If we need any examples in this society of the necessity of getting the devolution of justice powers under way, we have only to look at what those who oppose it seek to do.

Secondly, if we get devolution of justice powers, it will demonstrate that this institution and these institutions as a whole are capable of taking responsibility for difficult decisions. It will also demonstrate that the sort of ya-boo politics that we have seen so much of over the past three years are at an end.

Thirdly, there is clearly a need to have joined-up government and to have the institutions function together correctly. This morning, I sponsored an event in the Long Gallery for the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers. I made the point that an interplay exists between the criminal justice system and people who have mental health and personality disorder issues. Those issues are simply not dealt with unless Ministers who sit together round the same Executive Table address them. I note that my professional colleague across the way is at least nodding his head in agreement.

I have no doubt that confidence in the devolution of justice powers exists in this community. The overwhelming results of opinion polls and the kind of conversations that we all have show that although there may not be a demand for the devolution of justice powers as such, there is an absolute demand that these institutions take responsibility for the issues that are in the remit of the future Department of Justice. That is the case even if the questions that are asked in the polls are somewhat loaded. That absolute demand is why we need the devolution of justice powers. We need those powers to be devolved not because people necessarily want institutional change but because there is a vital necessity to see practical change and to see devolution delivering in all the areas that it can, including justice.

I listened with modest interest to Mr Kennedy's rant. I noticed that he managed to spend most of his time giving general abuse. He was then followed by Ms Ritchie, who managed to heap

an equivalent amount of abuse on people. *[Interruption.]* That is OK, however, because I can deal with it. However, when we are discussing an issue that is as serious as this, the fact that the two parties on either side of me degenerate into personal abuse and do not consider the issues seriously shows that some people have to grow up even if others have started to move forward.

Those who did not engage at Hillsborough when they were given the opportunity and those who did not engage before that when we invited them to engage on policies are the people who fail to recognise that, on the issue of a shared future, for example, we never expected to see a policy paper. However, we asked for and we got progress and engagement from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. That never happened when the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP were in charge. That is a measure of movement forward that shows some degree of happening.

When we get to the sort of remarks that we heard this morning from the Ulster Unionist Minister about what would happen if the Army had to be brought in —

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

Mr Ford: The UUP is now showing that everyone else is out of step except it and Jim Allister. The Alliance Party supports the motion.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I am a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Members driving to the Assembly today probably heard the interview on BBC radio of the widow of Stephen Carroll, the murdered police officer. I do not think that anyone could have not been moved by her strong words, the words of an Ulsterwoman crying on behalf of Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen: get on with it, do your job, do what we have elected you to do, respond to the needs of this community, and listen to the people.

I would not want anyone else in the House to be in the unenviable position of one Member during that radio discussion, because he had to respond to a real person. Not a journalist's put-down, but the real words of a widow who could take a very different approach to life. She said: get on with it for the memory of my husband and the memory of ordinary Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen. That is a challenge to every

man and woman in the House to pick up the gauntlet, take the House forward and rule this divided country with a bit of energy and hope, and try to bring a bit of harmony to this place. Is this House listening to the crying words of men and women outside the Chamber, or are we in wrecking mode? That is the answer that Ulster awaits today.

I carefully chose my place in the Chamber today. I stand beside a man who was shot by the IRA, and behind a man who was a gallant member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. That tells its own story about the strength of feeling in this party and this House to take this land forward. I do not like the outside interference that has been put upon the Ulster Unionist Party. No one likes that, but it does not take away from our duty and our responsibilities to take the difficult decisions and to do what is right. It is taking those difficult decisions that will make this House noble, instead of a House of ridicule.

Mr Donaldson: What message does the Member think that the dissident IRA bombers who exploded a bomb outside Newry courthouse would have for the House today? Would they be supporting the devolution of policing and justice or opposing it? Did they explode that bomb to frighten some people out of taking the right decision?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr Paisley Jnr: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I hope that Members take the right decision, not because of outside interference, and are not scared away. I hope that they do the right thing because of the people whom we all represent. To come into this House, we made a manifesto pledge that there would not be a Sinn Féin Minister of policing and justice precisely because of some of the fears of some of my colleagues and some of the things that have happened in our land. On that point, we can say that we have delivered; it is mission accomplished. Yes, we have come to an agreement, and, yes, the compromise is that we do not take that post either.

Taking those tough decisions will make this House noble rather than a House of ridicule. However, some want it to continue to be the place of ridicule, and we should not rise to the scare tactics of suggesting that Sinn Féin will not support operational decisions. The very

people who say that have themselves failed to support operational decisions by the police. I just wish that some of those people would lead by example.

There is a default; the position that we have negotiated will not go back to a grab-all after 2012 — a safeguard that this party put in place for unionism that was not there in 2003 or 2005. Why was the UUP willing then, but not willing now?

12.30 pm

There will be some issues raised about national security, which is a matter that is important to me and other Members of this House. Let us address the confusion. Mr Attwood has said publicly that Northern Ireland is not like any other part of the UK. The fact is that it is the same as the rest of the United Kingdom. National security is an issue, and it is embedded here in the same way as it is in the north of England, Scotland and London. We have put in place another reassurance and safeguard because we are not a place apart. We are a place within the Union. Therefore, we should and must go forward today with confidence.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm, when the next Member to speak will be Martina Anderson.

The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Ms Anderson: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím chun tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion and declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. I also declare that I am, like Martin McGuinness, a very proud resident of the Bogside.

I return to what Members were talking about before lunch: no matter how much some parties in the Chamber try to frustrate the process, the transfer of policing and justice powers away from London and into the hands of locally elected politicians is without doubt what the people want. They are demanding a justice system that will deliver for all people here. Those of us who work closely with our communities — that applies to many in the Chamber — know the extent of the anger at the revolving-door justice system that allows criminals back on to the streets, sometimes hours after being arrested. We know of people's sheer heartbreak when killers are sentenced to a few years' imprisonment for their crimes. I am sure that Members have worked with families, as I have done in Derry, who have been absolutely devastated by the lenient sentences handed down to the people responsible for the death of their loved ones. People such as Eugenia Doherty, who has allowed me to refer to her, whose son Ciaran died in a car crash in 2008. The man convicted of causing 17-year-old Ciaran's death was sentenced to just two years in prison. I and, I am sure, many others have seen the heartbreak and pain endured by such families.

There has been no local Minister or locally designated framework to which we can refer those families for assistance in arriving at some kind of understanding of the situation. Seeing their loved ones' killers given such lenient sentences only compounds people's pain. Such cases go to the heart of the need to transfer policing and justice powers and to build a justice system that is absolutely fit for purpose. I have dealt with cases in which there has been a fundamental breakdown of the justice system, from the PSNI through to the PPS and the courts. The motion provides us with an opportunity to shape and reconstruct the system, so that justice and the needs of victims are at the heart of the process. UUP Members say that the machinery of justice is broken, but they do not want to take on the responsibility of

fixing it. Of course the task ahead is massive and difficult, but we in Sinn Féin have never been afraid of hard work.

In many ways, this is day one for the new justice system. The challenge that we all face now is to build the kind of justice system that the people demand and deserve. For one, I look forward to playing my part. As a member of the Policing Board's human rights and professional standards committee, I appreciate the opportunity to shine a light into every corner of policing in order to safeguard citizens' rights, including, where necessary, those of police officers. That is the diligence and accountability that we now intend to apply to the whole justice system.

Concerns have, of course, been raised regarding the NIO's draft protocols on how existing policing arrangements will operate in the new Department of Justice, but the role, responsibility and status of the Policing Board are set in legislation and will not be adversely affected by the transfer of policing and justice powers. Furthermore, members of the Policing Board were informed on Thursday that all those protocols are works in progress and are subject to change.

I want to be clear: MI5 should have no role whatsoever in Ireland. As someone from a community that has suffered absolutely immensely at the hands of an oppressive state, I know the poisonous and malignant influence of that organisation in my country only too well. It is for that very reason that Sinn Féin firewalls civic policing from the toxic influence of MI5. That organisation should have no role in our country or in civic policing. Some parties criticise us, yet they want to bring MI5 back into the heart of the process and make it a fundamental part of policing in our community. We are building a system with maximum accountability, transparency and disclosure of all aspects of policing and justice.

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

Ms Anderson: It is about so much more than politics; it is about communities, families and people. It is about all the people in the North, and they want the kind of justice system that I believe we can put in place.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Anderson: It is up to everyone in the Chamber to vote in favour of the motion.

Mr Hamilton: It is a pleasure to speak to this motion. Like my party, I have long been in favour of the devolution of policing and justice powers to this institution. There is a catalogue of reasons why we have wanted it, not least the historical attachment that unionists have had to having policing powers in our own Parliament. In fact, as David Ford indicated, the 1972 Parliament collapsed as a result of those very powers being taken away from unionists in this Building.

Everyone in my party is a long-standing devolutionist. Long before others came up with fanciful ideas about how to run this place, my party stood alone and fought for the maximum amount of sensible devolution to Northern Ireland, so we want more powers here, not fewer. In addition, we have always wanted to make a difference. Imperfect as things have been, in the past three years, we have tried to make a difference and, whether in policing and justice, social policy or economic policy, we will continue striving to make a difference in this country.

We wanted powers to be devolved on the basis of sound and solid conditions being met, principal among which was that there should not be a Sinn Féin Justice Minister. Mr Speaker, that is not going to be the case; there will be no Sinn Féin Justice Minister now or in the future. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Hamilton: I hear catcalls from Members to my right, so this is an opportune moment to remind those individuals about their position on the devolution of policing and justice powers. This morning, I heard on the radio Reg Empey talking last night. He said, "Our history is our strength". On this issue, their history is their weakness, because they stand exposed as the hypocrites that they are. The Ulster Unionist Party was prepared and willing to devolve policing and justice powers in 2005, at the midpoint of the last Assembly's mandate. Today, they are not so sure about what, in their eyes, was the right and proper thing to do five years ago in 2005.

Mr Hilditch: Was that to enable them to secure the position for Sinn Féin? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Hamilton: The Member made a very good point: the Ulster Unionist Party's decision in 2003 to devolve powers in 2005 showed its utter short-sightedness. As everybody knows, at that time, powers would have been devolved to two Ministers and, at that time, Sinn Féin was overtaking the SDLP as the largest nationalist party, so, in 2005, Sinn Féin and not the SDLP would have occupied one of the justice positions. That was also a time when Sinn Féin was allied to an army that was armed and involved in criminality and terrorism on the streets of Northern Ireland. That shows the short-sightedness —

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I remind the House that Sinn Féin is a political party, so the Member should curb his remarks. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Members that they should temper their remarks and respect the House's dignity and its business.

Mr Hamilton: I am happy to point out that, as a result of the Democratic Unionist Party's resolute actions, the republican movement has advanced to the point at which those arms have been abandoned and its terrorist and criminal past is behind it. The Ulster Unionist Party, however, was prepared not only to sit in government with Sinn Féin while all that behaviour was going on but to devolve policing and justice powers to it. Its members stand exposed as the hypocrites that they are. Although we would like to have had their support for the devolution of policing and justice powers, when it became patently obvious that they had no intention of doing what they have long stood in favour of doing, it was utterly apparent to everybody that we were dealing not with a dysfunctional Executive but with a dysfunctional Ulster Unionist Party. Opinion poll after opinion poll shows that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland support the devolution of policing and justice powers. Indeed, in quiet corners of this Building, its Members tell us that they want those powers to be devolved to the Assembly.

In his opening remarks, Mr Kennedy talked about everything but policing and justice. There was no objection at all to the substantive point before us today: the devolution of policing and justice. It shows that what his party is doing today is for purely party political reasons. Its opposition is entirely manufactured and is not consistent with its historical position.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: No, I will not give way. The Member will have time to answer the accusations and valid criticisms that I have thrown at him. The Ulster Unionist Party may want to tell the British Secretary of State to butt out of the affairs of Northern Ireland, and it may want to tell its Tory paymasters to get stuffed, but it will not tell the people of Northern Ireland that they cannot make progress. The DUP and the DUP alone, offers the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to make progress and to move forward, and that is what I am backing today.

Mr Speaker: I call Alan McFarland.

Mr Storey: Captain McFarland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McFarland: Major, please. I will start by declaring my membership of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee and by paying tribute to the Chairperson, the Clerk and the staff for the outstanding work that they have done with us over the past few years.

For five years up until 2006, I served on the Policing Board with Alex Attwood, Sammy Wilson, Ian Junior and Fred Cobain, constructing the outstanding, modern Police Service that we have today. During 2006, I served on the Preparation for Government Committee, and we nursed the fledgling negotiations between the DUP and Sinn Féin around the table for the first time. However, we were not allowed to refer to them as negotiations. The DUP insisted that it was a scoping exercise, and we got into the most awful trouble every time we used the word "negotiations". Indeed, I recall a major row between Willie McCrea and Martin McGuinness, when Willie took unkindly to a lecture from Martin McGuinness, and it is interesting that, 24 hours ago, Martin was still running around in a state of pompous lecturing.

For the past three years, I have served with the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and in front of Members today is the latest of our three extremely fat tomes on policing and justice. I am telling everyone that, because I spent the past eight years of my life developing policing and justice so that it can be devolved here; therefore, there is no doubt that my party and I wish to see it devolved here. We need local legislation so that anyone who is found guilty of attacking an elderly person in their

home, socialising at night at the Odyssey with a six-inch Bowie knife on their hip, annoying neighbours with antisocial behaviour or attacking the fire, police or ambulance services should receive a sentence that will act as a meaningful deterrent rather than the sort of sentences that they get at present. We need that legislation to be allowed to be developed here. Why then does the Ulster Unionist Party object to the motion?

We have been trying to fix a broken Executive and trying to persuade the DUP and Sinn Féin to adopt a four-party coalition, which is what it is supposed to be, and a consensus in government, which is surely what we all strive for here. Surely, that is not too much to ask for. However, despite all the fine, inclusive words over the past month, we have encountered again the blockage that has been with us since 2007. The Executive are a two-party junta. generalissimo Robinson and generalissimo McGuinness have their parties ruthlessly drive issues through the Executive and Committees. Where is the equality and listening to others' views in all that?

We had 154 days of chaos in the halted Executive, and it is a bit rich for Martin McGuinness to lecture us on vetoes as he did earlier. The Sinn Féin Executive Minister is on an ideological crusade, destroying grammar schools and prep schools against the wishes of all the other parties in the Assembly. Our efforts at Hillsborough and over the past week to fix the dysfunctional Executive have been blocked by the junta once again.

The Ulster Unionist Party would like to see policing and justice devolved to the Assembly, but we object to the corruption of the democratic process that sees Lord Ford gerrymandered into the role of Justice Minister.

2.15 pm

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that, on occasions, you have ruled that Members should be referred to by their correct name. I know that it pleases Mr McFarland to make that cheap, snide remark, but it is becoming a bit boring. If he wishes to refer to me, may I ask that he addresses me properly?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have said in the House on several occasions that Members should be referred to by their proper name, and that also applies to parties.

Mr McFarland: It is interesting that some people react faster than others to the cut and thrust of politics. We also believe that it makes no sense and, in fact, is dangerous to devolve policing and justice to this cracked and broken two-party junta of an Executive. My party and I will not support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: For too long, policing and justice has been a stumbling block. I hope that the devolution of policing and justice will become a stepping stone to a more stable society. I hope that lessons have been learned from the misuse of power, which led to Stormont being prorogued 38 years ago. I remind Mr Ford that one of the greatest misuses of power that led to the demise of Stormont was, of course, Bloody Sunday.

The SDLP has a vision for a society coming out of the Troubles that is at peace with itself and whose citizens are at peace with one another. We envisage a society that has a system of justice that is just, fair, compassionate, accessible and sensitive to the needs of all its people and is practical and effective in meeting the needs of all in society. The transfer of policing and justice is only the beginning; it is not the conclusion or completion of devolution. It is a process of reinforcing and, at times, rebuilding the confidence of ordinary people in the institutions of justice and policing.

That positive achievement could not have been realised had it not been for the recreation of policing under Patten. The SDLP is proud to take credit for the heavy lifting in that regard. Without the infrastructure of policing, no society can properly afford security to its citizens, and without fair policing and an acceptable police force we cannot have the rock on which justice and policing can be firmly placed.

Acceptable policing has provided the basis for the transfer of policing and justice powers, but the issue of policing is not finished yet. We want community policing. We believe that we are working towards that, and that should be an objective of all the parties in the Assembly. It is our aim and the aim, I hope, of other parties to achieve that. The SDLP seeks a justice system that serves the needs of all the people and grants justice. We believe that to be the paramount aim.

We envisage the creation of a charter of rights for victims of crime; the establishment of a sentencing guidelines council; legislation on

knife crime; the Prisoner Ombudsman based on statute; and we want the Assembly to work closely with the new Law Commission and its deliberations. On policy, my party wants to see the implementation of the Criminal Justice Inspection recommendations. We also want to see reform of the Prison Service and the development of the prison estate. We want to see the building of a new women's facility. We want to see the building of a new prison. We believe that it is essential that a new policing college be built here.

My party seeks a review of the work of the Public Prosecution Service. Last week's events highlight the deficiencies that exist there. Above all, the Assembly must address that office's accountability to the people of Northern Ireland.

My party also wants to see a review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, which is unfair to victims of crime. We also want to see the setting up of a criminal justice policy review forum and the reform of legal aid. Without that, ordinary people will not have access to their rights in the civil courts and will not receive justice. We want to see the review of the monetary jurisdiction of County Courts and the High Court.

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

Mr A Maginness: Finally, there are many outstanding issues that need to be addressed, particularly in relation to the intelligence service, North/South relationships and so on.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr A Maginness: Those issues require ongoing work.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an Chéad Aire agus leis an LeasChéad Aire as ucht an tuairisc seo a chur os ár gcomhair inniu. Ba mhaith liom freisin mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Cathaoirleach an Choiste, Jimmy Spratt, as an obair atá déanta aige agus ag foireann an Choiste.

I welcome the motion that has been tabled by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, and I commend the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's second report. A resolution would set in motion the legislative process for the transfer of justice and policing matters to the Assembly; the establishment of a Justice Department and, in turn, a Justice Minister;

and all that flows from that. That is what people elected us to do, and that is what this Assembly will achieve today. The Committee's report is an important component of that. I want to take the opportunity to thank the Committee Chairperson, Jimmy Spratt, for his work and the Clerk and his staff for their contribution. Patience was required throughout the process; he showed remarkable patience.

It is understandable that many people who, perhaps, are listening to the debate would believe that the issue concentrates solely on policing. Nothing could be further from reality. As important as policing is, it is only part of the process that leads to transfer and, indeed, its reality. Other agencies that will be transferred include the Court Service, the Public Prosecution Service, the Prison Service, the Prisoner Ombudsman, the Probation Board, the forensic science laboratory, the Criminal Justice Inspection, the Youth Justice Agency and the Legal Services Commission, which deals with legal aid, as well as many others to boot. With that transfer comes all those agencies' budget lines. Indeed, it brings with it an ability to make changes and to introduce new legislation. Going down that list of agencies, I believe that I can say without contradiction that all of us have, in recent times, dealt with them and found that doors were closed simply because they were not within the Assembly's remit. With transfer, those agencies will come under the auspices of the Justice Department and Justice Minister. Their work will be open to scrutiny by the justice Committee. That is the Government's responsibility. It is our responsibility as elected representatives and, importantly, it is what the people who elected us want us to do.

Many people believe that the current criminal justice system does not work for the benefit of the community. Transfer provides new opportunities to change that. It will now be our responsibility to make the criminal justice system work for the community's benefit.

The Hillsborough agreement lists areas that the new Department will address as an addendum to the Programme for Government. Under the banner "Equality of access to justice", they will include a sentencing guidelines council; review of alternatives to prison custody; the power of the Prisoner Ombudsman to be reviewed in the light of experience elsewhere; and calls for a review of conditions of detention and management and oversight of all prisons. I

note that Alban Maginness cited a number of them. His party's lukewarm reception to the Hillsborough agreement must be warming up.

Indeed, many people down through the years have said that our current prison system requires major reform. Now is the time to fulfil that, and we have the opportunity to do so now. For example, the Assembly debated issues of prison policy on two separate occasions. The first occasion was when the report of the Criminal Justice Inspection was debated, and the second occasion was the debate on the Prisoner Ombudsman's report into the death of Colin Bell when he was in Maghaberry prison. On both occasions, it was noticeable that no representatives of the Prison Service or the agencies that were involved found it necessary to be at the Assembly to listen to the debate. Indeed, many Members remarked on that. A marker was put down during those debates about what should transpire as a result of the recommendations that were made. Given that, however, none of those agencies contacted me, and I do not know of any other Member who was contacted. That is a damning indictment of ourselves.

The opportunity now exists, and we should not miss it. Whenever events occur, such as deaths in custody, we all run to microphones and say that this and that should not happen, yet we have no powers of scrutiny or powers to ensure that any recommendations will be implemented. That opportunity now exists. People who talk about the transfer should see it in its completeness and should not narrow it down to one issue or to an issue of their own reckoning. This is an opportunity to do the right thing for the people who elected us to do the right thing.

Mr Donaldson: I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate and to support the devolution of policing and justice powers to this Assembly. We were reminded that, in 1972, the then unionist Government decided to close the doors on Stormont because they were losing those powers. I note that their successors in the Ulster Unionist Party stated that they have no principled opposition to the devolution of the powers. Therefore, I find it a little curious that they are here today to vote against the devolution of the powers. Their history speaks to them of the need to have these powers in a devolved Parliament and government.

When we examine the case for devolution and see those who support its happening now, we

see that they include the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the chairman of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland. Given all the difficulties that the Police Service and the RUC before it have encountered, if those people can put their hands up and say that now is the right time for devolution, who are we to second-guess them?

Mr Kinahan: Dr McCrea, who is a member of Mr Donaldson's party, said that he would vote against the devolution of policing and justice powers. I wonder, therefore, how many other members of his party will be voting for the devolution of policing and justice powers.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Donaldson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the extra minute. The Member will be able to see clearly that this party is united in its support for the devolution of policing and justice powers. Let there be no doubt about that. The divisions in his party's position are more evident in the Member's ranks than in ours. Has the Member of Parliament for North Down, who is that party's single Member of Parliament, endorsed the Ulster Unionist Party position? I doubt it.

As the Member for North Antrim said, Mrs Kate Carroll spoke on the radio this morning and said that despite her hurt, pain and sense of loss, she felt that now was the right time for politicians to move forward. Oh that we all had the courage of people such as Kate Carroll, who can set behind them their difficulties and their personal feelings and recognise that this is the right thing to do and that this is the right time to do it.

I have not heard any coherent argument from the Ulster Unionist Party as to why it opposes the devolution of the powers at this time. The Ulster Unionist Party's deputy leader, Mr Kennedy, told us that it was something to do with the Irish language. I have read the Hillsborough agreement from back to front, and I cannot see any reference to the Irish language. He then told us that it was something to do with the Army being withdrawn from Northern Ireland in October this year. That is absolute nonsense. That matter was not even discussed at Hillsborough; it was not even an issue at Hillsborough. It is just something that he had to dream up as a fig leaf to cover his embarrassment for opposing the devolution of policing and justice powers.

When people have to make things up and scare-monger to justify their position, it says a lot about the credibility of their position. *[Interruption.]*

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Donaldson: I recently attended a church service in Newry, along with the deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, to commemorate police officers of the Newry subdivision who had given their lives in defence of our freedom and to protect the entire community. Some of them were murdered in the mortar attack on Newry police station 25 years ago. Afterwards, I spoke to the families of those police officers, and they told me that it is time to move on. However, I respect that there are others who do not share that view. I respect their position and the integrity of that position, because it is principled opposition; it is not just about timing.

Mr B McCrea: Us.

Mr Donaldson: It does not include you, the Member for Lagan Valley, because your opposition is not principled. It is all to do with party politics, not principle. I can respect people who oppose the devolution — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members must make their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Donaldson: I can respect people who have a principled opposition to the devolution of policing and justice powers, but I do not respect those who seek to play games with the issue.

A year ago, the House stood in unity when the murderers were out on the streets murdering two soldiers and Constable Stephen Carroll, whose widow spoke on this subject this morning. The House was united in sending them a very clear message that they will not have their way. What is it that they are trying to do? They are trying to destroy the Assembly and the political progress that we have made. Why did they explode that bomb outside Newry courthouse? Why choose a courthouse? It was chosen because it is symbolic. What was the message? The message was that they wanted the devolution of policing and justice to be stopped. It saddens me that today the House is not united in sending them a very clear message, which is that we intend to press ahead. We will not allow the bombers and gunmen to have their way.

Even at this late moment, I wish only that those in the Ulster Unionist Party would reflect on their position. Whatever their reservations about timing, frankly, that is not good enough. It is time for us to unite again and send a clear message to the terrorists out there who seek to undermine the progress that we are making — those who want to drag us back to the dark days of the past. We should send them a united message, and I hope that, even yet, the Ulster Unionists will see sense and make the right decision, give principled leadership and join us in the lobbies to support the motion.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This is a very big day for the Assembly and for our communities. Unfortunately, I missed some of the debate this morning, but I am picking up that it is a very emotional day for people.

I would like to touch on some of the issues that we have encountered in our community concerning the fact that a lot of constituents see all the agencies as one. The example that I will use is of multi-agency meetings that include the PSNI, the council, residents, community groups, statutory bodies, and so on. More often than not, when serial offenders in our community appear in front of the courts, the PSNI object to bail, yet they are granted bail. Those are the sorts of linkages that I am talking about. People need to feel that local people are making all of the institutions accountable. That is very important. Massive strides have been made, particularly on policing, over the last while. Massive strides have even been made on engagement with different statutory bodies. However, there are sometimes blatant and obvious gaps between them all. Today will be the start of a process that will ensure that people can see that there will be seamless links.

Absolutely nothing will be sorted out in one day. Other Members have said that this is the start of a change. It is the first day of real change and of local power being in the hands of local politicians, most of whom enjoy a substantial mandate. For example, there have been recent cases in my community, such as the murder of Thomas Devlin and Harry Holland. There are many others that do not get the same type of publicity, for obvious reasons.

It is also a big day for the many families who have sought and been denied justice. It is not a day for party political point scoring. There have

been many difficulties across the House, in my community and in the communities of other Members about historical legacies and what those will mean for people. Many people have suffered much pain.

Leadership starts in this House, and, as Members, we will go back to our constituencies to do the work that we were elected to do, such as that which is done at the multi-agency meeting that I described earlier. Elected representatives, residents, the PSNI and other statutory bodies are trying to bring an end to criminality in their communities by working with each other. When policing and justice is devolved, the people who are trying to eradicate really bad aspects of antisocial behaviour will know that one of the biggest gaps has been plugged. Indeed, they will know that there will be local accountability, and that is very important.

The pain that we all share, regardless of which side of the House we sit on, will not end today. In fact, if we are being totally honest, the people who have lost someone at the hands of the police and the families of policemen who have been lost are the very people who have told us all to wise up and to get on with it. People who are living with the legacy of the conflict, whatever end of the community they come from, are telling us to wise up and get on with it.

We have also heard that message from residents and constituents whose quality of life is, at times, zilch. They find it hard to tackle and to bear the levels of criminality that they face. All agencies, communities and stakeholders are trying to work together to make a real difference to people's lives, and today is a big day for them. For that and many other reasons, I support the motion. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Ross: In 2007, the unionist electorate endorsed the Democratic Unionist Party. They endorsed the manifesto on which we stood, which was to bring strong and accountable devolution to Northern Ireland. That manifesto included our desire for responsibility for policing and justice to be returned to the hands of Stormont.

We made it clear that we wanted two conditions for the devolution of policing and justice: we wanted community confidence; and we wanted to ensure that there would not be a Sinn Féin Justice Minister. As a result of legislation that the House has passed already, we know that there will not be a Sinn Féin Justice Minister; Sinn Féin will not nominate to the

post of Justice Minister. In addition, under the mechanism by which the Justice Minister will be elected, cross-community support will be required. It is important that a position such as that of policing and justice Minister, which has sensitivities, can command the support of both communities and maximum buy-in from this House and the greater Northern Ireland community.

As part of the agreement that was made, the Chief Constable will retain 100% control over policing operational matters, there will be no political interference in the judicial system and, as has been said earlier, responsibility for national security will remain in the hands of Westminster. That is consistent with what we said we wanted, and it is consistent with what the unionist electorate backed us to do and endorsed in 2007.

In addition, following the Hillsborough agreement, we have secured a financial package for the devolution of policing and justice worth £800 million. During the credit crunch and at a time when there are pressures on government finances, that is a substantial package for the devolution of policing and justice and has been welcomed by the Chief Constable. A package has been agreed for the part-time Reserve, and progress has been made on parading, including the abolition of the Parades Commission by the end of this year.

All of that helps to build confidence. The fact that there will not be a Sinn Féin Justice Minister now or in the future guarantees confidence within the unionist community. The DUP has been active in consulting with the community, and we have ascertained that that confidence is now there. Indeed, opinion polls of recent days have confirmed that position. As my colleague Ian Paisley Jnr said, the wider community in Northern Ireland want to see progress. They want us to get on with it, and they want devolution to deliver for Northern Ireland and make real progress in this country.

Our achievements can be contrasted with those of the Ulster Unionist Party, which has now stated its opposition to the motion and to the devolution of policing and justice powers. Earlier, Mr Kennedy, in what I presume was a Freudian slip, said "I give up" when he meant to say "I will give way". The unionist community gave up on the Ulster Unionist Party for a number of reasons in 2003. We need to look at the Ulster

Unionist Party's position in 2003. At that time, it supported the devolution of policing and justice powers. It wanted those powers to be devolved by 2005. Indeed, my colleague Simon Hamilton made that point earlier. However, the Ulster Unionist Party wanted to devolve those powers in a context that was very different to that which exists in Northern Ireland today. At that time, Sinn Féin refused to support the police, law and order, and the courts. In addition, the Ulster Unionist Party did not seek any safeguards or blocks on who the Justice Minister would be. Indeed, at the time, the Ulster Unionist Party said that the appointment of a Sinn Féin Justice Minister was inevitable. Those were the words of the Ulster Unionist Party. Such an appointment is not inevitable under the Democratic Unionist Party, and we have ensured that Sinn Féin will be blocked from getting the position of Justice Minister.

It appears that the Ulster Unionist Party has learned little over the years. Even today, it argues for a system of election for the Justice Minister through d'Hondt. That, of course, would open up the position to Sinn Féin again, and the unionist community across Northern Ireland will be cognisant of that. Indeed, during the Hillsborough negotiations, the UUP said that we should not discuss the issue of parading or link anything to the devolution of policing and justice powers.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that, if the Ulster Unionists vote no today, they will be voting against extra money to tackle the dissident terrorist threat in Northern Ireland and that they will also be voting — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that they will also be voting to retain the Parades Commission?

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

Mr Ross: If the Ulster Unionist Party has its way today, £800 million for the Police Service will be lost. I do not think that that will be lost on the wider unionist community.

Interestingly, I listened to a radio interview this morning with David McClarty, who said that we should not worry because the motion will be agreed even if his party votes against it. That probably highlights the sort of principled position that the Ulster Unionist Party claims

that it has today. Indeed, we have heard much about how its opposition to the motion is to do with the dysfunctional Executive. Let us have a look at the Executive that existed in the previous mandate under the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. That Executive collapsed three times and made fewer decisions than the current Executive. Therefore, when the Ulster Unionist Party talks about dysfunctionality, it is probably speaking from a position of great experience.

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

Mr Ross: I do not think that the unionist community will listen to the Ulster Unionist Party, because that party has lost all credibility in recent days. I therefore have no hesitation in supporting the motion, and I hope that Members will also endorse it.

Mr McGimpsey: I presume that we have yet to see the snowmen on the DUP Benches, because this is a warm day and we are having a warm debate in the Assembly. However, no doubt, they will be along in due course.

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: In the interests of good relations in the Assembly, party colleagues and I responded to an invitation yesterday from the deputy First Minister to talk to him. We were introduced to what I presume is his new good relations strategy. It is called "get out".

My party is not and never has been against the devolution of policing and justice powers in principle. In fact, we have advocated it. However, there was never any deal to devolve those powers in 2005. That is false. We believe firmly that we need to aspire to the devolution of policing and justice powers. However, the problem is that the Executive are clearly dysfunctional. For example, the Executive did not meet or function for 150 days. The Executive are dysfunctional, and there is a battle a day. As a Minister, I can tell Members that this Executive are different from that which existed during the days of Ian Paisley. I can assure the House of that. At least when Ian Paisley was First Minister, we had a First Minister with the ability to show some leadership. That leadership is long gone. *[Interruption.]*

2.45 pm

Why are we here today? We are here as a result of Sinn Féin blackmail. Sinn Féin said that there would be political consequences unless policing and justice powers were devolved. To demonstrate that, Sinn Féin closed down the Executive for 150 days, threatened the DUP, and warned that it would walk out and collapse the institutions. At that point, of course, our Secretary of State threatened elections. Faced with the prospect of elections, the DUP caved in. That is why we are here today. It has nothing to do with principle on the part of the DUP. *[Interruption.]* It has nothing to do with anything other than the DUP's caving in at the prospect of elections. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: I understand the angst in the DUP, Mr Speaker, because it knows that some day it will have to face the electorate. The DUP, clinging to office, knows that it is only putting off the evil day.

What has the DUP conceded in order to make this deal? It has conceded the existence of a gerrymandered and undemocratic Justice Minister, and I am ashamed that Members from the Alliance Party would allow themselves to be used in that way. It has conceded something around an Irish language Act — we still do not know what — and has agreed to side deals.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGimpsey: I leave it to the DUP to give way. I will not give way to it. *[Interruption.]*

We have the promise — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: We have the promise — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: We have the promise of an all-Ireland parliamentary forum. We have the promise of an all-Ireland civic forum. We have the on-the-runs. The DUP now wants to put its hands up for that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: It is what Gerry Adams referred to as a staging post.

However, there are practicalities involved. If we devolve policing and justice powers, if the dissident threat continues to manifest itself, and if the Justice Minister feels the need to call in the Army, where will Sinn Féin stand then? Will Sinn Féin support the Army's being brought in to support the police or will we go back to having a dysfunctional Executive? *[Interruption.]* Those are very real questions. For 25 years, the British Army was what stood between this society and general civil war. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Storey: We do not want to hear him.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McGimpsey: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I hear that the DUP is united: the united snowmen party. And where is Nigel Dodds? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Please allow the Member to be heard.

Mr McGimpsey: Where is Nigel Dodds? He said that there would be no devolution of policing and justice powers in his political lifetime.

This is not the time to devolve policing and justice powers. Devolution is a precious commodity and is the future that will produce peace and a settled society that we can hand on to the next generation.

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

Mr McGimpsey: This proposal threatens everything that we have achieved so far.

Mrs D Kelly: For many reasons, some people believe this to be a very poignant day. Some claim that, with agreement on the devolution of policing and justice powers, the final piece of the devolution jigsaw is in place. Although the SDLP believes in, and has long called for, the devolution of policing and justice powers, other outstanding matters need to be resolved; for example, building reconciliation, establishing a bill of rights, and building stronger and better North/South relationships.

Others will claim that it is a poignant day, on which the people of the North no longer have a British direct rule justice Minister. However, we have a Sinn Féin/DUP contrived deal for their anointed one. For nationalists, it is indeed a

poignant day, as Sinn Féin colludes with the DUP to gerrymander nationalist votes, to sacrifice the principles of the Good Friday Agreement, and to make deals on parading and a CSI strategy for a shared future that exclude the other parties and, more importantly, were made over the heads of the people. For the post of Justice Minister, no nationalist need apply.

If one refers to paragraphs 3A and 3B of the motion, one can see that events like Bloody Sunday would not be covered under devolved matters. Indeed, the Minister of Justice would not necessarily be given any information if agents handled by MI5 were involved.

The SDLP has put on the public record its views on that issue in relation to the murder of Kieran Doherty, and, in private meetings with the British and Irish Governments over many years, it has highlighted the dangers and risks of no one in the North having oversight of, or being accountable for, MI5.

Paragraph 1D of the motion deals with the Royal prerogative of mercy in relation to terrorists. It is interesting that the British Secretary of State said that today was a poignant day as he sought to pile pressure onto the political parties. His suggestion that anyone who is not a cheerleader for the Hillsborough Sinn Féin/DUP deal is somehow ignoring the recent upswing in dissident republican violence is, quite frankly, outrageous.

There are other matters that a Justice Minister here will have no say in or control over, and that is a matter of concern for the SDLP. The Director of the Public Prosecution Service will be able to hold Diplock trials, yet the Minister of Justice will have no say in that. There is also a need for equality monitoring throughout the criminal justice system to establish how criminal justice is handled and secured and how the agencies that provide criminal justice are staffed.

Today is a poignant day for many victims of not only the recent dissident republican violence but republican and loyalist terrorism of the past 40 years. Where is the justice for the disappeared, many of whose bodies have not yet been recovered and many of whom are only now being named as their murders are owned up to by the IRA?

Today is also a poignant day for those in the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party who have always provided leadership and done the heavy lifting to ensure that the power-sharing institutions were brought into being. It is a

day of poignancy when we see those who did their best to bring down the institutions over many years — some for 30-odd years — in the Chamber, and one wonders whether the 3,000-odd deaths ever needed to happen. It is the view of the SDLP today that dissident republican violence is wrong and futile, just as it was its view that IRA and loyalist terrorism was futile and pointless many years ago.

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: No, I will not give way; not today.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: Other Members have spoken about other non-political people who have done the heavy lifting, such as the independent members of the Policing Board and the district policing partnerships who risked their lives to oversee policing reform. Indeed, you were a member of the Policing Board, Mr Speaker. When politicians were asked to step up to the plate and do the heavy lifting they lived up to the task.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way to my colleague.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member has recalled the first phases of devolution under the Patten plan, which included the transfer of powers from the Secretary of State to the Policing Board and the Chief Constable of the PSNI. Does she agree that that period shows — just as the Policing Board was able to confound low expectations at that time — that devolution, even with all the difficulties that we are aware of, can still work? Does she also agree that adding to the suite of the Executive's powers may be a way of improving the functionality and performance of the Executive, contrary to the argument that has been made by some other parties?

Mrs D Kelly: Of course I agree with my party colleague on that matter.

Perhaps Mr McKay of Sinn Féin will realise that my not giving way to him was the first time that the SDLP has excluded his party from anything. The SDLP did not exclude Sinn Féin from any of the talks or negotiations, and it is interesting —

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

Mrs D Kelly: I will. In conclusion, it is a poignant day for the wider police family who remember the murder of their colleague and friend Stephen Carroll. I pay tribute to them and to his widow.

Mr G Robinson: Today's debate must be one of the most historic since the Assembly came into being. Today, we take another step to show the world that Northern Ireland can truly be master of its own destiny. As we all know, some people are afraid of progress, and they oppose, politically or violently, the political stability that the motion further supports.

My party is delivering on a manifesto promise to complete the devolution of policing and justice powers. To ensure that proper funding is in place, our First Minister negotiated an additional £800 million. Despite the TUV's belief that it has the right to rule, using an approach that has long since proven detrimental to unionists, my party knows that the people of Northern Ireland want future stability, peace and economic growth, and the devolution of policing and justice powers will help to deliver that.

The fact that the police and the courts will be operationally independent of the Justice Minister ensures that, unless parties such as the TUV continue to split the unionist vote, neither can come under the control of Sinn Féin, now or ever.

Over £400 million will be used to compensate RUC officers who have damaged hearing and to make recognition payments to officers of the RUC part-time Reserve. The agreement also covers personal protection weapons, which is a subject that has caused much concern to current and former members of the security forces.

In a short time, the Parades Commission will be abolished, much to the relief of the unionist people, who regarded it as contributing to the overall parading problem. A fairer system with greater local input will be established.

Those are all elements of an agreement that many believed would be impossible for Northern Ireland's politicians to achieve. I urge all Members to support the devolution of policing and justice powers, because it is much too important an issue with which to play petty politics. Support for the motion will show that Northern Ireland has matured politically.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 3.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the first Member to speak will be Mrs Naomi Long.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is now time for a rather sedate Question Time with the Minister for Social Development, Ms Margaret Ritchie.

Housing Executive: Savills Report

1. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the Savills report on the Housing Executive's housing stock. (AQO 903/10)

The Minister for Social Development

(Ms Ritchie): In 2008, we decided to carry out an independent assessment of the Housing Executive stock and its maintenance costs. I commissioned Savills to carry out a stock condition survey to determine the ongoing investment required for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive stock.

The Savills team concluded that the Housing Executive stock was by far the best-quality housing stock that it had ever inspected across Britain and Northern Ireland. In 1974, 6.3% of properties were deemed unfit; the corresponding figure today is less than 1%. Looking at the results of the 2009 house condition survey, the Housing Executive should be commended for maintaining its housing stock to a high standard. The survey shows that the work undertaken in its properties has been of high quality. The Savills report indicates that we need to take a fresh look at our overall maintenance strategy, and that is what we are doing.

My officials continue to work with the Housing Executive to assess the recommendations in the Savills report and are developing a maintenance investment strategy based on those recommendations. As the Member knows, the Social Development Committee tabled a motion on the Savills report yesterday.

Mr Weir: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am acutely aware of what you said about this Question Time being less controversial. Therefore, Members may be

glad that we are discussing the Savills report and not the Saville report.

Given that the Savills report recommends reducing investment in the major capital works programme, what assurance can the Minister give my constituents that there will be investment in Housing Executive homes and that the necessary work will be carried out in the small number of houses that the report deemed to be poor or very poor?

The Minister for Social Development: Mr Weir asks a very pertinent question. Investment in the planned maintenance programme over the past five years has been greater than investment in the newbuild programme. I will continue to invest in the planned maintenance programme and in the response maintenance programme. However, I am conscious of the limited resources that will be available to me as a result of issues regarding capital receipts. A large part of the budget is predicated on capital receipts and income from land sales.

I have not yet finalised my Department's budget for next year, but I will still bring forward money for planned maintenance, response maintenance and elemental response. Members will recall that the Savills report referred to the fact that, until now, we renovated properties from the front door to the back door. That was the multi-element improvement scheme. The Savills report tells us that that scheme is not the best value for money. It states that the best way to ensure value for money is to carry out elemental works by replacing kitchens or bathrooms when they have reached the end of their useful lives.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the Savills report is about cutting back on maintenance and raising rents? Does she also agree that that will hit the quality of housing in the long term and put people in debt, especially those who will be unable to pay higher rents?

The Minister for Social Development: Mr McCann will be aware that the Savills report stated strongly that the Housing Executive provided the highest quality of maintenance throughout these islands. I have no doubt that that high level of maintenance will continue.

He also raised the issue of rent convergence. As I said yesterday, we are looking at that issue. I will bring a paper to the Social Development

Committee on the issue, because I want to see the greatest possible equity and fairness, even though many people on low incomes find it difficult to make ends meet and, if they are not in receipt of benefit, find it difficult to pay rent.

I am in no doubt that no decisions have been taken on how the report's findings will be taken forward, and I am awaiting the maintenance investment strategy from the Housing Executive, which will help to shape my views on the way forward for maintenance in all Housing Executive properties. As I said yesterday — I referred to it again this morning — it is worth pointing out that the portfolio of properties owned by the Housing Executive now equates to the portfolio of properties in the private rented sector. We must consider that fact in the overall context of housing provision.

Ms Lo: The Savills report pointed out that the Housing Executive does a lot of ground and security work that is not included in landlords' functions in Great Britain, where such work is usually carried out by the local authorities. Is the Minister thinking about approaching local councils or the Department of the Environment about a joint funding mechanism to take on that type of work?

The Minister for Social Development: Ms Lo must have considered the Savills report forensically. The large areas of amenity lands that cost the Housing Executive a considerable amount of money to maintain is one of many areas that the report examined. We are considering the issues to determine how those areas can be best used to benefit the local population. I await the report on the maintenance strategy and the estate management strategy from the Housing Executive.

The Member raised the issue of councils. We must always remember that the functions of councils in Britain are different to those here. In Britain, councils have responsibility for housing and estates. That does not happen in Northern Ireland, and it is not part of the suite of functions that will be devolved to councils under the review of public administration.

Mr Burns: The Savills report highlighted certain aspects of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's costs. Does the Minister have any view on the Housing Executive's land and estate management costs?

The Minister for Social Development: The Savills report provided useful information for the Department for Social Development's (DSD) annual subsidy determination for the Housing Executive's landlord function and will assist the Housing Executive and my officials in housing division in targeting resources to where they are most needed. We must remember that resources are scarce at the moment, and we must ensure that they are targeted at the people who need them most.

Savills highlighted the significant costs that are associated with the maintenance of the amenity lands in and around Housing Executive estates. My colleague will understand that that was the issue that Ms Lo raised. We have real opportunities to use that land better, and I have asked the Housing Executive to come up with a plan to offer sites to tenants for use as allotments. That would benefit the local community. Ultimately, if the Housing Executive land bank is put to best use, we can reduce estate management costs substantially.

Moneymore: Antisocial Behaviour

2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development what role her Department is playing in addressing antisocial behaviour in Moneymore. (AQO 904/10)

The Minister for Social Development: I presume that the question relates to antisocial behaviour in a housing context as opposed to matters that should be addressed directly to the Police Service.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is committed to tackling any form of antisocial behaviour wherever it occurs on its estates. It will seek to respond to instances of antisocial behaviour whether the complainant is a Housing Executive tenant, private tenant, owner-occupier or any other person who is visiting its property. It is also committed to preventing antisocial behaviour through a range of interventions, support and diversionary measures, and it works closely with other agencies in that respect.

The Housing Executive has not received any recent complaints about antisocial behaviour in the Moneymore area but is aware that the police are investigating a number of recent incidents of a criminal nature. The Housing Executive has entered into an information-sharing protocol with the PSNI, Cookstown District Council and the Youth Justice Agency to facilitate closer

partnership working. I will be pleased to accept the details of any specific concerns that Ian McCrea has about the situation in Moneymore.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that she is aware that it is difficult for the community in Moneymore to live with the blight of antisocial behaviour. She mentioned that the Housing Executive's role in dealing with antisocial behaviour is different from that of the PSNI. There is a concern —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please ask a question, Mr McCrea.

Mr I McCrea: I am coming to the question, Mr Deputy Speaker.

There is a concern among tenants in the private rented sector that there is little that the Housing Executive can do about antisocial behaviour. Will the Minister consider removing or suspending housing benefits that are being claimed by people who live in privately rented accommodation and who are responsible for the most extreme instances of such behaviour?

The Minister for Social Development: That would be a punitive course of action. Measures such as suspending housing benefits or initiating eviction proceedings are always a last resort. We will always attempt to address such problems through preventative measures, and only if those fail will compulsory actions be initiated that could lead to eviction.

I take Ian McCrea's point about suspending housing benefits. I presume that the Member asked the question because he has information about particular cases of antisocial behaviour. Perhaps he will provide the details of those cases to me so that they can be fully investigated.

Mr Armstrong: Does the Minister agree that the situation in Moneymore is worse than anywhere else in mid-Ulster because of a historical lack of investment in facilities for young people in that area? Will she make some funds available to assist such facilities?

The Minister for Social Development: Mr Armstrong will appreciate that I am not totally acquainted with what is happening in Moneymore. Perhaps he will advise me about that so that I can conduct a proper investigation from a housing perspective. Youth Service provision is an issue for another Department. However, Mr Armstrong is probably aware that the Housing Executive, to facilitate closer

partnership working, has entered into an information-sharing protocol with the police, Cookstown District Council and the Youth Justice Agency. The Housing Executive and other agencies recently published a leaflet that outlines that working relationship and the responsibilities of each agency. Individual cases are considered at regular inter-agency meetings, and decisions are made about future action and determining the lead agency's responsibility.

There may be particular instances of antisocial behaviour that affect tenants who are trying to lead a normal daily life, and I sympathise with those people. Perhaps Mr Armstrong could furnish me with the details of any such instances so that we can carry out a full investigation and provide you with a full and detailed written reply.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, I am feeling a little neglected, because you seem to be addressing your remarks away from the Chair. I call Mickey Brady.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister open to giving stronger powers to local authorities and communities to deal with antisocial behaviour under the new housing Bill?

The Minister for Social Development: I am happy to consider any issues that relate to the forthcoming housing Bill. However, the Member will be aware that that Bill will deal with the regulation of private landlords and light-touch landlord registration. The Member has been seeking those measures for some time. There is no doubt that there is a direct correlation between legislation for the private rented sector, regulation of landlords and possible antisocial behaviour.

Shared Future

3. **Mr O'Loan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work of her Department in promoting a shared future. (AQO 905/10)

The Minister for Social Development: Since becoming Minister, the progression of the concept of a shared future for all has been at the forefront of my agenda. That is because I, like many others, realise that if we fail to build an inclusive future, we jeopardise our opportunity to secure lasting peace, sustainable communities and economic prosperity. We run the risk of playing

into the hands of those who use random, callous acts of violence to try to turn the clock back. For that reason, I have ensured that shared future objectives are integral to my Department's policies and programmes. Those objectives include the delivery of shared housing and the provision of quality shared spaces in physical development projects across Northern Ireland, work to address the problems at interface areas, and encouragement of cross-community work in disadvantaged communities.

3.15 pm

However, the impact of my work is hampered, undoubtedly, by the absence of a strategic approach to that vital issue across government. Members will be aware that following 14 public meetings across the North about a shared future, I have made a commitment to bring a paper to the Executive on that critical issue. Members will also appreciate that the conventions governing such matters mean that I cannot go into detail of what such a paper might contain, but it breaks no confidence if I tell Members that it will propose measures for picking up the pace on a shared future and ensuring that the characteristics of shared future thinking find their way into the DNA of policy development and decision-making across the Executive.

I hope that the paper will receive the support of my Executive colleagues and that its proposals will help to ensure that a shared future becomes a priority for the Executive as a whole.

Mr O'Loan: I thank the Minister for her answer and for the leadership that she has shown on the matter. Does she have any view on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy that was agreed by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) recently?

The Minister for Social Development: We are told that the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy that has been languishing in OFMDFM for years has been agreed. If that is true, I welcome it. However, it is a matter of concern that when I asked for a copy of it, I was refused one, but then I am just a democratically elected Executive Minister. When I was refused a copy, I asked when I could receive one. On 25 February, I was told, inexplicably, that it would be two weeks. I look forward to getting my copy of the document on Thursday, and I hope that there will not be any more excuses on the matter.

If CSI is agreed, and if it still has any substance, it can provide a long-term vision and a practical framework for achieving a shared future. It can provide a vision framework to help all of us to work together to build a future that is free from sectarianism and division. I would like to think that everyone in the House would aspire to that as we try to build a more normal and reconciled society on this part of the island.

Mr Hamilton: It is remarkable how parties that have complained for years about the lack of CSI and that did nothing about it now seem to complain about progress having been made.

Everyone agrees on the concept of a shared future in housing. Will the Minister outline whether there have been any retrenchments in existing shared future housing developments where unfortunate incidents have happened? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that agreements that are signed up to are maintained by all residents in those developments?

The Minister for Social Development: I am surprised by the Member's comments. What is absolutely true about the SDLP is that since its foundation, it has always believed in a truly reconciled society. That is inherent in us; it is part of our DNA. We work for a reconciled society. We have implemented a shared society through partnership arrangements in local government since 1973. It is to be regretted that other parties are only latter-day converts to that concept.

Mr Hamilton raised issues about shared future estates and neighbourhoods, which are two aspects of the shared future housing agenda. I will launch a further tranche of shared future neighbourhoods shortly. Every development in the newbuild housing programme is screened in accordance with a shared future. The Member should convey to me any issues that he has in relation to an already constructed shared future housing scheme, and I will have those investigated fully.

I hope that every Member in the House aspires to a shared future and a shared future in housing through shared future neighbourhoods and estates, of which there are now many throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: The Department for Social Development has a key responsibility in town centre, housing and community regeneration. Does the Minister agree that her exclusion from

significant involvement in developing the CSI strategy is a major mistake and another sign of a degree of dysfunctionality in the way in which the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister operates?

The Minister for Social Development: I agree with Mr Beggs that it is deeply regrettable that the CSI strategy has not been an inclusive process. Inclusion and bringing people together are at the very core of cohesion, sharing and integration, and all parties need to be involved in the strategy. It is regrettable that the CSI paper was not available at the last Executive meeting, given that we were told on the public airwaves, two days before the meeting, that it had been agreed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister without recourse to Executive colleagues. That is hardly the way to run government.

Incapacity Benefit

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of incapacity benefit. (AQO 906/10)

The Minister for Social Development: There are currently 97,143 incapacity benefit claimants in Northern Ireland. That figure includes those who are entitled to payment of the benefit and those who, although not entitled to payment, receive weekly National Insurance credits. The figure equates to 8.8% of the working-age population.

Employment and support allowance (ESA) has replaced income support that is paid on the grounds of a new claimant's incapacity and incapacity benefit. However, incapacity benefit remains available to those who satisfy the linking rules. There are two ways in which linking rules can apply to clients. First, people who received incapacity benefit previously can return to receiving the benefit at the same rate providing they reclaim within eight weeks of the end of their previous claim. Secondly, those who have been incapacitated for more than 28 weeks may qualify providing their claim has not been disallowed and they started work or training within one month of the end of their previous claim.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the fact that people on incapacity benefit are not classed as economically inactive has a serious impact on the unemployment figures?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank the Member for his question. The best place to deal with that issue is the House of Commons, where it is possible to amend the parity legislation that deals with welfare reform and other matters relating to benefit. One is better to be in the place in which the parent legislation originated.

Mr Bell: Given the concerns in my Strangford constituency about incapacity benefit and other benefits, what impact, if any, does the Minister feel there will be on the contracting out of medical assessments?

The Minister for Social Development: I thank Mr Bell for his question. That is one of the issues under consideration. I want to ensure best quality in benefit uptake and ensure that those who are entitled to benefits are able to access them, whether through their local social security jobs and benefits office, an advice centre or the constituency office of a Member of the Assembly.

It has been remiss of me not to have said this previously, but it is possible for Members to view the way that employment and support allowance is calculated by visiting the ESA centre at James House. So far, to my knowledge, only one Member, Dolores Kelly, has taken the opportunity to make that visit. That access is available to all Members.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister indicate how the planned welfare reform, which emanates from the UK Government in London, will impact upon benefit claimants in the North?

The Minister for Social Development: The stated aim of welfare reform is to encourage and enable as many people as possible to return to the labour market. To that end, the reforms will ensure that the welfare system provides people with the opportunities that they need to improve their skills, prepare for work and move off benefits and into employment where that is appropriate.

However, I am concerned that the welfare reform proposals, which will be introduced in full whether a Labour or Conservative Government are elected in Westminster, could be applied in a way that is unfair. In the North, we have less affordable childcare than in Britain, and there are other distinguishing factors. As the detailed application of welfare reforms will be decided in London, it is important, as I stressed earlier to Mr Boylan,

that all our MPs take their seats and engage on this issue at Committee Stage of welfare reform Bills in the House of Commons. It is pointless for a certain party to complain about British welfare legislation and parity issues when, by not taking its seats in the House of Commons, it does little to change the legislation.

Community Development: North Antrim

5. **Mr Paisley Jnr** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the delivery of the community development fund in north Antrim. (AQO 907/10)

The Minister for Social Development: I congratulate Mr Paisley on his selection to follow in his father's footsteps in north Antrim. I hope that he gets a much bigger vote than Jim Allister, even if that leaves him a few thousand votes short of my colleague Declan O'Loan.
[Laughter.]

I presume that Mr Paisley refers to the range of community support in north Antrim. We provide support and funding totalling £527,000 to community development in north Antrim through the following programmes: the neighbourhood renewal programme, which covers Ballykeel and Ballee estates; the small pockets of deprivation programme, which provides funding to the Carnany, Castle and Glebeside areas of Ballymoney; the Dunclug community chest, which seeks to build community cohesion; the areas at risk programme, which provides support to communities in Harryville and the Doury Road area of Ballymena; the community investment fund, which provides support to the Ballymoney Community Resource Centre; and the community support programme, which provides funding through district councils in the north Antrim constituency. I recall that the Member has raised the issue of Doury Road with me in the past. I am sure that he appreciates that there has been much investment in community support in that constituency.

Mr Paisley Jnr: I appreciate the Minister's good wishes, but I hope that her foretelling of the future is faulty.

In my constituency, the Good Morning Ballycastle project assists the elderly, the Ballykeel Community Association assists the young, the elderly and business start-ups, and Mosside Community Association tries to address all those needs. They provide a snapshot of community

needs, and they all benefit from DSD funding, as the Minister said.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You must ask a question, Mr Paisley.

Mr Paisley Jnr: When that funding evaporates in March, what means has the Minister to ensure that the valuable work that those associations carry out will continue for another valuable period of investment?

The Minister for Social Development: I hear what the Member says about the good community development that is taking place in those areas, and, from my visits to them, I know about that good work and the involvement of local community volunteers in promoting community cohesion and development.

If the Member sends me further details, I will be happy to look at them.

3.30 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Policing and Justice Powers

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly prays that the following matters, as set out in schedule 3 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, should cease to be reserved matters:

1. Those matters in paragraph 9 with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the following provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000—

(a) Chapter 1 of Part 1, so far as relating to the prevention or detection of serious crime (within the meaning of that Act), and

(b) so far as relating to the prevention or detection of crime (within the meaning of that Act) or the prevention of disorder—

(i) Chapter 2 of Part 1, and

(ii) Parts 2 and 3.

B. In relation to the prevention and detection of crime, the subject matter of Part 3 of the Police Act 1997.

C. The operation of—

(a) sections 21 to 40 of, and schedules 3 and 4 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, and

(b) section 102 of, and schedule 12 to, the Terrorism Act 2000.

D. In relation to terrorism, the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy.

E. The operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

F. So far as it was a policing and justice matter (within the meaning of section 4) immediately before the coming into force of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010—

(a) the subject matter of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971;

(b) the subject matter of sections 12 and 13 of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (substances useful for the manufacture of controlled drugs).

G. The Serious Organised Crime Agency.

H. In relation to prisons, the accommodation of persons in separated conditions on the grounds of security, safety or good order. (In relation to subparagraph H, “prisons” includes any institution for the detention of persons because of their involvement, or suspected involvement, in crime.)

2. Those matters in paragraph 9A (the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland).

3. Those matters in paragraph 10 (public order) with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

B. In relation to the maintenance of public order, the armed forces of the Crown (including the conferring of powers, authorities, privileges or immunities on members of the armed forces for the purposes of the maintenance of public order).

4. Those matters in paragraph 11 with the exception of the operation of the temporary provisions, as defined in section 47 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5. Those matters in paragraph 11A (co-operation between the PSNI and Garda Síochána with respect to certain matters).

6. Those matters in paragraph 12 with the exception of—

A. Items for the time being specified in article 45(1) or (2) of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004; and the subject matter of article 45(10) of that Order.

B. The security of explosives, including—

(a) the prevention of loss or theft of explosives,

(b) the prevention of the use of explosives for wrongful purposes, and

(c) the detection, identification and traceability of explosives.

(subparagraph B does not include the security of fireworks, or the licensing of shotfirers, or the subject matter of section 2 of the Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.)

7. Those matters in paragraph 14A (rights of appeal to the Supreme Court, and legal aid for such appeals).

8. Those matters in paragraph 15 (matters relating to the Courts) with the exception of the operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

9. Those matters in paragraph 15A (the Northern Ireland Law Commission).

10. Those matters in paragraph 17 (the Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners for Northern Ireland). — [The First Minister (Mr P Robinson) and the deputy First Minister (Mr M McGuinness).]

Mrs Long: I welcome the move to allow for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and I support the motion. It is good that, as on other issues, locally elected and locally accountable people will have the opportunity to influence and direct policy on policing and justice matters and to work with their colleagues in the Executive to bring some coherence to policing and justice policy.

I also recognise that the devolution of policing and justice is the final piece of the devolution process, which has been outstanding since 1998. It is a good sign, despite the criticism that it has drawn, that there now seems to be sufficient agreement to complete the devolution process. I cannot see that there is a negative in that. So, that is a good sign.

From the beginning, much of the debate on the issue has been characterised as rancorous, and it has only gone downhill since then. People are tired of the tone of the debate, and certainly the public and the people with whom I am in contact would like to see real debate and real progress on the issues. People want to see the Assembly work and survive. They do not want to see it move from crisis to crisis, and most of them recognise that the devolution of policing and justice is a key aspect of progress.

David Ford laid out the Alliance Party's position, and I will not retread that ground. However, I want to look at some of the arguments that were made for voting against the motion. The first and primary argument is that the Executive are dysfunctional. I want to tackle that, because it is an important issue in the mind of the public. I believe that the Executive are dysfunctional and, on occasion, fail to perform. However, unlike those who put forward that argument, I do not believe that that is entirely the responsibility of the DUP and Sinn Féin. All four parties in the Executive have contributed at different times to its dysfunctionality. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Long: The Ulster Unionists are making a lot of noise in the corner, which is not unusual. What ultimately matters, however, is how they handle these issues. It is worth bearing in

mind that, when the DUP did to them what they are now trying to do to the DUP, the DUP's stated aim was to destroy these institutions. Is that what the Ulster Unionist Party is seriously about, and is that the stance that it is taking out to its electorate? I wonder how clearly thought through that position is.

Furthermore, part of the dysfunctionality has been due to the fact that the smaller parties in the Executive have tried to be both in the Executive and opposed to the Executive. That is dysfunctionality in essence, and it needs to be addressed. When people are in the Executive, they need to stand up and take decisions as a collective. That needs to be seen to happen, as that is part of the dysfunctionality. When the Ulster Unionist Party leader Sir Reg Empey and the SDLP leader Margaret Ritchie come together with their task force, they will, hopefully, be able to bring forward proposals that will deal with that part of the dysfunctionality, as well as all the other issues that they have highlighted.

Danny Kennedy accused me of not listening to what the Ulster Unionist Party said, but I did listen. He said that he was not happy that the Executive now act only in the interests of the two and the few. I did not hear Mr Kennedy raise his voice when his party was one of the two and the few. Members need to be aware of consistency in their own behaviour.

At the core of the current issues about dysfunctionality is the fact that we have lurched from crisis to crisis, much of it driven by the focus on policing and justice. It has distracted Members from the ordinary business of government. On many occasions, it has led to a hiatus on other matters while people take hostages around the Executive table on policy issues to further their position. The continuation of that uncertainty is not good for governance or Executive functionality. The devolution of policing and justice powers will make a significant contribution to resolving that dysfunctionality.

The Alliance Party's position regarding the justice Ministry has already been clarified for the public mind. The topic is not up for debate today, although, given the ire that we have drawn from the SDLP in particular, one would think that it was. Today, the Alliance Party speaks on the SDLP side of the argument because we are in favour of the devolution of policing and justice powers. I noticed that the former SDLP leader, Mark Durkan, had to intervene during

Dolores Kelly's speech to remind her that she does not have common cause on this issue with the Ulster Unionist Party. From listening to her speech, it sounded as if she did.

It is hugely important that policing and justice —

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Given the SDLP's inconsistencies today, does she not think that it is ironic that one SDLP Member complains about a potential protocol that would give the Justice Minister the ability to interfere with operational aspects of the Chief Constable's role, which is a smoke-screen, and other Members complain that the PPS has too much independence and there must be some interference. The SDLP is all over the place.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mrs Long: I absolutely agree with my colleague. In some cases, we have seen inconsistency on those issues. We had a debate on the CSI strategy, and that topic was raised again today. Let us be very clear: the leader of the SDLP is happy to nominate a Justice Minister without there being any progress at all on a shared future. She is also willing to throw aside the common understanding of a shared future by continuing to pigeonhole members of my party, who have made a stand to say that we do not fit the two tribes mentality. She continues to pigeonhole us in a sectarian way that does not reflect our expressed identity. That is not the essence of a shared future.

When it comes to the position of the Ulster Unionist Party — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Long: The position of the Ulster Unionist Party ultimately requires courage. What the party has done tactically is foolish.

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

Mrs Long: It is clear that the party has no influence on the process — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Long: It looks like petty electioneering. The UUP has differentiated itself from the DUP

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Long: How does it differentiate itself from the TUV?

Mr Shannon: Members will not be surprised to hear that I support the motion. I hope that every Member, even those who have concerns, will recognise that certain groups and certain people have put much hard work into this process so far. Other Members here today — we heard them because the debate has been acrimonious to say the least — sniped and made remarks not because they have that option but because they stayed at the side of the playground, unwilling to play ball and screaming foul play at any opportunity.

We are not tumbling into the devolution of policing and justice powers headlong at full speed with no thought or consideration about what we are doing. That could not be further from reality. It has taken a long time to come to the decision to support the devolution of policing and justice powers. That has ensured security for the people of the Province, as well as £800 million for policing, the police Reserve pension, hearing loss claims, legal aid and the organisation of the Justice Department. We ensured that there are adequate resources available for the future and for those who secured our safety in days gone by. My colleague Ian Paisley Jnr made comments earlier about Allan Bresland and Jimmy Spratt, and we recognise their contribution.

After intense talks in the past, the DUP negotiating team managed to pull together the deal that was needed to allow the Province to prosper. Despite all the media attention and the machinations of some Members, we achieved something that will satisfy the people of the Province. The agreement will provide a constructive way forward.

Earlier today in the Chamber, we heard comprehensive reports from the Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee and the deputy First Minister. They went into great detail about the precise nature of the Bill and about what will happen next. I congratulate all those who worked so hard in putting the agreement together because their contribution is sometimes not recognised.

It is no secret that I am well known for my constituency work. I work hard on the ground and listen to what is said. For every person who has expressed concern to me and whose concerns, heightened by gossip-mongers, I have

allayed, 10 more have told me to get the job done so that Northern Ireland can move forward. I have been approached by ex-servicemen from the RUC and Army who have heard many rumours about the deal, spread by those who seek to sow seeds of discord to suit their own political agenda.

I have been able to state with certainty that there will be no Sinn Féin control of policing and justice or a Sinn Féin Justice Minister. That guarantee is and will remain enshrined; to that we are committed. I have had Loyal Institution members in my office — more than one Member in the Chamber is also a member of a Loyal Institution — who understood that the deal was looked at by the Orange and by the Black Institutions, which were satisfied with their gains. Those people have told me so. The 95% of people who supported the deal on Saturday past is a clear indication of that.

The agreement means that the Parades Commission will not be in place next year; that additional resources have been secured for the police and the courts; that there is money for the part-time Reserve and more officers on the streets; and that there is more money for those who suffered loss of hearing in service and who fought for years to win it and have long deserved it. We do not nor will we ever forget the sacrifice made by those men and women in the past. The devolution of policing and justice makes provision for that too. There will be more funding for legal aid, which means that people in need of help from the courts will be able to receive it. Ask any mother embroiled in a custody battle and she will say that that her legal aid is essential.

Now is not the time for Ulster Unionists to beat their chests and say that they do not agree and want no part of the deal. Unfortunately, that deal is here. It was secured by the Good Friday Agreement, in which they had a very strong hand. We are tied into matters; therefore, we have worked within the framework of the Executive, of which Ulster Unionists are a part, to secure the best financial and security package for the Province.

Most Members in the Chamber are fathers or mothers who remember when they were driving their kids somewhere in the car and the wee ones in the back seat would ask, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?”. There they are — the Ulster Unionists — asking whether they are

there yet. The DUP, the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party are in the driving seat, and we are moving forward. Those Ulster Unionist children are in the back seat saying, “Are we there yet?”. They want us all to do the hard work, but they will not do anything to contribute to it. If anyone wants to know who those people are, they are the ones in the short trousers with the teddy bears.

I support the motion. The Ulster Unionists should stop whingeing from the back seat; join in the conversation with everyone else in the car; support the motion; and move forward with policing and justice.

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

Mr Shannon: They should do it now and have the guts to support us. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Sir Reg Empey: Today’s proceedings are the normal procedures of parliamentary democracy. They are procedures that we have inherited from the Mother of Parliaments and, as in any parliamentary democracy, there will be different points of view. Some parties will agree with the motion, and some will not. That is how parliamentary democracy functions. Those of us who find ourselves, in good conscience, unable to support the motion believe that the conditions are not yet right. We are doing what we were sent to this House to do: exercising our judgement. We are seeking to serve the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Those who have any understanding of Ulster Unionism will know that we do not take pleasure in voting no. I am immensely proud of the sacrifices my party has made for the cause of peace. Our determination to make Stormont work for all the people of Northern Ireland — unionists, nationalists, all of us — continues. Our wholehearted support for the brave men and women of the PSNI continues unabated.

Before, during and after the Hillsborough process, my party declared that it would make a judgement on the basis of three fundamental principles. The first is the need for the power-sharing Executive to function as a four-party coalition. To say that the Executive have not done so since May 2007 is to state the obvious. If the Executive are to represent all the people of Northern Ireland, they will have to function

as any other coalition functions, on the basis of equality between the coalition partners.

The second principle is the pressing need to ensure that the Executive address rather than ignore the education debacle. For more than two years, the Executive have not discussed post-primary transfer. That is not the only matter in education — far from it — but it is holding up progress on other fronts. My party does not expect others to agree with it about all education issues. It is, however, looking for consensus in place of strife.

3.45 pm

Thirdly, there is the matter of policing and justice itself. Ulster Unionists believe in the devolution of policing and justice powers. However, we do not believe in devolving those sensitive powers to an Executive who are incapable of deciding how to transfer children from primary to post-primary schools, for example. The stark fact is that the leaders of the parties in the Executive have not had a single conversation together about how to respond to the dissident threat or about how the institutions will approach major disagreement between the parties on policing and justice matters. That concerns me greatly. Does it not seem reasonable that, by this stage, we should have had some preliminary talks to ensure that we are able to stand together when the inevitable challenge comes from those elements?

None of our three principles has been addressed in a meaningful way. The Executive are still not working as they should, and there is no prospect of them operating as a genuine coalition, as we saw from the deputy First Minister's rant against my party this morning. The education debacle remains unaddressed. The context for the devolution of policing and justice powers remains unstable.

I recognise that the First Minister attempted to address some of my party's concerns, but he faces the same issue that my party and I face: Sinn Féin's attitude. Progress is being held up by Sinn Féin's unwillingness to accept the normal democratic conventions of coalition government. Sinn Féin's rejection of the Executive's working together as a coalition of equal partners has been gravely disappointing. I hope that, in the days to come, Sinn Féin will reflect on that and move to a position that is in the interests of good government for all the people of Northern Ireland. When lecturing us earlier about instability in the institutions, the

deputy First Minister seemed to forget that Sinn Féin is the party that brought the Executive to a standstill for over 154 days during a global economic crisis. That same party now has the bare-faced cheek to lecture others about the workings of the Executive.

The Ulster Unionist Party is unable to support the motion. My party and I have, in good faith, sought compromise, and so we will exercise our right according to the principles of parliamentary democracy. We will vote against a motion that we believe is not in the best interests of our society at this time, and we will do so as a democratic political party that is pledged to making power-sharing work in an inclusive manner for all the people of Northern Ireland.

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

Sir Reg Empey: We exercise our right to refuse to bow to the blackmailing and bullying to which we have been subjected in recent weeks.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacú leis an rún.

Despite the comments of the previous Member to speak and some other Members and despite media commentary, the debate is not about the Ulster Unionist Party; it is about the transfer of policing and justice powers to the locally elected representatives in the Chamber. Everything does not have to be perfect on day one — far from it — but local politicians must start to build a new justice system and a new framework with which to manage policing and justice matters.

As the final Sinn Féin Member to speak, I wish to comment on a few of the contributions thus far. I want to nail — if necessary, I am sure that Mr Speaker will correct me if I cannot use this terminology — the lie that the SDLP has been using not only in the Chamber but on the airwaves about how the Justice Minister will be appointed and about where the agreement to do so came from. How to appoint the Justice Minister is not in the Hillsborough agreement. It was not agreed or sorted out in Hillsborough. It was sorted out in the Chamber on 1 December 2009 at 6.26 pm, as recorded in Hansard:

"Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Department of Justice Bill [NIA 1/09] do now pass." — [Official Report, Vol 46, No 4, p254, col 1].

Perhaps the SDLP has not read the Bill, so I shall read what it voted for at 6.26 pm on 1 December 2009. Clause 2 relates to the Minister in charge of the Department of Justice. It states that the Department of Justice is to be in the charge of a Minister appointed by virtue of a nomination —

“(a) made by one or more members of the Assembly; and

(b) approved by a resolution of the Assembly passed with the support of —

(i) a majority of the members voting on the motion for the resolution,

(ii) a majority of the designated Nationalists voting, and

(iii) a majority of the designated Unionists voting.”

At 6.26 pm on 1 December 2009, the SDLP voted for that clause. If the SDLP is serious that that is gerrymandering, a corruption of democracy and a dismantling of the Good Friday Agreement, why did it vote for it at 6.26 pm on 1 December 2009? If the SDLP honestly believes that, why did it vote for it? Mr Speaker, you will perhaps challenge me again, but I will tell you why the SDLP voted for it: because it does not believe its own propaganda. The SDLP knows that, when it goes on the airwaves and stands in the Chamber and talks about Sinn Féin denying it its democratic right, it is lying, because it voted for it. It was not arranged at Hillsborough or in any back room anywhere else with the DUP. The SDLP voted for it in the Chamber.

In a recent interview, Margaret Ritchie spoke about the beginning of her new leadership and how she would perhaps bring the parties to court over the fact that the SDLP was being denied the justice ministry. That would be an interesting court case. It would be entitled ‘Ritchie v Ritchie’, because she is part of those who established the voting mechanisms for the establishment of that ministry.

Moving on, today is not about the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP or Sinn Féin. It is about the continuing building of the peace process. While many on the opposite Benches —

Mr A Maskey: In the case of Ritchie v Ritchie, would it be appropriate for her to seek counsel from Mr Maginness or Mr Attwood as former solicitors?

Mr O’Dowd: I would advise her to seek legal advice from another quarter, but that is another story.

This is about building another chapter in the peace process. Members on the opposite Benches rightly talk about their experiences of the past, but it has not been an easy journey for republicans either. The policing journey has not been an easy one for republicans, and we have had to make many compromises that were difficult for us. Indeed, some republicans could not go along with those compromises. I respect that. They have left and have gone on to other ventures. I am not talking about those armed groups; I am talking about the people who have decided that they cannot agree with the Sinn Féin strategy, and that is fair enough. However, Members on the opposite Benches, particularly those in the Ulster Unionist Party who have just lectured the deputy First Minister, need to realise that politics is about the art of compromise.

Everything is not perfect in the Executive, and everything is not perfect across many of its Departments, but if we are serious about putting up a challenge to those who threaten violence on our streets today is an opportunity to do that. It is an opportunity to move forward on the peace process with a united voice and to bring justice and policing powers to the Assembly whereby we appoint the Minister and the scrutiny Committee and we start scrutinising and rebuilding a justice service that everybody can be involved in.

On Sunday, I attended a march for a family who have been waiting 20 years for an inquest for their son and brother. On Monday, I attended a court case for six families who have been waiting three decades for an inquest to be held into the death of their loved ones. The justice system thus far has let down many people. We have the challenge of creating a justice system that will not be perfect overnight, but it can deliver a new beginning to policing and justice in this society.

Mr Attwood: I agree with the deputy First Minister that the devolution of policing and justice is long overdue, and the very fact that we are discussing it today is a tribute to the people who, over a long time, went about implementing the changes to policing and justice that were outlined in the Good Friday Agreement. It is also a tribute to those who joined the PSNI

and who applied to the PSNI, to the people who were members of the first and second Policing Boards and to all the rest of the people who were advocates for change. This vote today is first and foremost their achievement. However, in voting for the devolution of justice and policing powers, we are not voting for the Hillsborough agreement.

At the beginning of the debate, the deputy First Minister explained that the motion is long because it was decided that it was necessary to err on the side of completeness and transparency. He added that we were entering an era of joint and equal working. If nationalism is to be excluded from government, it will be not an era of joint and equal working but the reverse. It is not to err on the side of completeness and transparency to do deals on parading over the heads of the community or to fail, to date, to publish a so-called agreement on a shared future. If the deputy First Minister believes those words about transparency and an era of joint and equal working, let us see the proof in the shared future strategy and on parading.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I am coming to you now.

Mr O'Dowd spoke about how the SDLP has voted. The SDLP has been consistent in voting for the principle of devolution of justice powers and opposing its terms. *[Interruption.]* I will come to the Department of Justice Bill.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Attwood: In every debate and vote on the matter in the Chamber, that has been the principle. Unlike the principle that Mr O'Dowd outlined on 1 December 2009, when he said that, if the SDLP was interested in having an extra seat in government, it should:

"fill in a CV, present it to the DUP and have discussions on the matter." — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 46, p239, col 1].*

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Attwood: In any case, if it is not unparliamentary to talk about a lie, Mr O'Dowd said that what we did in the vote was an endorsement of the exclusion of nationalists from government and that that was when it happened. That is wrong. On 9 February

2010, Martin McGuinness said something that deserves to come back to haunt him. He said:

"Every single Member knew from the very beginning of this term of the Assembly that there was no prospect whatsoever of the Democratic Unionist Party agreeing to the transfer of policing and justice powers in the context of the d'Hondt mechanism." — *[Official Report, Bound Volume 48, p97, col 2].*

He said that "every single Member" knew: that is you and you and you and you.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way in a second. In May 2007, Sinn Féin knew that it was the intention of Peter Robinson and the DUP not to go down the road of running d'Hondt. That is when the lie began; that is when the error was committed; and that is when the injustice and inequality towards nationalism was introduced.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member also acknowledge the consistency of the Alliance Party's inconsistent approach? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Attwood: It is curious that Mrs Long said that there were inconsistencies in how other parties behaved. Will she answer the question that Mr Ford failed to answer last week? Last November, Anna Lo, who, unfortunately, is not in the Chamber, said that it would be almost impossible for progress to be made on justice matters unless the Executive produced a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy to show that they are doing all that they can to eradicate prejudice. Mrs Long cannot have it both ways. Her party cannot, on the one hand, say that the Executive have to produce a strategy and, on the other hand, on the basis of an unpublished and unfinished secret document written by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, nominate for the justice Ministry. The Alliance Party cannot have it both ways.

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: No, I will not. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Attwood: We want to see the devolution of justice powers work to the maximum. Good comments were made by Members, including Sinn Féin Members, in that regard. We have

differences with the UUP today over the vote, but I do not diminish by one iota the fact that, for years, the UUP, unlike the DUP, attempted to make progress on policing and politics, and it led when the DUP failed. What I find utterly reprehensible is the behaviour, unseemly words and conduct of the Secretary of State. That same behaviour was demonstrated this morning by the deputy First Minister, who said that the UUP's was one of the most dysfunctional political positions that he had ever come across. How those who, along with loyalism and state forces —

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

Mr Attwood: — were responsible for threats and terror can refer to other people as having dysfunctional political positions escapes me.

4.00 pm

Mr Bell: With regard to policing, is it not, in fact, a good day for Northern Ireland and its entire people? Northern Ireland has come of age. It is a new day and a new dawn. The hope that exists throughout Northern Ireland, in communities from the west to the east, is that the Assembly can take responsibility for policing and get it right.

As a unionist who has decried the loss of those powers when I was just two years of age —
[*Interruption.*]

Dr Paisley says that I am a beautiful baby. I was two years old when unionism lost those powers. I turned 40 years of age of Sunday. I am delighted that unionism will regain those powers.

Of all the skills that policing requires, surely chief among them is the ability to deliver justice. Many Members are able to celebrate the time when they got elected. However, when I was originally elected to Craigavon Borough Council in 1997, I could not celebrate because the lives of Constable Graham and Reserve Constable Johnston were taken by brutal acts of terrorism. I saw the blood of innocent heroes on the streets of Lurgan. I can never celebrate becoming elected, because that memory will always be with me.

It takes courage for men and women from all backgrounds to continue to police Northern Ireland. They literally risk life and limb. Constable Carroll was a hero who risked his life, which he laid down for our tomorrow. Heroes, such as Peadar Heffron, have lost limbs to defend me,

my children and society in Northern Ireland. We owe a great deal to those police officers.

Many Members, such as Councillor Kelly and others, have received death threats. When I was chairman of Craigavon District Policing Partnership, death threats came to me. Police visited my wife at home. She was told that I could not come home until I had been to the nearest police station. I had to leave my young children.

It was then that we determined that we would never ever give in. Policing had to be got right. The Chief Constable and the courts had to be operationally independent. There could not be a Sinn Féin Justice Minister. Is it not the case that had we not done what we are doing, 1,200 police officers would have been made redundant? Imagine that in the current context of attacks on elderly people, antisocial behaviour and domestic burglaries. What faith would the community have in the Assembly if it walked away and made 1,200 police officers redundant? Great progress has been made.

Earlier, the House heard a half-hearted speech from Sir Reg Empey. He is on the wrong side of history. I believe, genuinely, because of contacts that I have, that many Members on those Benches do not agree with the stance that their party has taken.

Mr Easton: Does the Member agree that the fact that that party's only MP, Lady Sylvia Hermon, divulged to me just last Friday during a meeting at Bangor police station that she supports the devolution of policing and justice to Northern Ireland represents yet another split within the Ulster Unionist/Conservative Party?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to his time.

Mr Bell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Member makes his point well.

I thank the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, Mr David Cameron, and the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who have shown statesmanship in their support of what the Assembly is doing today.

It appears that, for the Conservative Party, putting the best interests of Northern Ireland first is more important than the paltry position of the Ulster Unionists. Is it not now the case that a great gulf is fixed between the Conservative Party and the Ulster Unionist Party? One party — the Conservative Party — is supporting us,

while the other is playing cheap party politics. I wonder whether, if C S Lewis were writing today, he would term it “the great divorce”.

Mr Kennedy told me that he did not want to go through the Lobby that supported the deal for all the people of Northern Ireland. I am proud to be in a Lobby that does not include his party. There are those with the bomb and the bullet, and there are those like the TUV with the ballot, who are seeking to destroy Northern Ireland and take it backwards. In fact, the only voluntary coalition the TUV currently has is with the dissident terrorists and some elements of the Ulster Unionist Party. That is a Lobby that nobody will want to go through.

Now that David Cameron has abandoned Sir Reg, he is, in this case, nobody's fool, but that is only because he freelances.

Dr Farry: I support the motion. Today's vote is important for the reasons set out by David Ford and Naomi Long earlier. We should recognise the efforts that have been made by the DUP and Sinn Féin to get us to this point today. The road has been tortuous, but we are here, and we should recognise and celebrate that fact.

The SDLP claims that it has always been consistent on this issue. In fact, it has not. It has flip-flopped on the issue. When the principles of the Department of Justice Bill were being discussed at Second Stage, the SDLP voted no. It then tried to amend the Bill, and failed at every occasion. At the Bill's Final Stage, after realising the error of its ways, it voted yes. We have seen the SDLP do a U-turn. It has not been consistent at all.

However, the importance of what happens today is not the vote that is about to happen shortly. It is about what happens afterwards with delivery; it is about the Executive delivering and beginning to function on a much stronger partnership footing than has been the case up until now; it is about delivering on policing and justice, with better services for victims and witnesses, more visible policing on the streets, increased integrity in sentencing, better management and rehabilitation of offenders, and the prevention of offending and antisocial behaviour on the streets of Northern Ireland. It is also about getting more joined-up government and ensuring that the Department of Justice can work with other Departments to provide real solutions to the people of Northern Ireland. That is the real added value and the real prize of devolution.

It is also about progress on a shared future, which is important both in its own right and to ensure that the divisions on the ground, which are a difficult context for policing and justice, are also addressed to make life easier and improve our criminal justice system.

There has been a lot of comment with regard to the Alliance Party and the post of Minister. Let me make it clear: the Alliance Party has never chased that post. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr Farry: We have always sought to be constructive. Of course, we are ambitious to play a role in Government, but we are more ambitious for this society. We have not been interested in the perks of office; we have been interested in ensuring that any Minister in post has the ability to deliver.

Mrs Long: The things that we were concerned about were, for example, the structures into which it would be devolved, the kind of programme that the Minister would be able to follow, and progress on CSI. Does the Member not agree that those are selfless things, because they benefit whoever the Minister might be?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added onto his time.

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for her intervention. It is about ensuring that the system works, irrespective of who happens to be sitting in that office. We have now had clarity that the Minister will be a full member of the Executive, and we have had clarity regarding the security of programme. Already, the Hillsborough agreement has the outlines of what a programme could be, and we have progress on a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. For the first time ever under devolution, we have the two leading parties finding some agreement on the most difficult and challenging issue facing this society. The Ulster Unionist Party, and particularly the SDLP, should not forget that when they were in charge, they failed miserably to produce any policy in that area. Irony of ironies; it was only when direct rule resumed that progress was finally made. I have not seen the document, and no doubt it contains flaws; but what is important is that it is issued for public consultation and that there is movement after 30 months of deadlock in the Executive.

I agree with Reg Empey that he and the Ulster Unionist Party are entitled to vote as they wish. If they wish to find themselves on the wrong side of history, as was mentioned, they are entitled to place themselves there. I think that it will be a betrayal of what that party has sought to achieve over the past number of years in bringing peace and stability to Northern Ireland, and I think it is well out of step with the majority of people who vote for that party, but that is for that party to defend.

What they are not entitled to do is to peddle falsehoods and erect straw men. For example, Minister Michael McGimpsey was on 'Good Morning Ulster' this morning talking about the Executive interfering with the hypothetical situation — which I hope we do not see — of the British Army being recalled to the streets of Northern Ireland. This afternoon, that same Minister spoke about the Justice Minister directing the recall of the British Army. That is complete and utter rubbish, which is at clear odds with all of the published documents. Frankly, I am astonished that any person would display such ignorance, or, if they do understand what is going on, actually try to peddle things that are false.

What they are doing is putting themselves in league with Jim Allister and the TUV: that is the argument that he is using. It is not a reasoned argument coming from a mainstream, moderate unionist party; it is the argument being made by reactionary unionism. It is ironic that the Ulster Unionist Party is now trying to move itself to the right of the DUP; something that will no doubt confuse the electorate. The integrity of UCUNF as a project must now be in question. How can there be a situation in which some UCUNF candidates go to the polls in May saying that they support the Hillsborough agreement while their colleagues say that they do not? How can a party hold such positions on one of the most important issues facing society?

Let us vote yes today, and let us vote to make the Executive less dysfunctional. Let us vote for a better and shared future.

Mr Poots: I am proud of the role that my party has played over the last three years in securing peace in Northern Ireland. I am proud of the fact that we forced issues that failed to be forced before. I am proud of the fact that Sinn Féin had to sign up to support the rule of law and order in Northern Ireland, and now have to

sign up to a British justice system, which will be administered here back home in Northern Ireland. It is the DUP that forced that issue.

I am proud of the fact that we forced decommissioning on to the agenda and ensured that those matters were dealt with before Sinn Féin could enter government. That is not something that the Ulster Unionists did: it is something that they failed to do. The body language of the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party today tells the story. The members of that party do not know where they are or where they are going. They have remained consistent in one thing: consistently getting it wrong in the decisions that they took in 1998, and they are consistently getting those decisions wrong even today. In the past, they have said yes to everything, and now they seem to be in a land of delusion, and do not know what to be saying yes or no to any more.

Mrs Foster: Is it not strange today to see the Ulster Unionist Party taking the position of lecturing our party about stability and the dysfunctionality of the Executive, when it was that party that brought the Executive down, not once, not twice, but three times in the past when it was in the position to do so? Does the Member agree that when we talk about the dysfunctionality of the Executive, one Minister in the Executive from the Ulster Unionist Party needs to look at his role, in particular, in relation to dysfunctionality?

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

Mr Poots: I fully agree with the Member. We have heard a lot of huffing and puffing, but one thing is for sure; the Ulster Unionist Party is not going to blow the house down. We are going ahead with the project because we are interested in delivering peace and better community relations. We are interested in delivering jobs and in taking Northern Ireland forward.

The Ulster Unionists have not engaged in the issue on the basis of a principle; they have engaged in it on the basis of pettiness. They are throwing the toys out of the pram. I suggest to the Ulster Unionist Party that the time has come for it to grow up and show a degree of maturity. Putting Ken Maginnis on the radio this morning — the man who introduced 50:50 recruitment to the RUC — was not the best tactic to use when talking about policing in Northern Ireland.

We are getting rid of 50:50 recruitment at the end of this year, and it is interesting that the Ulster Unionist Party's partners in UCUNF voted last week to retain 50:50 recruitment in Northern Ireland. That is the policy of the Ulster Unionist Party, yet it does not know to vote for a good deal for unionism, a good deal that the DUP delivered at Hillsborough and before.

4.15 pm

This morning, I heard Mr McGimpsey speak. He has got it wrong so often. He got it wrong when he said that there would be a Sinn Féin Minister. We have heard the discussion on how the vote will take place. There will be a cross-community vote. The DUP ain't voting for a Sinn Féin Justice Minister, so, in the cross-community vote, he must be referring to the Ulster Unionist Party voting for a Sinn Féin Minister. We ain't doing it. Mr McGimpsey then went on to tell us — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to be heard.

Mr Poots: I understand why the Members do not want me to be heard. They do not like what they are hearing, because those are the facts.

Mr McGimpsey then went on to ask whether the Justice Minister would call in the Army if the Chief Constable required its support. How does Mr McGimpsey not know the facts? Did he not read the agreement? Has he not read the legislation? Has he such a misunderstanding of political life and of parliamentarianism that he does not know what he is talking about? The Chief Constable will have operational control of the police, not the Justice Minister. We ensured that at Hillsborough. Moreover, judges will not be appointed by the First Minister or the deputy First Minister. They will also retain their operational integrity.

It is interesting to hear those who are against mandatory coalition barking and complaining outside of the House. They are, in fact, engaged in a voluntary coalition, and by "they" I mean the TUV of Mr Allister; Óglaigh na hÉireann, or whatever it is called; the Real IRA; and the Continuity IRA. They all want to pull down this House and to destroy what is happening in Northern Ireland. We are not going for that; we are delivering progress in Northern Ireland. We are delivering the deal and moving things forward.

I can remember very well this House being pulled down on three previous occasions by the

then First Minister, David Trimble. The DUP has never had to threaten to pull any House down once it got into the position that it is in. It has been Sinn Féin that has threatened to pull the House down. Trimble pulled it down because he was not getting what he wanted, and Sinn Féin threatened to pull the House down because it has not got what it wanted. The DUP has stood firm for the unionist community, and it will continue to do so.

I am delighted that the ugly scaffolding of the Belfast Agreement is being removed by appointing the Minister by cross-community vote.

Mr Speaker: Time is almost up.

Mr Poots: I hope that, in future, we will move to having cross-community votes for the appointment of all Ministers and that mandatory coalition will be completely removed.

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Poots: The Ulster Unionist Party wants to ensure that there is another nationalist Minister in the Executive.

Ms Purvis: By this time, all that can possibly be said about policing and justice has been said. I shall add the Progressive Unionist Party's policy on the devolution of policing and justice to the record.

In summary, my party's policy is: get on with it. The Progressive Unionist Party wants devolution to be completed. That is a key step towards political maturity in the Province and towards elected representatives taking full responsibility for the running of our country. The PUP believes that the devolution of policing and justice is an opportunity for leadership and a chance to make a genuine contribution to Northern Ireland's political growth and development by publicly demonstrating that Members of the Assembly have confidence in the abilities and stability of our governing institutions, even when it comes to highly charged issues such as policing and justice.

Devolution of policing and justice will also deliver an enhanced level of accountability to the people of Northern Ireland and allow more direct representation of their needs to the Departments and agencies that are responsible for delivering the services and benefits that are part of justice and policing powers. That is my party's policy, and it is a very good one.

I wish to make a couple of brief observations about the debate. Whoever takes up the post of Justice Minister must work to extremely high standards of impartiality and professionalism and demonstrate that he or she has a comprehensive understanding of all the issues that affect community safety, criminal justice and policing. I appeal to that individual to put those standards first and to ignore the distractions of political point-scoring, which are always a temptation, because they would undoubtedly damage this important development.

Many individuals worked hard to make peace and political progress a reality, and some Members have taken personal and political risks to get to this stage. Outside the Chamber, many individuals make important contributions to community safety and well-being every day and work hard to keep relationships within and between communities, as well as between the police and communities, constructive and effective. In some ways, those men and women have taken policing and justice into their own hands in the very best sense of that phrase. They have filled the vacuum that was left behind as the political process struggled towards this day. They have come up with creative, productive and local solutions to problems that were left in the wake of the Troubles and by the enduring impact of poverty, deprivation and isolation. I commend those individuals for their work. I hope that we will soon see the benefits of putting locally accountable political representatives in charge of the services that are associated with policing and justice. I support the motion.

Mr B Wilson: I also support the motion. Indeed, I believe that policing and justice should have been devolved many years ago. The devolution of policing and justice is important because it is seen by many, inside and outside Northern Ireland, as the next stage in moving to a normal, democratic society. The Green Party has always supported a devolved local Assembly, because we feel that that is the only way to deal with the major social and economic issues facing the people of Northern Ireland. Deadlock over policing has threatened the institutions, and the people of Northern Ireland have a right to expect more responsible behaviour from their politicians than they have seen.

This debate has extended over many months, and, at times, has descended into farce, with

Prime Ministers jetting in and out of Belfast, and politicians from across the globe phoning our political leaders at all times of the day and night. Although all political parties profess to support the devolution of policing, some of them seem to be going out of their way to find reasons why they should not. Anything less than an overwhelming vote in favour of the motion will seriously undermine the credibility of the Assembly.

The credibility of the Assembly has been seriously eroded in the past year. The people want the Assembly to work, but they see it gridlocked on virtually every issue. Some Members pointed out that there is public concern about the Assembly's failure to deliver and its perceived inability to make difficult decisions. Instead of political leaders trying to reach agreement, politics has been reduced to the traditional zero-sum game. Every issue is presented in such a way that there must be a clear winner and loser, leaving no room for compromise. Instead of looking for a win-win situation in which all parties gain and therefore increase confidence in all sides of the community, there appears to be more value placed on defeating political rivals than on good governance. The devolution of policing and justice is a win-win situation. All parties profess to agree that it needs to happen and that it has widespread public support, so why do the Ulster Unionists seem to be so keen to reject it?

The long debate on policing and justice has been littered with red herrings as various factions try to undermine it. First, it was the condition of resolving the parading issue. Did anyone seriously believe that the parading issue, which has bedevilled the country for more than 200 years, could be resolved in a few days? That was a deliberate attempt to prevent an agreement. However, the most cynical and petty attempt to disrupt progress was to introduce the 11-plus as a precondition. Although we all want the 11-plus mess to be resolved, no one could seriously have expected it to be resolved in that timescale.

Members of the Ulster Unionist Party have tried to portray themselves as macho men who will not be bullied by Woodward, Cameron, Brown, Bush or Clinton. *[Interruption.]* In fact, they are not macho. They are seen as ineffective, and their decision to oppose the devolution of policing and justice powers is another kick in the teeth for the ordinary unionist voter in north

Down who wants the Assembly to succeed.
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr B Wilson: The discussion goes beyond policing and justice. Resolution of this issue will be a sign that the two main parties can reach agreement on a major issue, and it will provide hope for further progress on issues such as the economy, education and health. That is a positive feature that can be built on.

I have been active in Northern Ireland politics for more than 40 years, and throughout that time I have always campaigned for a devolved government that is based on power sharing. Therefore, I strongly supported the Belfast Agreement and felt that it was a major step towards full power sharing devolution. That devolution was to evolve and was to include the devolution of policing and justice powers. Unfortunately, over the past few years, gridlock and stagnation have blighted that evolution. The vacuum that was created by stagnation has been filled by cynicism, dissident republicans and the TUV. Today's motion is an opportunity to get Northern Ireland back on track, to dispel cynicism and to undermine dissident republicans and the TUV. We have reached a level of political maturity. The motion reinforces the Belfast Agreement, and therefore, I support the motion.

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): Today the Assembly is being asked to complete the process of devolution. This vote represents the end of one process and the beginning of another. It is yet another step towards a better future for everyone in Northern Ireland. Progress will allow the Executive to refocus on the issues that really concern the people of Northern Ireland.

Whenever I approach the issue of policing and justice, I do so on the basis of the commitments that my party made during the 2007 Assembly elections. The promises and pledges that we made are in our manifesto, which was authored by the party officers and endorsed by the party executive and by the overwhelming majority of the unionist electorate. One of the co-authors of that manifesto, which indicates that we support the devolution of policing and justice, was one Jim Allister. With his DUP party officer colleagues, Jim Allister co-authored that document. He voted for it in the party officer meeting. He voted for it in the party executive. He campaigned on it for our candidates in the country, and he voted for it in that election.

Therefore, support for the devolution of policing and justice powers goes throughout the unionist community. At least it did, until one person changed his mind and took some colleagues with him. I am committed to fulfilling the pledge that I made to the Northern Ireland electorate to devolve the powers of policing and justice in the right circumstances. I believe firmly that we have the right circumstances.

The Ulster Unionist Party has made it clear that it supports the devolution of policing and justice powers in principle and that it has always done so. Its approach today is more a matter of tactics or strategy than of principle. I understand that. That is the cut and thrust of politics, and perhaps it is a normal part of politics. However, it is a little disappointing that some of the Ulster Unionist Party's criticisms of the devolution of policing and justice powers are simply factually inaccurate.

Earlier in the debate this morning and as recently as this afternoon, the Health Minister, Mr McGimpsey, said that the Executive would have a role to play if it were necessary to bring the Army back into Northern Ireland.

In fact, while hyperventilating during his 'Good Morning Ulster' interview, he asked what would happen if a Justice Minister wanted to bring in the Army because of the dissident threat. What would happen if the Chief Constable said that he needed the support of the Army? Would he get the support of the Executive? Would Sinn Féin Ministers put their hands up for it?

4.30 pm

I would have thought that any Member of the Assembly would have done sufficient research for a debate to be aware of the factual position, and I would certainly have thought that a ministerial colleague would have done so. However, clearly he has either not done that work or is attempting to deceive people outside the House, so let me put clearly on the record what the position is. Paragraph 2.2 of the annex to the national security protocol makes it clear — I quote for Mr McGimpsey and others — that:

"The police operational response, including any request for military assistance, is a matter for the Chief Constable who has operational responsibility and is independent".

I hope that that kills off the nonsense that has been poured out by some elements of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr McGimpsey was not prepared to stop there. During that interview he went on to talk some crazy claptrap about an Irish language Act, North/South bodies and on-the-runs, while his colleague has talked about the Army having to leave by October. Where do they get this nonsense? Who makes it up for them? It is complete trash, and the Ulster Unionist Party knows it is trash, which makes it all the more sorry.

The Ulster Unionist Party's degree of desperation in trying to blacken the process of the devolution of policing and justice causes it to scrape around in the gutter. It is prepared to take up any old — I was going to say "lie", and I can say that. I am talking about the Ulster Unionist Party, and it is permissible in those circumstances. That party knows that what it said is not true and that it is simply a means of scaremongering and deceiving those outside the House. It is the product of the manure heap. It would be disgraceful behaviour from any Member of the Assembly, but it is all the more unforgiveable when it comes from a Minister.

I have also heard that Jim Allister, in the course of some broadcast, has tried to add to the scaremongering by saying that there will be a Sinn Féin Minister of Justice in 2012. If Jim Allister or the Ulster Unionist Party want to vote for a Sinn Féin Justice Minister in 2012, they can, but the DUP will not be doing so.

Mr S Wilson: They would have one now.

The First Minister: Yes. Let us be clear: the proposal that was made by the Ulster Unionist Party for the election of the Justice Minister would have operated through d'Hondt, so Sinn Féin would have had a chance of taking that post after the next election if it was to become the largest party. Happily, however, the unionist electorate will have sufficient sense to ensure that Sinn Féin does not become the largest party, and it will continue to support the strong and consistent unionist party that is the DUP.

I have done all that I can to encourage the Ulster Unionist Party to support the motion. I entered the process of engagement with that party, both at Hillsborough Castle and afterwards, in good faith. I wanted that party to be fully involved, and, as a result of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, Sir Reg Empey and Margaret Ritchie are now chairing an important Executive working group on the functioning of the Executive. Good work is being done by that working group. We have not been

able to reach all-party agreement on those matters as yet, but last night I offered Sir Reg tangible evidence of a four-party coalition and a public assurance that the DUP would not use its votes on the Executive to override the votes of any three Ministers if they wanted a matter to be further considered. That offer was made in the context of the UUP supporting the devolution of policing and justice, and I am disappointed that it does not appear that that will happen. Nonetheless, I am prepared to repeat that offer in circumstances in which the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP approach Executive business in good faith. Whatever the outcome of the vote today, we should not be distracted from doing what is right.

That working group is making constructive proposals, and my party has been able to offer support for the ideas that have been tabled so far. We continue to support proposals that can improve the performance of the Executive. However, I must point out that the current Executive are already functioning better than their predecessor. During the current Administration, we have taken 539 decisions, whereas the previous Administration, led by the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, took only 320. Yet those are the two parties that talk about dysfunctionality. The current Executive function almost twice as well as theirs. Their Executive had to be suspended on three occasions before eventually collapsing after a fourth suspension. That demonstrates a greater level of functionality and performance by this Executive. We have also been able to handle more difficult decisions than the previous Administration were able to take on board.

The basic argument being advanced by the Ulster Unionist Party on why it is not prepared to agree to today's motion is that it does not believe that the Assembly and Executive are yet ready for the powers to be devolved. I say to Sir Reg that he should not make the perfect the enemy of the good. I believe that it is right that we continue to improve the performance of the Executive. It is right that we continue to improve the processes of the Executive and the way in which we operate. As has already been seen, year on year we are able to take more and better decisions as an Executive, and I hope that that will continue.

The Member for North Down Mr McFarland recalled his days as a member of the Preparation for Government Committee when

it was dealing with policing and justice. I hope that Mr McFarland remembers what he said on that occasion, because he did not remind the House of it. He acknowledged that there was not sufficient confidence in the unionist community to allow the devolution of policing and justice powers at that time. He said that it was, therefore, not possible to agree to devolution. However, he went on to say that, should the barrier of Sinn Féin's refusal to announce its support for the police be removed and devolution restored to Northern Ireland — both of which things have happened — his party would believe that the time was right for the devolution of policing and justice powers. That was the position of the Member for North Down then. In the intervening period, he seems to have moved away from that position for party political reasons.

Let us make no mistake about it: the Ulster Unionist Party wants the motion to pass today. It simply wants to preen itself as though it is against the proposition. Not only does the Ulster Unionist Party's partner, the Conservative Party, want it to happen, not only does the wider unionist community want it to happen, but it is clear from five separate polls that the party's voters want it to happen. Privately, many of the Ulster Unionist Assembly Members want it to happen as well.

It is time for us all to move forward. There must be no going back to the bad old days. Throughout history, there are times of challenge and defining moments. This is such a time; this is such a moment. The motion refers to the transfer of policing and justice functions. It puts back in place the powers that the founders of the state won for us almost 100 years ago and that were taken out of local control in the 1970s. However, the decision that we take today is about so much more.

Some have not embraced the new era of politics and do not yet accept the validity of the institutions, probably because they did not take the lead role in their construction. For that reason, they have dithered, dallied or sought to destroy or damage the institutions. I do not suggest that anyone in the Chamber or outside thinks that the system is flawless. Any coalition is difficult to operate, and a mandatory coalition is the most difficult of all. The vote is a matter of completing and maintaining devolution. It is about whether we move forward together as a society. It is about whether we have the courage

to give leadership to our community. Leadership is not about saying, "After you"; it is about saying, "Follow me". Leadership is not about choosing what is easiest or what best suits our party interests; it is about doing what is right for our people.

Northern Ireland does not need leaders who are timid or leaders who dither and dally. We need leaders who can stretch their imagination. We need to push the boundaries of change and progress in Northern Ireland. As leaders in our society, we can settle for continuing to reflect the divisions in society, or we can work to heal those divisions. That is the journey that my party is on, and I hope that everyone in the House will join us on that journey. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question, I advise the House that section 4(2A) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that the motion be passed with parallel consent.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 88; Noes 17.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Adams, Ms Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Unionist:

Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Rev Dr Ian Paisley, Mr Poots, Ms Purvis, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Other:

Dr Deeny, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr McCarthy, Mr Neeson, Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P Maskey and Mr Shannon.

NOES**Unionist:**

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Cobain, Mr Cree, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mr Gardiner, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McFarland, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McNarry, Mr K Robinson, Mr Savage.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Kennedy and Mr McCallister.

Total votes	105	Total Ayes	88	[83.8%]
Nationalist Votes	44	Nationalist Ayes	44	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	52	Unionist Ayes	35	[67.3%]
Other Votes	9	Other Ayes	9	[100.0%]

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly prays that the following matters, as set out in schedule 3 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998, should cease to be reserved matters:

1. Those matters in paragraph 9 with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the following provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000—

(a) Chapter 1 of Part 1, so far as relating to the prevention or detection of serious crime (within the meaning of that Act), and

(b) so far as relating to the prevention or detection of crime (within the meaning of that Act) or the prevention of disorder—

(i) Chapter 2 of Part 1, and

(ii) Parts 2 and 3.

B. In relation to the prevention and detection of crime, the subject matter of Part 3 of the Police Act 1997.

C. The operation of—

(a) sections 21 to 40 of, and schedules 3 and 4 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007, and

(b) section 102 of, and schedule 12 to, the Terrorism Act 2000.

D. In relation to terrorism, the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy.

E. The operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

F. So far as it was a policing and justice matter (within the meaning of section 4) immediately before the coming into force of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010—

(a) the subject matter of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971;

(b) the subject matter of sections 12 and 13 of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 (substances useful for the manufacture of controlled drugs).

G. The Serious Organised Crime Agency.

H. In relation to prisons, the accommodation of persons in separated conditions on the grounds of security, safety or good order. (In relation to subparagraph H, “prisons” includes any institution for the detention of persons because of their involvement, or suspected involvement, in crime.)

2. Those matters in paragraph 9A (the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland).

3. Those matters in paragraph 10 (public order) with the exception of—

A. The subject matter of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

B. In relation to the maintenance of public order, the armed forces of the Crown (including the conferring of powers, authorities, privileges or immunities on members of the armed forces for the purposes of the maintenance of public order).

4. Those matters in paragraph 11 with the exception of the operation of the temporary provisions, as defined in section 47 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5. Those matters in paragraph 11A (co-operation between the PSNI and Garda Síochána with respect to certain matters).

6. Those matters in paragraph 12 with the exception of—

A. Items for the time being specified in Article 45(1) or (2) of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004; and the subject matter of Article 45(10) of that Order.

B. The security of explosives, including—

(a) the prevention of loss or theft of explosives,

(b) the prevention of the use of explosives for wrongful purposes, and

(c) the detection, identification and traceability of explosives.

(subparagraph B does not include the security of fireworks, or the licensing of shotfirers, or the subject matter of section 2 of the Explosives Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.)

7. Those matters in paragraph 14A (rights of appeal to the Supreme Court, and legal aid for such appeals).

8. Those matters in paragraph 15 (matters relating to the Courts) with the exception of the operation of sections 1 to 8 of, and schedule 1 to, the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the operation of Part 1 of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 where a certificate under section 1 of the 2007 Act has been issued.

9. Those matters in paragraph 15A (the Northern Ireland Law Commission).

10. Those matters in paragraph 17 (the Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners for Northern Ireland).

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

Committee Business

Amendment of Standing Orders

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

The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Lord Morrow):

I beg to move

After Standing Order 44 insert –

“44A. OFFICE OF MINISTER OF JUSTICE

(1) The office of Minister of Justice must be filled by applying the procedures set out in paragraph 3D(4) to (8) in Part 1A of Schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 within a period of seven days beginning with the day on which –

(a) the determination mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(a) takes effect;

(b) the resolution mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(b) is passed;

(c) the direction mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(c) is given;

(d) the period of exclusion mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(d) comes to an end as so mentioned; or

(e) the Minister of Justice ceases to hold office as mentioned in paragraph 3D(14), otherwise than by virtue of an Assembly election.

(2) Where under paragraph 3D in Part 1A of Schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 a person is nominated to be Minister of Justice –

(a) that nomination must take effect; and

(b) the person nominated must affirm the terms of the pledge of office and take up the office;

within 30 minutes of the nomination, unless the person nominated, or another member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend that time limit, and gives a reason or reasons for so asking, and the Assembly approves the extension.

(3) If a vote to fill the office of Minister of Justice is delayed under Standing Order 28(1) in order to comply with a petition of concern, the time periods set out in paragraphs (1) and (2) shall not run for the period of that delay, provided that that delay is no longer than one sitting day.”

Amendments need to be made to Standing Orders as a result of the anticipated devolution of policing and justice powers. The Committee on Procedures has been working for some considerable time on producing Standing Orders to facilitate the transfer, although, as with all such matters, there has been a last-minute rush to get everything finalised. I thank the Committee for its hard work on what were, at times, quite technical issues. I also thank the Committee Clerk and other staff who have been extremely helpful and hard-working.

The motion is one of a number that the Committee on Procedures will bring forward before the end of the month. There is a possibility that the Minister of Justice could be nominated before 12 April, when policing and justice powers are due to be devolved. The Assembly needs to have this Standing Order in place now to allow the nomination to be made and for the Assembly to vote on it, just in case the decision is taken to appoint the Minister before 12 April.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998, which was amended in 2006 and 2009, sets out in detail the procedure for appointing a Minister of Justice. The Act allows for Standing Orders to provide some supplementary detail on the procedure, and the Standing Order before the House today provides that detail. It is based on the 2009 model for the appointment of the Minister.

The new Standing Order 44A will make provision for the nomination of the Minister of Justice following the model used for the nomination of other Ministers. It states that the office of the Minister of Justice must be filled within seven days of certain events taking place, such as the determination, resolution, direction and other events as listed in schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 2009.

5.00 pm

It also states that the nomination must take effect and that the person who is nominated as Minister of Justice must affirm the Pledge of Office and take up office within 30 minutes of the nomination. The period for the appointment of other Ministers is 15 minutes, but it has been set at 30 minutes for the appointment of the Minister of Justice to allow for the possibility of a division. As Members know, there is no vote on the appointment of other Ministers. The title of Standing Order 44 will be expanded to make

it clear that it does not apply to the Minister of Justice.

Among the issues considered by the Committee was how a petition of concern will impact on the nomination and taking up of office. Members will be aware that the effect of a petition of concern is to delay the vote by one day and turn it into a cross-community vote. In the event that a valid petition of concern is tabled, it is necessary for the Standing Order to make provision that the one-day delay does not impact on the seven-day and 30-minute timescales that I mentioned earlier. Accordingly, the one-day delay will be discounted when calculating the time period within which the Minister of Justice must be appointed. As the vote on a Minister of Justice is already on a parallel consent basis, no further change is needed.

As I said, the Committee on Procedures will bring more Standing Orders on policing and justice, and an amended Standing Order on sub judice, to the House before the end of March. If the Assembly agrees to today's motion, and to the amendments to Standing Orders that will be tabled later this month, the Committee on Procedures agrees that the reprint of all the amendments will be issued together to keep the amount of paper used to a minimum. However, the revised Standing Order presented today will be available on the Assembly's website from tomorrow, provided that it is agreed by Members. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Chathaoirleach agus leis an Chléireach. I thank the Chairperson for tabling the motion and acknowledge his work in bringing the changes to Standing Orders to the Assembly. I also want to acknowledge the work of the Committee Clerk and her staff.

We have just had an important debate on the devolution of policing and justice powers, as indicated by the attendance in the Chamber and the media attention. That should not undermine the important work that has been carried out by the Committee in relation to Standing Orders. The decision that has just been made must be reflected in Standing Orders. Indeed, without the relevant Standing Orders, the important decision that was made five or ten minutes ago would have no standing. I acknowledge the work that was carried out by the Committee,

the Chairperson and the Committee staff. We support the changes to Standing Orders.

Mr K Robinson: I will follow the example of Lord Morrow, who presented the Standing Orders to the Assembly with brevity. As Mr McCartney said, we have just had an important debate on the devolution of policing and justice powers. My party put forward its concerns and principles. The House chose to go in another direction, and we accept the democratic situation that flows from that. I pay tribute to the Committee Clerk and the staff who helped us to work through the Standing Orders in the knowledge that a Minister of Justice may be appointed one day.

The procedures outlined in the motion aim to make the situation as clear as possible. Only time will tell whether the person nominated for the office of Minister of Justice is taking a poisoned chalice. Nevertheless, that person will have 30 minutes to take up office after his or her nomination. It does not seem as though there will be a rush for the job. However, some may be persuaded to take it on and others not. Thirty minutes seems to be a reasonable period of time. Our concern is whether whoever is nominated and takes up office will have the legal competence to face the difficult tasks that lie ahead and that will be addressed by further Standing Orders.

There is nothing else that I and my party want to say, other than the changes to Standing Orders are fairly straightforward. We support them, and we thank all those who helped us to get to this situation.

Mr O'Loan: The amendment to Standing Orders is the technical stage of what has been decided. It creates the formal arrangements for the appointment of a Minister of Justice. My party has made its views heard on the nature of the previous motion. I will not repeat them or challenge the proposed amendment of Standing Orders.

Permit me to say something; it will not be lengthy. This should be a day of celebration that, at long last, the Assembly takes control of the justice function. The SDLP has long called for that. However, it can only be a day of very qualified celebration. In the previous debate, Mark Durkan spoke of how the additional function could add to the cohesion of the Executive, and I am sure that that possibility exists. However, to achieve that, it would have

been wise to have started well. We have not started well.

The comment has been made that this day, on which we make a momentous decision on the devolution of justice powers, is the first anniversary of the death of Constable Stephen Carroll. I heard his widow Kate speaking on the radio this morning, as I am sure many other Members did. Hers was a voice of wholeness and integrity. Wholeness and integrity are not what have marked out this process. On the contrary, it has been marked out by dishonesty and hypocrisy. That is nowhere more evident than in the designs to appoint a Minister of Justice. The d'Hondt mechanism of proportionality was not accidental; it was a key element of the Good Friday Agreement. It may not last forever, but, at this stage, it is a vital part of the architecture that holds us together.

The party that is constantly referred to in relation to the post of Minister of Justice has chosen to be opportunistic, rather than principled. It should hardly need saying that a Minister of Justice should have an instinct for justice. A prospective Minister who cannot see the point of the Saville Inquiry into the deaths on Bloody Sunday has no such instinct.

In conclusion, and this summarises what I have to say —

Mr I McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you rule on whether this has anything to do with what we are here to debate? The Member has just gone off on a political rant that has nothing to do with an amendment to Standing Orders.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Member will want to stick to the subject.

Mr O'Loan: As I said, I will be brief. We are dealing with an amendment to the Standing Orders that enable the creation of a Ministry of Justice. It is fair that I should comment on them.

In conclusion, I have a very deep concern. It is that, as we build further the superstructure of this Assembly, we simultaneously undermine its foundations.

Mr Neeson: I thank the Committee Clerk and her staff, the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and my colleagues on the Committee on Procedures. We have been busy preparing for the devolution of policing and justice in recent weeks.

Today is a momentous day not only for the Assembly but for the people of Northern Ireland. I welcome the decision that has been taken.

The Committee has been dealing with many of the issues related to policing and justice. The amendment to Standing Orders is necessary for the appointment of a Minister for policing and justice. Next week, we will deal with the appointment of a Committee for policing and justice. The Committee on Procedures has been busy drawing up draft amendments to Standing Orders for that. I support the motion.

Dr Farry: I, too, support the motion.

The amendment to Standing Orders puts into practice what has been agreed by the Assembly on the way forward. They are Standing Orders to elect or re-elect a Minister irrespective of the personality, and I regret Mr O'Loan's comments about personalities. I could make comments about the personality of any candidate, and point out that more than one person has announced their candidacy. I will not do that. It is not appropriate to the debate or for the Assembly to go down to that sort of level.

The SDLP is entitled to make its argument about d'Hondt and the structures of the Good Friday Agreement ad nauseam, but I am not required to agree with what is said. A cross-community vote as a means of electing a Minister is an enhancement of power sharing; far from detracting from power sharing, it will build confidence. How can anyone argue that a person elected by a cross-community vote is illegitimate, because people from all backgrounds — unionist, nationalist and other — would have shown their confidence for that person?

Mr O'Loan: I will put the argument to the Member so that he may begin to understand why a cross-community vote may not represent what it is purported to be and what the Member argues it to be, namely, something that is in the best interest of the whole community. Is it not conceivable that we could have a situation in which there is a numerically dominant party in each section of our community, and that it may suit each of those parties very well, for their very separate reasons, to agree on a particular outcome despite what they say about what they wish to achieve? They may, in the end, have agreed on a very different outcome, and that very different outcome, sought by each party for

its own selfish, particular interests, may not in fact serve the whole community.

Dr Farry: That was a rather convoluted argument from Mr O'Loan. Let me put it this way: I support the Good Friday Agreement and the principle of power sharing. Power sharing is what lies at the heart of the agreement, not d'Hondt, which is a system of proportionality; indeed, it is one of several systems of proportionality that could have been used to determine an Executive.

There are other ways that an Executive can be formed in a power-sharing context. My party and I have argued for electing an Executive based on parties coming together voluntarily around an agreed programme and seeking cross-community legitimacy in the Chamber, and having a situation whereby parties can move in and out of Government depending on the circumstances. I qualify that by saying that all parties, particularly Sinn Féin, should be entitled to move in and out of Government and that that system is not designed to do down any political tradition or party. It is about ensuring that we have good government.

That is what I would like to see, and my party will continue to campaign for that to improve the structures. At this stage, however, we are talking about one mechanism to elect one Minister: it is not a Trojan Horse for a much wider reappraisal of the Executive and the way that it is formed. That is a debate for another day. However, there is a major deficiency in the election under d'Hondt, because, in essence, it puts Ministers in silos based on how a particular mathematical formula would work out.

We have seen evidence of how one party can impose its will on the policy outcomes of a particular aspect of the Executive. For example, the DUP imposed its will on whether we have an environmental protection agency: it said no; four other parties said yes, but the DUP's view prevailed. In education, four parties are working together to find common interim arrangements. One party, which happens to control the Ministry, is saying no, and its view prevails.

Power sharing is not, as the SDLP often says, about a power carve-up. However, I think that its understanding of power sharing is fundamentally different from mine. Power sharing is about ensuring the collective ownership of decisions that are taken on behalf of the common good of society; it is not about dividing society up into little fiefdoms. A Minister from a particular party

can impose his or her will on an agenda because of the lucky dip nature of d'Hondt. We cannot afford to have that situation in this society.

5.15 pm

We should not be naive about the importance of the justice issue. It was justice issues that brought down the Stormont Parliament in 1972. It was such a difficult issue in 1998 that it could not be devolved at that time. It is only this afternoon that the Assembly has finally requested —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please draw his remarks to a close?

Dr Farry: Therefore —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up. *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures (Mr Storey): The debate has been slightly longer than is usual when it comes to speeches or discussions in the House regarding Standing Orders. I thank the Members who made contributions. The debate recognises the importance of what has taken place in the House today. As the Chairperson mentioned at the start of the debate, the Committee on Procedures worked hard to prepare all the Standing Orders on policing and justice powers so that the Assembly is ready to facilitate the transfer of those powers. The appointment of the Minister of Justice will probably be the first step, followed by the establishment of the justice Committee. Members can look forward to a raft of amendments in the near future, including those to cover the establishment and membership of the new justice Committee and various consequential amendments.

Raymond McCartney referred to the work of the Committee staff. I place on record my appreciation to the staff for the way in which they have dealt with the issue to date. Ken Robinson accepted the democratic situation in which we find ourselves in relation to the previous debate. He commented on the office of the Minister of Justice being taken up within 30 minutes of nomination and the rationale for that period of time.

It is unfortunate, and regrettable, that Mr O'Loan took the opportunity to make a political point. Those comments should have been made in the previous debate. Mr Neeson and Mr Farry supported the establishment of these Standing Orders and the changes that will flow from them.

I commend the motion to the House.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 44 insert —

“44A. OFFICE OF MINISTER OF JUSTICE

(1) The office of Minister of Justice must be filled by applying the procedures set out in paragraph 3D(4) to (8) in Part 1A of Schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 within a period of seven days beginning with the day on which —

(a) the determination mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(a) takes effect;

(b) the resolution mentioned in paragraph 3D(2) is passed;

(c) the direction mentioned in paragraph 3D(2) is given;

(d) the period of exclusion mentioned in paragraph 3D(2)(d) comes to an end as so mentioned; or

(e) the Minister of Justice ceases to hold office as mentioned in paragraph 3D(14), otherwise than by virtue of an Assembly election.

(2) Where under paragraph 3D in Part 1A of Schedule 4A to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 a person is nominated to be Minister of Justice —

(a) that nomination must take effect; and

(b) the person nominated must affirm the terms of the pledge of office and take up the office; within 30 minutes of the nomination, unless the person nominated, or another member of the Assembly asks the Assembly to extend that time limit, and gives a reason or reasons for so asking, and the Assembly approves the extension.

(3) If a vote to fill the office of Minister of Justice is delayed under Standing Order 28(1) in order to comply with a petition of concern, the time periods set out in paragraphs (1) and (2) shall not run for the period of that delay, provided that that delay is no longer than one sitting day.”

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

School Newbuilds: Hollywood

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Weir: I see that I am speaking to a rapt House. We do not quite have the earlier atmosphere. I suspect that today's Adjournment debate on the newbuild and the education sector in Hollywood may not make the headlines tonight. Nevertheless, the issue is vital to the people of Hollywood; to those who are involved with the schools; to parents in north Down and east Belfast whose children attend the schools; to teachers at the schools; and to everyone who has an interest Hollywood schools.

Let me say at the start that although there is some community frustration at the lack of clarity on the way forward, the debate is not an attempt to have a go at the Minister. That frustration pre-dates the Minister. The debate is a sincere bid to secure some clarity and certainty for the people of Hollywood and to get some assurance that there is a positive way forward. The debate was sparked by the Department's failure, in response to my questions for written answer, to make it absolutely clear when or if things were moving ahead. I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some assurance on that to the House today.

In the past, a lot of the focus has fallen on one particular Hollywood school, but this scheme affects four schools in the town. It involves Priory Integrated School; Hollywood and Redburn primary schools, which, it is proposed, will be amalgamated; and Hollywood Nursery School. The proposals are wide-ranging in many ways. By its nature, the project is multi-school and multi-sector; it involves the integrated and controlled sectors. It also affects a wide range of pupils, from preschool age to school leavers.

All of the schools that I have mentioned have made an outstanding contribution to education in north Down. I could quote chapter and verse

of the various school inspections that reflect on the good work that they do. In many ways, those schools are a model for the future. Between them, they encompass more than 1,000 children, so the issue is not inconsiderable.

However, the excellent work that is being done by teachers on issues like sustainability, the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework is being hampered by a long-running problem in Hollywood. To quote one member of staff, the school buildings are no longer viable. That has been the case for a long time. Indeed, I had the opportunity a while ago to visit one of the schools, and I could see that the fabric of the building was in a very poor state. There was a clear need for capital build.

That need has been recognised for a considerable time and has resulted in an overall appraisal of the schools, which resulted in what is called option 4. Option 4 is a multi-school approach that involves a newbuild 450-pupil post-primary school at the Redburn site, demolition of the old Priory Integrated College building, the construction of a new 21-classroom primary school at the Priory site and a new nursery school at the Hollywood Primary School site.

Thus, in effect, there would be a newbuild for Priory; the amalgamated Hollywood and Redburn primary schools, which between them have a current enrolment of about 520, would go onto the old Priory site; and the nursery school would move to the old Hollywood Primary site. That was agreed a number of years ago. On 1 March 2006, the then direct rule Minister, Angela Smith, said that, as part of a package of overall investment that included other schools such as Bangor Grammar School, a holistic approach would be taken to schooling in Hollywood. It is worth quoting a couple of her remarks:

"It is crucial that all our children have the best facilities possible ... My announcement today holds the promise for thousands of children to learn, and teachers and other staff to work, in modern facilities."

Since that announcement, another block to progress has been that the anticipation of capital newbuilds has restricted the amount of maintenance work being done, particularly by the education board.

In June 2006, the project took a further step forward when the then Minister Maria Eagle

announced how the investment was to be procured. At the time, all capital projects were expected to proceed under traditional procurement procedures.

At the beginning of 2007, a problem arose when the Secretary of State indicated that the project, which had already been approved, needed to be reviewed in light of the Bain review. That created a degree of delay. Nevertheless, although there were issues about numbers at Priory Integrated College, it demonstrated that it is oversubscribed and that it meets the Bain targets. Indeed, the lack of newbuild is the only thing that is holding the project back.

Shortly before devolution, Maria Eagle confirmed that the project could proceed. From that point on there has been a degree of frustration about the lack of movement on the schools project. Although work was scheduled to begin this year, as a result of capital-spend restrictions on the Department as part of wider pressures on the Executive, the project is again in question. We are seeking the Minister's assurance that it will go ahead and that a definitive timeframe can be ascribed to it.

Hollywood children, like those in every other part of Northern Ireland, deserve to be educated in the best possible facilities, which must be fit for purpose and adequate. Therefore, I issue a simple plea to the Minister to give that assurance, clarity and certainty by giving the green light to the children and parents of Hollywood so that they know that the capital-build elements of the project will move ahead on time. I look forward to the debate and to hearing the Minister's remarks. Hopefully, she will also give us her assurance.

Mr Cree: I apologise because I will only be able to stay for a short time. I am pleased to see the Minister looking resplendent in the corner. I just hope that she is listening. She always does. I also hope that she will try to move the matter on for us.

The development of Priory Integrated College has been under consideration for a long time. The school does excellent work, and it is greatly respected throughout north Down. The present scheme is innovative, because it proposes a holistic approach and a complementary solution to education in Hollywood. I know of no other school that covers all three education levels, which do and will work together.

Some four months ago, an economic appraisal was sent to the relevant education and library board, but we have heard nothing since. We know from questions to the Minister that a review of the project and the capital spend is under way; however, we would like to know when that process will be resolved. Many plans have been made, but they are being held up. I am sure that the Minister has studied the matter, so I urge her to look at the merits of the composite scheme and to give the matter a push in the right direction. The work has been done, and the cause is a deserving one that is in the interests of educating young people, so it deserves immediate action.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Flattery is always worth a try.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for North Down for bringing the debate to the Floor. I share his concerns about the issues that have arisen in relation to the Hollywood schools. Indeed, the problem is more widespread than the Hollywood area.

In 2003, a Department of Education press release featured Hollywood Primary School, Redburn Primary School and Priory Integrated College on a list of newbuilds.

In 2008, I noticed that in the Council for Integrated Education's magazine, 'Learning together', there was a photograph of the Minister accepting a thank-you card from the then acting principal of Priory Integrated College, Peter McCreadie, and some pupils. However, two years later, no sod has been cut, and there is still uncertainty about the future of the project. There is disappointment among governors, teachers, parents, pupils and past pupils. There is confusion in Hollywood about what the future holds, and there is confusion everywhere that newbuilds are awaited. That is not surprising, because there is also confusion emanating from the Department.

5.30 pm

As I said earlier, departmental officials have told members of the Education Committee on several occasions that there will be no newbuilds in the coming year. The Minister issued a press statement saying that there would be £170 million available for newbuilds in the coming year, and she told us that projects may or may not go ahead, depending on the ongoing review. There seem to be contradictory messages coming

from the Department, and schools that were told that their projects would be on site in the spring of this year are still awaiting word. Schools that are affected include, in my constituency, St Joseph's Primary School, Madden; St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Forkhill; Dromintee Primary School; Abbey and St Clare's primary schools, Newry; St Joseph's Primary School, Newry; and, in South Down, Carrick Primary School, Burren. I am sure that there are many others throughout the North of Ireland.

Department of Education officials gave the Committee a paper entitled 'Schools Estate — Capital Programme'. According to that paper, there was £192 million available for capital works. When the Executive's reduction of £22 million was netted from that, £170 million remained. However, that figure is almost committed already. For example, £101 million is committed to PPP payments, £17.2 million is committed to existing major works that are under way, £30 million is committed to minor works, and £22 million is committed to site works and other fees.

The sum of those figures indicates that the £170 million that the Minister mentioned in her press release has already been used up by existing schemes, and that seems to indicate that there is no headroom expenditure for fresh, major capital projects. I do not know whether the Minister realises that that is the case, and one wonders who is correct. Are her officials correct, or is she correct? We need to know the answer to that question. We need to know what exactly is happening in the review of capital schemes and what stage it is at. When will it be finished? Is there money for new capital projects? If so, how much money is there? When will schools, such as those in Holywood that are awaiting newbuild premises, know for certain where they stand?

Governors, teachers, principals and pupils of the schools in Holywood, and the other schools that I have referred to, need to know the facts. I hope that the Minister will be in a position today to clear up the confusion and tell us exactly what the future holds for new capital schemes, not just in Holywood but throughout the North of Ireland. Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of Priory Integrated College and as a member of North Down

Borough Council. I thank Peter Weir for securing this important Adjournment debate.

In some respects, this is a *déjà vu* experience for us all, because we had an Adjournment debate on Priory Integrated College in November 2007. It occurred in the context of the go-ahead for the college having been put on hold by the direct rule Ministers in light of the Bain report's recommendations.

At that stage, we were using our good offices to ask the Minister to move ahead with the scheme for the redevelopment of the schools in Holywood. I was pleased, and the governors and the wider community in Holywood, including the parents and pupils, were more delighted when in February 2008, the Minister gave the go-ahead for the redevelopment. Since then, tremendous progress has been made in trying to deliver on the new vision for education in Holywood.

I appreciate that we have hit some difficulties, given the financial context in which Northern Ireland finds itself. Indeed, Dominic Bradley outlined some of those issues in greater detail. However, I take consolation from the fact that the Minister has said that money is available for ongoing capital investment. Things are not grinding to a halt, but it is obvious that times are more difficult. Continued capital investment is important not only for our construction industry and the wider economy but in enabling us to continue to invest in our schools estate. Such investment is important not only in providing a better environment for children to learn but in ensuring that we are providing a modern infrastructure. In many respects, the proposals for Holywood meet that vision.

There is more to the situation than our merely seeking to rebuild a number of schools. The issue is about addressing the new policy environment, particularly the worthy policies on sustainable schools that the Minister has articulated. It is also about area planning and collaboration between schools through the entitlement framework. What is happening in Holywood is a strong example of that. For example, Priory Integrated College has taken a powerful lead in a lot of learning areas, and that is applied not only in Holywood but down the Ards Peninsula. It is to be welcomed that children are moving between Priory Integrated College and other schools and that they are taking advantage of different courses and having a more rounded access to education.

The Minister also recognises the importance of investment in the infrastructure. I congratulate her on visiting Priory Integrated College in her first few weeks in office. I think that that visit was back in May 2007. At that stage, I am sure that she could not have helped but notice the poor state of repair of the college building, which is well over 50 years old.

The schools in Holywood are working closely with the community. There is strong support in the community in Holywood and elsewhere for reinvestment in the schools estate, and the community is keen to help those students who are involved. There is also potential for North Down Borough Council to collaborate with Priory Integrated College on the development of a new 3G sports facility, which the community and pupils in the school could use. That is a clear example of the potential for joined-up government in that it ensures that we use our scarce resources to the maximum benefit, and in doing so, help our students and the wider community with their development.

The proposal is also a rationalisation of the schools estate. It is important that we do not lose sight of that. It is a way of making the schools estate more efficient. We are not asking for an increase in the level of funding to do more; we are looking for an invest-to-save initiative. In particular, we are seeing the merger of two primary schools on one site. Priory Integrated College is heavily oversubscribed and has to turn people away. We could have a primary school with a roll of over 500 students, which would make it one of the larger primary schools in Northern Ireland and well above the Bain threshold. There is also a heavy demand for nursery places in Holywood. We want sites to be juggled so that Priory Integrated College will move on to the Redburn Primary School site, Redburn Primary School and Holywood Primary School will merge on the old Priory Integrated College site, and, finally, the Holywood Primary School site can be used for the new nursery unit. However, we need to continue with the Priory Integrated College scheme, which has gone to planning. Although that has been placed under a certain degree of uncertainty, it is important that we deliver all elements of that new vision for Holywood.

I know that the Minister is well aware of the situation. I appreciate that she is in a difficult financial position, but I am sure that she agrees that this project makes a lot of sense.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close, please.

Dr Farry: Hopefully the review will be concluded and have the right result.

Mr Easton: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter, which involves education in my constituency of North Down. I also want to say well done to my colleague Mr Weir, who secured the Adjournment debate on this important issue.

The proposal to build a new 450-place post-primary school at the Redburn site, to demolish the old Priory Integrated College building and to construct a new 21-classroom primary school at the site, as well as a new nursery school at the Holywood Primary School site, is considered to be the best way forward to ensure the necessary education provision for pupils who currently attend controlled schools in Holywood and those who are likely to attend in the future. Therefore, it is recommended for acceptance.

As far back as March 2006, which is four years ago, the then Education Minister Angela Smith announced a £380 million investment for school building programmes. Contained in that announcement was the acceptance of the proposal that is the subject of this debate. It was, however, subject to review in accordance with the Bain report. Nevertheless, in March 2007, Education Minister Eagle stated:

"I would like the remaining assessments for the schemes on hold completed with the relevant authorities within the next two months to see whether there is a strong case for the schemes to proceed."

At the end of March 2007, the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) asked the Department of Education for clarification on what additional information it required in order to allow the delayed projects to be released. In May 2007, the Department responded to the SEELB, raising concerns about the number of pupils attending Priory College. Later in May, the board responded and the Department accepted that the project met all the criteria set out in the Bain report.

However, in September 2007, the Department raised yet more concerns about the school's religious balance, whether parents supported the move to the Redburn site, and how developments at other schools would impact on Priory Integrated College. The board responded

later that month. In November 2007, a debate was held in this very Chamber. Although the Minister acknowledged that the school was below the threshold determined by Bain, she stated that if a school provided a high standard of service, the threshold did not necessarily have to be met.

On a visit to the school in May 2007, the Minister said that she was impressed by the good work of the principal and staff, as well as their evident commitment to the delivery of quality education in the school. She added that she hoped that a decision would be made on the application as soon as possible, but that she did not have development plans for the school in front of her. The board, however, said that the Department had sufficient information in its possession to enable it to make a decision.

Three years later, we are still waiting. The question that comes to mind immediately is where the money went for the plan that was announced by Education Minister Smith in 2006. This delay is completely unacceptable. I call on the Minister to make a decision on this application, to let it go forward, and to find the money for it.

Mr McFarland: I thank my colleague Peter Weir for securing the debate. Three of my colleagues have now gone through the factual history of all of this. Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be glad to hear that I do not propose to do the same.

I know that one of the earliest visits that the Minister made in office was to Priory Integrated College. Therefore, she has been there and is in no doubt of the issues that are involved. She will have seen how particularly useful this plan is for the development of schools in North Down. It is neat and covers a number of schools that might otherwise require separate builds. It made lots of sense when she visited the college; it has made lots of sense since.

I understand that she is in difficult financial straits with regard to a number of capital builds. However, this project is a particularly good one. It would be a terrible pity if the hopes of people in Holywood and North Down, the children who attend these schools and the staff who teach them were dashed if that excellent plan were to crash at this stage. As other colleagues have done, I ask the Minister to find the money for this and to let it go ahead.

5.45 pm

Mr B Wilson: Like my colleagues, I congratulate Peter Weir on initiating the debate. I declare an interest as a member of North Down Borough Council. As Mr Farry pointed out, we are discussing potential joint efforts with Priory Integrated College.

I want to come back to Angela Smith's statement of 1 March 2006 on investment in a school building programme. There were around 10 different schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, and very few of them have got very far. Bangor Grammar School was one of the first to be informed that it would benefit from the programme, followed by three schools in Holywood. In addition, as a member of the board of governors of St Columbanus College, I raised with the Minister previously the fact that its building project has also been delayed. I understand that it was due to be on site last month.

Dominic Bradley put the issue into a wider context. Most of the schemes are under review. I understand that most of them have passed their review, but they are still waiting for a response. As has been pointed out, it is very frustrating that that response has been delayed. I understand that architects are being laid off by certain schools because they cannot go ahead with the development.

As far as I am concerned, Priory Integrated College is a special school. My son went there when it was Holywood High School. In 1995, it voted to become an integrated school and, at that stage, there was concern about its long-term future. The situation was reviewed in the Bain report. However, the college has expanded in the past few years, and its student numbers have greatly exceeded the numbers required. There was a need for a new school when my son went there in 1996, and now, 14 years later, the need is much greater.

The plan that was devised to incorporate primary, secondary and nursery schools is an ideal solution for the education facilities in Holywood. I feel that it should be given priority if money becomes available. I ask the Minister to consider the benefits to the community as it very much involves providing facilities for the community. I ask the Minister to take that into consideration when she is deciding on the allocation of the cash.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tugaim buíochas don Chomhalta as an deis seo a thabhairt dom chun plé a dhéanamh ar na tionscadail chaipitil atá beartaithe in Ard Mhic Nasca. Ó ceapadh i mo Aire Oideachais mé, creidim gur thug mé le tuiscint go soiléir go bhfuil sé mar aidhm agam oideachas ardchaighdeán a dhearbhu do gach páiste agus duine óg agus go bhfuil comhionannas mar chroílár ag gach rud a dhéanamid, lena n-áirítear soláthar scoileanna nua.

I thank the Member who secured the debate for providing the opportunity to discuss the proposed capital projects for Holywood. Since I became Minister of Education, I believe that I have made it clear that my overall aim is to ensure a quality education for all our children and young people and to ensure that equality is at the core of everything that we do, which includes the delivery of new schools.

We have made good progress in updating the schools estate in many areas, with new schools just completed and occupied and more on site. However, I want to take a fresh look at how we deliver capital projects. I want to make sure that we put the right type of school in the right place to meet the needs of children and young people, and I want to avoid making the mistakes that were made in the past because of the lack of area planning. Since 2007, 39 major projects have been completed, and 16 projects are on site.

Most Members here will be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework that I am putting in place to ensure that we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need. The policies driving that review include, to name but a few: sustainable schools; the revised curriculum; the entitlement framework; Every School a Good School; the revised literacy and numeracy strategy; the early-years strategy; the special educational needs review; an inclusion review; and the review of Irish-medium education. I will reiterate briefly some of the detail of those policies and highlight their importance to our education system as we seek to ensure that the right capital projects are delivered.

The sustainable schools policy is crucial to improving the system for all our children, because the education system — as Members

will have heard me say on many occasions — is letting down too many children. We need to ensure that all our young people get a first-class education, regardless of their background or where they live.

To that end, the policy sets out six criteria for helping to assess the viability of schools. Those criteria are both quantitative and qualitative. Consideration will be given to the educational experience of the children; the financial position; leadership and management of the school; accessibility; enrolments and links with the community; and, above all, the provision of a quality education. The latter must be the overriding consideration. Obviously, equality needs to be at the core of all that.

From September 2010, all pupils in our schools will be taught through the revised curriculum, which has at its core a focus on knowledge and on the skills that pupils need to apply that knowledge in everyday situations. It concentrates on raising standards in reading, writing and maths, and on preparing young people for all aspects of life and work, while giving schools and teachers greater flexibility to deliver lessons in a way that suits pupils' needs.

We have also recently introduced Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement to raise standards in all schools across the North of Ireland. That is a pupil-centred policy with equality and improvement at its heart. It sets out my Department's commitment to raising standards and reducing educational underachievement. Every child should, and must, have access to high-quality education in a school setting that is characterised by good leadership, excellent teaching and strong links between school, parents and communities.

I know that there are good schools that are already doing what is advocated in Every School a Good School, and I do not seek to detract from that. However, there are still too many schools where pupils are not reaching their full potential. I believe that all schools are capable of improvement, even the good ones.

The strategy for raising achievement in literacy and numeracy is a vital component of my Department's approach to improving standards, thereby assisting young people to acquire the literacy and numeracy capabilities that allow them to realise their full potential.

The review of Irish-medium education includes a specific recommendation regarding the development of Irish-medium post-primary provision. I have accepted that recommendation in full recognition of the fact that the sector has grown steadily at primary level over the past number of years, resulting in increased demand for Irish-medium post-primary provision. It is my sincere intention to make Irish-medium education available at all levels to the parents and children who wish to avail themselves of it. The Irish-medium review also identified the issue of poor accommodation in many Irish-medium primary schools, and I am looking into that.

All the policies that I have detailed are intertwined and designed to ensure the best possible outcomes for all. Given the financial constraints that we face, I am sure that Members will agree that it is crucial to get the investment right. I look forward to support from all the parties in the House for getting further resources, because we are all aware of the importance of school builds. That matter affects all our constituencies. It is against those policies and the wider financial context that all proposed capital projects are being assessed.

Progress of the capital projects for Priory Integrated College, Holywood Primary School and Holywood Nursery School will be dependent on the outcome of the review. The outcome will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate. Projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial year, taking account of available resources.

Tá áthas orm go raibh deis agam an tionchar a mhíniú go hiomlán a bheidh ag na beartais chomhlántacha ar eastát na scoileanna agus an dóigh a gcruthóidh soláthar scoileanna nua córas níos fearr oideachais.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to explain fully how the complementary policies will impact on the schools estate and how the delivery of the new schools will create a better education system.

Adjourned at 5.55 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 15 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill has received Royal Assent. The Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 became law on 12 March 2010.

Budget Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that the Budget Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 became law on 12 March 2010.

Ministerial Statement

NI Water

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice from the Minister for Regional Development that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My written statement on 12 March provided Members with a brief outline of the immediate actions that I took following receipt of the independent review team's report on procurement governance failures in NIW. I wanted to ensure that Members were informed about those important issues at the earliest possible opportunity. I am grateful to you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, for granting me the time to make a fuller statement.

An independent review team was jointly commissioned by the Department for Regional Development and NIW accounting officers, with my full agreement, to undertake a review of procurement governance issues in NIW. That followed an internal audit review within NIW relating to contracts approval. The findings of the internal audit highlighted a number of serious governance failures in relation to procurement activity within the company. The independent review team commenced work on 25 January and submitted its final report on 25 February 2010.

Following the completion of the review, I met the independent review team to hear from it about its findings at first hand. I will briefly give Members a flavour of some of the main findings by quoting directly from the report:

"The IRT has concluded that the failings noted in the Contracts Approval Internal Audit report represent a serious breakdown in the governance and control framework of NIW. The breakdown in the application of the governance and control

framework is a serious matter for those responsible and accountable, primarily the Board of NIW and the executives responsible for ensuring compliance ... the IRT is aware of a serious breakdown between the NIW Board and its CEO over the way the Contracts Approval Internal Audit report had been notified to the Shareholder without consideration by the NIW Board. The IRT has been advised by the Chair of NIW that, in his opinion, the CEO does not have the trust and confidence of the Board and that this position is now irreconcilable. The CEO advised the IRT of a breakdown in trust between himself and the NIW Board.

The IRT is concerned about the severe difficulty this situation causes in enabling the Shareholder and NIW to put in place the necessary remedial action plan to implement the recommendations of this review ... It is our view that this situation cannot be allowed to continue and appropriate action must be initiated by the DRD Accounting Officer to ensure that a proper governance and control environment is secured within the NIW as a matter of urgency. In our view this would be best secured by tasking the current CEO and NIW Sub-Accounting Officer to deliver the agreed action plan, supported as necessary by DRD."

On receiving the report and after considering its findings and recommendations, I wrote to all members of the board of NIW on 3 March, providing them with a copy of the report and expressing my grave concern at its content. I asked four of the board's non-executive directors — the chairman, Chris Mellor, and Ruth Thompson, John Ballard and Declan Gormley — to consider their positions in light of the findings or to make any written representations to me. The report praised the work of a fifth non-executive director, Don Price, to improve the audit committee in NIW, and I determined that he could stay on the board, subject to his agreement to a number of conditions. Subsequently, he agreed to comply with those, and I am glad that he will remain on the board.

I met the four other non-executive directors at their request to hear their perspective on the issues. Subsequently, each of them submitted written representations to me, and they all asked to remain on the NIW board. However, following consideration of the full range of evidence relevant to the issues in question, I reached a final decision to remove each of the four non-executive directors from the board with effect from 11 March. I wrote to each of them on that day to inform them of my decision.

I wrote to the two executive directors who are board members — the finance director, Ronan Larkin, and the director of asset management, George Butler — to inform them that I would consider their positions as board members following the outcome of a further investigation to be undertaken by the chief executive of NIW to determine which executives in the company should be held responsible for the failures in procurement governance and control. I have asked for that further work to be completed as quickly as possible.

The Department will now take action to appoint a number of new non-executive directors to the board of NIW on an interim basis, pending the outcome of a full public appointments process. The chief executive and accounting officer of NIW has already prepared an action plan to take forward those of the report's recommendations that fall to him. The Department will work with and support the chief executive in implementing the action plan.

I hope that all Members will join me in commending the DRD and NIW accounting officers for initiating the independent review so quickly after the issues came to light. I also commend the independent review team for completing its work so quickly and for providing clear recommendations, which provide a sound basis for putting the matter right and moving forward.

The firm action that I have taken to implement the report's recommendations will provide a strong basis for the company to establish appropriate governance arrangements and to move forward with the confidence of the whole community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members that this session is for questions on the Minister's statement.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Mr Cobain): Many people must feel disappointed in the further erosion of Northern Ireland Water's ability to carry out the duties for which it was established. The Committee was concerned when the roles of the chairman and the chief executive were joined, and we made that point clear. I note that the report repeats that it was a DRD failure to allow that job sharing to take place. The report identifies a number of failings by DRD as a shareholder. What action will the Minister take to address some of those issues? Will

he assure the House that that will be done as swiftly as possible?

The Minister for Regional Development: I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for his interest, and I look forward to engaging with him and the Committee later this afternoon, when we will talk through the issues. He raised the issue of the interim appointment of the chairperson as acting chief executive officer. He will know that that appointment was made on the basis of the resignation of the chief executive and was seen as a stopgap measure to fill the post and to ensure that the company was able to continue the progress that it was making.

The report is clear in saying that the Department was slow to act on a number of occasions, but it also states clearly that the blame for the failures that were investigated rested ultimately with the NI Water board and its executives. The report is specific on that point.

The Department responded promptly to the recommendations. As I said, we are seeking to appoint interim executives, and we await the completion of further work. We have not yet got the full picture; the chief executive officer's work is ongoing, and we fully support him in that. The consequences of that work will be dealt with appropriately by the company and the Department. The Department will also appoint one of our officials to the audit committee to ensure that there is tighter scrutiny of procurement and contract issues.

Once the interim appointments have been made, we will consider the longer-term situation and the future arrangements for the company. However, I assure the Chairperson, his Committee and other Members that we take the matters seriously, and I feel that I have acted promptly in dealing with them. This is clearly not the end of the matter. I am sure that the Member's Committee will continue to be interested in any further work required to deal with the issues that have arisen and to put matters right.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development (Miss McIlveen): I am sure that I am not the only Member who is astounded at what has happened in recent days with an organisation that still has to prove itself in the minds of many people. Will the Minister outline the direct implications of that incident on his Department? What costs, if any, have been

incurred by consumers as a result of that gross mismanagement?

The Minister for Regional Development: As I outlined to the Chairperson of the Committee, the Department will appoint someone to the NIW audit committee to ensure that it has a tighter scrutiny role. One of the conditions under which the remaining non-executive director is staying at NIW is that there will be a new and much more interactive relationship between the Department and NIW. We will also appoint interim commissioners and consider the future of the company and its relationship with the Department.

There is no evidence that there was any loss of money for consumers. However, where single-contract tenders were awarded, one cannot provide evidence that value for money was achieved. Where people are in competition for work, the implication is that that provides value for money. However, one cannot say with any certainty that those tenders were, indeed, value for money. We could not be sure of whether that was the case unless we went back over the process and retendered. That situation, therefore, leaves NIW in a vulnerable position. Clearly, single-contract tenders are appropriate in certain specified circumstances. However, the circumstances in which NIW operated them were not defensible. That left us with no option but to take appropriate action. However, we have no evidence to suggest that there was a loss of money to consumers as a result of that.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sé dúinn ar maidin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers to date. I am sure that all Members will commend the swift and decisive nature of the report. Indeed, the events of last Friday will provide people with a good understanding of what accountability means in real terms. Will the Minister consider all governance issues relating to the company as part of the review process?

The Minister for Regional Development: NIW has had a troubled history because of the nature of the situation in which it was set up. There was distrust regarding the intent of the direct rule Administration in creating it with respect to privatisation and water charging. The company, therefore, did not get off to a good start, and it has had a troubled history.

Given this latest episode, it is important to re-establish public confidence in the water and sewerage arrangements. I am prepared to examine all longer-term options for the company. Through the interim appointments, we want to ensure that NIW starts working properly again. We also want to ensure that we bring to light all outstanding issues through the further investigatory work that is being done and that we deal with the consequences of those issues and do not shirk any of them. I am, therefore, prepared to look at any and all options for future governance arrangements.

Mr Gallagher: In his statement, the Minister said that the matter is a serious one for those who are responsible and accountable.

It is also a very serious matter for many others, not least those who tendered for work with Northern Ireland Water in the past and the paying customers who have had to put up with its chaotic and shambolic billing arrangements. Will the Minister tell the House about some of those who have lost out on the contracts in question and what his Department estimates the potential liability to be? Furthermore, will he assure the House that the decision to dismiss the staff in question is watertight and that there can be no legal comeback for those concerned? Moreover, he said that a new tendering framework will be introduced in time. All Members want to know how soon that will be in place.

12.15 pm

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member asked three questions. Essentially no one else has lost out. The contracts were awarded on a single-tender basis with no other competitors involved. That is a problem in itself, because others were not asked to tender for the contracts in question. I agree with the Member that the issues are serious for those responsible and the community generally.

On the issue of future action, action has already been taken. The chief executive of Northern Ireland Water has been supported in conducting further enquiries, and his report is expected at the end of March. If action is required as a result of that report, it will be taken. A much tighter framework has also been put in place to ensure that the type of action in question is not repeated in the future.

In certain specific and rare circumstances, single-tender contracts can be appropriate,

but the investigation by the team that was appointed by the Department indicated that contracts were awarded in that manner on a regular basis. That is a matter of great concern, and the Department will be taking immediate actions to remedy that. In my statement, I said that the Department would be examining the longer-term governance arrangements because of the need to restore public confidence. I readily accept that the company has had a troubled history from its inception, and the Department wants to ensure that whatever action it takes provides future public confidence.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the report and particularly the speed with which it has been carried out. However, I am disappointed that it highlighted the lack of financial control in Northern Ireland Water. I have particular concerns about "Contractor A". Will the Minister say whether the contract with that contractor still exists, whether it is being reviewed, how long it has been in operation and what he intends to do about it?

The Minister for Regional Development: A copy of the report has been placed in the Assembly Library, and it is also available on the Department's website. I cannot provide the Member with the specific details of the contract that he referred to because a huge number of contracts have been and are continuing to be examined. If the Member has questions about a specific contract, I am happy to provide him with those details. However, a copy of the report is available for scrutiny in the locations that I identified.

Mr I McCrea: In his statement, the Minister referred to the further investigation that the chief executive of Northern Ireland Water will carry out into the activities of the executive directors of Northern Ireland Water "as quickly as possible", but is there a specific time frame for its completion? Furthermore, does the Minister feel that the actions undertaken by the non-executive directors of Northern Ireland Water are serious enough to warrant police investigation and for appropriate action to be taken thereafter?

The Minister for Regional Development: The chief executive of Northern Ireland is to complete his further work by the end of March. The Department expects a report from him in a couple of weeks on the ongoing investigatory work along with recommendations on how to

deal with individuals if they are found to be responsible or accountable.

Essentially, the issue is whether evidence exists of fraud. To date, there has not been any evidence of fraud, so there has not been a requirement to bring those matters to the attention of the PSNI. However, when evidence of potential fraud is uncovered, the Department and NIW have arrangements and guidelines in place on how to bring that to the attention of the appropriate authorities. If such evidence is uncovered in this case, those arrangements and guidelines will be followed.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome, as will the general public, his comments about exploring all options for governance.

As a follow-up to Mr McCrea's question, I ask whether the Minister will expand on the ongoing investigation into the executive directors and reassure the House that decisive and appropriate action will be taken by the chief executive of NI Water.

The Minister for Regional Development: As I said, the non-executive directors have been dealt with, but that is not the end of the matter. The report threw up substantial concerns about the governance and the proper scrutiny and management of contractual arrangements in NIW, and I acted in response to its recommendations. The report also recommends that the ongoing work of the chief executive be brought to a speedy conclusion. We have offered our full support to the chief executive and assured him that, whatever recommendations actions may be required as a result of that work, we will not shirk our responsibility.

We intend to give the appropriate support to the chief executive officer. That is important not only in the case of NIW but across all public sector bodies. The Government are a substantial spender of public money and provide a huge amount of business to local companies. It is important that there be transparency and a level playing field for everyone involved. The notion that it is more a matter of who people know rather than how they perform must be removed from the public sector. That sort of inquiry and the actions that follow from it may help to establish confidence not only in NIW but throughout the public sector.

Mr Hamilton: As a follow-up to the previous question about the executive directors of Northern Ireland Water, I ask the Minister to outline whether he or his Department paid bonuses or sought approval for the payment of bonuses to any of the executive directors of Northern Ireland Water during the past three years. If so, on what basis did that happen?

The Minister for Regional Development: People have been paid bonuses as part of their contract. However, the issues that we deal with in the statement have been brought to light over the past couple of months. The people whom I dismissed from the board will not receive any golden handshakes. If the further inquiry presents recommendations with regard to the executive directors, they will be implemented. That may affect the position of the people on the board and even, perhaps, their position in the company. As I said, bonuses were part of contractual arrangements over a number of years and are not necessarily reflective of the work that has been done over the past month or two.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his statement. The report identifies problems with the procurement processes. It states that the shareholder, the Department for Regional Development, had not been asked to approve the procurement. Does the Minister accept that his Department, as well as the board of Northern Ireland Water, failed in that respect? Does the episode not show that DRD's oversight of Northern Ireland Water is deficient? What steps will the Minister take to address the report's criticism of his Department?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member knows that the relationship between the Department and the company is a formal one. The company has operational responsibility for day-to-day matters. The shareholder would not have been alerted to any contractual issues unless they had been brought specifically to its attention by the company, as was the case when the investigation was triggered, or by individuals. No information was brought to the Department's attention. Therefore, no red flag was signalled over the past number of years on those matters. However, when the chief executive brought the matter to the Department's attention, we asked him to conduct further work, which uncovered further evidence about this particular approach to contracts. Thereafter, the Department's accounting officer and the chief executive, as the accounting officer for the company, initiated

an independent inquiry, the consequence of which we are discussing today.

The Department's other failings were identified as the appointments of the chairperson and chief executive and the slowness to appoint further board members at a time when the independent review team was considering the funding of water and sewerage services. At that stage, we felt that appointing directors before the conclusion of the process would have been pre-emptive. The report contained some criticisms of that type, but it is very clear that the responsibility for procurement issues, which caused so much concern, lies firmly and squarely with the board.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I share his frustration that, yet again, the water company has made an awful gaffe. He says that there will be no golden handshakes. He will remember that Katherine Bryan received £250,000. At that time, the chairman, who has now been sacked, assured the Committee that, from then on, everything would be rosy in the garden. At what stage will the Minister seriously consider taking the organisation back under the control of the Department rather than face embarrassments time and again?

The Minister for Regional Development: The Member suggests that it is an embarrassment. It would be much more embarrassing if we had not acted when we discovered ongoing issues of concern and had tried to put a lid on the matter and not investigate fully. I make no apology for bringing the matter to the public's attention, for the action that I have taken on board members and for any other action that may arise from the investigation.

Regardless of whether the matter is damaging to the NIW, the whole public sector and other government agencies in the longer term, it is important to apply scrutiny, and action must be taken against people who do not measure up to the appropriate levels of responsibility for running agencies or Departments. Regardless of whether that is deemed an ongoing embarrassment, I make no apology for that approach. It is right to deal with those issues in an open, transparent and upfront way and deal with the consequences.

Katherine Bryan, who was paid off, was an employee of the company. The board members who have been dismissed are not employees of the company. The bonuses — returning to

the question that Simon Hamilton asked — are dealt with on the same basis as those in the NICS, and no bonuses were paid to any company members this year.

The Member asked about the organisation's long-term future. As I said in response to Raymond McCartney, I am prepared to consider all options on the long-term future. Every option has implications. It is not simply a matter of deciding to return the agency to the Department's control; that, too, will have consequences. However, I want to ensure that we continue to make the necessary investment.

Regardless of the company's governance arrangements, no one can deny that the water and sewerage infrastructure has improved radically in the past number of years and that the investment, which was tested and was found to be necessary, has achieved results and provides the whole region with a much better water and sewerage infrastructure. That investment needs to continue and needs to be governed properly. We need to ensure that the agreed arrangements for the medium-to-longer term enable us to continue to make that investment properly. We must ensure that those who do business with the company feel confident that they are operating on a level playing field and in a way that provides proper scrutiny and accountability for the public, who, after all, pay for that investment.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am not a member of the Committee, but I have taken a keen interest in this matter because, for years, public perception has been that there is unaccountability in the public sector. I commend the Minister for what he has done.

The Committee for Employment and Learning has tabled a motion on public appointments for debate in the next couple of weeks. We need to consider how to open that process to more people rather than to the few.

The Minister told Ian McCrea that he hopes to have the chief executive's report by the end of the month. Does the Minister then intend to make a further statement to the Assembly so that Members can receive an update on this serious issue?

12.30 pm

The Minister for Regional Development: As the Member acknowledges, the report is due to the

Department at the end of the month. I presume that it will contain some recommendations from which actions and consequences may flow. I will consider any recommendations and decide what action to take, but I am more than happy, as I have been, to return to the Assembly and the Committee for Regional Development to share that information and to explain further what is going on at the company, the actions that we and the company's chief executive intend to take, and the longer-term consequences for the company. It is much better that that information be out in the public domain and be dealt with in an open, up front, honest and transparent way, rather than put a lid on it to limit the damage that has been caused.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he give details of the costs and terms of dismissing the four members of the board of Northern Ireland Water?

The Minister for Regional Development: There is no anticipated cost of dismissal. Tommy Gallagher asked about the legality of the process and sought assurances that the dismissals were handled properly. We have taken legal advice every step of the way, and we are sure of our ground. From my perspective, there is no cost of dismissal — I appointed those people to the board and I have dismissed them.

Ministerial Statement

Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots):

First, I offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends of two people who were killed on the roads at the weekend: Angela McKee from Lisburn; and Mavis Rolston from Garvary in Enniskillen, who died in County Cavan. Those tragedies continue to remind us, if a reminder were ever needed, of the importance of the issues that we are about to discuss.

I wish to make a statement to inform Members formally that I am launching the consultation on a new road safety strategy. As Members know, the current road safety strategy was originally designed to run until 2012. However, as most of the measures in the strategy have been completed and its targets achieved, it was decided that a new strategy should be introduced by the end of this year.

In January 2010, I circulated a draft consultation paper to ministerial colleagues for consideration. After the Executive agreed its contents, which included commitments for several other ministerial colleagues, I sent the paper to the Committee for the Environment on 4 March 2010, informing it of my desire to move quickly to begin public consultation and of my intention to make this statement today, in which I am announcing the start of public consultation on preparing a new road safety strategy. The consultation period will begin tomorrow and run until 15 June 2010.

The consultation document that will be publicly available tomorrow represents the work of a road safety strategy project board that comprises representatives from the main statutory stakeholders. My Department took the lead on the project, supported by senior representatives from the Department for Regional Development, the Department of Education and the Police Service. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was represented by the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service. I thank the project board and ministerial colleagues for their unanimous support of and interest in the issue, as well as others who

contributed to and supported the work that has been done to date.

Before I get into the detail of the consultation, I should remind the House that when we are talking about casualties and statistics, each figure represents a life lost or a future damaged. Although I am sure that Members are only too aware of that, it is always important to keep it at the front of our minds.

The consultation starts tomorrow, but it is worth noting that considerable consultation has already gone into preparing the document. That fact is indicated in the document.

A number of workshops have been held with the statutory stakeholders and with other interested agencies and Departments to tap into the wide range of experience and expertise that is available and to consider as wide a range of ideas and proposals as possible. My officials also wrote to around 500 stakeholders and have received responses from, or engaged directly with, around 40 groups and organisations. We have spoken to 15 groups comprising 300 children and young people who are aged between five and 21, and we have issued over 2,000 questionnaires to those in the key 15- to 18-year-old age group. My Department's road safety education officers are working to get those questionnaires completed, and we have already started to see responses come back from that exercise.

For those Members who have not yet seen the consultation document, I will provide a brief summary of its contents. A safe systems approach has been adopted to preparing the paper. That approach considers roads, vehicles and road users together and seeks to ensure that each element takes account of the limitations or potential weaknesses in the other two. The paper starts by looking back at where we have come from with road safety in Northern Ireland and turns to look at how we can move forward to improve it in the future.

The paper sets out the key road safety challenges to be addressed over the lifetime of the new strategy. Those include continuing to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries; focusing specifically on improving safety on rural roads; working to protect young drivers and motorcyclists in particular; and reducing inappropriate and illegal road user behaviours, including speeding, drink- and drug-driving and careless and dangerous driving. Also

included are improving our knowledge of road safety problems and of how to solve them, and working within funding constraints and future uncertainties.

The paper highlights the main evidence, statistical analysis and research that were used in its preparation. It also reflects other strategies and consultations in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The paper includes a vision for what I want to achieve, which is simply to position Northern Ireland among the safest countries in the world. Although Members may think that that is unrealistic or over-optimistic, I note that the document shows that in 2008, we would have been placed around sixth in the table of 27 EU countries ranked by fatalities for each million of the population. We should certainly be seeking to improve even further in the future.

It is important that we consider how we might most effectively deliver road safety in the future. For example, we should consider whether local authorities should become more involved and whether a strategy should be underpinned with lower-level local road safety plans. We should also ask whether we need wider involvement from stakeholders in both planning and advising on the way ahead for road safety. Those are important considerations.

The key road casualty reduction targets that are in the consultation paper will probably be of particular interest to Members and the public. The targets are due for achievement by 2020, and they will be measured against a baseline of average figures for the period from 2004 to 2008. As Members will be aware, such averages are used to prevent targets being based on a single particularly good or bad year.

The proposed targets are to reduce by at least 40% the numbers of people who are killed in road collisions; to reduce by at least 45% the number of people who are seriously injured in road collisions; to reduce by at least 55% the number of children aged between 0 and 15 who are killed or seriously injured in road collisions; and to reduce by at least 55% the number of young people aged between 16 and 24 who are killed or seriously injured in road collisions. The targets in the current strategy were to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 33% and to reduce child road deaths and serious injuries by 50%.

The new targets are more challenging in two ways. First, the proposed actual percentage

reductions are higher, and, secondly, we are starting from reduced baselines. The average number of deaths and serious injuries that was used as a baseline for targets in the 2002 strategy was 1,748. The equivalent baseline for the new strategy is 1,236. The baseline for child deaths and serious injuries was 250 in 2002 strategy, and the baseline in the new strategy will be 128. In summary, therefore, there will be lower baselines and higher targets.

The document proposes introducing separate targets for reducing overall deaths and serious injuries. A new target is proposed for people who are aged between 16 and 24, and it is worth noting that we will be among the first countries to have such a target. If it is adopted, we will be the first country in the UK to have it. Indeed, the Republic of Ireland does not have such a target.

I also propose to include a range of performance indicators in our strategy for the first time. Those will not be classed as targets but will be used to measure progress. It is recognised good practice to have such indicators, and they will be particularly useful in helping to recognise emerging issues and to monitor and to understand developments in more depth than might otherwise be possible.

As part of a new strategy, I propose that we consider measuring and reporting on certain matters on an ongoing basis. Those are: the number of people who are killed in road collisions in rural areas; novice driver casualties within six, 12 and 18 months of their passing their driving test; the number of car occupants killed who were not wearing a seat belt; and the rates of road users, including cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists, killed or seriously injured for each million kilometres travelled. The document includes more than 170 proposed action measures that will help us to achieve those challenging targets. The action measures have all been agreed by the road safety strategy project board and the Departments to which commitments will fall.

The measures that are proposed in the document include undertaking an audit of road safety education services and resources to ensure that they address today's road safety issues appropriately; developing and implementing an updated and improved programme of measures to influence young people's attitudes and behaviours; reassessing and improving the way

that novice drivers first learn to drive and/or ride, are tested and continue to learn throughout their life; and extending the use of driver remedial courses and making greater use of educational interventions for errant road users.

The following measures have also been proposed: introducing graduated penalties for certain offences; undertaking a review of speed limits on upper-tier rural roads; considering the applicability of urban speed reduction initiatives and assessing the potential for wider introduction of 20 mph limits in residential and other urban areas where there is a significant presence of vulnerable road users. The proposals also include adopting the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) speed limit enforcement guidelines and setting up an active-travel forum that includes a range of stakeholders to consider a broad strategic approach to active travel; setting up a motorcycling forum that includes a range of stakeholders to consider an inclusive and strategic approach to motorcycling; and focusing on better retrieval and extrication of casualties based on collaborative working between the fire and rescue services on both sides of the border and the community and voluntary sector.

I should mention two issues in more detail, the first of which is graduated driver licensing (GDL). I remain very concerned about the unacceptably high number of young and novice drivers who are involved in fatal and serious collisions on our roads each year. We need to improve how we train and test drivers to ensure that they are safe and competent. Evidence of graduated driver licensing systems in other countries supports the view that moderating the risk exposure of novice drivers while they gain crucial additional experience can reduce the likelihood that they will be involved in a collision.

I will, therefore, shortly consult on detailed options for how we might amend the existing 45 mph speed restriction on learner and restricted drivers and introduce a new system of graduated driver licensing to replace the R-driver scheme. Such a GDL scheme may include measures such as raising or lowering the age of qualification for a provisional or full licence, setting minimum learning periods, allowing learner drivers to drive on motorways and/or dual carriageways and post-test restrictions on passengers. It may also include night-time curfews, increasing the duration of the current 12-month restricted period and introducing an

offence-free period. I look forward to in-depth considerations of those issues at that time.

For the purposes of the consultation that we are discussing, I simply wish to seek views on the broad principles of improving the competencies of our novice drivers and of minimising the risks that they face. There has been much debate about drink driving and the blood:alcohol limit. Consultation on that has already been carried out. Work is progressing to allow for appropriate legislation to be made and for necessary equipment to be sourced and approved. That work will allow the limit to be reduced and random breath testing and appropriate new penalties to be introduced.

12.45 pm

At the same time as the consultation paper is issued, I will make available a number of supporting documents. The research that was conducted to support the development of the new strategy will be available online, along with a profile of current road safety issues. Further research will be added as it is completed, and reports will be updated as appropriate throughout the consultation as new data becomes available.

Therefore, a toolkit will be available to help people to consider and comment on the proposals. The information will also help people to come up with new ideas and to propose and support any ideas that they already have.

We are all aware of the financial context in which the consultation will be issued and within which the strategy will be implemented in its early years. Although that should not be a block to saving lives, it cannot be ignored. We should always remember the human cost, but it is also worth reminding ourselves of the financial cost of road casualties. The consultation paper shows that over the life of the current strategy up until 2008, it is estimated that prevention of all road casualties in Northern Ireland would have saved around £2.9 billion. The financial value of the road casualties that were prevented was £951 million, and when figures are available for 2009, that figure will rise to well over £1 billion. That helps us to understand the quantum of possible savings that could be made in Northern Ireland in the future through the reduction of road casualties.

Every death and serious injury is one too many, and the only acceptable level of road accidents

is none. I want the road safety strategy to drive society to do everything in its power to strive for that. Almost every day, I hear stories of devastation, lives lost and futures ruined. I listen to the grief borne by families, friends and communities. We must all do our very best to prevent more families from suffering the tragedy of such shattered lives.

I am happy to take Members' questions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to ask questions to the Minister's statement.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mrs D Kelly): On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the Minister's road safety strategy consultation and look forward to playing a full and constructive role in ensuring that the strategy delivers significant reductions in fatalities and casualties on the roads.

As the Committee awaited the strategy, it asked a range of stakeholders how road deaths and injuries could be reduced. Problems in rural areas were identified as a key concern, and, as we all know, many of the most horrific accidents occur on country roads. Therefore, I am pleased that the Minister has recognised the importance of addressing road safety in rural areas by including a number of measures that are aimed at improving the situation. However, does the Minister not think that if his actions in rural areas are to be taken seriously, there should be a target specifically focused on reducing road fatalities and casualties in rural areas?

The Minister of the Environment: I thank the Member for highlighting the issue of rural areas. Between 2003 and 2008, 560 deaths and 3,733 serious injuries occurred on rural roads, which account for 72% of deaths and 55% of serious injuries. The measures proposed in the new strategy will seek to address the behaviours that contribute to the high level of deaths and serious injuries in rural areas. In addition, measures will specifically target road safety in rural areas, not least the proposals to consider speed limits on upper-tier rural roads and to target road policing resources towards high-risk locations, particularly in rural areas.

We will also consider the erection of road safety cameras at locations in rural areas where a considerable number of accidents take place and, to that end, identify locations where there appears to be a build-up of accidents. Through such measures, we hope to drive down the awful

statistics for rural road accidents, all of which involve a human life.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement on what is an important matter. The issue was originally raised by my colleague Mr Ross. The graduated driving licence, where it operates, tends to comprise a combination of measures. Will the consultation contain individual questions on each option or will a combination of measures be offered?

The Minister of the Environment: The consultation will contain individual questions. The information will be collated, and we will consider what can be delivered. We do not anticipate taking forward every issue, but we need to look at what we can bring together to greatest effect and introduce that at the earliest opportunity to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries that involve the 17-year-old to 24-year-old category, which accounts for 11% of drivers, but almost 40% of road deaths. We are deeply dissatisfied with those figures and will continue to seek to drive them down.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, offer my condolences to those who were killed over the weekend. Does the Minister intend to work with mobile phone and insurance companies to see what they can bring to the strategy, and to see what we can learn from other jurisdictions, particularly Sweden's Vision Zero initiative?

The Minister of the Environment: I am keen to work with insurance companies in particular. Monitors can be placed in cars to identify speed at all times. An insurance company could then quickly know whether someone was driving at inappropriate speeds, and withdraw the insurance. A series of steps can be taken to challenge driver behaviour. It is in the interest of insurance companies to work closely with us to deliver this strategy, because it will drive down their costs as well as drive down the awful record of road deaths and injuries.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the Minister's decision to conduct the consultation earlier than anticipated. I declare an interest as a councillor, a member of Carrickfergus road safety committee, and a father of two teenage drivers. The Minister suggested that councils may have a role to play in road safety in the future. Does he agree that it is important that the community and voluntary sector, and individuals who show a commitment

to road safety, are also kept on board so that their expertise can be used to improve road safety locally?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes, absolutely. Many people are interested in road safety, and we want to encourage such interest further. We want to make full use of our resources, so the more voluntary assistance, the better. It is critical that we seek to get as many people as possible involved in getting the message out, and moving to local authority community planning will provide us with a significant opportunity to develop that.

Mr Lunn: I may be touching on the same point as Mr Beggs. The Minister mentioned a figure of £2.9 billion. That contrasts with the roughly £150,000 that it cost to run the Road Safety Council and the various road safety committees. Is there a place for such bodies, given that the actions of his Department, and, to be fair, more particularly his predecessor, have resulted in reducing the number of committees from 18 to about seven?

The Minister of the Environment: That issue was highlighted after several reports were critical of the value for money that was being delivered. Only 12% of the £170,000 was invested in the front line, and the rest was spent on administration. That money has not gone, and we want it to be delivered to front line services rather than to administration.

Over the lifetime of the strategy, some £2.9 billion could have been saved. That we saved £950 million demonstrates how other Departments can provide considerable help to, for example, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Better road safety measures resulted in more than £100 million of savings each year, much of which benefited the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Over the next several years, we can reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads. On a human level, quite a number of families will avoid the grief that they would have experienced had those road accidents occurred. We can also save the Executive and some elements of the private sector, such as insurance companies, considerable amounts of money, because hospitals will not have to provide many months of treatment and rehabilitation to people who have been seriously injured on the roads. The cost of that treatment

is huge, as are the benefits of reducing the number of injuries and deaths on our roads.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the progress that has been made on the drink-driving issue and graduated driver licensing. Areas in the world that operate GDL have already seen significant decreases in the number of road deaths. Although the system has been highly successful, it has not been particularly popular with younger drivers. What steps does the Minister intend to take to ensure that younger people are included in the consultation process and that the rationale for some of the measures that are being discussed are explained to them?

Although the Department of the Environment takes the lead role in road safety issues, has the Minister had any discussions with his Executive colleagues about speed limits? Has he had any discussions with the PSNI about average-speed cameras, which seem to have a dramatic impact?

The Minister of the Environment: We issued 2,000 questionnaires on GDL to young people. We also consulted directly with over 300 people in the children and young people's unit. We will continue to seek information from young people and keep them as well informed as possible about our ideas to make the roads safer for them. This morning, I attended the launch of a PSNI scheme, in association with the colleges and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), on the modification of cars. Single accidents have resulted in multiple fatalities because of modifications that left vehicles in an unsafe and unroadworthy condition.

We must continue to work with our young people in all those areas. A couple of weeks ago, I attended a function in Dungannon, at which people from the Ambulance Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, the PSNI, doctors and hospital staff explained what happened as a result of an accident. It was an extremely moving experience. A number of the individuals who spoke had lost loved ones in accidents. We must keep hammering through the message, particularly to our young people, that driving can present them with additional opportunities in life, but not driving safely may shorten their lives or leave them permanently injured. We must encourage our young people to heed that message.

1.00 pm

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. I particularly welcome his focus on rural roads and his comments about road safety cameras. Does he agree that the Frosses Road in north Antrim should be considered for the installation of road safety cameras and average-speed cameras? What action is he considering to take to tackle the attitudes, behaviour and culture of people, particularly in rural areas, who drive to their local pubs and drive home again after consuming alcohol? Finally, does he commend rural pub owners who regularly organise transport for customers who are under the influence to ensure that they get home safely?

The Minister of the Environment: I do not decide where speed cameras are located. However, the Frosses Road has an appalling record. Indeed, at the weekend, members of my family were travelling to a sports event in Ballymoney, and I warned them about the number of incidents that have taken place on that road.

As regards people driving to and from pubs, there is nothing wrong with that, as long as they do not consume alcohol at the pub. I welcome the designated driver initiative that was taken in association with Coca-Cola. That offered drivers up to three free soft drinks while they were out for the evening. However, we need to keep pressing home the message that the only level of alcohol that is truly acceptable in a person's system is zero.

We are seeking to pursue new figures, and we need to have the technique, which the Department for Transport in the UK is delivering, for proper and appropriate testing. That will lead to the situation in which people will be unable to drink at all when they go out because the figures will be so low. We need to get to that stage, because drink driving is still one of the key factors in the number of incidents on our roads that lead to death or injury.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's statement and his commitment to reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. The Minister referred to the launch of Project Evo, in which he took part this morning, and to the road safety event in Dungannon. Does he agree that the Police Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Ambulance Service and local doctors, are making a serious effort to tackle road safety

and get the message across to young people about the effects that drink driving and driving at fast speeds can have on people's lives?

The Minister of the Environment: A whole series of things have led to a major contribution in the reduction of road deaths. In fact, in the 1970s, which coincided with the worst period of the Troubles, we had the highest number of road deaths on our roads. At one stage, more than 300 people were being killed on our roads every year, and those figures have been driven down to just over 100, which is still unacceptable.

There are a number of reasons involved. First, cars are much safer now; they have much better braking systems and impact systems, and they are being designed with accidents and road safety in mind. Secondly, roads have improved; and there can be no doubt that if the road between Ballymena and Ballymoney were entirely a motorway, it would be safer. The same case will apply when the Dungannon to Ballygawley road becomes a motorway. There will be fewer accidents involving loss of life on those roads. Improvements have been made, and we will also benefit from the road improvements that are being made.

The bottom line is that driver behaviour on our roads is crucial. It may be suitable to drive on a motorway at 70 mph, and it may be wholly unsuitable to drive on a rural road at 50 mph. It depends on the circumstances in which one is driving. People need to realise that it is not worth risking their lives or the lives of others by overtaking a row of vehicles that is sitting behind a slow-moving vehicle, or whatever. It is fundamentally important that people get the message that driver error is the cause of most accidents. The roads are not the cause, although better roads would lead to fewer crashes. Driver error is the single biggest component in all accidents that involve death and injury.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement. I see that many of the measures proposed are outside the control of the Minister of the Environment and within the remit of the Department for Regional Development (DRD) in particular. Will the Minister inform the House what discussions and guarantees he has received from Conor Murphy that those aspects of the new strategy will be delivered?

The Minister of the Environment: The strategy was not drawn up in isolation from other

Departments. I have already put on record my appreciation for the work of senior officials in DRD who helped us to draw up the strategy, and I do so again. The strategy is about all of us working together to introduce measures that will help make Northern Ireland a better and safer place. We should seek to do that in all that we do, regardless of what Department is taking the lead, and we need to support other Departments that are delivering. In this instance, my Department has the lead on road safety and DRD has the lead on roads. We will work closely together to ensure that we can deliver on the strategy.

Last year, more than 100 people lost their lives on our roads. By the time that the new strategy is implemented, we want to see that number halved. More than 1,000 people were injured on our roads, and we want to see that number halved. We want to drive down the number of people who enter our hospitals from 1,000 to 450. A reduced requirement to provide long-term care and the associated savings that admitting 550 fewer people in hospital will bring will be a big help to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I have no doubt that all the Departments involved will work closely together to ensure that we can deliver on the strategy.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin, agus go n-éirí an bóthar leis an obair atá sé a dhéanamh. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I wish him well in his work on the strategy. The Committee for Regional Development, of which I am a member, has a particular interest in the strategy, and we will be supportive. I note that 2,000 questionnaires were issued to young people, and I particularly welcome the emphasis that has been placed on young people in the consultation. Will the Minister ensure that innovative media and forums are used to get the message across to young people? The TV advertisements are good and impressive, but young people may not be as switched on to television as they are to other media and forums. What consideration will he give to that? Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The Minister of the Environment: It is vital that we use every method at our disposal to get the message through to young people. We are, therefore, happy to use whatever medium that takes. We may advertise in cinemas or on the Internet. We will seek to get the message

across and drive it home in a range of ways. We must encourage our young people to pay attention and heed advice.

The Department's recent advertisements may not be as shocking as some previous advertisements, but they are driving home the message of mothers who have lost their child. That message is very powerful and emotive. Those mothers are real human beings who have gone through the tragedy of losing their son. I trust that, as they listen to that message, other young men will tell themselves that they do not want to put their mother through what those mothers on TV have gone through.

Mr Bell: I welcome the Minister's positive statement that the focus will be kept on drug-driving. Does he accept that there is a problem in Strangford with young people taking cocaine, ecstasy, the gateway drug cannabis and, worst of all, the death drug crystal meth?

Can the Minister ensure that the focus on drug-driving will be kept to the fore, just as the focus on drink-driving is to the fore, and that young people will be made aware in advance that if they drive to and from parties and take drugs and medications, such as Valium, illegally, they will face severe penalties with regard to their driving careers?

The Minister of the Environment: Absolutely. Of course, alcohol is also a drug, although that is not talked about too much. Anything that either slows down or speeds up people's system to an abnormal level will distort their ability to carry out functions such as driving. It is, therefore, critical that the focus continues to be kept on drug-driving, so that when police see someone who is driving erratically, but there is no evidence that that person has taken alcohol, they have a series of methods by which to ascertain whether the individual has taken drugs. That is more difficult to determine and, ultimately, it may require that the person is taken to the police station for a blood test.

I have no doubt that police are being trained well in that regard. That will continue to be the case. As technologies advance, we will be able to pursue that more vigorously. I am sure that the number of deaths that are caused by drug-driving will not be allowed to creep upwards. Indeed, that number must be driven downwards.

Committee Business

Report on the Inquiry into the Dioxin Contamination Incident

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 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other speakers will have five minutes.

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

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on its inquiry into the dioxin contamination incident of December 2008; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in liaison with Executive colleagues, to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

At 7.00 pm on 6 December 2008, authorities in the Republic of Ireland, with support from the highest level of government there, calmly announced on news bulletins that all Irish pork and pork products would be recalled from markets due to the discovery of dioxins in pork and pigs that had been fed with contaminated foodstuffs.

That announcement was made without any contact with Northern Ireland authorities at senior political or official level. Indeed, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development discovered the incident some two and a half hours later when she watched the RTÉ news.

The outcome of the announcement was the near collapse of the pig industry; losses of almost £15 million to the agrifood sector; a continuing legacy of financial burden on people who work in that sector; and a real kick in the teeth to consumers.

The fact that the inquiry is one of four that have been conducted into the incident — two in the Republic of Ireland and two in Northern Ireland — is indicative of the seriousness of the incident and its outcome. I am pleased that the Committee's report into the dioxin incident is the first report from a Northern Ireland perspective to be published. I hope that during the course of the debate, Members will endorse the Committee's findings and the conclusions

at which it has arrived. I believe that it is a touchstone report.

I also want to thank the Agriculture Minister for the Executive response to the report, which the Committee received on the afternoon of Friday 12 March 2010 and which recognises and agrees with the report's findings and recommendations. Obviously, the Executive must await the outcome of the MacKenzie review, to which the Committee contributed, before they finalise their position. I am pleased that the MacKenzie review team is now being asked to consider the recommendations in the Committee's report, which is before the House.

I will not go into great detail on every recommendation that is made in the report. I am sure that during the course of the debate, colleagues from my Committee and other Members will want to comment on some, if not all, of the recommendations. Suffice to say that it was a very detailed examination of the matter and of the roles played by the four organisations that were considered by the Committee to have been central to the incident from the sectoral perspective, namely the two agriculture Departments and the two food safety organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

1.15 pm

During the inquiry, the Committee became aware that others played a role, including the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and an even more substantial number of organisations in the Republic of Ireland, including the source of the contaminated foodstuffs and the local county council. That led the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to conclude that there were a:

"myriad of agencies responsible for food safety".

That conclusion was also evident to our Committee. That led to a great deal of confusion in the industry.

Although the Departments and agencies might appreciate their individual roles and responsibilities, the industry and sectors that they serve do not. That was evidenced on Monday 8 December 2008, when farmers arrived at abattoirs with their stock, only to be told that it could not be taken. The main criticism from producers and processors was

that they did not know who was in charge and they did not know whom to turn to for advice. That was exacerbated to a certain extent in the House, with two different Ministers talking about two separate areas of responsibility for the same issue. Although I totally understand the delegation and sharing of those responsibilities, it was as confusing for the consumer as it was for the farmer. It was perceived as a disjointed approach, and not what our industry needed at a time of confusion. We needed clear, strategic and consistent messages from the Executive. I note and appreciate that the Executive have accepted that finding and the subsequent recommendation.

It is particularly pleasing to note that the Executive will take on board the Committee's criticisms in respect of the very apparent breakdown of communications from the outset of the incident. However, it was not the breakdown of communications locally that really mattered. George Bernard Shaw once stated:

"The problem with communication ...is the illusion that it has been accomplished."

The authorities in the Republic of Ireland must have a keen sense of imagination, because their conclusion was that communication between them and the authorities here in Northern Ireland was timely and informative. That is a fallacy. Their communication consisted of an e-mail from a mid-level official late on a Friday afternoon that did not provide any detail; the announcement of the withdrawal of foodstuffs on a Saturday evening without discussion with any senior individuals in Northern Ireland, despite being aware that some 9,000 pigs are exported to Northern Ireland each week; and allowing the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to find out about the recall on the RTÉ evening news. That was despite the holding of ministerial meetings, which included no less a figure than the Taoiseach, during the lead-up to the announcement.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland contacted the Food Standards Agency in London, completely ignoring the agency in Northern Ireland, which found out about the developing situation two days later. To cap it all, our Minister contacted her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, quite appropriately, on 17 December regarding the eligibility of processors in Northern Ireland for compensation, but did not get a formal response until 23 January

2009 at a North/South Ministerial Council meeting — and those are examples that led the inter-agency review team in the Republic to conclude that communication was both timely and informative?

Mr Bell: The Member rightly raised some serious matters. Will he inform the House how the report affects cross-border relations?

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: I hope that that question will be answered by the end of the debate. However, if the incident is supposed to represent an example of good cross-border communication, it is a poor one. Anyone who reads the Committee's report will see that we speak with uniformity in our anger at the way in which communication was handled between the jurisdiction in the Republic of Ireland and our own jurisdiction. It sent out a bad signal and was a bad example of how two jurisdictions should communicate over an issue of mutual benefit. That tells its own story. No doubt, during the course of the debate, Members from all sides of the House will have their own points to make on that issue.

Other communication problems are detailed in the report, not all of which are directed at the authorities in the Republic. We have our own problems, and I am pleased that the Department recognised those and has given an undertaking in the Executive response to review communication processes.

No one in the House wants the farcical situation of a government Minister hearing about a serious incident on the news again. It is unfortunate that the authorities in the Republic do not recognise that there is a problem. The fact that a problem exists needs to be reinforced, particularly if the development of all-island strategies is to continue and, most importantly, the Northern Ireland industry is to put its faith in such strategies.

I will comment on the aid package that is provided in the Republic and by the Executive. I thank the Executive for the clarity on levels of hardship payments, although the figures in the report were provided by the Department. I am also mindful that the Executive provided a significant level of moneys at a time when they faced severe fiscal constraints. However, the Committee is critical of the time that it took to compile the package, and there are gaps about those who are eligible to receive payments.

We must ensure that that does not reoccur should there be a dioxin incident or a similar occurrence in the future. I hope that a lesson has been learned.

I thank the Committee staff for their diligence, expertise and exacting approach, not least the Committee Clerk, Mr Paul Carlisle. I believe that our report is a touchstone report. It clearly sets a high standard for reports that are produced by a devolved Assembly. It also sets out challenging roles for government officials, in this jurisdiction and in our neighbouring one, to recognise their responsibilities. It far outstrips other reports that have been produced to date on the dioxin contamination incident, and it will set the tone for future reports. I look forward to the report being read and its contents being properly deliberated and delivered on.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I pay tribute to everyone who was involved in compiling the inquiry report and to everyone who gave evidence or contributed in any way. I also want to show my appreciation to the Chairperson for guiding us through the report in a diligent manner.

We all remember the devastation that the foot-and-mouth epidemic caused to the agriculture and tourism industries. The pork contamination incident was on a much smaller scale, but it is a chilling reminder that we cannot take the issue of animal feedstuff lightly because there will always be a kickback if shortcuts are taken on animal feedstuff.

I appreciate the Executive's review, and they will make recommendations on the roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies, which should result in streamlined processes. Everyone will welcome the fact that the review will also identify barriers to good communication. A plethora of bodies was involved in the incident on both sides of the border. Too many bodies and Departments were involved in dealing with the incident. In such circumstances, there will always be an element of confusion about who takes ownership of particular matters.

There are also cross-border issues. Too many processes are being duplicated, particularly within the remit of the Food Standards Agency. We need to consider the possibility of one agency dealing with all the food standards issues on the island of Ireland. That is common sense, and it would mean that, in the event of an incident such as dioxin contamination,

there would be greater clarity about who has responsibility for what.

During the Committee's discussions on the crisis, a lot of people were of the view that a partitionist approach had been taken, particularly with regard to the way that the South of Ireland communicated and fed information in the first 48 hours. This is just the Committee's opinion, but it felt that the authorities in the South of Ireland were very slow to pass information to our Minister in the Six Counties. The Chairperson has already dealt with communication, and it is a disgrace that the Minister in the North, Michelle Gildernew, had to learn of the incident from a television programme. That is not acceptable.

There was talk that information had to go to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and to the member state first and foremost. However, it does not take a lot of effort to cc someone into an e-mail to let them know what is happening, even if it is not clear how serious the incident is. PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) contamination is a serious issue. There had not been an outbreak for a considerable time — not since the setting up of the Food Standards Agency, I believe. It was a serious incident, and other Ministers should have been informed. The Committee was very critical of that lack of communication. Fair enough, there were reasons for it, which I touched on earlier. Some people did not know who had responsibility for what. I hope that lessons have been learnt.

Some members thought that the Department was slow to provide the aid package. I commend the Minister for putting the aid package together; it was difficult because of the complexities involved and because of the North/South issue. I commend the Minister for getting the package that she got from the Executive. We must remember that the Minister had to make a case to the Executive, so we must give credit where credit is due. The aid package should work on an all-island basis, just like everything to do with agriculture and fishing. There should be no competitive disadvantage; that is not in the interests of the island's economy.

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

Mr W Clarke: There was discussion about a proportionate response. It was important to take the actions that were taken, because that

safeguarded our industry, which is the most important thing. We need only look at the dioxins contamination incident in Belgium to see how important it was to take action. That incident nearly destroyed the Belgian economy.

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

I thank all those who gave evidence to the Committee, as well as the Committee Clerk and Committee staff who worked tirelessly to move the process forward for the Committee. I also thank the departmental officials for the assistance and information that they provided to us.

The report is much too complex for us to absorb everything in it at this stage and to offer it as evidence today. The issues involved are hugely controversial, to say the least. In some instances, the report shows the difficulties that exist with some aspects of cross-border working. That is unfortunate because, in an incident such as the dioxins incident, we would have expected cross-border working to have happened much more quickly, to have been much more relaxed and to have been much more beneficial for us.

1.30 pm

We in the Ulster Unionist Party strive to protect farmers and the industry at all times. It is unfortunate that, on some occasions during the incident, the farming community was put on the back burner and was left almost to fend for itself. In the days immediately following the incident, I suggested to senior officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development that the Department try to get the stock off farms and produce an aid package to get our products back on the European and world markets. Those departmental officials totally opposed my suggestions and refused to act on them.

I appreciate that, in the longer term, the Department came up with a package and an opportunity to take stock off farms. However, that can be compared with how the Administration in the Republic dealt with the situation there. Stock was taken off farms, and the products that were in storage were disposed of quickly. Farmers there were able to get their pork and beef products in particular back on to the markets very quickly, and they were able to say that their products were clean and that all the products that had possibly been contaminated had been taken out of the

system. The fact that they were able to do that quickly left producers in Northern Ireland very much on the back foot. It meant that a number of our customers, particularly those throughout Europe, asked why the Republic of Ireland was able to market its products as being clear and officially free of contamination but we were unable to do so. That is very unfortunate.

I question strongly how the feed product, which was where the dioxin problem started, was able to get on to farms and be fed to animals here. I understand that it was a farm quality assured product. I declare an interest, as I am involved in the farm quality assurance scheme in Northern Ireland. Our meal dockets are checked annually, so I cannot understand how such a product slipped through the system, how it was possible that it was fed to animals in Northern Ireland and how it met official farm quality assured standards. That should not have been allowed to happen.

It is unfortunate that, by the end of the process, a number of farmers had still not received reasonable compensation or aid for the milk and slurry that they had to dispose of. I know of two dairy farmers who did not get any aid package for the milk that they had to dump. That cost those people an awful lot of money, and I understand that some of them were left on the verge of financial collapse simply because the aid package did not extend to them. I appreciate that an aid package was put in place, but the farming community feel that it did not extend far enough. A number of farmers had to hire slurry storage to store potentially contaminated slurry.

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

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development: Those farmers did not get any aid or support to do that.

Mr Burns: As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I support the motion. I endorse wholeheartedly the findings of the inquiry into the dioxin contamination incident of December 2008, and I call for a speedy introduction of the report's recommendations. I thank all those who provided written submissions to the inquiry and all those who gave oral evidence to the Committee.

The incident was nothing short of a disaster, and a lot of damage was done. Therefore, we must make the necessary changes quickly to

protect the Northern Ireland agriculture industry. The report makes many recommendations, but, given that those who conducted the extensive investigation considered practically every e-mail that was sent and every phone call that was made, time does not permit me to go into every point in detail. However, I will say a few words about the recommendations that I think are the most important.

It was absolutely clear that the single biggest weakness in the system was the line of communication. I do not wish to dwell on that point too much, but the fact that our Minister learned about the scare on the RTE news was completely disgraceful. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the South has a lot to answer for. However, even though its behaviour in that instance left a lot to be desired, we cannot overlook the positive work and co-operation that has taken place in dealing with other issues in the past. I, therefore, hope that that was a one-off and that there will be greater and more efficient co-operation on agriculture on an all-island basis in the future.

Good communication at all levels of the industry is vital in a time of crisis. Therefore, DARD must review and overhaul its communication process, and the incident management team must be set up as quickly as possible. It is they who should assume responsibility for communicating a single, clear and consistent message and for creating an early warning strategy. Furthermore, the number of agencies that are responsible for food safety in Northern Ireland must be streamlined. Too many agencies have their own specific roles and do their own thing. Most of the time, the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, and that is just not good enough, because we must be ready for other similar incidents that might happen tomorrow.

The aid package that was put together was simply not good enough. The compensation was nowhere near what was required, and it certainly did not help the beef and dairy sectors or other associated businesses. However, there is still time to review that, and I urge the Minister and the Executive to do so immediately.

The report is not about placing blame, but there were certainly people who got things wrong, and they know who they are. Although no damage was done to public health, there was certainly no happy ending. The extent of the damage to the industry and the fact that the pig sector has

struggled to recover are clear evidence of that. Lessons must be learned, and such a badly managed crisis must not be allowed to happen again.

Mr Ford: I welcome the publication of the report, and I congratulate not only the Committee Chairperson but Committee members and staff on the detail that they have managed to consider and on the quality of the report. I trust that that quality will ensure that the report is read. Sometimes, the thicker a report is, the less it gets noticed. I, therefore, hope that those who have responsibility for looking to the report will take notice of it.

The key issues that have been highlighted are the difficulties that we experience because of the relative simplicity of cross-border trade, the poor communications between the two jurisdictions and, as others said, the multiplicity of agencies with different levels of responsibility for either public health or animal health. There is no doubt that communication between the two jurisdictions was not as good as it should have been. It is not unreasonable to say that, on this occasion, communications from DAFF in Dublin to DARD in Belfast were extremely poor and were not nearly as speedy as they should have been.

I will digress for a moment: compare the approach that was taken to the dioxin scare with the approach that was taken to foot-and-mouth disease on this island and the adjacent island a few years ago. When the problem of foot-and-mouth disease first arose in this jurisdiction, the necessary communications went from Bríd Rodgers to Joe Walsh, and there was full contact between them. When foot-and-mouth disease spread into the areas of south Armagh and north Louth, wherein it had the potential to impact on cross-border trade, it was dealt with because there was a determination and a keenness to co-operate. We should say to the DARD officials that the co-operation started at this end, and it is sad that their counterparts in Dublin were unable to reciprocate by co-operating during the dioxin contamination. We will have to see whether the lessons to which the report referred have been learned and whether new practices will ensure better co-ordination and communication between the two jurisdictions. The officials who are listening to the debate are exclusively from DARD, but their Dublin counterparts should also listen to what is being said, because lessons must be learned.

There is no doubt that, as a result of the action taken on both sides of the border, public health was protected. We should be grateful that there was nothing like the level of scare that BSE created at different times. Nonetheless, a huge problem was created for a small number of people in the food production industry, and a rather smaller problem was created for a rather larger number of people. Efforts were made to provide compensation, but we must take an interest in the fact that the cost to the small number of farmers and processors has not been adequately addressed by the compensation package. Real issues remain in connection with the necessity of co-operation between Belfast and Dublin and the nature of their relationship with the EU institutions. To ensure that that issue will be addressed properly should a similar situation occur in the future, the problems must be resolved.

The multiplicity of agencies with responsibility for food safety in the two jurisdictions, whether at a human, animal or production process level, is also a major issue. It has not been fully established how those agencies should co-ordinate their activities and whether they could be reduced in number to ensure a better understanding of what is happening in every part of the island. It is part of the general lesson that sometimes applies here about the need for more joined-up government, better co-operation between different Departments and improved ways of ensuring that action is taken as speedily as it ought to be.

If nothing else, I hope that the Minister will be able to assure the House that she is taking that lesson on board and will ensure that the same problems that arose during the incident will not recur. I trust that she will not have to watch RTE to find out about an issue of significant concern to farmers in Northern Ireland.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. As a member of the Agriculture Committee and a farmer in my constituency of Newry and Armagh, I am aware that the incident caused great concern to the farmers who were unfortunate enough to have animals affected by the dioxin contamination.

We all remember the headlines in December 2008 when the pig industry was plunged into crisis. The pictures of pork being cleared from the shelves were beamed across national television, and those involved in the promotion

of Northern Ireland pork products were extremely downcast at that time. It was a dark day for the pig industry and one that will not be forgotten for a long time. The Committee of which I am a member has taken the issue extremely seriously, and its report into the incident is the result of a great deal of research and discussion with the many agencies and bodies involved in managing the crisis.

The safety of the public is the number one concern, and I share the view contained in the report that the largest contributor to the crisis, apart from the factory that produced the contaminated meal, was the failure of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the Republic immediately to contact our Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to inform it of the impending crisis. Indeed, the fact that we learned of the incident from the television news was totally ridiculous and unacceptable. Some 9,000 pigs are exported from the Republic to Northern Ireland each week, and farmers here had received the contaminated feed. Those two facts were well known to the Irish authorities.

1.45 pm

The animal health and welfare strategy in operation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was shown to be inadequate in the worst possible way. We had a situation in which confusion and indecision reigned. Quick and decisive action, backed up by firm and up-to-date information, would have gone a long way to reassuring the public.

The cost of the incident to the pig industry here is thought to be in the region of £10 million and has come at a time when the agriculture industry is already tightening its belt to remain competitive and viable. That is not to mention the cost to our dairy and beef sectors. In my constituency, one dairy farmer had to dump his milk for two months. The value of that milk was more than £20,000, which was a great loss to the farmer, and, as yet, he has not received any compensation. The Republic has, in effect, washed its hands of the impact that the crisis has had on the industry in Northern Ireland, and that is totally unacceptable.

I share the view that the Executive aid package could have been expanded to better target those considered to be ineligible for aid, even though they were directly affected and had to dispose of retail materials, milk and other products at

significant losses. There are lessons to be learned from the incident, and, for the sake of the industry, I hope that they can be learned quickly.

The Committee heard from many of the bodies tasked with food safety and industry regulation. More co-ordination is required so that, in the case of any future incidents, action taken is proportionate to protect public health. The potential impact on the industry must also be more carefully considered. I welcome the report and hope that its recommendations can be implemented without delay.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I support the motion. The report contains many points that I agree with, and I also agree with many points that have been raised in the debate. I want to concentrate on two issues.

First, it emerged during the inquiry that there was a huge dependence — an overdependence, in my opinion — placed on the Central Science Laboratory, which is based in York. All the testing for Britain and Ireland has to go through that lab. Given the importance of agriculture in Ireland, compared with its importance in Britain, there is room for both jurisdictions to see whether they can develop a central science lab based on this island, North or South. Agriculture is of massive importance to the island's economy.

Secondly, I want to talk about co-operation between the North and the South or rather the lack of co-operation between DARD and DAFF. The Committee heard evidence from DAFF officials on two occasions, in Dublin and in the Senate Chamber here. From them we heard an awful lot about their obligation and duty to adhere to EU law and domestic law. We heard how they contacted Brussels and learned what they did domestically in the Twenty-six Counties and what relationships they had with London. One would think that they had never heard of the Good Friday Agreement. One would think that they had never heard of an agreement reached on this island in 1998 that placed duties and responsibilities on the Southern authorities in their relationship with their Northern counterparts. It indicated to me just how partitionism —

Mr Shannon: Will the Member give way?

Mr Doherty: Yes, of course.

Mr Shannon: During an evidence session to the Committee as part of the inquiry, the Chairperson said:

"To paraphrase a member, they behaved like a bunch of Free Staters."

To which the member replied: "That is what they are."

Mr Doherty: That is true; well pointed out. With your help, I will develop that point.

It was clear that the officials had no sense of their duties and responsibilities to the North. As the picture emerged — perhaps events had not come to an absolute conclusion — the situation with respect to dioxin contamination was, potentially, developing into a very serious one. Officials never once thought to contact, formally or informally, their Northern counterparts. A huge lesson needs to be learned, and perhaps we need to create a Hillsborough agreement mark II that will bring the Dublin authorities to the table and make them realise that, given the importance of agriculture in the North and the South to the whole economy, their responsibilities are not only for agriculture in the Twenty-six Counties but the whole island. I recommend that the House accepts the report, and I ask it to consider the possibility of a Hillsborough agreement mark II for the Dublin Government.

Mr Shannon: For the record, I was not a member of the Agriculture Committee when the debacle started. Nonetheless, it affected me greatly. I declare an interest as a pork retailer who sells bacon, sausages and cooked ham.

I remember clearly the Sunday afternoon when the story unfolded. One of my customers phoned me to ask whether I had heard the news. I had not. I watched the 24-hour news channel and, within an hour, another four pork suppliers from the Strangford area, which I represent, had contacted me about the same issue. They were concerned that they could not gain access to a departmental official and were unsure about what to do with their products then and the following morning. As the hours ticked by, a real crisis was unfolding, and it was difficult to find information, guidelines and help on the 24-hour news channel.

At that time, I was very critical of the Department, and that is on the record. However, during the Committee's inquiry, it became clear where the problems lay. As I said to Pat earlier,

the Chairperson contended that the officials from the Republic:

"behaved like a bunch of Free Staters."

Moreover, when those officials gave evidence to the Committee, I thought that they:

"hedged their bets and batted carefully for their own side."

Other members agreed with that.

The officials from the Republic and from the Food Safety Authority of Ireland were clear about the origin of the problems. They did not notify our Department in time and did not let us know what was going on. Therefore, I commend the recommendation on page 6 of the report, which refers to the early warning system that we need to put in place. That early warning system must consist of more than simply letting departmental officials know, and it is critical to the management of potential future incidents.

I want to comment on the recommendation on the aid package. Given my contacts in the industry, I know of some suppliers who had literally hundreds of thousands of pounds of product sitting around. They did not know what would happen to it. Some people's compensation issues have not yet been sorted out, and I know that the report contains a recommendation about that. I want the aid package that is recommended on page 8 of the report to be implemented. As of today, 15 March 2010, some people are waiting for compensation. The money that they deserve should be passed on to them.

My third point is about consumer confidence and public safety. During the Committee's inquiry, a scientist who gave evidence said that, unless someone had eaten the contaminated pork for breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper for a year, there would be no difficulties. It would be like asking me to eat 50 bacon butties or a wee bit more for breakfast. I could not do that; it would be impossible. Even you could not do that, Francie — I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. When we talk about consumer confidence, public safety and the scares about products that were put about, it is important to put things into perspective. I am concerned about that.

I hope that, as a result of the report, we will ensure that an early warning system and provision for aid will be put in place and that outstanding compensation moneys will be paid.

We must establish a better working relationship with our counterparts in the Republic of Ireland on economic issues that are as important for them as they are for us and for the confidence of the industry in Northern Ireland, which produces the very best products. We must ensure that those issues are taken care of. I commend the report and support the motion.

Mr Savage: I sit on the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, which prepared and produced the inquiry report. I declare an interest.

The pork dioxin contamination scare occurred in December 2008 and resulted in pork being removed from shop shelves, as, in the end, it could not be sold because of health concerns. The scare caused major damage to and difficulty for the pork industry in Northern Ireland. It could not have come at a worse time, as shops and supermarkets were stocking up for Christmas and the new year.

The most concerning aspect, other than the public health fears, was the abject failure of the Government of the Republic of Ireland to advise our Executive and, in particular, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the potential seriousness of the incident in a timely manner. In the report's findings and recommendations, the Committee noted that the Minister found out about the total recall of Irish pork and pork products:

"by chance whilst watching a news programme in the late evening of Saturday, 6 December 2009."

That was simply unacceptable at a time when the pig industry here needed all the assistance that it could get north and south of the border. It is essential that early warning is given at the appropriate level. Time is of the essence, especially in cases such as the dioxin contamination incident, to allow the necessary actions to be taken. To that end, the report recommends that an early warning system be established that will:

"inform other Member States and regions who may be affected."

It also recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development:

"should critically assess its communication lines and processes in order to prevent a repeat of those circumstances witnessed on Monday 8 December. This should focus on an assessment

of communication lines and processes to farm businesses and industry processors, as these are providing ongoing advice in respect of the incident."

Like the Committee, I find it most concerning that the pork recall was ordered yet not communicated to DARD. That meant that, on Monday 8 December 2008, the Department and other local agencies here were not in a position to provide clear decisions and instructions to stakeholders during a crucial period.

Although I accept that no one came out of the incident with much glory, I commend the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her actions at that time. To her credit, she did her utmost to keep the House and the Agriculture Committee up to date with a rapidly developing situation. It is clear that there are many lessons to be learned from the incident. I trust that those lessons have been learned and that we will not find ourselves in a similar position ever again.

Such events may happen from time to time in Northern Ireland and many other places, but the key issue is communication. Lines of communications must be kept open. Our Minister and her staff are to be commended for the way that they handled that difficult situation. I hope that such incidents, minimal as their effect may potentially be, never happen again.

2.00 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the report and commend the Committee, officials and those associated with its production for their efforts in bringing it to this point.

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

Food safety is absolutely paramount for consumers and it is crucial to confidence in the industry. All available evidence suggests that that particular dioxin incident occurred as a consequence of contaminated fuel being used in the oil-fired burner that generated the heat to dry the feed at the company; a failure by the feed business operator to identify hazards associated with that flame dryer; and the risk of contaminated feed if, as appears to have been the case, contaminated fuel was used. Necessary measures must be put in place to address that.

Another issue of concern is the fact that contaminated fuel reached the business in

the first instance. That indicates that the oil that was purchased by and supplied to the feed business operator was clearly not fit for purpose. I understand that the gardaí are investigating how that occurred. The fact that contaminated oil may have reached a food business operator suggests that there were deficiencies in the oversight and control of oil and waste oil importation, distribution and sale. That needs to be addressed to prevent any recurrence of such a situation, in the interests of the industry, and more importantly, in the interests of food safety and food standards.

There are a couple of main issues that I want to raise. One is the fact that the aid package was inadequate to compensate farmers for their loss. My colleague Mr Elliott mentioned costs associated with slurry storage. The other issue was the poor communications that were in place. In situations such as the dioxin contamination incident, communications are of utmost importance in ensuring that people are aware of any potential risk to health in the food chain, so that it can be acted on as soon as possible.

As Mr Shannon indicated, it appears that any such early warning system was not in place. If it was, it clearly did not work. Communications failed utterly. That is clear from the fact that our Minister found out about the incident through a news programme late in the evening of Saturday 6 December, when restrictions appear to have been placed on Northern Irish farms on 5 December. Further statements were made on 7 and 8 December by our Agriculture Minister and Health Minister, whereas the news had broken on the rest of the island on 4 December. That appears to me to be a very substantial deficiency. When we are all working to harmonise standards in the best interests of consumers and all people on this island, that situation should not have occurred.

I do not want to see a recurrence of that situation under any circumstances. We are supposed to be working under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. There should be good working relationships between both parts of the island, and among Departments in both parts of the island. This is a classic case of that failing. As elected Members, we need to be more aware of how the situation should improve to prevent against such incidents. We need a new communications system put in place between DARD and DAFF, we need to be apprised of that,

and we need to hear about better co-ordination among all the agencies, North and South, which were associated with that particular dioxin contamination incident.

In conclusion, I support the report. I hope that its recommendations will be adopted so that we can have better standards and lines of communication to underpin consumers' confidence in the industry.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My Executive colleagues and I welcome the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's report on the inquiry into the dioxin contaminated feed incident. I congratulate the Committee on the work that it has done to produce what I believe is a very useful report. I will deal with the report's recommendations and respond to issues that were raised in the debate. Before that, I will make some general comments about the dioxin incident.

The dioxin incident was a contamination of animal feed. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the competent authority on animal feed matters except medicated animal feeds and processed animal protein. Therefore, the FSA had lead policy responsibility for making decisions on the safety of the pork and beef that entered the food chain. That included the need to keep out of the food chain animals in which the levels of dioxins were above those that are set out in EU legislation.

DARD is responsible for the enforcement and implementation of animal feed legislation. It had a lead role in dealing with the consequences of the FSA's decisions and the impact that they had on our producers. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) has a corresponding role in dealing with the impact of those decisions on the pork and beef processing sectors. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety was also involved, given its link with the FSA. DOE and NIEA were responsible for dealing with the environmental consequences of the incident. All that means that dealing with the incident was a cross-cutting issue that required close co-operation and co-ordination across the Executive.

The incident affected the whole food chain, from feed operators and suppliers to farmers, processors, retailers and, of course, consumers. Its impact spread to several sectors of the

agrifood industry. As well as affecting domestic markets, the incident affected exports to seven countries, which required regular liaison with representative bodies such as the UFU, the Meat Exporters' Association and the Pork and Bacon Forum. There was also regular engagement with DAFF, DEFRA and the European Commission.

Given the wide-ranging nature of the incident and the different roles and responsibilities of the bodies involved, it is right that we should review the incident and learn lessons for the future. I will highlight the positive and negative aspects of the way in which the incident was handled. On the positive side, an important factor in the handling of the incident was the joined-up and co-ordinated action of Departments, which was facilitated by the inter-departmental group that DARD set up and co-ordinated.

Once Dublin advised DARD of the incident, the Department acted quickly, using its animal movement and recording system, APHIS, to trace the premises that had potentially received contaminated material and to put in place restrictions to prevent animals moving off those premises and entering the food chain. That responsiveness was critical in maintaining consumer confidence and ensuring that our future reputation in the marketplace was not undermined.

There was frequent communication with affected farmers and the UFU throughout the incident, and DETI and Invest NI communicated frequently with processing interests. We worked effectively with the FSA and AFBI to identify the number of animals that could be legitimately removed from the cull and disposal scheme.

To put the matter into context, after the Twenty-six Counties ruled us out of its aid package at the end of January, the Executive decided at their meeting on 12 February to seek approval for an emergency support measure. We moved to obtain EU approval for the emergency support measure regulation, and the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I met the then commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel, to lobby for approval for the measure. Once that approval and the related state-aid approval were obtained, we acted quickly to make hardship payments and to operate the cull and disposal scheme.

Members will be aware that every Department contributed to that and that we paid out as

quickly as possible. We faced other pressures in what was a difficult financial climate, but we still recognised the need to support producers. Indeed, I spoke very firmly at the Executive about the need to support our producers. The arrangements for testing were co-ordinated with AFBI. That worked well, and AFBI played a very important role by providing scientific advice throughout the incident.

However, there were also negatives, and many Members have mentioned them. The incident points to some areas where legislation could be strengthened. In contrast with cases of animal disease, there is no provision in EU legislation to prevent the movement or slaughter of animals affected by dioxins. That needs to be addressed at EU level, and my officials have already raised that matter with DEFRA. We encountered a difficulty in that the Department's legal vires did not apply because of the nature of the incident. The legislation that relates to the detention of contaminated feed also needs to be amended, and there is scope to improve the understanding of the science associated with the relationship between PCBs and dioxins.

The report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development makes a number of very relevant and useful recommendations that will contribute to an improvement in the handling of any future incident. It is one of a number of review reports that have been completed recently. The FSA has reviewed its handling of the incident, and two reports have been completed by Dublin, one by the Oireachtas Joint Committee and another by an inter-agency group chaired by Professor Patrick Wall. The Executive have also commissioned a review of the handling of the incident, which is being carried out by Kenneth Mackenzie, who will report later this month. It is important to ensure that we take account of all those reports in our planning for any future emergency incident.

Part of the Committee report focuses on the need to streamline the number of statutory and other agencies that share responsibility for the production, processing and promotion of safe food. The Committee has suggested the establishment of an incident management group to ensure that a strategic approach is taken during any future incident. The Executive review will consider and make recommendations on that role, and the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of relevant bodies involved in the incident. It will also identify barriers to good communication

and management. The review team has been asked to consider that and other relevant recommendations in the Committee's report.

The report is critical of the failure of the Southern authorities to provide full and early information on the seriousness of the position that was developing in the South over 5 and 6 December 2008. I agree in principle with the Committee that the more warning we have about any incident, the better prepared we will be. I understand that the information that contaminated material had been sent to premises in the North was established only late on 4 December, and communicated to DARD on 5 December. At that time, there was no suggestion that feed had been contaminated with dioxins. On 5 December, DARD acted in a precautionary and proportionate way, given the information that we had, to restrict movements off the premises in the North that had been identified as having received contaminated material. It was only the following evening, when the DAFF Minister announced that dioxins had been detected, and that he was ordering a recall of pork products, that the full implications of the incident became apparent.

Many Members have mentioned the way in which I learned about this matter. I bring Members back to that Saturday evening. My baby was six weeks old at that time; I was at home watching TV with the children, watching Eoghan Quigg on 'The X Factor'. I will never forget it; I never want to go back to that time. We flicked over to the RTÉ news and I learned about the issue. That was the end of my weekend and my maternity leave, such as it was. I will not forget it in a hurry.

In accordance with the co-operative manner in which we work, it would have been appropriate for me to have been advised of the presence of dioxins in advance of the public announcement in Dublin. I am disappointed with that, and I made that clear to my counterpart in Dublin. However, I reiterate that I am content that the action that DARD took on the Friday in response to the notification that it received was appropriate.

The Executive review will make recommendations on communications, and, pending the report of that review and following discussions between Brendan Smith and me at a North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting, interim arrangements have been made between DARD and DAFF for the notification of any incident that

may have a potential impact on animal products in the food chain. Those measures build on the well-established arrangements for notification of animal disease emergencies and have recently been utilised in exchanging information on other potential food scares. For example, DARD was alerted early to the potential contamination of pig feed by selenium, and, just recently, about the finding of dioxins in a feed ingredient. In both cases, the findings did not identify any need for action. I understand that the FSA has developed early warning arrangements with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, which are being formalised in a concordat.

2.15 pm

The Committee's report also comments on the perceived delay by the Executive in compiling an aid package. It requests that we review the scope to provide further assistance to businesses affected by the feeding of contaminated feed, or those that incurred costs through, for example, the disposal of slurry, milk and processed retail products.

The reference in the report to aid being limited to 25% of the direct verifiable cost, or 25% of the value of animals, is incorrect. The Executive made £9.6 million available for hardship payments and to meet the costs of a cull and disposal scheme. The Executive did not agree that the hardship payments should cover a specified percentage of losses. Although a small number of claims from processing companies remain to be dealt with, the cost of the cull and disposal scheme was met fully by the Executive, and hardship payments have been made of up to 70% of the eligible cost incurred by processors and producers.

On the point about delay, I should emphasise that, in the initial stages, the Executive were making representations to the Southern Government to allow producers and processors in the North to access their aid arrangements. Once it was formally confirmed at the end of January 2009 that the Government in the South were unable to do so, the Executive acted quickly to put an aid package in place and to obtain an exceptional support measure regulation and the associated state-aid approval from the European Commission.

I stress that the decision to provide £9.6 million was taken when the Executive were facing significant financial constraints and had reallocated resources to deal with

pressures arising from the economic downturn. The Executive did not seek to provide full compensation for the losses experienced by any business affected by the incident. Although the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has secured further state-aid approval to allow it to make payments for processed material destroyed outwith the cull and disposal scheme, there is no scope to make available further additional assistance.

I note the Committee's recommendation that we act jointly with the South to explore the potential for future joint applications to the EU for the authority to pay aid in the event of any further incident. Under state-aid rules, however, public funding in response to any emergency is possible only in an exceptional situation. The EU has commissioned work on the scope for a system of financial guarantees or insurance to be adopted to enable industry to reduce financial exposure to any future animal, food or feed emergency.

Funding for hardship payments to producers and processors was possible only by re-prioritising expenditure across all Departments. There can be no guarantee that it will be possible to provide similar support in the future. The onus of responsibility lies with the food business operators to provide safe and wholesome food and to exercise every due diligence. I am pleased to learn, therefore, that the livestock and feed sectors of the industry are working together to examine ways of strengthening controls and quality assurance arrangements.

I repeat that I welcome the Committee's report. The Executive are willing to work with the Committee to develop an action plan that addresses its recommendations. However, that would be best done after we have received and considered the report of the review that Kenneth Mackenzie has undertaken for the Executive. We should aim to have a fully joined-up and coherent action plan that addresses all the appropriate recommendations in the various reports.

The Chairperson of the Committee for

Agriculture and Rural Development: December is a critical time for pig producers. They spend all year fattening their pigs to ensure that ham and pork products are available for the Christmas market and that people are able to celebrate with the foodstuff that they want. It is normally a time of financial rejoicing for producers, but on the morning of

7 December 2008, their joy was shattered. As Jim Shannon rightly stated, the industry was left overwhelmingly bewildered because it did not expect to wake up to the devastating news that pork products were being recalled. Families justifiably felt that their livelihoods had been stolen in a way that need not have happened.

Let us not beat about the bush: let us get right to the crux of the matter. The most critical contributory factor to our pig industry almost collapsing was the absence of appropriate communication from Ministers and authorities in the Republic of Ireland. It is a disgrace that not one but two Northern Ireland Ministers were not formally advised of the serious situation. It is a disgrace that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development learned of the crisis only from a news bulletin that was broadcast late on the Saturday evening. It is a disgrace that the inter-agency review group in the Republic of Ireland dismissed our concerns by claiming that communications were timely and informative, based on the fact that an e-mail was issued to a lowly official late on the Friday evening, followed by a second e-mail the next day.

It is also a disgrace that a meeting of the Government of the Republic of Ireland, which included the Taoiseach, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Minister for Health and Children and the Chief Medical Officer never considered it appropriate to contact any of their counterparts in the Northern Ireland Executive. Instead, they allowed the authorities in the Republic of Ireland to position themselves, their market and their food sector, and to take steps to protect and to move their industry forward.

Furthermore, it is a disgrace that the Agriculture Committee's evidence session in the Republic of Ireland was cold-shouldered and avoided by the authorities and the corresponding Ministry there. They took cold feet because when the Agriculture Committee is speaking with a united and unified voice, they are right to tremble. I assure the House that the Committee report points blame. One of my colleagues said that it does not, but the report states loudly and clearly that the authorities in the Republic of Ireland are guilty as charged. They had responsibilities that they completely failed to meet.

My views on the cynical positioning of government and industry in the Republic of Ireland are well known and are recorded in the Hansard minutes

of evidence that are appended to the Committee's report. However, it is evident to my colleagues on the Committee and to me that the authorities in the Republic of Ireland put their interests and their industry first, despite understanding the impact that the recall of pig meat would have on our industry in Northern Ireland. At the highest levels of government, they decided to proceed with the recall without informing the Northern Ireland Executive. In cross-examining a Mr Heraghty and a Mr Ryan from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the Republic of Ireland, Mr Molloy quite rightly said:

"You were taking advantage of the time that you had so that your industry would be protected, and when the recall happened, the industry here was in second place."

I say a hearty "hear, hear" to that cross-examination, because it is absolutely correct. Our country and our industry were put in second place when the industry ought to have been working collectively to protect all.

The Republic of Ireland effectively told pig farmers and consumers in Northern Ireland, and our Minister, to go and get stuffed. They ignored us and tried to walk away. It is interesting that we are having the debate on the day on which the 'Belfast Telegraph' carries a poll about a united Ireland. The approach of the industry in the South to our industry says that that will be a mighty long day a-coming if that is its attitude to people in Northern Ireland. Perhaps we accepted too readily assurances from authorities in the Republic and from officials here that a collective approach was being taken to animal health matters. There were assurances that a fortress Ireland approach to animal health issues would secure our positions and our markets, but this incident absolutely decimates any confidence in the processes that were supposed to be in place, and it has put our industry, quite rightly, on alert status.

There is a saying that the stupid never forgive nor forget, the naive forgive and forget, and the wise forgive but do not forget. The Committee in this House is made up of all parties of this House, and it ain't stupid. It will not be naive, nor will it naively accept the assurances of the all-Ireland, all-island animal health strategy. It will, instead, demand evidence that that is being applied collectively. In time, we may show forgiveness for what has been done and for the inexcusable actions of the authorities in the Republic of Ireland to our industry, but I assure

the House and the authorities in the Republic of Ireland that we will not forget.

Our industry has lost £15 million. Family businesses have been destroyed, and some of them have been put right to the wall deliberately, so that competitive markets in the Republic of Ireland can advance their position. That is a disgrace, and it is something that the House will not forget easily.

We are all too painfully aware that because of the tightening of the economic belt, the Department here in Northern Ireland does not have the resources to pay out vast amounts of compensation, but I again call on the Executive to reassess the hardship scheme, with a view to helping all those who lost out through no fault of their own, and to do that expeditiously. I ask the House to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on its inquiry into the dioxin contamination incident of December 2008; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in liaison with Executive colleagues, to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Capital Projects

1. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Education to outline the position on her Department's review of all current major capital projects. (AQO 917/10)

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Cuideoidh an t-athbhreithniú caipitil le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhoirmiú do chinntí maidir le hinfheistíocht chaipitil agus do bhainistiú an eastáit scoile.

The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate, the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and young people and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of that, it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

I remind the Assembly of the consequences of instances when capital investment is not scrutinised and planned robustly. The newbuild Balmoral High School opened in 2002 at a capital cost of £7.4 million. It closed in August 2008. I remind the House that I was not the person who made the decision about the opening of that school. I want to ensure that such a situation does not arise again. Planning must be robust, and it is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework that the Department of Education (DE) has in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties to equality and targeting on the basis of need. At the heart of that is Every School a Good School; the revised curriculum; the sustainable schools policy; the Irish-medium review; and the entitlement framework. As area-based planning develops, those policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

Since I took up office in May 2007, 39 major capital school projects have been completed. That represents an investment of more than

£253 million in our schools estate. A further 16 major capital school projects are on site, which represents a further investment of more than £252 million. I am sure that Members will agree that that represents a substantial level of resources, which are being targeted at the reshaping and modernising of the schools estate to enhance the quality of provision for all our young people. It is imperative that we continue to meet their needs through a sound investment strategy.

I put on record my support for the Catholic sector for the process that it is carrying out at the moment. It is radical and forward thinking, and my Department will work closely with it on that process.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for her answer. What percentage of the Minister's capital spend will be used to finance existing commitments and how many new projects will be commenced in the incoming year? Was the Minister content with the budget allocation that she received this year?

The Minister of Education: Are Ministers ever content with the budget allocations that they receive? I welcome the Member's question about that issue. I would love to have more money and, if parties opposite or on this side of the House want to support me on that, I would very much welcome it. I will write to the Member at the appropriate time with the answers to the first part of his question.

Mr Storey: When will the Minister give us a detailed answer in the House about the criteria that will be used for the review? Some time ago, she told the House that the review would be swift and robust, and she continually comes to the House and repeats the same old mantra about policies that have not even been approved. In fact, the entitlement framework might not even come into existence in 2013, because the Minister is removing financial commitments in relation to the entitlement framework. Is it acceptable that Castle Tower School, which a special school in my constituency, has been waiting for years for a decision from the Minister, despite a commitment that she made in the House before Christmas that that project would move forward? The project is stuck in the process, where, I suspect, the Minister is trying to wangle money out to give to other sectors of education provision in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Education: I have given detailed answers about criteria.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Considering that the £170 million that the Minister mentioned for capital schemes has been spent on existing costs, how much money does she have available for fresh newbuilds during the coming year?

The Minister of Education: The net capital budget for DE in 2010-11 is £169.3 million. At present, capital spending plans for 2010-11 have not been finalised. It is also important to note that DE's capital budget does not cover merely the construction of new schools; it also covers investment in transport; youth provision; early years provision; minor works, and several other capital requirements, such as professional design and project-management services. The budget for all capital works, which include each of those key areas of capital investment, is still under consideration.

I reiterate that I very much look forward to the House's support for my acquisition of any further money that may become available for capital investment.

Funding

2. **Mr K Robinson** asked the Minister of Education to outline the amount of funding that her Department earmarked for specific programmes or projects in each of the past four years. (AQO 918/10)

The Minister of Education: In addition to discretionary budgets for education and library boards; voluntary grammar schools; grant-maintained integrated schools; and other sponsored bodies, the amount of funding for specific programmes and projects in each of the past four years is as follows: in 2006-07, it was £158 million; in 2007-08, it was £181 million; in 2008-09, it was £200 million; and in 2009-2010, it was £186 million. For comparison purposes, the amounts relate to budgets that are set aside for such projects and programmes at the start of each financial year.

I measc na rudaí as a n-íocann na hacmhainní, tá seirbhísí ríomhaire do gach scoil faoi thionscnamh C2k, tacaíocht do pháistí leochaileacha agus daoine óga a dtéann an tOrdú um Leanai i bhfeidhm orthu.

Those resources pay for, among other things, computer services for all schools under the C2k initiative; support for vulnerable children and young people who are impacted by the Children Order 1995; young people who have specific special needs, such as those who are deaf and partially sighted; furniture and equipment for newly built schools; provision of thousands of places in voluntary playgroups in order to ensure that parents of youngsters who are in their preschool year have choice; and a wide range of key policies that bring tangible results to children and young people, such as the extended schools programme.

One of my key priorities is to ensure that the education and skills authority (ESA) is established as soon as possible, so that the efficiencies that it is intended to deliver can be realised to the benefit of all children and young people.

Mr K Robinson: I am sure that the money that has been spent on the ESA already will be taken into account.

To protect front line services and to maximise schools' autonomy, will the Minister undertake to significantly reduce budgets that have been set aside for specific programmes and, perhaps, give the House an indication of the level of cuts that will be likely and the percentage that will come out of current expenditure?

The Minister of Education: As I have said to the House, I am doing everything that I can to minimise the impact on front line services. The ESA is one of the best ways to ensure that there is cohesiveness and consistency throughout the North of Ireland. As the Member will know, there are currently five different boards and many different organisations. It must be ensured that money is not spent on bureaucracy and administration as has happened previously.

Not all funding can be allocated to schools. I gave a few examples of where a cohesive policy is needed, such as provision of C2k and protection of children and young people. Obviously, child protection is a key area. Extended schools are another case in point. I agree with the Member that, of course, the more money that can be allocated to front line services, the better. The best way to do that is to establish the ESA as quickly as possible.

Mrs M Bradley: Will the Minister outline how she plans to make the savings that are required by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)?

The Minister of Education: I am in discussion with my senior officials on all aspects of the budget. Obviously, I will not go into detail on some of those savings because the Assembly is not the place for that discussion; that place is at the Executive. However, it is essential that the ESA is established so that the Department can ensure that it gets money to front line services.

Educational Underachievement

3. **Mr Leonard** asked the Minister of Education what her Department is doing to address underachievement in the education system. (AQO 919/10)

The Minister of Education: Educational underachievement occurs when performance is below what is expected, based on ability. Research on the impact of selection shows that preparing children for transfer tests distorted the curriculum and required teachers to adopt a narrow repertoire of teaching strategies, rather than fully developing literacy and numeracy through more engaging approaches set within a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils not entered for tests received unequal or less attention than transfer test pupils, and some children had classroom experiences that not only failed to meet their needs as learners, but left them uninterested, demotivated and misunderstood as learners. I introduced transfer 2010 to put an end to those detrimental effects, particularly on our most disadvantaged young people.

Más fíor don fhianaise, ba chóir dá lán níos mó daoine óga in ann an scoil a fhágáil agus cúig ghrád GCSE A réalta go C ar a laghad acu, lena n-áirítear Béarla nó Gaeilge agus matamaitic, agus a fhágann an scoil agus na gráid sin acu faoi láthair.

Evidence suggests that many more young people should be able to leave school having achieved a level equivalent to at least five good GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English or Gaeilge and maths, than is currently the case. However, I am glad to report to the House that those figures have improved. In 2006, 12,000 young people left school without those qualifications; in 2007, that figure was 11,000; and, in 2008, that figure was 10,000. Therefore, we have made an improvement, but the numbers are still far too high and we cannot become complacent. Too often, underachievement is related to socio-

economic disadvantage and is compounded by poverty of aspiration. My focus is on tackling underachievement wherever it exists and on improving outcomes for all our young people.

In addition to transfer 2010, I am putting in place a range of interconnected policies aimed at ensuring that every child fulfils her or his potential: Every School a Good School; the revised curriculum; the literacy and numeracy strategy; the review of special educational needs and inclusion; the entitlement framework; the establishment of the education and skills authority; and the Achieving Derry and Achieving Belfast programmes. I am also working through the North/South Ministerial Council because underachievement is an issue of concern right across the island.

Mr Leonard: I thank the Minister for her answer. She made many points clustering around demotivation that we can all identify. Will she confirm the action taken by the Department when educational provision is found to be less than satisfactory?

The Minister of Education: Cuimsíonn ‘Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith — Beartas um Fheabhsú Scoileanna’ próiseas foirmeálta idirghabhála do na scoileanna sin a mheas an Chigireacht Oideachais agus Oiliúna a bheith “uireasach” nó “míshásúil”.

Let me be clear. The Department will take action when provision is found to be less than satisfactory. Our first priority must always be the interests of young people. Every School a Good School, which is our policy for school improvement, includes a formal intervention process for those schools that are evaluated by the Education and Training Inspectorate as inadequate or unsatisfactory. The formal intervention process requires the boards working, when appropriate, with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and other sectoral support bodies as necessary to work with such schools. They should ensure that the school receives the support that it needs to address the areas for improvement identified by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

The ETI will monitor the progress made by the school and report to the Department. The expectation is that, with support, schools will make the necessary improvements. However, if a school does not make sufficient progress, action will be taken to safeguard the education of its pupils. That will depend on

the circumstances of the school, and might include restructuring the governance, leadership and management of that school; merging the school with a neighbouring one; closing the school and reopening after a period with a new management team; or closure of the school. However, we cannot stand by, as direct rule Ministers did in the past, and allow generations of young people to leave school without minimum qualifications.

2.45 pm

Mr Bell: Does the Minister accept that, on the subject of educational achievement, our prep schools are responsible for educational excellence, and will she withdraw her proposal to take away prep school funding by September 2010, given that, in my constituency, it has been shown to cost an extra £5 million, it disadvantages the Protestant community, it affects children with special educational needs, and it has left children in prep schools traumatised and, indeed, terrorised?

The Minister of Education: I do not see the relevance of that question to the substantive question. We are talking about school improvement policy. I would welcome the Member's question at the appropriate moment.

Mr P Ramsey: In relation to underachievement, what GCSE grade does the Minister equate to a level of competency in literacy and numeracy, and what is the basis of that view?

The Minister of Education: The Department has different ways of measuring literacy and numeracy and what qualifications young people should have when leaving school. I outlined in my answer the improvements that have been made to date in relation to grades A* to C. I welcome those improvements, which mean that 1,000 extra young people are achieving those grades each year since I took office in 2007. That can have a significant advantage for those young people and for generations of people to come, but there are still far too many young people who are not getting the qualifications that they need, and my Department is working to ensure that there is much more equality in the system.

Islandmagee Primary Schools

4. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the time taken by

her Department in handling the agreed amalgamation of the primary schools in Islandmagee. (AQO 920/10)

The Minister of Education: Thit an rollú fadtéarma don bhunscoil atá beartaithe do Oileán Mhic Aodha go leibhéal atá go suntasach faoi bhun na híostairsí de 105 atá leagtha amach i mbeartas na Roinne um scoileanna inbhuanaithe i leith bunscoileanna tuaithe.

The long-term enrolment for the proposed new primary school in Islandmagee has declined to a level substantially below the minimum enrolment threshold of 105 outlined in the Department's sustainable schools policy for a sustainable rural primary school. Given the concerns regarding sustainability, my officials have asked the North Eastern Education and Library Board to consider provision in the wider area and provide the Department with a strategic view.

Mr Beggs: With due respect to the Minister, my question asked for her assessment on the length of time it has taken to build the new school. Does the Minister accept that the inordinate length of time taken in getting the process through departmental structures is causing problems, and that that delay and uncertainty may well have resulted in many children passing what would be their local primary school to travel out of the area to other schools? Does she, therefore, accept that the Department has a degree of responsibility, in that that delay may well have caused the numbers to decline, thus creating that uncertainty? Will the Minister carry out a survey of the number of children who are travelling out of Islandmagee to be schooled elsewhere?

The Minister of Education: I cannot take responsibility for previous Ministers; all I can do is take responsibility for what I am doing. I absolutely agree with the Member that the best scenario is where children do not bypass local schools and parents support their local schools, because that is the best way of building strong, cohesive, vibrant communities. The difficulty with the Islandmagee situation is that the original economic appraisal was based on a long-term enrolment of five class bases, or 116 to 145 pupils. However, enrolments at the existing school have declined year on year since 2004. As I said, the long-term enrolment at present for the proposed amalgamated school is 79 pupils — only three class bases. However, I absolutely

agree with the Member; it is important that all of us support our local schools.

Mr Neeson: I am obviously very disappointed about Islandmagee, but schools right across east Antrim are awaiting decisions. I am thinking of Woodburn Primary School in Carrick, Corran Integrated Primary School in Larne and Belfast High School in Newtownabbey. Can the Minister give me any indication of when decisions will be taken on those applications?

The Minister of Education: The education and skills authority, when established, will have full responsibility for bringing forward area-based plans, which will include the east Antrim area, but in the interim my Department will work closely with the school managing authorities to develop a more strategic approach to planning that is in the best interests of all young people in the area.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Unfortunately, amalgamations are a reality in today's society, due to changing demographics and an increase in the number of empty school desks. That applies at both primary and secondary levels. Will the Minister outline why the scheme for Islandmagee is being reviewed?

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. As I explained, the original economic appraisal was based on a long-term enrolment of five class bases, or 116 to 145 pupils. Since 2004, the enrolments have declined year on year. There are now 79 pupils, or three class bases. That gives rise to concern about continued sustainability.

Preparatory Schools: Funding

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Education for an update on her Department's funding for preparatory schools. (AQO 921/10)

The Minister of Education: Tá 16 rannóg ullmhúcháin faoi láthair atá ceangailte le scoileanna gramadaí. Don bhliain airgeadais 2008-09, bhí 2,411 dalta ag freastal orthu, agus soláthraíodh cistiú de £1,896 milliún faoin fhoirmle choiteann maoinithe.

There are currently 16 preparatory departments attached to grammar schools. In the 2008-09 financial year, 2,411 funded pupils attended those schools, and the funding provided under the common funding formula amounted to

£1.896 million. In 2008-09, the respective fees for those preparatory departments ranged from £1,900 to £3,295 per pupil. Effectively, that is buying access to a preparatory department, thereby creating inequality.

It is inequitable to continue a situation in which public funding is provided to schools that accept only children whose parents can afford to pay those significant fees. As the Member will know, the report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, which is known as the Bain report, was published in December 2006, prior to my coming into office. It highlighted the issue of funding for preparatory schools. One of the report's key recommendations was that the rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed. George Bain stated:

"Equity must continue to be at heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity... The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget."

In its document, 'Every Child an Equal Child', the Equality Commission stated that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education. On its position on the funding of preparatory departments, the Equality Commission stated:

"Preparatory departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependent on the parents/families ability to pay additional substantial costs."

My Department commissioned the Department of Finance and Personnel's business consultancy service to undertake a review of the funding and to provide a report of its findings. The report concluded that my Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access. I must stress that the business consultancy service is under the Department of Finance and Personnel.

I decided that, before making a final decision on the matter, an equality impact assessment (EQIA) should be undertaken. That EQIA consultation closed on 4 March 2010, and I will consider the responses received before making my final decision.

Ms Lo: I sincerely thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. The Minister talked about equality. Many parents choose to send their children to preparatory schools because they are single-sex schools or because they have small classes, which are beneficial to children whose first language is not English and to those who have special or slight learning needs. Such provision is not available in mainstream schools. Even if the Minister is thinking along those lines, it is far too short notice for parents.

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

Ms Lo: Could I ask the Minister to reconsider and to perhaps think about phasing out that funding over a longer period so that parents can prepare better?

The Minister of Education: As I said, an equality impact assessment was carried out, and I will study the responses to that carefully. I consider it inequitable to continue with a situation in which public funding is provided to schools that accept only those children whose parents can afford to pay significant fees. I welcome the Member's concerns about those children of the 2,411 who attend prep schools for whom English is a second language. I ask the Member how equality can be ensured for the 70,000 children in the controlled sector and the children in the maintained sector. Funding must be allocated on the basis of equality, not on the basis of a parent's ability to pay £2,000 or £3,000 a child each year.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam don Aire.

Is the Minister effectively telling principals of the grammar schools that are affected to close their prep schools, or can grammar schools choose to keep those units if they wish? The Minister's critics might argue that she continues to fund Irish-medium and integrated provision. Is there an issue with that?

The Minister of Education: I will answer the second question first. Is féidir le páiste ar

bith rochtain a fháil ar Ghaelscoil nó ar scoil imeasctha; níl ceangal orthu táille theagaisc a íoc leis an rochtain sin a fháil.

Any child can access an Irish-medium or integrated school, and they are not required to pay a tuition fee before doing so. The issue is about equality of access. Inherently, preparatory departments do not provide equality of access, because attendance is dependent on a parent's or a family's ability to pay substantial costs. It is not for my Department to decide on the closure of preparatory schools; it is a matter for the grammar schools. My job as Minister is to ensure equality for all children in the system.

Mr Gardiner: Does the Minister anticipate that her Department would make financial savings if prep schools were closed, or does she envisage additional costs coming from other Departments?

The Minister of Education: The review is being carried out on the basis of equality of access, not on financial grounds.

Dr McDonnell: What assessment has the Minister made of the associated knock-on costs of removing funding for preparatory schools? Will she detail what the costs might be for school funding, including those for replacing pupils in other schools, transportation to other schools where necessary, teacher redundancy costs and possible capital investment? A number of the schools that might have to take on children from preparatory schools are already full or falling down or are in considerable difficulty and do not have the capacity.

The Minister of Education: I reiterate that the Department of Education (DE) has no plans to close any preparatory schools, nor could it do so. That will be a matter for the grammar schools that have preparatory departments. The Department of Education will, of course, make provision for any children who wish to move to the publicly funded education system, and we will do that willingly. The Member said that some schools are already full, but we are in a time of demographic decline. It will be for parents, not DE, to choose to move their children. If some parents make that choice, DE will facilitate that and ensure that those children have a place.

Grammar School Admissions

6. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Education, following the Catholic Church's announcement

to end academic selection, whether she will assist those grammar schools seeking to move away from entrance tests. (AQO 922/10)

The Minister of Education: My officials and I are available to meet representatives of any grammar school that is seeking to move away from entrance tests. We will gladly provide the advice and assistance that we can to help schools to make that transition while ensuring that they continue to be centres of educational excellence in partnership with their fellow educationalists across the primary and post-primary sectors.

Academic selection is totally unnecessary. It is possible to have academic excellence without academic selection. Equality is the cornerstone of the new education system, and it is at the heart of all my policies. The Department's equality agenda includes the development of new arrangements to allow children to transfer to post-primary schools without the use of academic selection.

3.00 pm

Cuirim fáilte roimh an gcomhairliú ar an athbhreithniú ar sholáthar iarbhunscoile trasna na hearnála Caitlicí a sheol an Coimisiún d'Oideachas Caitliceach ar na mallaibh.

I welcome the consultation on the review of post-primary provision across the Catholic sector launched by the Commission for Catholic Education recently. That review opens the door for Catholic grammar schools to move away from the use of academic selection. My door is open to all grammar schools, from whatever section of the community they come, to talk about how they can join with the rest of us in creating a world-class education system for all young people.

Agriculture and Rural Development

Farm Modernisation Programme

1. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what lessons have been learnt and what changes in departmental practice are proposed to the operation of the farm modernisation programme following the difficulties experienced in tranche 1 of the programme. (AQO 931/10)

2. **Dr W McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what changes she is proposing to tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme following representations made by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. (AQO 932/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh maith agat, George. Thanks a million for that nice wee delay. With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 1 and 2 together.

As I indicated during the no-day-named motion debate on 8 March, and following on from my officials' presentation to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development on 9 February, I have proposed a considerable number of changes for tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme that will provide for a fair and practical scheme. In place of the first come, first served approach that was advocated by the industry for the first tranche, I intend to open tranche 2 for applications later this spring for a given period of approximately six weeks. There will be no queues, because applications will be received via a range of channels, such as online, by post or hand delivery. All applications received during that period will be assessed against four proposed additional selection criteria that will determine the allocation of the funding available under tranche 2. Those criteria have been scrutinised extensively, and I have made changes to their scoring to reflect those that the consultees wish to see. For example, I have stated that I want tranche 2 to target disadvantage in order to help smaller farm businesses that are working under poorer agriculture conditions. However, marks will now also be awarded to farm businesses in lowland areas under the land classification criterion.

The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee's representations reflected the widely expressed views that I should encourage young farmers to enter, or remain in, farming. In recognition of the fact that many of those young people are not yet the heads of their farm business, I have altered the scoring of the succession opportunity selection criterion so that a registered business member who is under 40 years of age will obtain the top score under that criterion.

I have asked officials to set up a steering group of industry representatives to consider the list of eligible items on the key degree of modernisation selection criterion for tranche 2. That steering group will address the Committee's request that additional items be included for the poultry, pig and fruit-growing sectors. As a result of those changes, and drawing on the lessons learnt from the first tranche, I hope that the operation of the second tranche programme will be enhanced significantly. However, I also hope to retain the better aspects of the first tranche with minimal bureaucracy in the simplified application form, procurement methodology assessment and claim processes, which the industry welcomed.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she outline what changes, if any, she proposes to introduce for tranche 2 of the farm modernisation programme following last week's debate in the House?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: During last week's debate, I said, clearly, that I wanted a fair and practical application process for tranche 2 funding, and that is still the case. As I said, and in response to a number of consultees who made the point about lowland farmers, I reviewed the criterion so that there are now 10 marks available for them. I am also looking at the modernisation banding and the manure efficiency technology subprogramme (METS), which was referred to in one of the amendments to last week's motion, and, we will, hopefully, get something opened up on those later this year. I have taken on board the views of the House, and those are being applied. I want to work closely with the farming industry, Members and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development in developing my proposals.

Dr W McCrea: Having listened to last week's debate, the Minister will acknowledge that one of the changes over which the Committee had real concern was the discrimination against lowland farmers. The Committee does not want any farmer or any section of the farming community to be discriminated against. Will she heed the Committee's recommendation on that issue or continue on a confrontation course that will lead to challenge?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member will accept that I am not confrontational by nature, and the

farm modernisation programme is certainly not sectarian or discriminatory. I have focused on the severely disadvantaged and disadvantaged areas because they suffer the most hardship, and there is a real need for modernisation.

The last social survey of farmers in 2002 showed that cattle and sheep farmers in the severely disadvantaged areas were predominantly Catholic, those in the disadvantaged areas were broadly split 50:50 between Catholics and Protestants, while the lowland farmers were predominantly Protestants. However, 70% of all agricultural land in the Six Counties is in less-favoured areas in which the farming environment is difficult and challenging and farms exist on the margins of viability. That is why I want to provide all the support that I can to help those farmers to modernise. It is a practical response to need and disadvantage.

Mr Burns: Will the Minister tell the House what engagement she has had with the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) regarding phase 2 of the funding? Will she assure the union that she has taken on board its many concerns?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I have met with farmers' unions and discussed my proposals with them. After last week's debate, I wrote to the UFU and asked it to re-engage in the process when the Department begins to develop its modernisation criteria. Unfortunately, it has advised me that it will not be able to do that.

I will continue to work with farmers' unions and other stakeholders. My key message in the Department has been about working in partnership. That is what I am doing.

Rural Isolation

3. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she intends to take to address rural isolation, particularly in terms of access to services and benefits. (AQO 933/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Shortly after taking up the post of Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I asked departmental officials to examine the specific poverty and exclusion issues faced by rural dwellers. Following extensive research and consultation, the rural anti-poverty and social inclusion programme was developed, and interventions to address the key priorities

of the rural community, including fuel poverty, transport, community development and the rural challenge programme, were identified.

Under the assisted rural travel scheme, 6,000 rural dwellers have benefitted from concessionary fares using rural community transport partnerships. Furthermore, 90 letters of offer — each offering up to £5,000 assistance and totalling over £410,000 — have recently been issued to community and voluntary sector groups through the rural challenge programme to assist in dealing with localised rural exclusion and disadvantage. Moreover, a regional project has been established in conjunction with the Public Health Agency to maximise access to services, benefits and grants for rural dwellers, and 4,200 rural isolated households will benefit from visits from trained advisers and follow-up support. Those locally recruited and trained advisers will advise the households on locally available services and grants and benefit entitlements. The visits to households will take place in July and August 2010, and funding of £700,000 has been allocated to the project.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am curious to know how the initiatives outlined will practically correspond to, or work in conjunction with, those of the Public Health Agency. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: As I said, 4,200 households across the 88 most deprived rural wards in the North will benefit from the regional project. It will involve collaboration with several Departments and agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable households, in the most deprived rural wards, are identified and receive visits from trained advisers. Thirteen lead organisations have been recruited to co-ordinate the project delivery across the North.

In simple terms, using local community knowledge, the households most in need will be identified, and trained advisers will visit, gain the confidence of householders and complete benefits and services checks. That is very important, given the level of benefit uptake. We know that there are many pensioners who are not accessing all the benefits to which they are entitled, many of whom live in rural households. We want to identify those people, advise them of their rights and ensure that they are getting the benefits to which they are entitled.

Mr Shannon: Minister, thank you for your response to the question about rural isolation. I am concerned about community transport, which is one of the issues that you referred to in your answer to the original question.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the Member please refer all his questions through the Chair?

Mr Shannon: I stand corrected, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Peninsula Community Transport operates within Ards Borough Council, and Down Community Transport operates within Down District Council. Under the review of public administration (RPA), there is some concern that community transport either will not continue at all or will not continue in the way in which it has in the past. Have you held any talks with those groups about those concerns?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We are working very closely with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to ensure that the roll-out of the assisted rural transport scheme works. We are all dying to know what the outcome of RPA will be and have been looking at it very carefully. If groups need a reconfiguration of boundaries, I presume that that will happen. The community transport projects all work very well in their areas and they also work well collaboratively and collectively. Whatever the future brings, I am sure that they will be well able for the challenge.

Mr Cree: The Programme for Government includes a commitment to address rural poverty and exclusion. Will the Minister detail any initiatives that have been undertaken that have had a genuine and positive impact on rural communities?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I will narrow my answer to that question by talking about one specific area. We have in place a range of measures to target poverty and social exclusion. Over the past few days, my Department's rural childcare programme has issued 20 letters of offer, to the value of £1.3 million, to organisations that aim to provide solutions to specific issues faced in rural areas around the delivery of and access to childcare services. That programme is the mechanism for giving rural parents the opportunity to get into training, employment or education. That is probably one of the best things that we can do to lift people out of poverty, increase their

choices and enable them to get into the workforce. There is a wide range of issues to deal with, but that is one that can help to address social exclusion and rural poverty.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin.

Will the Minister elaborate on how her Department defines rural isolation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: We have worked very closely with stakeholders to develop projects to tackle poverty and social exclusion, and the isolation that results from that. We were asked to provide a rural challenge programme aimed at the community and voluntary sector to get to the heart of poverty, exclusion and disadvantage by equipping local groups with the necessary skills and funding to address the specific issues relevant to their areas.

Isolation can mean different things to different people, and we have taken a bottom-up approach to the issue to ensure that each area can identify problems. There is not a single catch-all definition. We have asked groups to look at the measures that we have put in place, and to use and apply them in their own areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is not in his place to ask question 4.

Rural Development Programme

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an outline of progress on axis 3 of the rural development programme. (AQO 935/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Axis 3 of the rural development programme is being delivered on behalf of my Department by seven joint council clusters (JCC), each in partnership with a local action group. All JCCs have opened calls for applications under most measures and have approved 348 applications for grant aid worth £10 million. All those applications were assessed and recommended for approval by local action groups in line with the bottom-up ethos of the axis. My Department, in consultation with the JCC administration units, closely monitors progress and the applications that have been received.

A comprehensive review of the JCC implementation plan is planned after this financial year has ended. That will be undertaken in conjunction with the joint council committees and will examine the progress of implementation plans against their agreed targets. The outcome of the review will contribute to financial planning and to my setting of expenditure priorities in the Department.

3.15 pm

Officials have also engaged in a number of meetings with other Departments and agencies to ensure the ongoing strategic fit of the rural development programme with other funding streams. Moreover, I am aware that officials have been dealing with a number of ongoing issues, particularly in the grow area, but that they have now been largely satisfactorily addressed.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answer. Am I correct to say that 348 applications have been approved at a cost of £10 million? I think that I picked those figures up. Will the Minister tell the House the total number of applications that were received? Were all those applications approved? What proportion was approved?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Thus far, the joint council committees have approved 348 applications at a cost of £10 million. To date, £2.4 million has been spent under axis 3 of the programme, and projects that have been funded relate to farm diversification and to business creation and development measures. The majority of spend relates to capital grant projects. Axis 3 project spend is expected to accelerate in 2010-11 owing to the volume of letters of offer that have issued over the past four months.

Mr Bell: Given that axis 3 covers diversification into non-agriculture activities and seeks to encourage tourism, will the Minister assure us that she will liaise with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, which has identified Strangford as an area where the agriculture industry could move into promoting tourism?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Absolutely. We already work very closely with the Tourist Board. It is not often that Strangford is mentioned twice, so well done to both Members. The Tourist Board is considering areas and has signature projects. However, I want the tourism potential of axis

3 and the rural development programme to be invested in areas that might not necessarily have the same profile, such as the Sperrins. We want the money to be used in areas where the signature projects have not kicked in. Strangford has a fairly high profile. However, do not worry, because we will consider ways in which to improve the tourism infrastructure across the Six Counties.

Forestry Bill

6. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline progress on the Forestry Bill. (AQO 936/10)

8. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Forestry Bill will protect ancient woodland. (AQO 938/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will take questions 6 and 8 together.

After the introduction of the Forestry Bill to the Assembly on 29 June 2009, I secured Assembly agreement to the Bill's Second Stage on 15 September. The Bill then moved to Committee Stage, and on 5 October, the Assembly approved a motion to extend Committee Stage until 2 March 2010. The Committee invited written submissions from stakeholders, and a series of oral evidence sessions commenced on 3 November.

In light of feedback from those evidence sessions and from engagement with the Committee, the Department considered a number of possible amendments to the Bill. Officials attended an oral evidence scrutiny session with the Committee on 26 January and on five occasions during February. I have now obtained the Committee's agreement to all the Bill's clauses, subject to a number of amendments being agreed. However, the amendments do not affect the vision or purpose of the Bill. Committee Stage is now complete, and the Committee's finalised report, including the text of the agreed draft amendments, was laid before the Assembly on Tuesday 2 March. I am grateful to the Committee for its positive engagement with the Department on the Bill.

The Bill was always intended to protect ancient woodland by means of felling management plans to regulate the regeneration of ancient woodland sites. However, even with ancient woodland, some level of woodland management, which might include some felling, will always

be appropriate or necessary. Nevertheless, to make the Bill's intention clear, an amendment has been agreed that states that in the case of ancient woodland, any felling management plan shall have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland. Overall, I am very pleased with the Bill's progress so far. Consideration Stage will commence in April, and we expect to be able to complete the remaining legislative stages before the beginning of July.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response. Notwithstanding her replies so far, is she satisfied that the Bill provides the necessary powers to allow the forestry industry, through its various and diverse objectives, to make its contribution to issues such as climate change?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

I believe that it can do that. The Bill outlines the Department's clear duty to promote forest expansion and sustainable forestry. Those are two key aims for the Department. The Bill includes a number of provisions through which the Department will seek to realise the full potential of our forests and the contribution that they can make to wider government objectives in areas such as tourism, sport, renewable energy, outdoor education and health and well-being.

The Bill includes a specific reference to climate change, and it will equip the Department with the necessary powers to promote and grant-aid new woodland creation with the associated climate change mitigation benefits. The provisions in the Bill give the Department the necessary powers to pursue all those important issues.

Ms Lo: Will the Minister encourage the restoration of ancient planted woodlands that are in private ownership?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

Absolutely. We all have an interest in the protection of our ancient woodland, of which very little is left. The Bill will contain a provision to regulate the felling and regeneration of woodlands by means of a licence, which will compel forest owners to manage woodland in a sustainable manner, including the timing and extent of felling and the composition of regenerating woodlands. It is not appropriate to give absolute protection to ancient woodland, because there will

always be occasions when some level of felling is appropriate or, indeed, necessary to protect sustainability. However, the Bill will include an amendment to deal specifically with ancient woodland and to make it clear that the Department, in exercising the felling licensing system, will seek to protect the special character of the woodland.

Mr K Robinson: The Minister's response reveals the Bill's technical and all-encompassing nature. Does the Minister envisage that the Bill, once it is enacted, will help Northern Ireland to meet its annual commitment for new woodland, which, to date, her Department has not been good at achieving?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I recognise the challenges to meeting our public service agreement targets. I hope that the new grants regime that we have introduced will encourage people to plant new woodland and help, as I said in my previous answer, to mitigate some of the climate change targets, which will be equally challenging, not just for me and my Department, but for a number of Ministers in the Executive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to switch off all electronic equipment. I call Mr Ian McCrea.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be aware that I have, in the past, raised the issue of mountain biking in forests. Will she update the House on any progress that has been made on that, and whether it will form part of the Bill?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Although mountain biking is not specifically mentioned in the Bill, we plan to, as I said earlier, fully utilise our forests and maximise the contribution that they can make in meeting wider government objectives in areas such as tourism, sport and health and well-being. Mountain biking covers all those objectives.

I spoke to Dawson Stelfox from the Countryside Access and Activities Network on Friday 12 March 2010 about the issue of forests, and it was discussed informally at another event that I attended. It is something that is very close to my heart. I would like to see our woodlands being better utilised, not just for the creation of timber, attracting visitors or improving tourism, but for the betterment of the people who live in communities in and around forest land. I am anxious to make contact with district councils

and other bodies, because we cannot do that on our own. We have the forest land, but we need more partnership working, which I welcome. A number of good opportunities, such as the high ropes course at Tollymore Forest Park, will be available shortly. We just need to utilise them.

Townland Names

7. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will promote the use of townland names as an important part of rural identity. (AQO 937/10)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I am pleased to announce that my Department is moving to include townland names in the addresses of all DARD offices.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: That is a response to an initiative that was undertaken by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure under the chairmanship of Mr McElduff. The Committee has long advocated the use of townland names and has asked all Departments, MLAs and the Assembly Commission to consider adopting their townland names as part of their official addresses. I recognise and value the historic, cultural and linguistic importance of townland names, particularly to the rural community. They are a significant part of our shared local heritage, and I am keen to support their promotion and preservation.

There has always been and continues to be a great association between people and places. A great number of townlands take their names from the people who have lived there, such as Ballyrobert, Ballynichol and Ballymurphy. Members might be interested to know that this place is in the townland of Ballymiscaw, which translates as the fort of the shadows.

I know that the Member, in his capacity as Committee Chairperson, has a keen interest in the matter of townland names. He may not want me to go this far, but he is no doubt keen to stress that the translation of his townland of Aghagogan — the field where giddy-headed people congregate — does not necessarily reflect the character of the people who live there today. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call "Bally" McElduff for a supplementary.

Mr McElduff: I am grateful to the Minister. I welcome her and her Department's proactive approach to highlighting and promoting townland names. She has covered everything that I intended to ask in my supplementary question. However, will the Minister contend that townland names and place names are equally as relevant to urban settings as they are to rural settings? Some Departments are hiding behind that fig leaf of an excuse.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I assure the Committee Chairperson that there is not a fig leaf big enough. *[Laughter.]* I have no hesitation in encouraging anyone to use and to promote the use of townland names. I hope that by including townland names in all DARD office addresses, which are rural in their nature but located in towns nonetheless, I am leading by example.

We can look to some good examples. Members might not know that if they look at the Google Earth map of Fermanagh, the townland names are visible. It is a bit of a shock to compare that map of Fermanagh to other counties that do not have the same coverage. Good work is being done. Fermanagh District Council and others have done a good job generally, but much more can be done. I want to see my Department playing its role as well. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the initiative that has been taken by the Minister and congratulate her on being the second Minister to take the issue on board. Her colleague the Minister of Education informed our Committee last week that her Department is going to use Rathgael House and other —

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

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister further twist the arm of or entice her other Executive colleagues to take the lead from her and Caitríona Ruane and implement what this Assembly voted for eight years ago. I am delighted that, eight years after the Assembly took a decision, some Executive Ministers are doing what they have been asked to do.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Member will be interested to know that I recently wrote to the Minister of Finance and Personnel about the place names project that Queen's University is developing

in the hope that I could, if not strong-arm him, then entice him into instructing his Department to look at how we can further protect and preserve townland names. We all have a shared interest, and that can only strengthen our cultural heritage. I encourage all my Executive colleagues to follow mine and Caitríona's lead.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire cén uair a bheidh seoltaí bhailte fearainn ar pháipéarachas na Roinne.

When can we hope to see townland names used on the Department's stationery?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: We will phase in the use of townland names as stationery is reprinted. I have already started to use townland names in the addresses of DARD offices. It will not be done overnight, but we will also look to enable people to put the name of their townland on DARD forms, and so on.

3.30 pm

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

Private Members' Business

Cafe Culture Society

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to bring forward legislation to enable the hospitality industry to create a cafe culture society similar to that in other European cities, towns and villages to help promote the tourism, leisure and hospitality industries. — [Mr McEluff.]

Motion not moved.

Preparatory Departments

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee previously agreed that, when two or more amendments have been selected, additional time may be allocated at the Speaker's discretion. As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes 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.

Miss McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the Department of Education's decision to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools as demonstrated by the Department's budget proposals for 2010-11; believes that the consultation process undertaken by the Department does not meet with the Sedley requirements on the standards of proper consultation; considers that this proposal is contentious and should be considered by the full Executive; recognises the excellence in terms of attainment achieved by those pupils attending preparatory departments and the value for money that these departments represent in terms of funding by the Department of Education; further believes that the withdrawal of such funding would represent a false economy, suppress social mobility and restrict parental choice; and calls on the Minister of Education to reverse the decision.

I also indicate my intention to accept the SDLP's amendment.

It is another sad day in the life of the Assembly when we have to debate another unnecessary crisis that has been created by the Minister of Education. It is with some concern that I note that it appears that the Minister of Education seeks to undermine education provision for some 2,500 pupils for no reason other than some kind of ideological jihad.

On 7 January 2010, the Minister launched a consultation on the draft equality impact assessment on the proposal to withdraw funding from the 16 preparatory departments of grammar schools in Northern Ireland. That consultation was ostensibly based on the independent strategic review of education, which recommended that the rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed. However, we know only too well that the Minister likes to pick and choose provisions from the Bain report to support and suit whatever her ideological aims may be.

It is all well and good for the Minister to carry out consultation; indeed, she is required to do so by law. However, the Minister needs to be aware that a consultation should not simply pay lip service to the law. I draw her attention to the Sedley requirements. They are named after Stephen Sedley QC, who submitted them in legal argument in the case of *R v Brent London Borough Council, ex parte Gunning* (1985). Mr Justice Hodgson's decision in that case, which has been reaffirmed in case after case, establishes a number of requirements that must be carried out to meet the standards of proper consultation. First, a consultation must take place before a decision is taken, and it should be capable of informing the decision to be taken. Secondly, true reasons must be given for the proposals in order that proper consultation can be given and a full response made. Thirdly, there must be adequate time given for the consultation in order that proper consideration can be given to it and to allow for a full response. Finally, the responses to the consultation must be thoroughly, fairly and appropriately considered before finalising any proposals.

I submit that the first of the Sedley requirements is not met because the Minister has already taken the decision to remove funding. That means that the consultation does not meet the fourth requirement of Sedley, because there is no chance of the responses being conscientiously considered by the Department.

In the amendment tabled by the Minister's party colleagues, we are asked to note:

"that the proposed withdrawal of funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools was part of the package of efficiencies agreed by the Minister of Education following the outcome of the Budget 2007 process".

It is clear from the Minister's 2010-11 budget figures that she has factored in the removal of the funding to prep departments in her spending plans. That is proof, if it were needed, that the Minister has already decided to withdraw the funding. The consultation is merely a matter of going through the motions. Regardless of the equality issues surrounding the withdrawal, she is intent on pressing ahead. Comments made earlier by the Minister during Question Time reinforce that impression.

What is even more incredible is the limited scope of the consultation on the review of funding to the prep departments of grammar schools on which this EQIA is based. The consultation is limited to schools, whereas, in the opinion of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), it warranted a full consultation. I understand that NICCY was not even consulted on it. It seems that the Minister and her Department play fast and loose with the concept of consultation, but perhaps that should not surprise me.

Why is the Minister doing this? It is just clumsy, clichéd gesture politics. She believes that prep departments are elitist. She chooses to disregard the hard-working parents who continually make sacrifices for the betterment of their children. My office has been inundated, as I am sure those of all Members of the Assembly have been, with letters from distraught parents on this issue.

The effect of this decision is felt particularly in my constituency of Strangford, where the prep department of Regent House School is situated. Parents of the children in that prep department and of children in other prep departments across Northern Ireland do not fall neatly into the Sinn Féin stereotype of wealthy elites. They are hard-working parents who make sacrifices to give their children the best chance in life, in order that they can go to schools that produce good results and have reasonable class sizes. Those parents are tilers, joiners, greengrocers, digger-drivers and mechanics. They have

indicated that the decision not only takes away their choice of a non-denominational school for their children outside of the controlled primary, maintained or integrated sectors but, in some cases, removes the choice of sending their child to a single-sex school. I refer the Minister to article 44 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, which enshrines in law the right of parental choice:

"so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents."

Does the Minister care about the upheaval she is causing children and the distress she is causing parents? For what? It cannot be because it will save money. Those prep departments provide excellent teaching and learning environment at a cost of £808 per pupil to the taxpayer. The parents of the pupils pay the remainder of the fees. Compare that to the fully state-funded schools, where an average of around £2,911 is spent on each pupil. If the Minister believes that by removing funding from the prep departments we will save money, she is sadly mistaken. By removing that funding, she will put prep departments out of the reach of many parents who work hard to spend that bit extra to help their children. It will result in enrolment numbers falling; and the further they fall, the higher fees will climb. That will inevitably lead to a greater fall in enrolment and so on. It is obvious that prep departments will eventually close if the Minister does not reverse her decision, which will lead to a greater drain on the education budget. If all prep departments in Northern Ireland were to close, it could cost the education budget an additional £5.1 million, whereas it costs just £1.9 million to fund them. In this time of necessary cuts, how can the Minister justify that?

One of the most striking concerns is the complete lack of planning or transitional arrangements following the decision to remove funding. If prep departments close, how will the move to primary schools be managed? Has the Minister considered the implications of their closure in human costs? What will happen to the teachers? Are the primary schools that are local to those prep departments full? What about the specific impact on children in year 6 who are entering year 7 and intending to sit transfer tests? I know that the Minister is no

fan of those tests, but to add additional strain to those children is, frankly, cruel. However, the Minister intends to remove that funding in the forthcoming year. That gives parents no time to plan. That decision flies in the face of her earlier proposals on numeracy and literacy and early years provision.

The Minister has stated that she wants to invest more in primary education to tackle underachievement. However, figures cited in the review of funding show that prep departments represent good value for money. The report acknowledges that prep departments attained significantly higher results than primary schools in Key Stage 1 in English and maths in 2007-08. It points out that the percentage of pupils in prep departments attaining level 3 in English is more than double that of primary schools, and the results are similar in maths. That trend continues in results at Key Stage 2.

The Minister has indicated in answer to questions for written answer that, in her opinion, the decision to withdraw funding for prep departments does not fall under the list of duties outlined in section 2.4 of the ministerial code and that, therefore, she does not intend to bring the matter before her ministerial colleagues on the Executive. I challenge that opinion: it is a statutory obligation to bring matters to the Executive, and failure to do so could render any decision invalid and open to challenge. I also understand that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has written to the Minister to tell her that, since he believes it to be a contentious issue, the ministerial code requires her to bring it to the Executive. The Finance Minister made that clear during the recent Budget debate.

Given what I have said, I will not accept the amendment in the names of Mr O'Dowd and Mrs O'Neill. However, the SDLP's amendment provides a practical means to resolve the impasse by suggesting engagement by the Minister with key stakeholders.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we continue the debate, which could be lively, I remind Members of the Speaker's ruling that they should set the standards of debate that are expected in the House, namely courtesy, good temper and moderation. It is also important that Members speak through the Chair and that remarks are made through the Chair and not across the Chamber.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Could the Speaker rule why it was necessary for that reminder to be brought to the attention of the House in respect of this debate, particularly given that the Deputy Speaker is in the Speaker's position? I would like the Speaker to rule on the relevance of that matter to this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has no right to challenge the Speaker's ruling. I drew attention to the Speaker's ruling because of the background commentary when the previous Member was speaking and because of attempts to communicate across the Chamber during this early stage of the debate, which seemed likely to continue. Therefore, I was giving clear direction on the Speaker's earlier statement when he drew attention to the fact that the debate was expected to be conducted with courtesy, good temper and moderation. I am simply giving direction that that is how we want the debate to continue.

3.45 pm

Mr O'Dowd: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after "grammar schools" and insert

"; believes that primary schools provide an excellent opportunity for all children to begin their educational journey; notes that the proposed withdrawal of funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools was part of the package of efficiencies agreed by the Minister of Education following the outcome of the Budget 2007 process; recognises that the proposal is in keeping with the recommendations of the report on the independent strategic review of education (Bain report, December 2006) and with the findings of the Department of Finance and Personnel's business consultancy service review of funding to preparatory departments of grammar schools (September 2009); and looks forward to the outcome of the equality impact assessment being undertaken by the Minister of Education to establish if the decision impacts on equality obligations."

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak in favour of amendment No 1 and against the motion and the SDLP's amendment. It is strange that the House is united, or that a number of parties are united, around the motion. Last week, we witnessed severe rifts between the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party over the serious subject of policing and justice. Having listened to them last week, one would have believed that there was no chance of reconciliation. Alas, they have managed to bring

themselves together on this subject, and one has to ask why that is the case. They have not found a form of unity to tackle poverty or to deal with small rural or urban schools that face closure. Indeed, as I said, they could not find unity to tackle the serious subject of policing and justice, which concerns the safety of people in their home. Why, therefore, have they come together on the subject of prep schools? I ask the question genuinely. It is strange that the DUP, which stated that big house unionism is over, appears to be more than content to unite itself with the Ulster Unionist Party on an issue that is largely based on privilege.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way later.

I accept Miss McIlveen's argument that parents from a number of backgrounds send their children to prep schools and that such schools are not only for the great and the wealthy. However, the fact is that the prep schools will accept a child only if their parents hand over between £2,000 and £3,000 in that school year. That does not cover the other expenses that the family and the child incur throughout that educational year. Perhaps the parents do not protect privilege, but the prep departments certainly do.

During meetings of the Education Committee, I have asked senior representatives of the grammar schools how a parent would go about getting their child into a prep school. They gave me a list of ways, and I said that that was great. However, I asked them whether a child would get into a prep school if the parent turned up on the first day of the school term without the £2,000 or £3,000. The answer was no. We are being asked to fund or assist the funding of private education. Why are the parties on the opposite Benches united on that question?

I am sure that many people listening to the debate today will wonder what prep schools are. There may be none in their area, or perhaps none of their neighbours' children or their own children go to one. Those schools will have no relevance whatever to many people who are listening to this debate.

Mr Storey: The Member's attacks on what the Ulster Unionist Party and my party do in the House today have no relevance and are a total red herring. He is trying to politicise the issue, which is a shame on him and his party. Some

parents make sacrifices to send their children to prep schools. Will the Member tell those parents that they are wrong to make that choice for their children and that they should somehow discard that priority because it does not happen to suit the agenda of the party opposite, which has nothing to do with politics and more to do with ideology?

Mr O'Dowd: Far be it from me to break the news to the Member, but we are politicians. This is a political debating Chamber, and the Member's party was among those who tabled the motion. The Member can hardly accuse my good self of politicising the issue.

If parents wish to send their children to prep schools, I have no objection whatever to that. However, every time that the subject of grammar schools or prep schools is brought up, I question whether parents who make sacrifices to send their children to those schools are the only ones who make sacrifices and the only ones who are interested in their children's education. I am glad to say that the vast majority of parents I meet make sacrifices for their children and want the best education possible for them. The vast majority of parents I meet do not send their children to prep schools or grammar schools. Does that make them bad parents? It does not, so let us not apply the sacrifice argument to only one group of parents.

Miss McIlveen said that the Minister was involved in an ideological jihad — I think that that was the term that she used. Several reports on the subject in which the Minister had no involvement have been published. The Bain report, which is the main report on the subject, was produced before the Minister came into office. It refers to the funding of prep schools as being inequitable. Is that an ideological jihad? That other famous Department that is hardly renowned for its ideological jihads — the Department of Finance and Personnel — commissioned a report, which was published in September 2009. It stated that it was inequitable to continue funding prep schools. Therefore, do not point the finger across the Chamber and accuse the Minister, the Department or this party of being involved in some sort of jihad against prep schools. Independent reports into prep school funding have pointed up time and again that it should not continue and that it should be reviewed, and that is what the Minister has done.

That brings me to the consultation. The red herring that the proposal is not being properly consulted on brings me to the SDLP amendment. The proposal was highlighted in the Department of Education's Budget settlement in 2007, which was three years ago. The parties opposite and the party to my left voted for that Budget around the Executive table. The report was published.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way in a moment. Perhaps the SDLP Member is going to correct me, because his party voted against the Budget. Therefore, I will save him the bother. *[Interruption.]*

The Minister did not vote for it when she was sitting around the Executive table. The proposal has been sitting there since 2007, and, all of a sudden, some parties are now saying that they have not been consulted on it. However, what has really happened is that the prep schools and the grammar schools have asked the parties what they are doing about prep school funding, and they have had to put up their hands and say that it has been sitting there since 2007, it has been talked about since 2007, and now it is becoming a reality, and they have done absolutely nothing about it. I would be interested to know — perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us — whether any parties in the Chamber responded to the equality impact assessment on the withdrawal of funding, which has been going on since January. That is important.

Sinn Féin's amendment is a factual amendment. It sets out the historical context and origin of the proposal and what will happen next. It is not based on the belief system of my party or any other party in the Chamber, and there is no reason why the parties around the Chamber should not unite around it. We are awaiting the outcome of the equality impact assessment of the proposal to withdraw funding from the prep departments to see whether it will have an adverse effect on any category specified in the equality legislation.

It is worth nothing that there is no mention of equality in the SDLP amendment. If the motion goes through as amended by the SDLP, equality will have been scrubbed out of the history books. It raises the question: what is the SDLP's policy on education? What is the SDLP's policy on anything else for that matter? It appears to me that the SDLP has ripped up

its education policy and shredded it, because it is now in favour of academic selection and of funding prep departments, and it appears that it is now in favour of elitism. That party has told us that it is not prepared to accept an equality impact assessment of the proposal. Perhaps the SDLP will tell us exactly what its education policy is, because it appears that, since Christmas 2009, it has been thrown in the bin.

We await the outcome of the equality impact assessment of the proposal to withdraw funding for a very good reason: equality is a double-edged sword. It is not there to protect one section of society above another. It is there to ensure that equality is delivered through all decisions made by a Sinn Féin Minister, a DUP Minister or any other Minister. That is why it is important for the Assembly to await the full findings of the report before it comes to a position.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "attending preparatory departments" and insert

"and that the time frame for withdrawal of funding will have an adverse effect on their well-being; believes that the financial implications have not been adequately assessed; and calls on the Minister of Education to enter into discussions immediately with the schools' representatives with a view to determining a solution acceptable to the schools' authorities and the Department."

Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht inniu, agus éirím le leasú uimhir a dó a mholadh. I thank the mover of the motion and others in the House for supporting our amendment. I am glad that Mr O'Dowd acknowledged that the SDLP voted against the Budget, although I note that he was willing, until corrected, to say that we voted in favour of it. The same could be said of his misrepresentation of other SDLP policies. He knows well that the SDLP has been against academic selection over the past 30 years, and he also knows well that academic selection has not been ended. It has been privatised in the form of a variety of tests, but, contrary to what his party's Minister of Education so often claims, it has not been ended.

Members must bear it in mind that the most important people to be considered in the debate are the children who are at the heart of the issue. Anything that we say here today or anything that we do should be guided by the best interests of those children in the short term and in the long term. I thank the parents

who contacted us to express their views and concerns in the lead-up to the debate.

More than 2,000 children — 2,426 to be precise — attend the 16 preparatory departments in Northern Ireland. As Members have heard, the Department of Education is seeking to change the way in which preparatory schools are funded. That move is largely in response to proposals that were made as a result of the independent strategic review of education, which is better known as the Bain review. Paragraph 6.50.5 of the report states:

"The rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed."

The SDLP is not against that review. For 2009-2010, each preparatory pupil will attract grant-aid funding of around £808. That accounts for approximately 30% of the teaching costs, and it compares with £2,020 that is allocated for each primary-school pupil. The total allocated to preparatory departments will be almost £2 million. The withdrawal of that funding could entail extra costs for the Department. At a time of huge pressure on existing budgets, that move could cost the Department something in the region of £3 million to £5 million per annum in direct costs, not to mention the costs associated with jobs; the impact on local communities; the impact on the schools involved; the possible need for newbuilds; and, of course, the impact that a sudden upheaval will have on the children concerned.

The Department's argument is that, on grounds of equality, the present situation is unsustainable. It says that, since not all parents can afford to send their children to a preparatory school, there is not equal access. The SDLP believes that, if change is required, it must be managed correctly and sensibly. Change can be brought about through proper consultation that involves all the stakeholders. However, the Department has tried to railroad the process rather than have a full consultation. Instead of a 12-week consultation, which is normal practice, the consultation was done in seven weeks. Many believed, as was stated earlier, that the consultation had a predetermined outcome and was, therefore, a farcical exercise.

My party and I are not convinced that the way in which the Department has gone about managing change in this instance is in the best interests of the children concerned or that it has followed best practice, as the motion indicates. Sudden change at this time will have a severe impact on

families who send their children to preparatory departments and on the children, who are wondering what the future holds for them. It is wrong for children, parents and teachers to experience that degree of anxiety.

4.00 pm

It is far from clear that the Department has carefully weighed the impact of that change on children's education, families' lives and, indeed, on its own departmental budgets. Many issues remain outstanding with regard to the short timescale that has been proposed by the Department. It will leave parents with limited time in which to consider their options and make alternative arrangements. Undoubtedly, that uncertainty leads to a great deal of anxiety for children, parents and teachers.

My party believes that careful consideration must be given to the extent to which children will be affected by the proposed changes in funding and how they can be accommodated in primary schools that are adjacent to their homes. As Members know, area-based planning, which would have helped deal with pupil placement and which should be more developed, has not been progressed to the extent that is necessary to deal with the relocation of a large number of pupils throughout a wide geographical area. One questions whether this is the appropriate time to withdraw funding from preparatory schools, given that the Department of Education's budget is under severe pressures to the extent of around £140 million.

Departmental officials have told the Education Committee that it will be extremely difficult for them to make savings without that having an impact on front line services. Surely a move that will place additional pressures on the Department's finances is ill-conceived at a time of difficult choices and dwindling budgets. The Department must explore fully the impact of that change on other sectors of the education system. Change must not be declared unilaterally. It must be agreed between the Department and schools over a reasonable and agreed time frame, and in a way that enables schools, teachers, parents and pupils to manage it in a systematic and orderly fashion, through dialogue with all stakeholders.

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

My party's amendment calls for that. It is reasonable and sensible under the

circumstances. I urge all Members of the House to support amendment No 2. Go raibh céad maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Elliott: I support the motion and, indeed, the SDLP's amendment. I am pleased that the SDLP has taken its position because that demonstrates clearly the isolated and unreasonable position that Sinn Féin has adopted on education issues in the Executive and the Assembly.

The decision to withdraw funding from preparatory departments throughout Northern Ireland is another clear example of the Education Minister's ideological crusade against certain, selected children in the community and education system. The previous speaker, Mr Bradley, stated that children are at the heart of the matter. He explained clearly that children will suffer, not us in the Assembly. We must put children first.

Often, the Minister talks about putting children first. However, clearly, she has not given that the thought that it deserves. Perhaps, she has done so, but simply wants to continue with her own agenda. That highlights Sinn Féin's objectives as a political party and its "ourselves alone" mentality, which we have gotten used to in the political world. However, there is no reason why that should filter into children's education.

One founding principle of Western democratic society is choice. I am pleased that many parents can choose where to send their children to be educated. Parents who send their children to preparatory departments pay their taxes like everyone else. They deserve proper services from the Education Minister and the Department, and, indeed, from the Executive and the Assembly as a whole. They have a right to be recognised in that respect.

The proposal will cost the education system more money. I understand that each preparatory pupil attracts grant aid funding of around £800. I also understand that each primary school pupil in other education streams attracts around £2,000 of grant aid. Therefore, there is a shortfall of £1,200 for each pupil, which will have to be made up by the Department. I do not know why that is the case. I have heard other figures; for example, some schools in the Catholic maintained sector in the Western Education and Library Board area attract funding of around £7,000 for each pupil. Clearly, those

shortfalls will have to be made up by the Department and the boards.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. In relation to that point, it is quite clear that the report that was carried out does not have any analysis of the inequity of funding right across the educational sector. That raises the question of whether, instead of prep schools receiving only £800 for each pupil, they should now get all their funding and should be treated equitably within the educational system and the structure that we currently have.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Storey for his intervention — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. If there is any more noise from the Public Gallery, I will have it cleared.

Mr McNarry: Och, go away.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the Member wish to make a point?

Mr McNarry: I welcome the opportunity to say that this is a public debate. We invite the public into our House, and the public make an expression. I understand the rules and the regulations, and I understand why you have ticked them off. However, I hope that it is just a warning and that people can come into our House and express solidarity with people who look at that lot over there and want nothing to do with them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am carrying out the rules of the House. Does any Member wish to criticise me for doing that?

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I understand what took place. However, it was a sin in ignorance. When people come into the House they are not often warned that nobody can speak but the Members on the Floor, and that should be made clear. I know that it is difficult to say everything at once, but I do not think that you are short of speech, sir.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Dr Paisley, I only implement the rules. That is all.

Is there a point of order?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not going to question your ruling on the previous matter. However, I am going to question the comments of Mr McNarry. I do not know whether he attended a prep

school, but I know that he did not learn any manners wherever he went. Is it parliamentary to point over to Members of the House and refer to them as "that lot"? We are an elected parliamentary party in the Chamber. In fact, we carry a major mandate, contrary to what the gentleman in the corner has.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The rules of the House are clear about using proper names, and I am sure that Members will want to note that fact.

Mr McNarry: Further to that point of order, I thought that during that brief —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Is the Member making a point of order?

Mr McNarry: Yes. On that point of order, I am asking whether, during that brief interlude in which you invited me to speak to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, you had, in effect, suspended the rules of the House to allow that to happen and my behaviour was, therefore, perfectly in order.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We will move on. Please continue, Mr Elliott.

Mr Elliott: To get back to the point of business, I thank Mr Storey for his intervention as it highlights the issues surrounding the debate and the report that has come out. At times of financial restraint in the Assembly and the Executive, I would have thought that it would have been more prudent for the Education Minister to attempt to get a situation in which there were financial savings, instead of trying to create more of an impact on the Department that she is in charge of. In fact, Sinn Féin has claimed that the decision formed part of the Department's budget for 2007-2011. However, neither the Programme for Government nor the Budget document mentions preparatory departments. I am at a loss to understand how the Minister can make such a claim.

If the Minister genuinely cared for all children and genuinely believed the flawed conclusions of the Bain report, she would seek to remove prep school funding in a way that would cause the least disruption to children and the education system, instead of going about it in the way that she has. I am not sure about time, Mr Deputy Speaker, because things seem to have moved on.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises that, since 1992, preparatory funding has been reviewed, and all funding streams periodically. The manner

in which the Minister has cut off that funding illustrates her real agenda: the agenda against choice in the education system in the Province; indeed, the Minister and her Department appear to be following a personal agenda.

Mr Lunn: I will choose my words with extreme care. I support the motion and the SDLP amendment. The Minister's proposed action is based on the review of funding by the business consultancy service (BCS). Paragraph 7.2 of its report states that it is:

"unable to draw any firm conclusions on the equity of the funding arrangements of preparatory departments compared to primary schools."

In paragraph 7.4 of its report, the BCS concludes:

"The withdrawal of DE funding to preparatory departments is likely to have marginal impact on the education budget."

It also states:

"the equity issue far outweighs the economic issue".

Therefore we are back to paragraph 7.2.

I wonder how the BCS worked that out. Nobody knows yet what decision the parents of prep school children will make. However, if they transfer in large numbers to primary schools, it could cost the Department up to £5 million in increased funding, including the possibility of an increased premises factor funding if the accommodation is transferred back to the grammar school, to say nothing of redundancy, transport and other costs.

The withdrawal of funding is being proposed against a backdrop of extreme pressure on all aspects of public spending, and nowhere more so than on the education budget. No new schools are likely to commence being built in 2010-11, projects promised years ago are being pushed back due to lack of funds, the backlog of essential maintenance in the schools estate stands at about £240 million, and we will be spending only about £30 million on that in the incoming year. The Minister has even challenged the Education Committee to come up with proposed areas where savings could be made, presumably because she cannot identify them herself.

The transfer system is in chaos. Some 18 months' work went into the education and skills authority, which could have saved some money, but it now appears to lie in ruins. We have

the sustainable schools policy, Every School a Good School, area-based planning, the revised curriculum, early years provision, the entitlement framework, and Lord knows how many initiatives — some good and some not so good, but all time-consuming and confusing.

Morale in the education system is at an all-time low, and the bright spot in all of that is the continuing expertise and dedication of teachers trying to guide our youngsters to achieve their maximum potential. What does the Minister now throw into the mix? An attack on prep schools, which is, in my opinion, an attack on their associated grammar schools. There is no clear rationale for that action at this time. It is a denial of parental choice, and the conclusions of the BCS report do not stand up to scrutiny on any financial basis. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the reason is ideological. It is just a retaliation for the breakaway actions of the grammar schools, actions which, as the Minister knows, do not find favour with my party. However, we do not think that an attack on prep schools is the way to proceed.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No. Imagine the predicament of a P5 or P6 pupil at a prep school whose parents have sacrificed many thousands of pounds to exercise their freedom of choice and are now faced with no alternative but to change their child's school at the beginning of their transfer year. That is a real possibility, because, as has already been said, not all parents who made that choice are especially well off. They chose prep schools for various reasons: geography; smaller class sizes; better pupil:teacher ratios; their religious and racial mix; and, in some cases, special needs requirements or even single-sex status.

4.15 pm

Given everything else that is going on and the resultant additional trauma that will be experienced by children who already face an uncertain transfer procedure, is it really reasonable for the Minister to introduce the proposal in a short timescale? Some of us do not approve of the present transfer situation, but it is a reality, and her proposal heaps confusion on confusion.

At the very least, the Minister's proposal to withdraw funding requires more discussion, as the SDLP amendment suggests. At best, the

Minister should reassess her priorities and put the matter on the back-burner, preferably for a long time. If she refuses, the ministerial code to which Michelle McIlveen referred will surely come into play.

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

Mr Lunn: I hope that the Minister has not already decided on a course of action, although that appears to be the case. I hope that she will see sense and withdraw the proposal. The Alliance Party will support the motion as amended by the SDLP.

Mr Craig: I support the motion and amendment No 2. Education is not just a topic for debate; it is crucial to the entire future of Northern Ireland. The Assembly is trying to move the economy forward to become a high-tech economy. If education fails, that entire Assembly strategy fails, yet here is another proposal from the Minister that will destroy one of the sectors in our education system that is succeeding. As pointed out in the Minister's report, that sector delivers high academic achievers. Perhaps that is why prep schools are now under attack. Are they under attack because they are too successful? Is it because parents in my constituency and others choose — I use the word "choose" carefully — to subsidise their children's education? Is that the crime of which they are guilty? Do the public really have wholly to fund every sector just so that everything is equal and right for everybody? That is not equality.

The Minister has no difficulty in making the public pay for other choices that parents make. I defend their right to make those choices. If parents want to send their children to Irish-medium schools, so be it. However, why is it that I and others must fully fund those sectors but the Minister deems it wrong to support a sector that we only partially fund to the tune of 30%? That is not equality — it is anything but.

I want to quote from the European Convention on Human Rights, a document from which the party opposite likes to quote all the time. The convention states that:

"the State shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions."

Therefore, under human rights legislation, if someone decides that it is right for them to

subsidise the education of their children, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. What is the great difficulty with someone deciding to subsidise their children's education? Is it the Minister's ideological argument that we cannot allow the private subsidisation of anything? If that is the case, the entire House is in huge trouble, because the public purse cannot afford the full funding of everything in society.

I commend those parents who make the hard decision to subsidise their children's education. It is not always the wealthy who choose to do that: far from it. Many working-class parents go without foreign holidays, new cars and bigger houses so that their children get the best education possible. That is their choice and I commend them for making it. I have no doubt that it will benefit all in our society.

Many children in other schools are undoubtedly underachieving. However, early intervention and investment are the way to tackle that, not removing a successful part of the system. If we believe in parental choice, we have no right to enforce our ideological doctrines on others. Parents have rights.

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

Mr Craig: Young people should not be used as political pawns in a battle of educational philosophies. I support the motion and amendment No 2.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My colleague John O'Dowd made the point that, upon learning of the debate, some people asked: "What are prep schools?" It is important to state that they are fee-paying, private schools that are open only to those who can afford to pay. Sinn Féin completely opposes private education being subsidised from the public purse. We are interested in supporting all children to reach their full potential on the basis of equality, not on the basis of whether their parents can afford to pay. It is unfair to ask a parent to pay: why should any parent pay?

As parents, we want the best for our children; we want them to have a happy and fulfilling experience of education. Our primary schools provide an excellent opportunity for all children to begin their educational journey. At a time —

Mr Storey: I hear repeatedly that parents have to pay. Is it not a shame and a disgrace that

many primary and prep schools must pour thousands of pounds into our education system through parent-teacher associations because money is not made available? Therefore, the amount of money available in education is a huge issue.

Mrs O'Neill: To a certain extent, I agree with the Member. I hope that he is equally vocal in supporting additional money for all primary schools and not just a select few. We must be realistic. With thousands of empty school desks across the schools estate, it is important that primary schools are protected where possible and that empty desks are kept to a minimum to ensure the survival of all our local primary schools and their associated jobs. We do not have the luxury of speaking up for only a few schools. I am interested only in looking at all schools and educational provision for all children.

A few points must be reiterated. First, the proposed withdrawal of funding from schools' prep departments was part of a package of efficiencies agreed by the Minister of Education at the outcome of the Budget Bill 2007 debate. It is a bit rich for the parties on the opposite Benches to jump up and down today when they too signed up to that Budget process.

Mr Storey: That is nonsense.

Mrs O'Neill: It is not nonsense: it is absolute fact.

The proposal was in keeping with the recommendation in Bain's 'Independent Strategic Review of Education' report, which was published in December 2006 and again highlighted the issue of funding for prep department pupils. The report recommended that that expenditure:

"should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of significant pressures on the education budget."

In taking that forward, the Department of Education commissioned the Department of Finance and Personnel's business consultancy service to undertake a review of funding to prep departments and to provide a report to the Department. That final report was provided in September 2009, and its findings again concluded that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to prep departments on the grounds of equality of access, which is the core issue here today.

The Minister has accepted the report's findings, but she has asked for an equality impact assessment (EQIA). Members are almost being presumptuous in having the debate, because the Minister has not laid out her plans for the way forward as a result of that EQIA, which concluded only at the beginning of March.

Equality of access is at the core of this debate. It has to be made clear that the Department is not closing prep schools; it proposes merely, on the back of the two reports and subject to an EQIA, not to fund those places. Any decision to close prep departments will be for parents and the schools.

Ms Lo: There are three prep schools in the controlled sector that, if the Department's funding were to be removed, would become independent schools and their existence would be called into question. Those schools would lose all of their status for receiving support from education and library boards.

Mrs O'Neill: That would be a decision for the board of governors of the school. The Department proposes merely to stop funding for the schools, not to close them. Closing them would be a decision for the boards of governors and the schools.

In proposing the motion, Michelle McIlveen said that the issue was contentious and should, therefore, be referred to the Executive. I remind the DUP that it is the First Minister and deputy First Minister who will decide what goes on the Executive table, not individual DUP Members.

My party colleague said that Sinn Féin will not be voting for the SDLP amendment, which states that the financial implications have not been adequately assessed. What about the financial implications of continuing to fund the education of some children to a greater extent than to that of others? Surely, the SDLP does not think that that is acceptable. It also makes me question whether the SDLP is succumbing to the DUP and UUP positions rather than having the courage of its convictions.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I am coming to the end of my time now. Thank you.

The core point of the debate is that the argument is about equality of access. It is not an argument about finance; it is about equality,

which is the only one in which Sinn Féin is interested.

Lord Browne: I support the motion, and I support amendment No 2 as tabled by the SDLP. The Minister has made two key claims. First, she has claimed that her proposals will reduce costs and, secondly, that preparatory departments and prep schools are inequitable. The argument about costs needs to be put in context. We have heard already that the Department of Education spends £1.9 million a year in funding prep school pupils and that that covers 2,411 pupils at 16 institutions. It is interesting to note that in the Minister's constituency of South Down, one primary school — a Catholic-maintained primary school with less than a third of the pupils of all the prep schools put together — received £2.2 million last year alone.

Not only is the cost argument a false economy but prep school funding makes up a miniscule proportion of the Department's budget yet allows thousands of families the freedom of choice in educating their children.

Mr Spratt: Does the honourable Member agree that prep schools offer excellent value for money for the taxpayer? As we have heard already, a large proportion of the cost is borne by parents. Does he agree further that, if funding is cut, fees would increase and a substantial number of parents would be forced to move their children to primary schools? In my constituency of South Belfast, many primary schools are grossly oversubscribed already and that will have a knock-on effect on the Department. In the long term, it may well result in redundancies of teachers, which will also have a knock-on effect on the Department. The Minister has not costed that out.

Lord Browne: I thank the Member for adding to the opinion that the Minister's argument about cost is totally false. I accept that it will lead to the loss of jobs, not only of teachers but of ancillary staff, ground staff, domestic staff and so on. Indeed, it could result in the loss of contracts for local food companies and so on.

Mr Storey: No costings have been given on staff. At least 125 teaching staff could be affected, yet no costings have been made on that, and the Department has given no indication that it has given the matter serious consideration.

There is also the issue of the timescale for a proposed closure under the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

4.30 pm

Lord Browne: I thank the Member for his intervention. I look forward to the Minister's explanation of the costings.

My second point is that the Minister claims that prep school funding is inequitable because it benefits a relatively small number of pupils who tend to be drawn primarily from one section of the community. However, let us consider the Minister's attitude to funding for Irish-medium schools. That funding benefits an even smaller number of pupils than prep school funding. Irish-medium schools receive almost five times as much funding as prep schools, despite having fewer pupils. If that is not the very definition of inequitable, I do not know what is. That exposes one thing: the Minister's decision is not based on costs, access or equality, but on her personal, obsessive and ideological crusade against grammar schools, coupled with her overtly sectarian approach to education.

The Minister chooses to put all her efforts into attacking and denying parental choice where that does not fit into her narrow and backward-facing ideology. Rather than working to improve educational standards, she chooses to take a sledgehammer to any parent who dares to dissent from her vision of an educational system where freedom of choice is reserved for only one section of the community.

Let me be clear: if the Minister's proposals go ahead, the only option that some families would have is for their children to attend either a state school, which is fully funded by the taxpayer, or an independent school, which the vast majority of people cannot afford. I do not believe that that is a choice. I, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I am extremely pleased to be able to speak in support of the motion and the SDLP's amendment. Like many other Members, I believe in choice and, more importantly, in freedom. The plan to cut funding is an attack on choice and privilege and is against any financial sense whatsoever. The plan will save very little. In fact, as we heard, it will cost much more. Really, the plan to cut funding is an attack on parents and children.

Mr McCarthy: I wish to draw the Member's attention to his remark that he is for privilege. Will he explain what he meant by that? We are here to try to ensure that every child has equality of opportunity, regardless of his or her background. Privilege should be out the window. Will the Member explain his remark?

Mr Kinahan: I said that the plan to cut funding is an attack on privilege. I did not say that I am for privilege.

The plan is a religious attack, a dogma. If Members look back through history, they will see that that is just one small step from the re-education that has taken place throughout history. Some Members may laugh, but the plan to cut funding is not far away from China's failed great leap forward, the various Soviet Union five-year and seven-year plans, and, even, the Nazis' burning of books. For Members who are much the same age as I am —

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Member of the House to refer to a departmental policy or the direction of a Department as being equivalent to Nazism?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that Members will moderate their language and ensure that they do not use words that cause offence to others.

Mr O'Dowd: Further to that point of order, I ask that the Deputy Speaker asks the Speaker to examine the use of that term in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will certainly do that. Continue, Mr Kinahan.

Mr Kinahan: I referred to that Germanic side purely because of its attack on learning and its burning of books. The dogma that you are forcing on us today is just a small step away from that. I was just about to speak about the killing fields, where again there was re-education. Everywhere in history — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member should resume his seat. All remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

All that we have heard today from Sinn Féin Members is dogma and attacks on the things that they do not like. Last week, the Ulster Unionists stood united against the devolution of policing and justice powers and the

dysfunctional Executive, mainly because of what is happening in education: it is not working. Sinn Féin will not bend to discuss matters or even start talking to the other parties in an attempt to find consensus.

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree with me that the Minister's proposal is not only ill-judged dogma, but very expensive dogma? It has been estimated that her policy may cost between £3 million and £5 million, which is money that the rest of the education budget can ill afford. Indeed, last week there was a debate on capital builds in my constituency, much of which has been delayed because of a supposed shortage of money. The problem is not just the impact that the decision will have on the prep school sector or the individual heartache and difficulties that it will cause for parents and children; it will mean negative ramifications throughout the entire education sector. That is why the Minister's stance is so ill judged and ill conceived.

Mr Kinahan: I agree entirely with what the Member has said. I was in England last weekend, listening to a presentation by one of the top headmasters there during which he spoke about how education must excite a child and make each child his or her own centre of excellence. Education also must teach each child to tolerate, respect and understand. What we have seen today in the Chamber is the complete opposite. The cutting of funding to preparatory schools is an effort to take schooling down — for those Members who remember their maths — to the lowest common denominator, the absolute basics. We must improve education for many, but we must strive for the highest common denominator, find what excites a child and choose the things that are best in society.

Mr Weir touched on the issue of cost, and we know that that is very small compared with the overall education budget. We also know that around 25% of children in Northern Ireland are not receiving a good education. We must examine the current system, choose from it what is excellent and use that in all our schools. My plea today to the Minister is not to destroy the preparatory schools, and for her to keep the funding in place. I support the motion and the SDLP amendment. I ask for the Minister to begin to talk to other Members and to look for consensus on the way forward.

Dr McDonnell: I will be as quick as I can. Time is running out for the debate and I will try to get to the heart of the matter as quickly as possible.

No other issue that I have come across has caused such an outcry, or caused me to receive so many e-mails over the past two to three weeks. Let us be clear about it: this issue appears to parents to have less to do with the welfare of children and — though it pains me say it, Minister — more to do with putting a party political view ahead of the interests of children. Any decision that impacts on the education of children should be taken only after a full consultation has been undertaken in the most robust fashion, so that all possible implications of that decision are outlined and understood.

Mr Ross: The House has already heard the economic, educational and libertarian arguments against the Minister's decision. The Member mentioned consultation. Does he agree that this is an issue that is novel, cross-cutting and contentious and, therefore, should be decided by the Executive? Does he also agree that if the Minister decides to go ahead with her proposal, against the wishes of the Executive, it could lead her into very difficult circumstances?

Dr McDonnell: I do not share the expertise that the intervener has about Executive matters. It is something of a mystery to me, and I am not quite sure how they do business there. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: However, if the Member believes that the Executive could sort out the issue, for God's sake let them do so.

The decision to withdraw funding immediately from the preparatory departments of grammar schools is another example of clumsy decision-making by the Department of Education. We tabled our amendment because we are deeply concerned at the way in which the decision was taken. We believe in equality and fairness, but we also believe that any decision about education and educational provision for our children should be taken after full consultation with all those involved. All the implications — educational, social, financial and others — should be thoroughly discussed and defined, within a reasonable time frame, before we make a decision and impose it.

Mr D Bradley: Does the Member agree that the Sinn Féin position is hypocritical? All teachers' salaries in fee-charging post-primary schools in the South are paid by the state, but not one Sinn Féin TD is on record in Dáil Éireann as calling for the withdrawal of that funding. So much for an Ireland of equals, when there is one policy for the South and a totally different one for the North.

Dr McDonnell: I thank Dominic for his intervention and accept his point.

As Members outlined, the decision was taken without consultation. We have enough problems in the education system to do us for some time. A series of things should be done, such as building new schools and amalgamating schools with falling numbers.

Crises are avoided when people with detailed knowledge of the issue are affected and brought into the decision-making process. Good, positive working partnerships produce progressive politics, which can benefit people and bring everybody with us.

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: I will not be able to finish.

Mr Bell: Mr Deputy Speaker might give you an extra minute.

I agree with the idea of consensus. Does the Member agree that the Minister should listen to the advice of her own officials from the South Eastern Education and Library Board, who have told her that her proposals are unrealistic, unachievable, unworkable, will cost an extra £5 million, will affect children with special educational needs and will disadvantage the Protestant community?

Dr McDonnell: I will not pick on the Minister; I will pick on the issues. All Ministers could listen to all Members a bit better.

There has been a severe weakening in the Department's relationship with school representatives and parents over the transfer issue. The decision to withdraw funding from preparatory departments further compounds that and causes unnecessary hostility, suspicion and distrust. All that responsible parents want is the best for their children. Reform of early education is needed and must be done for the benefit of the children, not in the context

of a dogma or a mandatory position. We must negotiate, move and improve the situation.

Aside from the consultation, I suggest that parents, to a large extent, have a right for their children to complete their primary education at their existing schools. An increase in fees will mean that preparatory departments will close, and, in some cases, I am not sure that state schools will be able to cope. The Minister's proposals will severely disrupt 2,500 children.

We need a serious debate on whether the state should subsidise private schools. All Members across the Chamber may not agree with that, but we need to deal with that debate in its own context.

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

Dr McDonnell: In the current context, a unilateral and arbitrary decision has been taken without meaningful consultation.

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

Dr McDonnell: Parents and children are frightened and distressed.

The Minister of Education (Ms Ruane): Go raibh maith agat. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis labhairt ar an tairiscint ar an mholadh cistiú a aistarraingt ó rannóga ullmhúcháin.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion on the proposal to withdraw funding from preparatory departments. I want to set out the clear rationale for that proposal. I also want to provide an assurance that I will fully consider the views of respondents to the consultation on the proposed changes to the common funding formula for 2010-11 and the responses to the Department's equality impact assessment on the proposal before I reach a final decision. Members will be aware that the closing date for responses to the public consultation on the equality impact assessment was 4 March 2010. My Department is analysing those responses and will compile and publish a summary response document.

4.45 pm

John O'Dowd asked whether any parties responded to the proposals: none of them did. The UUP, the SDLP and the DUP did not respond.

Mr Shannon: I did.

The Minister of Education: Jim Shannon responded as an individual Member. The Alliance Party did not respond either. Members have been asking for consultation. We welcome consultation through the equality impact assessment, which is the place to record the full views of all the political parties. I want to put that point on record.

I welcome the SDLP's clarification that it has not departed from its 40-year-old policy on academic selection. It should tell that to its partner parties, the UUP and the DUP, on the working group that operates outside the Executive and the Assembly. They use the same argument against our policies on bringing equality to the transfer process through transfer 2010 by claiming that there has been insufficient consultation on the proposals and that change takes time. Change does take time, and far be it from me to give anyone a history lesson — I do not want to do that — but, in case Members do not know, prior to 1994, the state provided 50% of the funding to preparatory departments. In 1994, it provided 40%, and, in 1998, the figure was 30%. The Bain report was produced in 2006. Therefore, people who argue that there is not enough time or that change must be managed should study the history of the matter.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No; I will not.

The same applies to the transfer argument. The UUP, the DUP and the SDLP got together to say that we need more time to manage change. Previously, I brought to the House a 'News Letter' article from 1964 that detailed how the Ulster Government were moving quickly to replace transfer tests. I was two years old at the time, and I am now 47. Therefore, the SDLP's arguments ring hollow.

We received a considerable number of responses to the public consultation, and I thank everyone who took the time to respond. At this stage, I am not in a position to make a final decision on the proposal because I want to consider carefully the analysis of the responses before reaching my decision.

Some Members opposite made comments about the Irish-medium sector. Any child can access an Irish-medium or integrated school and is not required to pay a tuition fee. That is what I, and the United Nations, mean by equality of access. Preparatory departments inherently

do not provide equality of access, because attendance is dependent on a parent's or family's ability to pay.

For Members' information, there are 16 preparatory departments in the North of Ireland. The annual fees for one child are: Methodist College costs £3,295, Victoria College costs £3,180, Campbell College costs £3,025, Bloomfield Collegiate costs £3,015, Belfast Royal Academy costs £2,960, Royal Belfast Academical Institution costs £2,850, Bangor Grammar costs £2,777, Wallace High School costs £2,750, Strathearn School costs £2,685, Sullivan Upper School costs £2,550; Dalriada School costs £2,513, Royal School Armagh costs £2,500, Friends' School costs £2,459, Down High School costs £2,300, Regent House School costs £2,200, and Glenlola Collegiate costs £1,900.

Each of those preparatory departments, which are attended by some 2,400 children, charges a fee to parents to allow their children access to the school. Those fees are substantial: in 2008-09, they ranged from £1,900 to £3,295 per pupil. That represents an average of £2,700 per pupil.

Níl rogha ag páistí nach féidir lena dtuismitheoirí na táillí a íoc cé acu ba mhian leo freastal ar rannóg ullmhúcháin nó nár mhian.

We have heard a lot about parental choice today. My colleague John O'Dowd made the point that the children of parents who are not in a position to pay those fees do not have a choice as to whether they wish to attend or have access to a preparatory department. That clearly creates inequality of access for children. I would have liked to have heard Members opposite talking about choice for all those children.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Education: No, I will not give way.

We have heard a lot from the Members opposite, but we have not heard about the choice for the 75,000 children in the controlled sector and the 78,000 children in the maintained sector.

The report of the independent strategic review of education, known as the Bain report, which was published in December 2006 — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Minister, please resume your seat.

Most Members have been very good up to now. I ask you to allow the Minister to be heard and to make no more remarks from a sedentary position.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The report of the independent strategic review of education, known as the Bain report, which was published in December 2006 — prior to my coming into office — considered the strategic planning and organisation of the schools estate and made a number of recommendations. One of that report's key recommendations was that the rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed. I have a clear duty to consider all the recommendations in that report, and the recommendation on preparatory departments is no different. That is what I am doing now, because doing nothing is not an option.

In his report, Professor George Bain, referring to the distribution of the education budget, stated:

"Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity."

The issue of equity and equality of access was also highlighted by the Equality Commission in its document 'Every Child an Equal Child', which was published in 2008. It stated that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education. In respect of its position on the funding of preparatory departments, the commission stated:

"Preparatory departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependent on parents/families ability to pay additional substantial costs."

In light of the Bain report's recommendation, my Department commissioned the Department of Finance and Personnel's business consultancy service in January 2009 to undertake an independent review of that funding and to provide a report of its findings. The last time that I looked, the Minister of Finance and Personnel was from the party opposite. That

independent report, which was provided to me in September 2009, concluded:

"that funding provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee is not consistent with the principle of equity in the distribution of resources. We have therefore recommended that DE consider the withdrawal of such funding."

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has already made it clear to the Minister of Education that her proposals are novel and contentious. Is it in order that she mislead the House by trying to pretend that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is anything but against her proposals? He has told her in writing that he disagrees with her proposals and wants them brought to the Executive. Is it in order for her to deliberately mislead the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Bell, you have twice accused the Minister of misleading the House. I ask that you withdraw your remarks.

Mr Bell: I will not withdraw my remarks. The Minister of Finance and Personnel has given to her, in writing, the fact that he disagrees with her proposal and wants it brought to the Executive.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Bell, you are now challenging the authority of the Chair. I am giving you one last opportunity to withdraw your remarks.

Mr Bell: I cannot stand in the way of the truth.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As the Member has refused to withdraw his remarks, I order him, under Standing Order 65, to withdraw immediately from the Chamber and its precincts for the remainder of today's sitting.

The Member withdrew from the Chamber.

The Minister of Education: Tá béim á cur ar chothromas arís agus arís eile, agus ní féidir neamhaird a thabhairt air.

Again and again the issue of equity of access has been highlighted. It cannot be ignored. However, before reaching a decision on the recommendation, I asked for an equality impact assessment to be undertaken to ensure that all aspects of equality are fully considered. I welcome the significant response to the public consultation exercise, which demonstrates that the views of those most affected by the

proposal have been sought and captured through the consultation process.

I wish to make a brief comment on Dominic Bradley's remarks. The EQIA consultation period was eight weeks: it began on 7 January and ended on 4 March, and is consistent with relevant requirements. Some Members questioned whether the consultation process meets the Sedley requirements on the standards of proper consultation. Those requirements state that consultation is undertaken when the proposals are still in a formative stage; that adequate information is given to enable consultees to respond properly; that adequate time is provided in which to respond; and that the decision-maker gives conscientious consideration to the response to the consultation.

I believe that the consultation adheres to those requirements, and I will not make a decision on the proposal until I have considered fully the responses to the consultation process. The number of responses received demonstrates that the process has successfully provided adequate time and information for consultees to respond.

I turn now to the issues raised in the motion. I am aware that some Members may feel that the proposal is contentious and should be considered by the Executive. I disagree. In many cases, although proposals to withdraw public funding will generate a degree of political and media attention, that does not deem them to be contentious. To continue subsidising what is largely private education, available only to a select number of children whose parents can pay the necessary fees, should be considered contentious.

Whether the decision is for the Executive or not, I would be seriously concerned if all matters that some Members deem contentious were to be brought before the Executive. It would render the Executive unworkable. The Executive should consider issues on an exception basis, not matters that are for an individual Minister to consider with meaningful consultation.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Minister read the ministerial code, which refers to issues that can be referred to the Executive and to her duties? To say otherwise, as she has said in the House today, is a misrepresentation of what the ministerial code requires the Minister to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, but I am sure that the Minister has been listening.

The Minister of Education: The inspectorate's view is that prep schools' attainment levels are not due to better teaching or management in preparatory departments, but are more likely due to other socio-economic factors. In 2007-08, only 0.24% of pupils attending preparatory departments were entitled to free school meals. It is likely that pupils attending preparatory departments would have achieved similar results in a primary school.

5.00 pm

Let us look at the pupil:teacher ratios: in maintained schools it is 20.5:1; in controlled schools it is 20.4:1; and in preparatory departments it is 16.9:1. Are the Members opposite saying that the 75,000 children in the controlled sector and the 78,000 children in the maintained sector do not deserve equality? If they are, then that is very serious. Some Members said that preparatory departments offer children greater social mobility. However, 66% of children who attend preparatory departments live in the top 25% of least-deprived wards, and 2% live in the 25% of most-deprived wards. From those measures, it appears that very few pupils from a socially deprived background attend preparatory departments.

As regards the financial implications of the proposal for the education budget, I have continually said — indeed, I said it in the House earlier — that this is a matter of equality of access; it is not a financial issue. There are sufficient primary schools with surplus places within the locality — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have asked Members repeatedly not to make remarks across the Floor and to refer all comments through the Chair. I will insist on that until the end of the debate.

The Minister of Education: Go raibh maith agat. There are sufficient primary schools with surplus places within the locality of preparatory departments to allow access for all children regardless of their parents' ability to pay. That system ensures that all children are treated equally and provides parents with a choice of schools. My Department will make provision for all children who move to other primary schools; that is an important aspect of the equity issue.

The UN has been invoked on this matter. For the record, the United Nations met me, and spoke to me, about academic selection and article 2 of the first protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Your time is up, Minister.

The Minister of Education: Article 2 of the first protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights protects the rights of parents to have their children educated.

Mr McDevitt: I thank my colleagues in the DUP, the UUP and the Alliance Party for supporting our amendment. The SDLP's intention is to try to focus today's debate on what we perceive to be the fundamental problem, which is a disregard for the due process that is necessary for proper policy to be formulated by the Executive. It is simply not the case that proper consultation has been conducted on this issue. It is simply not the case that this issue does not deserve or warrant proper Executive discussion.

I welcome a lot of what the Minister said. She has presented arguments that are worthy of further debate. The tragedy is that it has taken a motion to bring her to the House for that debate to begin. The Minister can respond to the motion in two ways. She can accept that there are legitimate arguments on both sides of the debate; that those arguments deserve to be better understood; that parents have the right to not have the rug pulled from underneath them in the middle of an academic year; and that children should be at the heart of everything that we do in the House.

When he moved our amendment, Dominic Bradley pointed out that process is not put in place simply to tick an equality agenda box. It is put there so that the interests of those who will be most affected by any policy can be best considered. It is particularly important that process is upheld when the interests in question are those of children. Equality of access is a fundamental and a foundation on which all good education should be built. The SDLP did not propose the amendment to make an ideological point. We did not propose the amendment to take another side in the debate. We proposed the amendment because equality of access deserves to be debated further in the House. We should treasure equality of access.

We should also have the courage to identify the barriers to real equality of access, particularly in primary schools in Northern Ireland. Those barriers are poverty, marginalisation, a legacy of the Troubles and poor parenting. However, the Minister and her Department, and the Assembly, have been distracted for the past four years by chasing headlines through making easy decisions, which win no political capital for the Minister or her party, rather than tackling the fundamental issues and barriers to equality of access to education for all.

I wish that we had spent the past three years debating not a failed exam but the fact that primary schools in this region are still not properly supported and the fact that we still do not put the resource that we should into early years and primary-school education for all our children.

We have not done that; we have done anything but that. We have chased clouds, we have had posturing and we have won headlines. What signal does that send to the children in the Gallery, those watching on the telly and those in working-class communities who deserve better from a Minister with a republican badge?

Dr McDonnell made an important point about the opportunity for progressive politics in the North of Ireland. That opportunity is suffocated by debates such as this; they suck the air out of any possibility of building consensus. We must understand that, in order to effect change, we must be willing to have argument. To have a good argument, we must be willing to consider compromise and consensus.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: No, I will not.

The Minister must know that change is not just a six-letter word. Change requires time, energy and effort.

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

Mr McDevitt: I thank you for your time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call — *[Interruption.]*

I insist that all remarks be made through the Chair. I call Mr Paul Maskey to make a winding-up speech on amendment No 1.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I apologise for not being in the House at the start of the debate. However, what I have heard from other parties does not surprise me. The Minister has outlined that this is not a financial argument; it is about equality. What difference is there between a child who attends a prep school and one who attends an ordinary primary school, an Irish-language school or a school in any other sector in the North of Ireland? There is absolutely no difference except the financial one.

I am bewildered by SDLP Members who talk about equality. Not once does the word “equality” appear in the amendment that that party proposes. We have been lectured before by the SDLP on equality, and we have been lectured by Connall on that subject.

The amendment proposed by my party states that we should await:

“the outcome of the equality impact assessment being undertaken by the Minister of Education”.

That is an important point, and it is why Sinn Féin submitted the amendment.

What are the other parties in the Chamber scared of? Is it the outcome of that assessment? Are they afraid of the truth that could emerge from it? Is that the issue? Why do none of the other parties support my party's amendment? We have heard speeches from all the other parties, but their failure to support our amendment proves that none of them are working towards equality. They should be ashamed of themselves for that.

We have heard statistics being bandied around today. I heard it said that to teach a child through the medium of Irish costs five times more than teaching him through that of English. That is a lot of nonsense. I have not heard worse. Mervyn Storey must be plucking such figures out of the sky. If he was still at school, and if he handed that in as homework, he would have got very low marks.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Maskey: No, I will not.

The big issue is that, when you quote facts and figures, you usually have to do the research — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. When it is clear that a Member does not wish to give way, you must leave it at that.

Mr Storey: The Member is making allegations.

Mr P Maskey: They are not allegations; I am stating facts. When you quote facts and figures, you have to quote sources. The Member did not do that, and he had his chance to speak earlier in the debate. You are the DUP education spokesperson, so shame on you that you did not even take part in the consultation — you did not submit a consultation response. There are people present in the Public Gallery who have kids who are going to prep schools, and you did not even have the decency to take part in the prep school consultation, so shame on you. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is my final warning: remarks must be made through the Chair and in no other way.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The same has to be said of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. Dominic Bradley, I believe, is the SDLP's education spokesperson, but did he take part in the consultation? I think not. That is a question that he has to answer. I am sure that he will respond to the e-mails that every Member received. He should explain to the people in the Public Gallery why he did not feel that it was right for him to take part in the consultation. So there you go.

Although I think that he did clarify his remarks, some of Danny Kinahan's comments seemed to suggest that the decision to withdraw funding is an attack on privilege. He then likened to Naziism some of the decisions that the Minister and the Department took. Nazis, when they were about, thought that they were privileged as well. Therefore, is Danny making a connection between Nazis and being privileged? That is what it sounds like to me, and that is not the signal that the Chamber or any Department should be sending out.

The issue is about parity of esteem and the amount of money that is spent per pupil. It is an important and emotive issue, because when you are putting your children through school, you do the right thing and try to send them to the right school.

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

Mr P Maskey: However, the Minister, as she has said on many occasions, is trying to make every

single school a good school, and that is what we are about.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to colleagues and other Members for taking part in the debate. We heard lots of rhetoric. I want to knock one point on the head; namely, Mr Maskey's comments about who took part in the public consultation. Dominic Bradley, Mervyn Storey and I are members of the Committee for Education, which is a Statutory Committee of the Assembly, and that is where we will be taking part in the consultation, as is right and proper.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Briefly.

Mr McCartney: Is the Member's argument that if his party is represented on a Statutory Committee, it should not take part in, or be barred from being part of, a public consultation?

Mr McCallister: The Member is probably as aware as anyone is that the Minister will not even listen. She spoke about the importance of the public consultation and of listening, yet went on to say that it is not right for the public to subsidise education in prep schools. That very much sounds to me as if she has already made up her mind. It would not surprise many in the Chamber that she is against prep departments, and that is to discriminate against those who make and want to have the choice.

Mr McNarry: Does my colleague think that the Minister can reconcile between parental choice and parental rights? Moreover, does he think that, in the end, she will make that decision herself or pass it over to the United Nations?
[Laughter.]

Mr McCallister: I thank the Member for that useful intervention. It certainly sounded like the Minister was getting direct contact from the UN.

There is no justification for the decision. As Mr McDevitt said, we have so many issues to address in education.

5.15 pm

Mr Shannon: I thank the Member for giving way. I hope that I will not take away too much from his time. Does he agree that the vile attack on prep schools goes right across the social strata and attacks Protestants and Roman Catholics, as well as the rich and the poor? Does he agree that there are people in the Public Gallery who

make a supreme financial sacrifice so that their children can go to those schools, which flies in the face of what the Minister said? Does the Member also agree that Minister Ruane is pursuing an ideology that flies in the face of all that is decent, moral and honest, and that can never be accepted?

Mr McCallister: I agree entirely with the Member.

The Minister laid out the costs that people pay for each of the prep schools throughout Northern Ireland. One has only to listen to the figures to realise the commitment that many of those parents have made. They have made that choice and have made sacrifices. As Mr Shannon rightly pointed out, the issue cuts right across all the divides in Northern Ireland.

One school in the constituency that the Minister and I represent is probably an example of integrated education at its finest, yet she opposes it. The consultation was flawed, as Miss McIlveen stated at the beginning of this debate. Mr O'Dowd said that it was somehow wrong for the DUP, the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP and the Alliance Party to be united on this issue because the UUP voted against the policing and justice proposals last week. The very reason why we voted against policing and justice is that the Minister of Education has failed on every single level. Some Members spoke about the failed policies. The Minister has failed to establish any form of consensus on any policy or movement forward. People are absolutely fed up with debating the issues with the Minister because she does not listen to them: she listens to some magical voice in the UN.

The Minister does not consult, which is why parents and teachers are demoralised with the leadership that the Minister gives to the education sector. That is the reason why we voted against policing and justice. The Executive are dysfunctional, and the Education Minister is the most obvious example of dysfunctionality.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: No. I have been fairly generous with my time and I have heard enough from Sinn Féin on this issue.

Mr O'Dowd talked about prep schools being largely privileged, and he acknowledged the sacrifices that some parents make. However, Sinn Féin's position is ideologically driven.

Most of the parties have accepted the SDLP amendment. Dominic Bradley spoke about different policies, the failures of the Minister and the withdrawal of funding, which will lead to the ludicrous situation of education costing more. If Down High School, a prep school in the constituency that the Minister and I represent, is closed, the surrounding schools will not be able to accommodate some of the children from that prep school. Where will the Minister send those children? Where is the parental choice? When the Minister speaks about equality, it means bringing everybody down; it is not about trying to raise standards or tackling poverty, deprivation and educational underachievement.

My colleague Mr Elliott spoke about how Sinn Féin is isolated in its position. It is encouraging to see such strong cross-party support. Sinn Féin criticised us for trying to work together to find a way forward on transfer. It poured scorn on that, as if there is something wrong with politicians from different parties trying to find a way to clear up a mess and a crisis that was created by the Minister of Education.

Mr Weir: Opponents of the motion indicated that they do not believe that the matter needs to be taken to the Executive or that it is perhaps a matter purely for OFMDFM. Does the Member agree that such failure to bring a controversial issue, pursuant to article 28(10) of a Northern Ireland Act, is the responsibility of the Education Minister? Does he also agree that if the Minister were to fail to bring that matter to the Executive, she would be acting without ministerial authority and would be on the road to court? The Minister has already admitted that the decision will create a financial burden, because she said that the matter is about equity rather than finance. However, adding court costs to the costs to the public purse would be another mistake on top of those that she is already making.

Mr McCallister: I agree with that, and that is the very reason why the issue should go to the Executive. It has been several years since the Executive discussed any education issues. Therefore, she should bring the matter to the Executive so that they can debate it and so that she can get Executive colleagues' views on this controversial issue.

Mr Lunn talked about the many failings in education. He spoke about the chaos with both the transfer test and the early years strategy. He asked about the strategy for

0- to 6-year-olds. We hear about educational underachievement, and we heard from Members around the Chamber that that strategy is one of the surest places from which to start tackling such underachievement. However, where is that strategy? It is nowhere to be seen, yet the only thing that the Minister can think about is attacking prep schools and parents who make a choice and huge sacrifices to send their children to prep schools. She quoted some figures on pupil:teacher ratios, but if we were to close all our prep schools, those figures would surely rise. She does not have the funding to close those schools. The inequality of the funding and the amount of funding that she puts towards Irish-medium education must be addressed. Indeed, Mr Craig made it clear that he did not have an issue with Irish-medium education, but he said that he wants to see equality pursued.

My colleague Mr Kinahan said that this is an attack on choice, and I firmly believe that. It is an attack on choice, and it is an attack on people who want to get their kids off to a good start. It is another form of —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCallister: It is another form of discrimination by Sinn Féin. We had it last week over the farm modernisation scheme from the Minister's colleague who is seated behind her —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr McCallister: — and we have it now today over —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Your time is up.

Mr McCallister: I support the motion as amended.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before putting the Question on amendment No 1, Members should note that, if that amendment is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 2, as its purpose will have been overtaken by the decision on amendment No 1. If that is the outcome, I will proceed to put the Question on the motion as amended.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the Department of Education's decision to withdraw funding from the preparatory departments of grammar schools as demonstrated by the Department's budget proposals for 2010-11; believes that the consultation process undertaken by the Department does not meet with the Sedley requirements on the standards of proper consultation; considers that this proposal is contentious and should be considered by the full Executive; recognises the excellence in terms of attainment achieved by those pupils attending preparatory departments and that the time frame for withdrawal of funding will have an adverse effect on their well-being; believes that the financial implications have not been adequately assessed; and calls on the Minister of Education to enter into discussions immediately with the schools' representatives with a view to determining a solution acceptable to the schools' authorities and the Department.

Adjourned at 5.30 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 16 March 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment Sectoral Format

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Speaker has received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the tenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in environment sectoral format, which was held in the Custom House, Dublin, on 5 March 2010. The statement has been agreed with the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA, who also attended. The Irish Government were represented by John Gormley TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, who chaired the meeting, and I, as Environment Minister, along with the Minister for Social Development, represented the Northern Ireland Executive.

Ministers had a meaningful discussion on the targets for the transposition of the waste framework directive, which is due to be transposed into national law by the end of the year, and on waste policy developments in each jurisdiction. The directive requires a significant increase in reuse and recycling rates for a wide range of waste streams, most notably household waste and construction and demolition waste. Ministers noted the challenges posed for both Administrations in transposing the directive.

Ministers welcomed a presentation by the chairperson of the North/South market development steering group (NSMDSG) and proposals for a joint work programme to be implemented in the short to medium term, which will help to create synergies between the market development programmes in both

jurisdictions and exploit economies of scale in the market for recycled materials. Ministers noted that the group is focusing initially on the markets for bulky waste, such as furniture and electrical goods, on quality protocols for dealing with various types of waste and on case studies on recycling best practice.

The Council received a progress report on the repatriation of illegally dumped cross-border waste. Ministers noted the steps taken to date to ensure the removal of waste from the first two sites at Slattinagh, County Fermanagh, and near Trillick, County Tyrone, in line with the framework agreement. They also noted that work on the site is expected to start by the end of September or in early October 2010.

Ministers welcomed the continuing joint concerted enforcement actions to target shipments of waste and noted that future action is planned.

The Council received a progress report on work by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) on developing a common set of environmental indicators and on research. A paper on environmental research outlining future joint action, focusing on agreed key thematic areas and strategic co-operation, will be presented to Ministers at their next meeting.

Ministers also noted that the EPA and NIEA are working together to facilitate contacts and formal linkages between environmental researchers in each jurisdiction to encourage access to EU funding, with particular focus on the INTERREG and seventh framework (FP7) programmes. That work is being taken forward in association with Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland, which support FP7 participation in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Council noted that the river basin management plans in Northern Ireland were published in December 2009 and that local

authorities in Ireland are adopting those plans. The Ministers welcomed a presentation by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the river basin management plans and the programme of measures for their co-ordinated implementation, including the wider environmental issues that will need to be addressed. The Council agreed to meet again in environment sectoral format in October 2010.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned illegal waste, which is clearly important not just for the Environment Committee but for the wider public. One of the concerns is that the courts system and enforcement methods are perhaps not as good as they should be in dealing with those who have been found guilty of illegal dumping. Has the Minister had any conversations with the courts to ensure that those people are fined? Secondly, given the high profile of illegal waste dumping, will he indicate whether there has been a decrease in the number of incidents of illegal dumping since it has become such a high-profile activity?

The Minister of the Environment: I am introducing a new waste Bill to the House, and, in my opinion, that will certainly give the courts greater flexibility and allow for heavier fines to be imposed on those who illegally dump waste. I think that we can meet that challenge, and I trust that the courts, which have their independence, will deal forcefully with individuals who break the law in that way. Indeed, many of those people are making huge profits from doing so.

It is our view that there are fewer incidents of people being involved in commercially illegally dumping waste. I certainly believe that a lot of the cross-border activity that went on for a number of years has diminished greatly in recent years. There has been a significant reduction in that type of activity.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How significant a challenge do the waste framework directive and NILAS targets pose to both jurisdictions? Are examples of good practice being exchanged between both Departments and Ministers? Are more materials being recycled this year than last year in all 26 local councils in the North? I know that, in my council area of Ballymoney, more materials are

being added to the blue waste stream. Is that being replicated across the North?

The Minister of the Environment: The targets for the waste framework directive are challenging, and I sometimes think that they could be even more challenging. There is a 50% target for recycling our household waste by 2020 and a 70% target for recycling construction and demolition waste. I think that those targets can be met. Last year we recycled 34.4% of our household waste, which is a rise on the 1999 rate of 4.9 %. Once again, I pay tribute to the public for rising to the challenge. If we can continue to keep the focus on those issues, we can continue to develop recycling. I encourage people to go to the website www.rethinkwasteni.org, where they can identify how they can better handle their waste streams. That new website, which has recently been launched, will encourage further recycling of waste.

It is clear that in Northern Ireland, year on year, we are continuing to push up our recycling towards the target that has been set. We should set out to overachieve and try to exceed the targets, because recycling makes sense environmentally and financially. Considerable savings are to be made from recycling, and a considerable number of jobs are to be created in and supported by the recycling industry. Some 3,000 people are employed in the recycling industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the Minister's statement. Can he advise the House on the movement of the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency towards a common set of environmental indicators? Will those indicators remain common to the indicators that are used in England, Scotland and Wales? It is important to understand how our regulatory regime is working and how effective it is in comparison with other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Minister of the Environment: The environmental indicators will be fairly common to those that are being set and expected of us by various EU directives. In that respect, we will continue to work not only with the Environmental Protection Agency in the Republic of Ireland but with the relevant environmental agencies in the devolved institutions. Meetings between those agencies take place regularly to ensure that the environmental standards that we adopt are

similar to those adopted across the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to a presentation by the chairperson of the North/South market development steering group and to proposals for a joint work programme to be developed in the short to medium term. Can the Minister give some indication of the level of co-operation and the initiatives and measures that his Department has taken in conjunction with DETI and, in the South, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to advance the green economy, which is seen as one means of creating jobs during the credit crunch?

The Minister of the Environment: Considerable work has been done with DETI, particularly on the renewable energy sector. Northern Ireland has vast opportunities to harness renewable energy, including wind, tidal and wave energy. The SeaGen project, for example, is supported by ESB Independent Energy, and many other generating companies outside Northern Ireland are involved in it. DETI and DOE have been involved in it. DOE has asked marine scientists to investigate the work that is being done there, because it is believed that, if tidal generation can work in Strangford Lough, which is one of the most sensitive marine environments, a tidal generator can be put almost anywhere. Intense work has been done on that scheme.

More widely, DETI has a set a target in the strategic energy framework for 40% of electricity to come from renewable energy sources by 2020. That will require the assistance and co-operation of the Department of the Environment, and it is critical that, in all that we do in Northern Ireland, Departments do not operate as silos or have silos within them. A collectivity and a connection is required between Departments and between the sections within Departments so that everything is drawn together to act for the common good. I firmly believe that reducing our carbon footprint and increasing the amount of energy that we can gain from renewable sources is for the good of everyone.

10.45 am

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for his statement. I wish to pick up on the previous question and answer. At a future North/South Ministerial

Council meeting in environmental format, do Ministers intend to discuss the harmonisation of the planning and regulatory framework, particularly for renewables? That is necessary to ensure that investors have a common area on the island of Ireland in which to invest, rather than the lack of economy of scale forcing them to make choices and lose opportunities. Approximately what proportion of the recycling market will be taken up by bulky goods, and, bearing that in mind, was consideration given to trying to advance broader all-island co-operation on recycling?

The Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland has its own set of planning policies and guidelines. Those planning policies are neither British nor Irish: they are, as they should be, Northern Irish. The more local we make the planning policies, the better we can meet local market requirements and needs. Given that certain decisions made during direct rule did not benefit the planning system in Northern Ireland, fundamental changes must be made. We need a much more robust planning system that is responsive to the needs of renewable energy, business development and so forth. Whatever those needs happen to be, we must press ahead and respond to them. I will, therefore, jealously guard the independence of the Northern Ireland planning system.

As for potential joint initiatives, there has been fairly in-depth consideration of producing an all-Ireland paper mill. However, as the correct market conditions do not exist at present, we do not propose to proceed. A great deal of the paper that is gathered for recycling currently goes to Dollingstown, where the Huhtamaki factory employs 200 people and produces 50% of the egg cartons for all of the UK and Ireland. Waste that previously went to landfill sites, where it produced methane and leachate, is now recycled over and over again for the public benefit, and jobs have been created. Furthermore, down South, considerable work has been done to address the issue of bulky goods. We hope to learn from some of that work and develop our own approach.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his short statement this morning, and I particularly welcome the detail on tackling waste. Given the fact that his time was, no doubt, wasted by travelling down South to bring back such a short statement to the House, does he agree that the issue of North/South bodies should

be revisited? Does he also agree that such meetings should be called only when there is an appropriate agenda, as opposed to one on which his report does not run to even one and a half pages?

The Minister of the Environment: Given that my Southern counterpart and I represent Environment Departments, there would be considerable benefit in using technology and modern communication systems to hold discussions. Face-to-face meetings are not always necessary, and I am happy to utilise telecommunications. I offered to do so for the next NSMC meeting, and we will see whether my offer is taken up. Perhaps I am greener than the other Ministers who attended the last meeting. I encourage others to take the opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint and to engage in meetings in a more environmentally sustainable way.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I refer specifically to the part of the Minister's statement that deals with the illegally dumped waste at sites in County Tyrone and County Fermanagh. That waste originated in the South but was dumped, for example, in Trillick. The Minister said that work will begin on the site to remove the waste by the end of September or the start of October 2010. Will he detail the preliminary or preparatory steps have been taken so far?

Secondly, I know that the Minister's statement is on the environment sectoral format. However, I wonder whether road safety typically features at meetings of that character. If it did not feature on the agenda of this NSMC meeting in environmental sector format, does it normally feature?

Thirdly, the meeting was chaired by John Gormley, who is in a bit of political difficulty at the minute. Did the Minister notice whether John Gormley was troubled or whether he was in good form?

The Minister of the Environment: Being the sort of Minister that I am, I will seek to answer all three questions.

Mr Gormley seemed to be in fine form, and he had a good vegetarian lunch after the meeting. He was particularly interested in talking about the processes of incineration and acid hydrolysis, which is a new system by which one can claim chemicals, particularly from wood-based products and items that

are high in cellulose. He was in good enough form. I, however, was not in very good form, because the waste material at Slattinagh and Trillick was supposed to have been taken away by now. That has been put back to September or October. I get impatient about such things, and I expressed my irritation that that has been put back again. A procurement exercise was engaged in and was advertised in the European journal. We are now told that, given the sensitivities of moving the material, the disturbance to the site and the potential for environmental damage, more work needs to be done. I pressed members very heavily to ensure that that work will start in the autumn. I do not want any further delays. The waste should not have been there in the first place, and it needs to be removed in a way that is for the good of the environment.

I do not like to rebuke other Members. However, perhaps Mr McElduff did not pay any attention last week to the Minister with responsibility for roads when he made his NSMC statement. Perhaps Mr McElduff does not pay any attention to that Minister. Road safety was dealt with at the previous NSMC meeting, at which Conor Murphy took the lead and which he spoke to in his statement on NSMC issues to the House. I encourage the Member to pay attention to the Regional Development Minister in future.

Mr Bell: I turn to accessing European funding, and I refer to my local government role as chairperson of the European working group and as a member of the Committee of the Regions and the Special EU Programmes Body. There are opportunities under the seventh framework programme (FP7) and through the inter-regional programme. I agree with my colleague Mr McGlone that there are opportunities, particularly in a recession, to look to areas in which European funding can be brought to Northern Ireland, not only to develop best research practice but to bring funds to Northern Ireland. Will the Minister ensure that every penny that we can bring down from Europe to improve environmental policy — in actual pounds, shillings and pence — will come to Northern Ireland, so that we will never be left in the abysmal situation in which we would have to send back to Europe some of the money that we had the potential to bring to Northern Ireland?

The Minister of the Environment: In environmental research, there are substantial benefits to having sound evidence-based data,

and that is fundamental to making effective decisions in both jurisdictions. We will continue to co-operate with the Environmental Protection Agency in the Republic to help us implement EU environmental legislation, to improve clarity on the state of the environment and the impact of mitigation measures and to ensure high levels of efficiency.

Each jurisdiction already reports to Europe through the use of common indicators on biodiversity and climate change to reflect the condition of our environment. In addition, both agencies must assess the vulnerability of the environment to climate change and are required to take its potential impacts into account when implementing the water framework and other relevant directives. The money that Northern Ireland and the Republic draw down from Europe on those issues will largely be spent in the respective jurisdictions. However, that money can be better used when we collaborate to enhance our interpretation of the directives, the environmental indicators that identify the environmental issues in Northern Ireland and what is expected of us. That is in the interests of both jurisdictions.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. Mr McElduff asked about the repatriation of waste from Fermanagh and Tyrone to the Republic of Ireland. Why has there been such a delay with that? Furthermore, why are Northern Ireland taxpayers footing the bill for 20% of that repatriation?

The Minister of the Environment: The repatriation of that waste is being led by Dublin City Council. The Member's party does not have any political colleagues on that council, and no party in the Chamber has much representation on it any more. I have expressed my unhappiness at the speed at which it is being handled, and I do not want any further delays on that issue, because it is critically important.

Northern Ireland taxpayers are not paying for 20% of the repatriation costs. They are not paying for any of the costs of repatriation but are contributing 20% towards the cost of excavating the site and putting the site in order, with the South paying the remaining 80% of those costs. The South is paying all the costs of repatriation.

It was deemed that Northern Ireland had some responsibility for the waste that was coming across the border because we had not kept a

close enough eye on the situation, and I agree with that. As an Assembly Member, I wrote to the then direct rule Minister Angela Smith, who was not remotely interested in dealing with the issue, and, ultimately, I took the issue to Europe and got the response that helped to kick-start the current process. We have a responsibility because we did not rigorously enforce waste management and allowed a great deal of illegal tipping to occur. However, the vast majority of the costs for the repatriation of the waste are being covered by the Irish Government through Dublin City Council.

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the statement and the Minister's commitment to renewable energy, a low-carbon island and more research into sustainability. Will the Minister tell the House what conversations have taken place at an NSMC level on potential research into climate change and its impact on the island of Ireland? Furthermore, what proposals, if any, has the NSMC to introduce an all-island strategy to address the short-, medium- and long-term implications of climate change across the island?

The Minister of the Environment: There are no current or future plans for engagement in that area. Sustainable development is headed up by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and we fully co-operate with that Department on it. It is in everyone's interest and covers a wide range of issues including climate change.

Mr Gallagher: I was touched by the comments of Barry McElduff. Does the Minister agree with me that they probably have something to do with the fact that Mr McElduff's party, like the Green Party, are very small in number in Dáil Éireann?

11.00 am

Furthermore, I welcome the Minister's report on the situation at Slattinagh in Garrison and Moneygar in Trillick. He said that he battled strongly for a date for work to start on those sites. That is the first time in the Assembly that we have heard about a start date, which is welcome because many people have been concerned about the situation for years. The Minister said that those sites were the "first two sites" —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member get to his question?

Mr Gallagher: Will the Minister name the other sites that are due for similar treatment?

The Minister of the Environment: I do not intend to be drawn into slagging off other political parties in the Chamber about their lack of representation in the Dáil or the fact that their representation dropped by 20% at the last election. I will not engage in that sort of activity today. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. We are talking about the repatriation of waste only this morning.

The Minister of the Environment: That is a European issue, and with Sinn Féin having lost its European seat south of the border at the last election, I am surprised that its Members want to raise the issue.

As for the repatriation of waste, a further 18 sites have been identified. Some people have raised concerns with me that there may be other sites. I encourage any Member or member of the public with information about waste from the Republic of Ireland being dumped here illegally to inform us so that we can pursue the people responsible. If there are sites on which waste has been illegally dumped of which we are not aware, I ask that people ensure that we get information about them. We need to ensure that such waste is properly dealt with and that the environment is not damaged by the resultant leachates and methane.

Private Members' Business

European Funding

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose 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 F McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the important contribution that European funding makes to communities; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in setting the priorities for any future funding from Europe.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle agus a chairde. I support the motion and the amendment.

European funding has been a lifeline to a number of organisations and groups down through the years, particularly those from the community and voluntary sector. It has made an important contribution to the delivery of much-needed front line services in local communities and has created real benefits on the ground. It has always been important that local key delivery organisations and all those who work at a grass-roots level in communities are part of the decision-making process when priorities for funding, such as that from Europe, are set. That is more important now than ever before, as we see a squeeze in public funding and the phasing out of European regional aid beyond 2013.

The strategic aims of Peace I and Peace II were to promote reconciliation, deliver projects that would underpin peace and reconciliation objectives and create the conditions in which the transformation of society from conflict to peace would be achievable. The benefits of that European funding can be seen at interfaces, where it has allowed relationships to be built by people and communities that live along divides. That has produced dividends by maintaining relative peace for many years. We now need to build on that.

Local district partnerships, funding bodies and Departments were all responsible for planning and organising the delivery of projects. Throughout Peace I and Peace II, European funding made a positive impact on communities in the North and the border regions.

No matter where we go, projects thrive, delivering much-needed services to communities. Many areas had no infrastructure, community or other, and it was Peace I and Peace II that allowed much of the infrastructure to grow. Services such as local youth clubs, crèches, community health facilities and bigger economic projects for the community not only delivered employment but built capacity for thousands of people across the North and in the border areas.

As I said earlier, the European Union has been a major player in funding community and voluntary organisations, through schemes such as the European social fund, Peace III, and INTERREG IVa, IVb and IVc, to name but a few. Some organisations and groups have claimed that the process is over-bureaucratic and that that has caused some problems. However, there are other concerns, as the situation with INTERREG IVa suggests. INTERREG IVa is a cross-border programme that focuses on developing a dynamic economy, supporting infrastructure and promoting innovative ways in which to address specific cross-border problems. Applications and multi-annual plans (MAPs) were submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in 2007 and 2008, and in January 2009, groups received indicative letters of offer. In June 2009, SEUPB informed the cross-border local authority groups that the review of the Treasury green book would need to be taken into account during any assessment of applications from the respective groups.

The main feature of that was the need for the groups to submit business cases for each individual element of the MAPs. SEUPB undertook to issue a template for the required business case by the beginning of September 2009. At a subsequent meeting with SEUPB on 3 September 2009, the groups were informed that it had reviewed the entire application process, individual applications were now required and a business case template would not be forthcoming. The cross-border organisations and the lead implementing councils have been working with the project teams, which comprise nominated officers from each participating council, to collate detailed

information and to translate each element of the MAPs into individual project proposals.

All applications have now been submitted to SEUPB for the next stages of the approvals process. However, SEUPB has suggested that a number of projects will be rejected. That is an area of concern that needs to be dealt with. Decisions that will result in applications being refused need to be transparent and open to scrutiny. Some groups are unhappy with how INTERREG IVa has dealt with the process.

We still do not exploit the other available funding streams in the way in which we could. The banks have failed to draw down moneys from the European Investment Bank, and there has been a lack of tapping into the joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises (JEREMIE) and joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas (JESSICA) initiatives.

The Europe 2020 strategy, which has been published, will be signed off at the European Council's meeting in Brussels in June, and member states will have an opportunity to have an input. Discussions on the future scope and shape of the EU budget between 2013 and 2020 will be high on the agenda this year. That is why we need to start the consultation process with stakeholders now.

Eurocities, which is the network of the largest European cities, is an important consultative body for EU institutions. It is developing a lobby paper on the potential shape of future EU funds and is making the case for a strong city dimension, given that 80% of Europe's population lives in cities, and cities are the source of most poverty and need. Moreover, given that less funding will be available and the available funding must spread further, Eurocities believes that EU funding should be people-focused and place-focused. We should adopt an integrated local development approach to funding similar to the old Urban I programme for west Belfast and the Shankill that targets places and focuses on need, as opposed to the whole NI programme, for which there would be designated EU funding areas. That is an important point, because it means that future priorities would be based on need.

The future cohesion policy is also important. Funding should be for all regions in Europe, not only the poorest, because all member states, regardless of their GDP, have poor pockets. GDP

should not be the main factor in determining funding. We need to be part of the debate now.

It is important that the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) begins consultation with stakeholders sooner rather than later. Funding priorities need to be based on objective need, not on the priorities of particular Departments. It is clear that other cities and regions in Europe are developing think pieces and early plans for the areas on which they feel that they should spend future EU funds. Some positive overtures have been made that suggest that the North could be eligible for Peace IV funding if a strong enough case were made and if the will were there to promote it.

Mr Attwood: I beg to move the following amendment: Insert at end

“; believes that opportunities for inter-jurisdictional EU funded projects have not been fully developed; and further calls on the NSMC and BIC to assess and identify where such funding opportunities exist including in the economic, education and innovation sectors.”

We support the motion and welcome the support of the Member who proposed the motion for the amendment.

The amendment is very specific. The SDLP's view, which is shared by more people than just us, is that the North is lacking when it comes to accessing European R&D moneys, particularly those that are accessed through joint inter-jurisdictional bids. We need to correct that.

When I last spoke in the Chamber in the presence of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, it was to make certain points about ways in which to develop and accelerate North/South co-operation for the benefit of people on both sides of the border and for all the citizens of the island. I made the point that there was a senior person in an economic agency on the island who believed that Ireland had only 10 years to make North/South co-operation work to its full potential, otherwise Dublin would lose out and Belfast would lose out more. On that occasion, I told the Minister that I would tell him privately who that person was, with the intention, as I saw it, that a conversation could take place between the Minister and that person so that he could more deeply and fully understand the significance of what that person was saying. I repeat that offer to the Minister today.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): You have not told me.

Mr Attwood: I said that I would tell you privately if you asked. I repeat that offer today.

In my view, unless the Northern Ireland Government accelerate the North/South opportunities that exist, as that person said, Dublin will lose out and Belfast will lose out more. The nature of the global market is such that we are going to experience competition not just from the Far East and China but from South America, where a billion people are positioning themselves in that market through their Governments. That will mean that, on the far side of the recession, the global market will pass us by, whether we like it or not.

The motion identifies one of the opportunities that exist, and one opportunity on which, as the SDLP sees things, we are failing to act. A €50 billion fund for research and development is available under the seventh framework programme, to which the Minister's colleague Mr Poots referred in his statement. However, bids to that fund must come from more than one member state. Therefore, such bids must be inter-jurisdictional in nature. The Irish Government set a target of accessing €600 million from that €50 billion fund. To maximise the opportunities so to do, they appointed staff in every Department to identify and work up proposals whereby the Irish state, with other member states, would access that fund. To date, the Irish Government have been successful in 60 different projects.

The question, therefore, arises: what have our Government been doing to access moneys from that fund? Have Departments appointed anyone to work up proposals to access that sort of funding? As far as I am aware, they have not. Have our Government set a target similar to that set by the Irish Government to access, say, €200 million? As far as I am aware, they have not.

When it comes to developing projects in order to access that €50 billion programme, there is only a handful of projects for which the Irish Government have been able to get a partner in the North, be it a private business partner or a university. The Northern Ireland Government have worked on less than a handful of projects.

11.15 am

We have the situation in which there is a €50 billion programme. The Irish Government have a target for what they want to access from that programme. They are looking for partners and are finding them in other member states, but not in the North. Meanwhile, in the North, very little has been happening with respect to working up bids for the same programme.

Mr Savage: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way in a second.

Those, unfortunately, are the facts. The SDLP probed the matter and that is the evidence that was found. It is corroborated by our Government's own publications. In 2008, the Northern Ireland Executive published the 'Priorities for European Engagement'. That document identified that the seventh framework programme for R&D was one of their priorities, and outlined what those priorities would be. I urge Members to read it, because it is far from impressive. It outlines the key stages and milestones, the timeline, and the update position over a certain time frame.

If one examines the original programme alongside the updated report that was published at the end of 2009, one will see that, lo and behold, the document published in 2008 and the report published in 2009, giving the update on those priorities, were exactly the same. There was nothing new in the updated report; it just regurgitated what had been said a year previously, except that it was worse than that. One of the small priorities that our Government had set in accessing the seventh framework moneys had been delayed because there were issues around a recruitment competition to appoint a member of staff to represent us in Europe. The consequence was that that would not be done until August 2009: I wonder whether it is still to be done. That suggests to me that when the Irish Government were gung ho for accessing that money, and have tried to do so through 60 different projects, and when they are looking for partner organisations in the North, our Government, in their own publication, came up with something that frankly adds up to very little.

I think that there is a pattern. When our Government engage with Europe, they tick boxes; they do not actually get their heads around how to access the moneys. We have an opportunity to access €50 billion, and the

Irish Government are crying out for partner organisations, universities or private businesses in the North with which to work, yet we have had only a handful of six or seven projects to access that money in the past couple of years. That is why the SDLP's amendment is so specific. It states that money is available and that we are not doing enough to access it.

I will give way.

Mr Savage: I agree with the Member. I have had some experience of this. There are many projects in Northern Ireland that firms want to progress. However, every time firms meet with people to discuss the projects, it is like hitting a stone wall. Nobody wants to know. Some of the people involved are in very high places. I do not want to name names, but I could do so and embarrass them.

The last time that I met with one of the firms, it was to get word back inside a few weeks. That was four months ago, and it has still not heard anything. However, this can be done, and I am glad to hear that from my colleague from South Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is a very long intervention.

Mr Savage: There are many European funding opportunities for small businesses in Northern Ireland, but they do not get any encouragement.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for those comments, and I will buy him a satnav.

The Minister knows that that is not good evidence.

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

Mr Attwood: I ask the Minister not only to respond at the end of the debate but to ask Invest NI and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to explain that disturbing amount of evidence.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Attwood: There is much evidence of the lack of access to moneys that are readily available.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that interventions should be succinct and to the point.

I call Mr Peter Weir, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel (Mr Weir): Although I am the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I will not speak in that capacity.

I welcome the debate on EU funding, which is an important subject. However, as I listened to the exchange between Mr Attwood and Mr Savage, I wondered whether the debate has enough men with no name to fill several Clint Eastwood movies. I will try to keep my remarks focused.

Mr Shannon: 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: I will not attempt to identify anyone in the Chamber in any of those capacities.

The DUP supports the motion and the idea of trying to ensure the maximum level of consultation. All of us, from whatever direction we approach the issue, want to ensure that we get the maximum amount out of Europe and that we have the maximum amount of spend to benefit our communities. As regards the amendment, we see merit in anything that boosts and maximises inter-jurisdictional and inter-regional EU funding. I do not necessarily go along with some of Mr Attwood's almost apocalyptic references or the suggestion that we should rush headlong towards North/South arrangements.

Mr Savage: Will the Member give way?

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: I will give way briefly if I will be able to speak again before my five minutes are up.

Mr Savage: The firm that I mentioned did not seek money, but it wanted help to research and develop its project. The problem is that the people who should be providing access to the funding do not have a clue what they are talking about.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: I assume that the Member is not referring to the Chamber when he talks about people who do not have a clue what they are talking about.

I say to Mr Savage and others that I want the maximum amount of inter-jurisdictional assistance possible, whether that takes the form of advice or financial help. My concern is that the Members opposite have a narrow focus.

There is a whole host of inter-jurisdictional relationships within the British Isles, and there is a whole host of North/South and east-west projects that can be undertaken. We should not close our minds to projects that involve Northern Ireland and other European regions.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Member not accept that regardless of what inter-jurisdictional drawdown we look at, we still underperform as a region? I agree with him that we should look to co-operate and draw down money from everywhere possible.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: I will leave it to others to assess underperformance, but we should always look to perform better. A number of years ago, when I was first elected to my local council, I was involved with the Connect project, which comprised a number of councils in the greater Belfast area. It ran a range of exchange programmes with Stockholm in Sweden, Rybnik in Poland and Vilnius in Lithuania. That was a good example of people working together across different countries. We must take a wide view on the matter.

I am a convinced unionist from a party that includes some members who are sceptical about Europe. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that major financial benefits have flowed from Europe. The amount of public sector funding that we received from Europe dwarfs anything that we received from anywhere else in the world. I congratulate our Members of the European Parliament, from whatever parties across the political spectrum, on the important role that they played in helping to secure those funds.

However, there is no doubt that there have been problems with some of the funding, and, as has been indicated, those are likely to worsen over the next few years as pressures increase. Because the European Union has expanded into eastern Europe, it has become ever more difficult for us to make our case. The wealth of Northern Ireland, and even of the Republic of Ireland, compares favourably with that of former communist countries where the standard of living is a lot lower. There is no doubt that we will be up against an increasingly tight financial regime. The market seems to be expanding ever eastwards.

Mr A Maginness: I accept the Member's point; he is absolutely correct. However, we need to

target more carefully the programmes from which we seek European funding.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel: The Member makes a valid point. We must ensure that we get the maximum bang for our buck. The Member, as Chairperson of the Enterprise Committee, along with me, as Deputy Chairperson of the Finance Committee, recently met representatives of SEUPB to try to push those sorts of issues. I am concerned about indications that there will be a high failure rate in respect of the submissions that we have made. That was presented as the norm throughout Europe.

It is questionable whether we have spent all that money as wisely as we should over the years. When Peace money initially arrived in Northern Ireland, there was a sense that we did not know what to do with it. That led to issues of imbalance and the funding of projects that were not sustainable. That is why there must be co-ordination, led by Government Ministers, to ensure that European money levered into Northern Ireland is spent strategically. As the proposer of the motion indicated, the concerns of the community must be taken on board. When good projects can be funded at a local level, we must ensure that that money reaches them.

I support the motion, and my party will not divide the House on the amendment. I add one caveat: to ensure that projects operate perfectly, let us remember that they are designed on a Europe-wide basis.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I should have declared an interest as a member of Belfast City Council and the West Belfast Partnership Board.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That has been noted.

Mr McNarry: Among the European bodies that help to develop EU policy is the European Committee of the Regions, known as COR. Two years after COR policies become directives, the Westminster Parliament enacts them as UK legislation. Some 75% of all our legislation now has its origins in the European Union.

You would think, Mr Deputy Speaker, that people who are nominated to represent Northern Ireland on COR would never miss an opportunity to put our case, to stand up for Northern Ireland and to look after our interests. However, you would be wrong. When my party colleague

George Savage was a representative on COR, he attended almost 100% of meetings to stand up for Northern Ireland. However, when power shifted, information from the time informs us that, in the three years to May 2009, the DUP's Edwin Poots attended only nine out of the 17 plenary meetings of the Committee of the Regions that he might have attended, and just five out of 16 Commission meetings.

The DUP's Lord Morrow attended only one out of eight plenary meetings and one Commission meeting out of 18. In the same period, the Sinn Féin Minister Conor Murphy attended only one out of 11 plenary meetings and not a single one of 12 Commission meetings. Councillor Bernice Swift, the other Sinn Féin representative, attended not a single plenary meeting out of 10 and not a single Commission meeting out of 11. Therefore, to call for greater community involvement in the framing and development of European Union policy is nothing less than the most rank hypocrisy from Sinn Féin.

In January 2009, the Office of the First and deputy First Minister gave a typical one-line answer to a question that my colleague Danny Kennedy asked.

He asked who was directly responsible and accountable for implementing policies and legislation originating from Europe. The one-line answer stated simply: each Department is responsible and accountable for the implementation of European policies and legislation that fall within its devolved responsibilities. That curt and off-hand reply simply demonstrates additional dysfunctionality when the Executive even get round to thinking about Europe.

European Union funding programmes and policies need to be pursued proactively by the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We need to beef up our attitude to Europe, especially at this time of economic downturn. We need to get the best out of Europe for our people. We spend £769,000 a year on our Brussels office. The Assembly needs to know that that expenditure provides a value-for-money return.

11.30 am

I repeat my party's call of April 2009 for the creation of a dedicated Stormont Committee on European affairs to give a proper focus and to co-ordinate the Province's European Union funding initiatives and policies. That

would enable us to use Europe far more and become an active part of European Union policy formulation, which would ultimately create active financial and policy support here for the Assembly. The Executive and their work would all combine. That would make it vital that not only our Departments but our Committee of the Regions representatives liaised effectively with the Stormont Committee.

I support the motion. However, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I cannot support Sinn Féin's temerity in saying that it contributes to and does the real work associated with the European Union.

Mr F McCann: It is easy to stand up and quote attendance records and statistics. Perhaps the Member should look at attendance records in his own party. However, that hides the fact that Sinn Féin has played a vital and crucial role across all aspects of European funding and all partnership boards in delivering not only projects but European funding straight into local communities.

Mr McNarry: I do not deny the role that Sinn Féin claims. I can equally claim it for my own party, as, I am sure, could Members of other parties. I quote statistics as the facts that we receive through asking questions about people's attendance. The Ulster Unionist Party's attendance, when the party had the opportunity to be there, was exemplary. I already illustrated that George Savage had an almost 100% attendance record, and, if someone wants to challenge that, then let them challenge it. However, our party is not represented at the Committee of the Regions any more. Sinn Féin and the DUP are there representing the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Bell: On a point of order — please keep me right on this, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will.

Mr Bell: I will have to be good and careful. Being a member of the Committee of the Regions yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker, you know that four Members are currently on the Committee of the Regions for this mandate as full members: Francie Molloy and myself as full members, and John Dallat and Arnold Hatch as alternate members. Therefore, the Member's statement that his party is not represented on the Committee of the Regions is — am I allowed to say this? — factually incorrect.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is a point of information.

Mr Bell: Sorry.

Mr McNarry: I am glad that I was not accused of misleading the House. It is rather early in the morning to get expelled. The Member got away with it all right yesterday; unlike the rest of us, he was able to be home for tea.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr McNarry: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Dr Farry: I declare an interest as a member of the Community Relations Council and of North Down Borough Council. The Alliance Party supports the motion and the amendment.

There is a tremendous opportunity for Northern Ireland in Europe, where there is a lot of goodwill towards our society. Rightly or wrongly, the way in which we have tried to manage a divided society and overcome a legacy of violence is recognised as a success story, and we can tap into that. However, due to the ongoing enlargement of the European Union and other funding priorities, our opportunity is time-limited. Indeed, it is right that people in Europe should expect Northern Ireland society to be maturing, normalising and moving to a situation in which it is less dependent on financial assistance.

In addition, we must recognise that all three of our MEPs have adopted an anti-Europe stance, which, no doubt, confuses the issue, particularly when we are trying to court the European Commission through the Barroso task force. Given that the UUP has hitched its wagon to the reactionary right-wing grouping in Europe, there is no point in it getting on its high horse. It is hard for the elected representatives of the various parties, through different wings, to court and condemn the Commission at the same time. I took some consolation when Peter Weir said that the DUP has only some Euro-sceptic members, and we await enlightenment about who the progressive members are.

The key issue is not how efficient or otherwise we are at distributing money or, indeed, at balancing funding communally. There is a danger in talking about a shared-out future rather than a shared future; we should be arguing about the overall size of the cake rather than the relative size of its slices. We should be developing our economy and society on the basis of outcomes

and looking at the difference that European funds have made and can generate in the future. In particular, we should look at peace and reconciliation, the development of a shared society, improving the competitiveness of the local economy and improving GVA through convergence.

I welcome the focus of the Peace III programme, which is more focused than its two predecessors. However, achieving good relations is about more than simply distributing funds; it lies in policy, and I welcome the fact that we are getting round to having our own policy in Northern Ireland to underpin what is happening elsewhere with funding. Until now, that has been a missing part of the jigsaw. Indeed, it is ironic that we rely on international and European funding, whether from the European Union, IFI or NGOs, to do a lot of our domestic good relations work.

With respect to competitive issues, we have the various structural funds at our disposal, and we are advantaged by those. The SDLP amendment fits that context, because it reflects the wider economic drivers that the UK Treasury asks us to consider. Again, Northern Ireland has been hampered by a lack of clarity in our domestic economic policy. I appreciate that the Programme for Government deals with the economy at a high level and, more recently, we have had the Barnett review; however, Northern Ireland does not have a formal regional economic strategy, and, in effect, that has been set to one side.

We must also recognise the different contexts in which state aid comes up, and we should learn to be more creative in how we address competing issues. It is not simply about getting money in to keep structures as they are; we should be looking to rebalance and modernise the economy. Sometimes, state aid works against that.

Finally, I shall focus on convergence. I appreciate that convergence is not a formal goal of the programmes for which we are currently eligible. Nonetheless, it is an issue, and there is evidence that Northern Ireland has not seen convergence at UK level or at the wider European level. I appreciate that the Executive have UK-wide convergence targets, which are not going terribly well. Indeed, the latest figures from the Minister suggest that we are going backwards in that area. We should also be looking at having a European-level convergence target, and we have an opportunity to do so through NUTS, although

I appreciate that that methodology is, to a certain extent, a hostage to fortune.

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

Dr Farry: We need to look at how other jurisdictions have used structural funds better than Northern Ireland to close the convergence gap.

Mr Shannon: I support the motion and the amendment. Discussion of European funding always reminds me of a remark made by Dr Paisley: we may not always enjoy being part of Europe — our fishermen, farmers and others would be better off without its stringent and sometimes useless rules — but, while we are, we need to milk the European cow. I suspect that that saying will go down in history.

Enough money is paid and business redirected to Europe to demand that our MEPs and MPs ensure that we get our fair share back. At present, that is not the case. Changes must be made, and we must be more proactive.

A know at mae pairtie's MEP Diane Dodds bes waarkin hairds fer oor faschermen an' fairmers ettlin tae bring sim' wit an' guid sense tae EU regulations hooiniver thon wul bae a lang an' haird battle sweeled ap i European tape an' bogged doon i daftness.

I am aware that my colleague Diane Dodds MEP is working hard for our fishermen and farmers in an attempt to bring some sanity and common sense to EU regulations. However, her battle will be long and arduous, wrapped in European red tape and mired in insensibilities and idiocy. While our MEPs battle the tide, it is up to all Members to ensure that the help that we can give is delivered to those who need it most. That is a job not just for the Finance Minister but for all Departments.

I recently called on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle Gildernew, to release European Fisheries Fund money for the fishing industry and, subsequently, for fishing communities in Northern Ireland. Some €36.2 million was made available for the fishing sector, and I asked why no funding had been released here despite the fact that, in Scotland, three tranches of money had already been given to fishermen. Minister Gildernew has confirmed that the delays are over and that 28 applications are about to be released, involving

some £3·5 million. Selection panels were convened before Christmas, and 12 successful projects have been offered investment worth some £1·1 million.

Why was there such a delay in achieving that? That money was needed most in recent times of hardship, when it was critically important to make EFF money available. The release of EFF money is vital so that our fishing industry, which is already on the ropes after the Brussels quota reductions, can benefit from available moneys. It does not make sense for EFF moneys to sit in a drawer while the fishing industry is crying out for help. However, things have moved on, and that is good news. I am aware of the work that has been put in, but each Department has a clear responsibility to tender for funding and to use it when they get it. It is not enough to ask for the money and then sit on your hands for months, deciding what to do with it.

Community groups do not get the fair share of funding that they deserve, particularly those that are able to use grants straight away, which is why the system must change from the ground up and not simply in the Department of Finance and Personnel. With respect, there must also be change in the Department for Social Development. The Minister could and should have in place an easier way to apply for funding that would enable all community groups to fill in the relevant forms, get the money quickly and allocate it to the correct bodies within a decent timescale, rather than waiting and wasting the money, which happens quite regularly.

Normal people consider a lot of the hoops that must be jumped through in respect of Europe ridiculous. Unfortunately, that is necessary if we are to secure anywhere near the amount of funding to which we are entitled. If the money is there, let us get it. To get what we need in a timely manner, each Department must take stock of what is available, how it can be used and how to apply for it before the Department of Finance and Personnel is approached. That means that the Department for Social Development must look at communities where, for example, Peace III funding has been used to establish the shortfalls and what can be done to ensure that, next time round, there is no possibility of such shortfalls. The Agriculture Minister can find out how many farmers missed out to ensure that she has enough funding for the next round. The next step is to establish where our farmers have missed out due to mistakes in form filling and

arrange a service to help them with that to ensure that those problems do not reoccur during the next funding tranche.

The Department of Finance and Personnel can meet its undoubted responsibility only when all other Departments also pull their weight. I prefer to drink good British milk, and I am sure that many in the Chamber like to do so as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Shannon: When that choice is not available, I have no problem with milking the European cow for all that I can get. I urge all Ministers and their Departments to do the same.

11.45 am

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment. I declare an interest as a member of the Committee of the Regions and a rural local action group. The debate on setting priorities for European funding is important and timely. The Barroso report highlighted a number of funds, other than Peace and rural funding, that were available to the Assembly and Departments. The concern that I raised in Committee on several occasions was that perhaps not all Departments are maximising opportunities by applying for funding and trying to draw down the maximum amount.

The OFMDFM report highlights the fact that the Executive and Departments here need to focus and maximise their efforts to draw down available funds. During the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's inquiry into European issues, some of the evidence highlighted the fact that the European Investment Bank was there to support businesses and ensure that they could draw down money.

Mr Leonard: The Member spoke about maximising effort. Does he agree that the Ulster canal project would bring a great deal of benefit? Although we appreciate that there is much objective need in communities to be met, there is still space for European funding for the Ulster canal project. Does the Member agree that that would be a good example of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure working with his colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel to seek European funding to deliver that important

project, which would deliver the Coleraine to Limerick waterway vision?

Mr Molloy: Yes. That is a good example of how money could be drawn down. In fact, European funding could be used to change Lough Neagh from private to public ownership. That has been an issue in the development of Lough Neagh over the years. The infrastructure that needs to be put in place for the Ulster canal, whether that be roads, waterways or leisure facilities, will be there for the long term, long after Peace and rural funding are forgotten. The South of Ireland has been very effective in building roads infrastructure with European funding. That is important.

It is also important that we identify opportunities for businesses to be supported by the European Investment Bank, especially since they cannot currently get resources from banks. We need to question the British Treasury: is it blocking opportunities to draw down funding because it sees match funding as an obstacle? Some obstacles may have to be removed before businesses can draw down available funding.

We need to maximise the resources that we have here. The Minister may think that to have the North and South working in partnership erodes the border and calls into question the constitution. Across Europe, however, bordering countries work together to maximise European funding and undertake projects in which they co-operate across those borders. That has not, in any way, called into question the constitutionality of any of the countries. We need to get over that issue.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: OK.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Brolly for giving way. Does he agree that the Lisbon agenda is critical to further cohesion in Europe and that a fundamental objective of the Lisbon agenda is to break down borders in Europe? Will he now correct his party's position on that treaty, which is so central to the future development of the European Union and the drawing-down of funds for this region in the years ahead?

Mr Molloy: Mr Brolly left the Assembly some time ago, but I am still here. The Member has identification problems.

We need to maximise the cross-border dimension so that there is a mutually beneficial

situation. Members have asked whether we need a European Department or subcommittee here. We need some means of focusing the Executive and Assembly in order to maximise the European funds that can be drawn down.

Attendance at the Committee of the Regions by its members was raised. Many of its members may have realised that the Committee of the Regions did not have much authority to do anything. Hopefully, under the new regime, the Committee of the Regions will have more say and accountability and will be better able to hold the Assembly of European Regions to account on how it delivers funds. Subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the lowest level of government, is important.

The Assembly and the councils have important roles to play. We must examine whether we need a subcommittee or a European Department to focus on drawing down and maximising funds and, as Mr Savage said, to provide support and guidance to businesses. We must also consider how to open up opportunities to maximise the funding that can be drawn down to enable communities and businesses to provide entrepreneurial skills and research and development.

Mr Elliott: At the outset, I wish to put on record the benefits that some European funds have brought to Northern Ireland. It has been highly encouraging for rural communities, and I have also seen the benefits to urban communities. Over the past number of years, particularly during the 2000 to 2006 cycle of funding, around £1.74 billion of European funding has been invested in this area, which has been extremely beneficial.

I will focus on community development and economic development, because there are huge benefits for those areas. Some areas focus on community development and others on economic development. However, had it not been for the structural funds, some of the benefits from economic development here would not have materialised.

With regard to community development, there are times when many of us question the validity of some of those applications and query the money that goes to those that are not sustainable. Over the years, we witnessed projects that started off in good faith but were unable to continue because of poor management and other issues that were outside

the control of the hard-working volunteers. That is one area in which I want to see improvement, where there is support —

Mr F McCann: I totally agree. One of the points that I tried to make at the start of my contribution was that many groups went through a bureaucratic nightmare when trying to deliver on various projects. They spent most of their time trying to deal with bureaucracy in the Department of Finance and Personnel and other structures that were put in place. That bureaucracy put them off and made some of them fold.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that intervention. We are almost on the same wavelength. More help and support must be provided to voluntary and community organisations, particularly to those that are starting up. Often, new groups know of opportunities for funding but do not realise the work that is entailed in securing it. Sometimes, however, securing funding is the easy part, and the continuous delivery of the project for a number of years thereafter is the difficult part. Such organisations need the additional help, support and expertise that have, at times, been missing. However, to be fair, most of the relevant agencies now realise that and are starting to help some of those organisations. For others, it is, unfortunately, a bit too late.

Many projects have been extremely successful on the economic development front. However, that is a different field, because the people involved are geared up to run a business. I am thankful that most of those businesses, with a few exceptions, have been sustained. I want to see more of that economic development helping a wider circle of people.

I have no difficulty, in broad terms, with cross-border projects, provided that they are administered and developed on a fair and equal basis. However, that has not always been the case, particularly with ICBAN. It is extremely unfortunate that unionists from various councils have been kept off the ICBAN board by members of the SDLP and Sinn Féin. We have pleaded with those parties in an attempt to redress that imbalance. Unfortunately, they have not taken up our offer to try to create a fair and equal balance. Sometimes, that is what makes unionists suspicious of the cross-border element of some of those mechanisms. When there are cross-border mechanisms,

I want to see measures in place that will ensure that unionists have reasonable and fair representation on them. I do not think that that should be a big issue for the parties, because the councils in the Republic of Ireland that send their representatives to those cross-border bodies will, obviously, have people from a nationalist persuasion. The number of unionists involved is small and amounts to a minority group. Therefore I cannot see why Northern Ireland councils cannot be given fair representation on those cross-border bodies.

I support all the European funding projects. During compilation of the Committee for the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister's report on its inquiry into European issues, I learned that many people, particularly from a European perspective, indicated that Northern Ireland has not always taken full advantage of its opportunities in Europe. It was highlighted that the National Assembly for Wales has done extremely well; it has been successful in accessing many more resources and funds than we have. We need to look at this issue with some urgency, because the next round will be commencing soon.

Mr O'Loan: I support the motion, as amended. I concur with the comments made by Alex Attwood, when moving the amendment, about the detail of utilising opportunities for EU funding of inter-jurisdictional projects. European funding issues and mechanisms are complex, and it is partly for that reason that many in the Chamber and outside it have not engaged fully with the possible opportunities for our economy, particularly at the design stages, when we are setting the broad themes of the European scheme. In recent times, in fact, some people have been quick to dismiss the benefits of North/South co-operation in attracting investment to Ireland. We need to be careful that that lack of engagement on EU funding issues and North/South co-operation as part of that does not have an adverse effect on our economy, as, I think, is happening.

We are a small region in Europe, and it would be reckless for us to seek to stand alone. Only if we put ourselves on an all-island basis will we be able to compete successfully at a global level. The SDLP believes strongly that the Northern Ireland economy will perform best when our long-term strategies for economic development are in harmony with those in the South. All Members will have noted the rebirth

of the proposal for a joint corporation tax with the South.

The SDLP was disappointed with the part on North/South co-operation in the recent independent review of economic policy. In that report, the potential for North/South co-operation was downplayed on the basis of the competitive aspect of the relationship between Invest Northern Ireland and the IDA in the South. There is a degree of competition involved, but it is unwise to neglect the possible upside of collaboration in this issue. We need to ensure that the prospects for collaboration between business development agencies, North and South, are utilised. There are different models through which that might be done, and I am open to discussion around them. However, work needs to start. There has been talk for years, but no progress has been made.

Investment on either side of the border will contribute to improving the all-island economy, and it is misguided to suggest that working together on this issue would be of no importance. That is particularly important when one considers that the financial support that we receive from the EU will diminish in coming years, because EU funding will take the form of support for co-operative work between two or more jurisdictions and will be available on that basis only. It is, therefore, imperative that serious thought is given to the potential for cross-border co-operation in every sector.

There is also the possibility of opportunities in other EU states. I declare an interest, having recently been appointed honorary consul for Romania. Romania has the offer of no less than €32 billion in EU funding between now and 2013.

It actively seeks partners in spending that money. That is a major opportunity for Northern Ireland. I have no doubt that similar opportunities exist in other new EU states.

12.00 noon

One stream of INTERREG funding caters specifically for cross-border innovation. Given the mantra that the economy is the priority in the Programme for Government, I urge OFMDM and the Assembly to do all that they can to utilise opportunities that Europe provides in that area.

The Irish Government plans to intensify efforts to create a rich environment for research and innovation, which they plan to market

internationally as the "innovation island". Obviously, the innovation-island concept will work and succeed as an international marketing tool only if the North and the Assembly play a full part in that. My party supports that vision strongly. Northern Ireland's incredible potential for successful innovation in the green-technology sector can place it in a strong position for the future.

Finally, I ask the Executive not to lose sight of key lessons from the 'Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy', which was published in October 2006. Much of that study is still of value and, if applied through joint working, could ensure that Ireland, North and South, is best placed to take advantage of future opportunities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr O'Loan: It is essential for future prosperity that the entire island becomes an innovation island, as has been described.

Mr Bell: Northern Ireland is a success story in Europe. It is important that we pay tribute to people in Europe who have taken genuine interest in Northern Ireland and have put up the money to match that genuine interest. That money has made real differences, not only in my community in Strangford but throughout Northern Ireland. It would be extremely foolish of the Assembly not to support the motion and the amendment. The Assembly can be critical, but in a constructive manner. It should be a critical friend of Europe.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member accept that there needs to be ongoing fairness and equality between unionists and nationalists, particularly on cross-border bodies when they are established?

Mr Bell: I support fully that constructive contribution from Mr Elliott. I will develop that point later in my speech.

The Assembly must always look for a factual basis to what it does. Therefore, let us look at the United Kingdom. The latest research and evidence base that I have been able to track down is a report on structural funds that was published in February 2010. What does it tell us? It tells us that Northern Ireland has received an allocation of €472 million. The breakdown of allocations per capita throughout the United

Kingdom is as follows: England, €91; Scotland, €122; Wales, €114; and Northern Ireland, €248.

We may not always get it right. However, we cannot shy away from the fact that Northern Ireland has received funding of €248 per capita while England and Scotland have received €91 and €122 per capita respectively. Although I agree with Mr Elliott's comments about the Welsh Assembly Government's innovative use of European money, particularly for social housing, Wales has received funding of €114 per capita while Northern Ireland has received €248 per capita. We are doing something right, and we have developed European opportunities well.

The Assembly needs to move on with the European growth and jobs strategy. That is what matters. If the House cannot develop constructively, on a cross-party basis, and deliver real economic growth and jobs, it should not be here. Huge opportunities exist in education and training; employment and social policy; fisheries and regional development; and enterprise and environment. The Assembly must maximise those opportunities for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland set a good example in the Committee of the Regions, which was mentioned earlier. My friend from Strangford mentioned a previous mandate of the committee, which is now history. The committee has a new mandate.

What happened? Francie Molloy of Sinn Féin and I had the opportunity to take both our seats and the alternate seats, as in the previous mandate. What did we do? Francie Molloy and I gave up our second seats to ensure that Deputy Speaker John Dallat and Councillor Arnold Hatch from Craigavon Borough Council got a guaranteed, full alternate seat. That ensured that the four main parties in the House were represented on the Committee of the Regions.

I can speak only about my own attendance at the Committee of the Regions, although I know that others' attendance rates are excellent. So far, the DUP has had a 100% attendance rate. God granting me good health, I will continue to have a 100% attendance rate. The DUP is fully committed to the Committee of the Regions and will play its full role in it. Indeed, the DUP has exceeded 100% attendance, if it is possible to do so — the Finance Minister can keep me right on that. One of the UK delegation could not attend a particular event, so the DUP not only fulfilled all of its responsibilities but took on the role of a UK member.

Mr Neeson: Does the Member accept that, in the first mandate of the Committee of the Regions, the DUP alternate member made one appearance?

Mr Bell: All of the DUP members of whom I am aware have made more than one appearance. We have heard in the debate that Northern Ireland has received €472 million. Are we going to move forward or are we going to play party politics? If Mr Neeson wants to play party politics, perhaps he should look first at his own attendance at the Council of Europe. With respect, people in glass houses should not throw stones.

All sections of our community must develop the growth and jobs agenda of Europe. We have a narrow window of opportunity. The US economic envoy, Declan Kelly, emphasised that last night, as has Mr Attwood today. There is a decade in which we can achieve success. It is now up to all of us, collectively and in a shared way, to follow the example that we set in the Committee of the Regions and to maximise the potential of Europe, not for us, but for those who really matter, the people of Northern Ireland.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Before I respond to the debate and outline the Department's position on the future of EU funding, I must point out that I am one of the House's Euro-sceptics; indeed, some might say that I am an extreme Euro-sceptic. That said, I recognise that although Europe has done a lot of damage in Northern Ireland — we have heard that time and again from all parties — we have also benefited from some of the EU funding programmes. Over the period 2007-2013, about £1 billion of European funding will have been received from various sources.

The debate ranged wide, and as usual, Mr Deputy Speaker, you indulged Members and allowed them to be wide-ranging. However, the motion is about future funding and consultation on that funding. I have no hesitation in saying that, in preparing our programmes and setting priorities for future EU funding, we will consult widely with the relevant bodies in line with our public expenditure and legislative requirements and those of the EU.

I remind Members that we are not talking about money that we will spend next year, the year after or even the year after that. It says something about Europe that Northern Ireland will not benefit from one penny of the money

that we are today debating until 2015. The wheels of Europe grind exceedingly slowly.

The funding and the consultation that we are talking about —

Mr F McCann: I do not disagree with the Minister. Some of the debates and arguments that we had during council meetings were about planning long-term strategies. The wheels of Europe may grind slowly, but we must prepare now to ensure that we are able to tap into that funding.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That brings me to the point that I wanted to make. Many Members said that the consultation must be about particular projects, almost to the extent of projects that they want for their constituencies. However, we should not look that far ahead. At this stage, the consultation will focus solely on the general thrust and principles of how the money will be spent. It will not get down to the level of individual projects, about which I will talk later.

The parameters for funds will be laid down by Europe and the UK Government, and there will be cross-border constraints. A range of various constraints will be placed on community groups, and rules on employment, the economy and the environment will be laid down. Once we know what funds are available, we will start to delve into the details. At that stage, we will have the consultation to which many Members referred, because that is when it will really matter to the groups and people who will be affected.

As far as the timetable is concerned, in 2010, we expect the publication of a number of Commission documents that will have an impact on future EU funding. The documents will include Europe's EU 2020 strategy and the outcome of the EU budget review. They will give us an idea of the total amount of EU money that will be available, whether we will be eligible and what Europe's spending priorities will be.

The main issues in the budget review are: the future of the CAP, to which Mr Elliott, who has now left the Chamber, referred; whether all member states and regions, or only the poorer ones, should benefit from structural funds; what priority should be given to environmental funding; and the UK rebate, which will have an impact on other aspects of our spending. The EU 2020 strategy will replace the Lisbon jobs and growth agenda, and we expect that we will

be required to spend most of any competitive EU money to get in line with that strategy.

We have only limited influence on the final outcome of those issues. We can feed into the UK position on the debates, and we can make our views known to others in Europe, but the final positions will be decided by the 27 heads of state at the European Council. As far as the structural funds are concerned, in the spring of 2011, we expect the Commission to bring forward its first proposals for the budget post-2013. Those will be debated with member states in the context of the overall priorities.

At this point, we still do not know how much money we will have or the detailed conditions that will be attached to it. If we assume that the arrangements will be the same as those for 2007-2013, the UK will know, in the spring of 2011, how much it will receive in total, but it will then have to decide how that is allocated to each region. The Executive will determine how the additional spending power will be allocated in line with the Departments' spending priorities, and there will be the necessary consultation with the various stakeholders.

I now come to some of the points that were raised during the debate. Mr McCann talked about the benefits of Peace funding, especially to community groups. I must warn the Assembly that there is no guarantee of any Peace money in the next round of funding. Indeed, those who are familiar with the background to Peace III know that there was a fight for it. Given the priorities in the European budget, the fact that there will be many other claims on that budget and the way in which the situation has developed here in Northern Ireland, there is no guarantee even of an acceptance of the need for Peace IV.

We should put that marker down at the start. Good arguments have been made about the work that has been done with the Peace money, and those are the types of matters that the Assembly will want to feed up to UK Government level.

12.15 pm

The Member also mentioned INTERREG IVa. Not so long ago, I answered questions on that matter in the House. The programme was slow in taking off, but we are meeting our targets, offers have been made, and we are sure that we are going to spend the money from INTERREG IVa and that there is no danger of missing out on that.

Mr Attwood, in proposing the amendment, spoke about the importance of inter-jurisdictional spending. I have made it clear in the House that I have no ideological difficulty when there is money that can benefit both sides of the border, when it improves infrastructure, or when it means that we can draw down additional finance because we work with other member states, whether it is the Irish Republic or any member state, or, for example, Scotland on inter-regional matters. I have no difficulty with claiming that money.

Mr Attwood particularly addressed the seventh framework programme. He may have been a little too pessimistic about the work that has been done on that. First, it is not the responsibility of DFP, but of DETI. Perhaps some of the concerns that he raised would have been more appropriately raised with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment or the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Secondly, DETI has done a considerable amount of work on that programme. We have already drawn down over €16 million, with 51 participants, including companies, universities and other organisations. I accept what the Member said in that there appears to be a difference between the total amount of money that we have drawn down and that drawn down by the Irish Republic, but it should be remembered — I am not trying to make excuses — that many of the research and development programmes, for example, are more suited to large companies than small or intermediate enterprises. Therefore, it may have been easier, because of the industrial infrastructure in the Republic, to draw down some of that money.

DETI has sought to help small companies by giving them grants to work in collaborative networks, which, in turn, allows them the benefits of economies of scale to apply for funding. Mr Attwood, quite rightly, identified an important source of funding. That fits in with the Programme for Government aim of developing the private sector to deal with and introduce the high-value end of the market. If there are opportunities that we are missing, we should, of course, take them, but the Member painted a rather bleak picture, as if nothing is being done. When we do not do things right, of course we should highlight that, but we should not talk the Assembly or Departments down if they are doing their job.

I see that Mr Attwood has just returned to the Chamber as I move on from dealing with his

contribution. He does that all the time; he asks questions, but he does not want to hear the answers to them.

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister give way?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I would have given way if he had had the courtesy to be present in the Chamber while I was addressing the points that he made. He has had his chance to speak. I responded, and he was not here to listen to me, so I will not indulge him again, other than to advise him that some of the issues that he raised are more appropriate to DETI, and he should, therefore, raise them with that Department.

Mr McNarry, who is also not in the Chamber, spoke about the importance of COR and the work that it has done. He always finds a way of getting just enough truth into his speech to raise doubts in people's minds, while ignoring some of the most salient facts, which perhaps would have made the story appear totally different.

Mr McNarry played up the importance of the group of which my friend Mr Bell is a member. Mr Bell made it clear that Mr McNarry conveniently forgot that, to ensure that there was a representative voice on the Committee of the Regions and so that no one could say that all the people and interests of Northern Ireland were not represented, the DUP and Mr Molloy of Sinn Féin magnanimously gave up places so that the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party could have an input. I am sure that those parties have played their part well in the recent discussions.

Mr Farry said that convergence was not a target. It is stated as an overall target in cohesion policy, although it is not stated by how much or that 100% of income across the region must converge. The focus is for regional economies to reach their full potential. Mr Elliott lamented that Wales is eligible for funding for which Northern Ireland is no longer eligible. That is not a sign of failure but of success: we have gone above 75% of average GDP and therefore no longer qualify for some of the funding. We should not be crying about that. Despite what Mr Farry said, there has been some convergence, and a price is to be paid for that achievement.

I shall not respond to the comments of other Members, as the clock is against me. The issue is important, and, despite my Euro-scepticism, I share the view of my friend from Strangford Mr Shannon that we should milk any money that is available from Europe. If there are more

effective ways of milking that money, we should ensure —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close, Minister; your time is up.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: We should ensure that we do so to maximise the economic benefits for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: Not since John the Baptist started his mass baptisms in the River Jordan have there been so many conversions as in the Chamber today. The Euro-sceptic Minister of Finance and Personnel has mellowed on Europe and European funding; Mr Fra McCann has become almost a Euro-zealot; and even Mr Bell has shown signs of conversion, which is quite exemplary. Perhaps his membership of the Committee of the Regions has mellowed him.

The debate has been good, because there has been considerable consensus on the motion and on the amendment. It is interesting that unionist colleagues support the amendment in the main and see value in inter-jurisdictional co-operation and working together in Europe for economic development. The SDLP wants to encourage that, and we want much more of it.

In response to what the Minister said apropos Mr Attwood's comments, the South has an ambitious target of €600 million. That is to be commended; it is rightly ambitious, and we should also be rightly ambitious. We must approach European funding in a skilful, targeted and strategic way. Hitherto, we have not been doing that.

We must employ the best expertise in seeking European funding. Given that the big funding is over, as the Minister and others rightly said, and that we can no longer rely on other forms of funding, we must be targeted in our approach and employ people in the Departments who have the required expertise to access funds from the various programmes in Europe. Matters will not be made easy for us, given that any additional funding will effectively dry up after 2012 and that we will face other difficulties in respect of state aid, so we must be clever, ambitious and targeted in our approach. That is what Mr Attwood and rest of the SDLP have been saying, and that is what, in fact, the Government in the South are doing. I am not saying that they are exemplars in that regard, but we can certainly learn lessons from what they are doing, and we exhort the House to do that.

There is no harm in Members of this House together with Members of the Oireachtas considering European funding and European issues to see whether we can maximise the value of the funding that exists and maximise European co-operation not just between the Republic and Britain but throughout Europe, because there is a lot to be said for that. We can develop good and lasting partnerships with countries such as Poland and Romania, which my colleague Mr O'Loan mentioned, and the time is ripe to do that. Unfortunately, I do not have time to cover all the interesting points that were raised about Europe.

I emphasise that we must revisit the whole issue of corporation tax, because that has implications for us in Europe. We should attempt to harmonise levels of corporation tax on this island. I know that there are consequentialists involved in doing that, but we must do it in order to really move the economy from the position in which it finds itself. I will give way to the Minister, because I see that he is pondering my remarks.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I was pondering the Member's remarks, because the issue of corporation tax has come up time and time again. Will the Member indicate where his party stands on the issue? If — that is a big if — we succeed in persuading the Treasury and the new incoming Administration to change the rate of corporation tax, the Northern Ireland Budget and public spending could be hit with costs of up to £400 million. Is he happy enough to lose that money, which will simply give shareholders bigger dividends while we run the risk of jeopardising some public spending programmes?

Mr A Maginness: That is an interesting discussion, but I will not go into all the details now. Of course, any reduction in the level of corporation tax would lead to the Budget and public spending being downsized in the first number of years, but I do not think that the hit would be as high as £400 million. The estimated hit is about £200 million, which is manageable. There are ways of doing that.

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

Mr A Maginness: I commend the amendment and the motion to the House.

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

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Today's debate has been interesting and a bit more peaceful than the last debate in the House yesterday, and I appreciate that.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Maybe.

Mr P Maskey: Maybe.

We tabled this important motion about setting priorities for European funding in the future because we wish to address the uncertainty that exists about that. After listening to the Members who spoke during the debate, I think that all parties will support the motion and the amendment. I think that Members who sometimes table amendments to motions that already are quite clear do so simply for the sake of it. However, in this instance, we are willing to support the SDLP's amendment.

12.30 pm

Fra McCann started the debate by mentioning the work that has been carried out at interfaces and how European money has helped address many issues affecting interface communities all over the North of Ireland. It is a very important and positive step, and it is one that, I dare say, would not have been taken had European funding not been in place. Interface areas, and, indeed, the entire community in the North of Ireland, would be worse off if it were not for that funding. That is something that must be looked at through forward work programmes and funding for communities, because we are not there yet. There are still many issues at interface areas, as we see throughout the North on many weekends. Work at interfaces is very important and must be considered with regard to European funding.

The work of the partnership boards in Belfast — and I will restrict my comments to a few seconds — has been very proactive, and tremendous efforts have been made. Tom Elliott said that he had concerns about bad management in some community organisations. However, the level of scrutiny under which some community organisations are put, and the level of auditing that goes on, is unbelievable. I am the Chairperson the Public Accounts Committee, and I can tell the Member that some Departments are not put under as much scrutiny as some community organisations. That is possibly hindering community organisations and holding them back, and is, therefore, something that must be looked at.

The second Member to speak was Alex Attwood, and he mentioned North/South opportunities and co-operation. That is very important, and it is something that Sinn Féin is calling for very much. A €50 billion fund has been set up, and the Irish Government have developed 60 different projects. However, I do not believe that any targets have been set by DFP at this stage. That issue needs to be addressed. The Finance Minister looks very lonely over there, as all his colleagues from the Benches around him have done a runner. I am not sure whether that is because he is a Euro-sceptic or because they are all sceptical of him. Perhaps that is something that his party colleagues will address at a later stage.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: They know that I can look after myself.

Mr P Maskey: Fair enough.

Peter Weir was the third Member to speak. He began by saying that the debate was similar to the Clint Eastwood film, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly'. As Fra McCann was the first Member to speak, does that mean that he was "The Good"? Alex Attwood was the second Member to speak: does that mean that he was "the Bad"? Peter was the third Member to speak, so everybody can have their own opinion about that. *[Laughter.]* Perhaps Peter will look in the mirror and argue his case.

I see that David McNarry has come back into the Chamber. I do not think that he can be proactive or enthusiastic about any motion because he always has something to criticise. He spoke about attendance at meetings of the European Committee of the Regions and other issues. However, when it comes to future funding, I do not want anyone from the right wing of the Conservative Party arguing on behalf of the community sector in the North of Ireland.

Mr McNarry: You wait your time.

Mr P Maskey: You have aligned yourself with that group in Europe and in England. That is something for you to address and something that your voters will have to address. Perhaps you will get a wake-up call after the elections.

Mr McNarry: That is quite intimidating, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. This chit-chat across the Floor will have to stop. Members should make their remarks through the Chair please.

Mr P Maskey: I am not sure who is being intimidated. If the Member is saying that I am intimidating somebody, perhaps you should make a ruling, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I do not think that I am intimidating anybody. I am making a winding-up speech on a motion that Sinn Féin put forward on a very serious issue and, therefore, one which we take very seriously. In no way am I intimidating anyone in the Chamber. There needs to be some explanation about that. However, that is Mr McNarry for you.

Jim Shannon talked about milking the European cow. Sammy Wilson said that although he is a Euro-sceptic, if there is a cow to be milked, he is there to milk it. Perhaps that is not the term he used, but that is certainly how it came across. For a Euro-sceptic, milking the European cow certainly takes the biscuit.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Is that a biscuit and milk?

Mr P Maskey: You can dip it in your coffee later on, as long as there is milk in it.

The important point to come from today's debate is that planning ahead means that there are better outcomes. If we plan ahead, get our acts together and allow ourselves plenty of time, we will be able to make good choices in the future.

The point was raised during the debate that we must be ambitious, and I agree that we must be very ambitious. It has been pointed out in the past that the money from Europe that was spent here could have been spent more wisely and in other areas, and that may be the case. Francie Molloy spoke earlier about the roads infrastructure in the South of Ireland, which is absolutely tremendous and has helped the entire infrastructure and many of the communities there. Perhaps we should be more strategic when considering future funding priorities.

Some of the funding that we have received from Europe in the past has come from the peace and reconciliation fund, and that funding may or may not be available in the future. However, I can assure the House that our own MEP Bairbre de Brún, like many other MEPs, has fought very hard to ensure that that source of funding continues.

Community groups, particularly those in interface areas, continue to undertake the hard task of filling in European funding applications, and that process must be streamlined. Most organisations spend months on funding

applications, meaning that they are not able to deliver on the ground. If the bureaucracy surrounding those applications can be changed it will allow more time for that work to be delivered, to the benefit of all.

An element of cross-border co-operation is very important in accessing European funding, and we should talk to our neighbours. I am aware of a tourism initiative in Belfast, which was successful in obtaining European funding because it made joint funding applications and arrangements with counterparts in Scotland and the South of Ireland. That is the route that we should take in the future.

Today's debate is concerned with addressing the issue of European funding as a matter of urgency; putting in place criteria templates for funding; setting our priorities to ensure that we get the best outcomes; and ensuring that the entire island of Ireland moves forward in a more positive manner in relation to funding. We should use the funding well and use it now.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the important contribution that European funding makes to communities; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in setting the priorities for any future funding from Europe; believes that opportunities for inter-jurisdictional EU funded projects have not been fully developed; and further calls on the NSMC and BIC to assess and identify where such funding opportunities exist including in the economic, education and innovation sectors.

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 12.38 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Presbyterian Mutual Society: Treasury Committee Report

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 will have five minutes in which to speak.

Mr Cree: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the conclusions of the House of Commons Treasury Committee report 'The Failure of the Presbyterian Mutual Society' and, in particular, the conclusion that "the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment should have taken a lead in identifying the problem, and in seeking a solution"; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to advise the Assembly of the reasons why it has not been possible to achieve a positive resolution to date.

I understand that the Enterprise Minister will not be able to attend the debate because she is in Washington. I hope that the Finance Minister will be here to respond on her behalf and on behalf of the Executive. I look forward to hearing what he has to say, because he has been very vocal on the matter.

The Treasury Select Committee, as well as others who have looked into the matter, is scathing on a number of issues. Chief among the people and groups that should have acted better are the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the Presbyterian Mutual Society (PMS) and its directors, and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

DETI's role is deserving of scrutiny. In a somewhat breathless defence of her Department following the publication of the Committee's report, the Minister said:

"It is not the role of the Registry to comment on the business performance or decisions of a corporate entity ... The Department of Trade and Investment had no reason to question the validity of the accounts, which were unqualified for audit purposes."

Essentially, the argument that she was making, which she repeated at the ETI Committee's meeting on 25 February 2010, was that the Department's role was to look at the PMS's accounts, to file them and to forget about them. In the Department's view, its role was to keep the PMS on a list of similarly registered bodies, to ensure that it still qualified to be on that list and to make sure that it filed returns on time. Therefore, the Department felt that no other action was necessary. However, the Department's corporate plan from 2002 stated:

"DETI is responsible for regulating Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies in Northern Ireland."

The PMS is registered as an industrial and provident society. We now know that the use of the word "regulating" was misleading, if not downright untrue. However, the wide perception in Northern Ireland was that if a body was compelled to lodge accounts with a Department, someone would at least open the cover sheet of those accounts and have a look inside.

The Treasury Select Committee's report states:

"If the Chairman of the Northern Island Assembly Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Investment believed the PMS was regulated, it is no surprise that ordinary people made the same assumption."

The Chairman at that time was the Member for Foyle Mr Durkan.

The difference between registration and regulation is huge. DETI does not seem to have considered changing the status of the PMS between its registration in 1982 and its near collapse in 2008. The question must be asked: did no one in DETI ever consider whether legislation that was introduced in 1969 was still adequate for regulating a society with assets and liabilities that ran into many millions of pounds?

One of the most troubling matters is the question of how the PMS should have been registered in the first place. During the Minister's evidence session with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in February, I asked whether the PMS's own rule book precluded it from registration under the 1969 legislation by virtue of the fact that it did not exist for community benefit. Moreover, the 1969 Act precludes businesses from registering as a co-operative if they make profit mainly for the payment of interest or dividends on money that has been deposited. Therefore, the society was

not a bona fide co-operative. In response, the Minister and her officials were adamant that their legal advice and the Department's opinion was that the registration was correct. The basis of that opinion, which appeared to be read from a prepared answer, was that the society was to function primarily as a source of credit for members at a reasonable rate of interest. On reflection, I am not satisfied with that answer.

The society's members were, on the whole, savers rather than borrowers. The society was largely a body whose function was to carry out business for the purpose of paying interest on its members' deposits. It conducted regulated activities without the necessary authorisation or exemption. It is worth noting that a 'News Letter' report on the crisis from 12 November 2008 states:

"Its activities consist of receiving money from shareholders – on which it pays a dividend –, making loans to churches and private individuals, and making investments in commercial property in England and Scotland from which it derives a rental income."

That supports the view that, by virtue of section 3 of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, the PMS was not eligible to be registered under that legislation.

It could transpire that the society was a bona fide co-operative in 1982. However, it had not been for some time. DETI officials would have realised that if they had bothered to read the returns that the society submitted. DETI had a duty to review whether the society was eligible to be registered as an industrial and provident society, especially during the rapid expansion period after 2002.

The PMS and its board also deserve criticism. The society carried out regulated functions although it was not registered with the Financial Services Authority (FSA). I firmly believe that it was registered as a co-operative in error for a considerable period. The society failed in its duties to members through inadequate governance of its affairs. It is ironic that in the PMS's final report, the director stated that he did not expect any significant changes to the society's activities in the forthcoming year. Similarly, the Church did not act as it should have. It has, at least, a moral responsibility to assist Presbyterians who have possibly lost their savings, because the Treasury Committee found

that the Presbyterian Church had encouraged its members to save with the society.

I want to outline the Prime Minister's duty on the matter. In September 2009, he told his party conference:

"we nationalised Northern Rock and took shares in British banks, and as a result not one British saver has lost a single penny."

The Government's guarantee to banks and other financial institutions caused the run on the PMS. Members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society rightly questioned the Prime Minister's bold claim.

In December 2009, in response to a House of Lords question for written answer, Lord Myners replied:

"The Ministerial Working Group on the Presbyterian Mutual Society will take account of all of the Government's previous interventions in the financial services sector when deciding how to respond to the problems facing investors in the Presbyterian Mutual Society."

That is a step in the right direction. The Government have a duty to honour their own statements, and I am glad that Lord Myners has stated that the ministerial working group will take that into consideration. However, I am not heartened that that duty will include the working group, which has done little or nothing thus far.

The situation has been characterised by Government inaction.

Lord Morrow: Perhaps the Member will enlarge on where the error was made, as he sees it. My understanding is that the PMS was formed in 1982, which was a long time before there was devolution in Northern Ireland. Does the Member agree that it is a wee bit rich of the chairman of the Treasury Committee, Mr McFall, to allocate blame, bearing in mind that he served here as a Minister? Furthermore, does the Member accept that there were many people who had opportunities during direct rule to put right the wrongs that he perceives existed, and those that actually did exist, for many years?

Mr Cree: Thank you for that. I have already made the point about the 1982 registration and, indeed, the Government's involvement, which has not been blameless.

As I said, the situation has been characterised by government inaction: inaction, first, by DETI,

in not being as accurate in its registration duty as I had hoped that it would be; inaction by the PMS board on reviewing the legality of its activities; and inaction by the working group while it waited for everyone else to do something first. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment outlined the role of the Executive as:

"standing ready ... from the time that the order was made allowing the Administrator to be appointed".

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

Mr Cree: On 19 October 2009, the First Minister said:

"We are doing all that we can." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 44, p 174, col1].

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Cree: Similarly, the then Secretary of State advised that he would follow events closely. However —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Cree: I took an intervention.

Mr Deputy Speaker: An intervention only applies to a five-minute speech, not for a 10-minute speech.

Mr Cree: That is something that might need to be looked at, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That may be so. Those are the rules.

Mr Cree: That is the last time that I will let Lord Morrow in, then.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): The inquiry was set up by the Treasury Committee largely because the PMS ministerial working group had promised to report fairly soon after its formation. A report was due on 1 October 2009, but was subsequently pushed back to 12 November 2009 and then to 10 December 2009, and the related briefing was postponed indefinitely. There was a lack of progress on the part of the ministerial working group, and it appears that the Treasury Committee's report was commissioned as a response to that.

The report considered the Financial Services and Markets Act (2000) (Exemption) Order 2001, which provides for industrial and

provident societies (IPSs) to be exempt from regulation provided that deposits are in the form of withdrawable shares. The report notes:

"only one third of the money held by PMS appears to be in this form."

It goes on to say that the Financial Services Authority investigated the PMS following the collapse and concluded that it was conducting regulated activities. The report that the PMS presented to the DETI Registry of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies makes it clear that the PMS was conducting activities that were over and beyond the form of withdrawable shares.

2.15 pm

The report from the Treasury Committee considered the co-location of registration and regulation functions in GB in the FSA. It states that that means that the registrar is well placed to draw the attention of the regulator to registered bodies, which appears to be straying into regulated business. It does not state that the FSA does that as a matter of course. Paragraph 32 of the report quotes the FSA as saying:

"Our mutuals registration team examines each society's rule book both at the time of first registration and when applications to register subsequent alterations to rules are received."

The Minister's press statement said that the report:

"did not disclose that the PMS was accepting deposits in the form of loans nor did they disclose the purpose for which loans were being advanced to members."

It went on to state:

"For the Treasury Select Committee to suggest DETI had access to all relevant information to form a view on whether the PMS was accepting deposits is beyond belief and untrue."

However, the report states that the society was dealing in mortgages and that it had investment in property to the tune of £129 million on 31 March 2008, and £140 million in the preceding year. Advances on mortgages totalled £174 million and £144 million in the preceding year.

The Minister said that the Department was not in a position to identify that unregulated activity, but that is exactly what the report states. It was sufficient for alarm bells to ring, and the Treasury Select Committee said that the Department

should have been in a position to identify that and take action. After that happened, the Department took action to assess risk, but the Treasury Committee asked why the Department, which was able to take that action in the aftermath of the incident, could not have done so prior to the event. Clearly, alarm bells could have rung at that stage.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: One does not blame the Minister, but there were deficiencies in the way that the Department conducted its affairs.

Mr Simpson: There are many aspects to the ongoing and prolonged crisis in the PMS. When the society went into administration in October 2008, after a dramatic run on its resources that was caused by the Government's decision to guarantee deposits in conventional banks, it had an immediate and very human impact. Upright, hard-working people found themselves in a crisis that was not of their making. My party took immediate action to try to create some stability and to allow room for a solution to be found.

Following an approach by the directors of the PMS, my colleague Minister Arlene Foster made an order under insolvency legislation to give the society the option of going into administration. That procedure prevented the immediate sale of the assets belonging to the society and provided an opportunity for an administrator to manage its affairs with a view to safeguarding its assets and funds and to preserve the interests of its members. The Minister has worked tirelessly, as have the First Minister and the Finance Minister, to bring the crisis to a satisfactory conclusion.

The Presbyterian Mutual Society working group was set up as a result of DUP pressure. It consists of representatives from Whitehall, the Financial Services Authority, DETI and the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). It is continuing to work hard to seek a resolution.

Along with colleagues, I am a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster, both of which discuss the matter regularly. I must say that there is disappointment at the judge's recent decision, which stated that those who deposited £20,000

or less will not be classed as creditors. That is not good news at all.

We were all frustrated and annoyed when we read the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee's report. It has not helped the search for a solution, which must be our priority. I agree with the wording of the motion when it states that it "notes with concern" the report's conclusions. However, I suspect that my grounds for concern are not quite the same as those of the Members who proposed the motion. The Treasury Select Committee's Chairperson, John McFall, seems to have been intent on finding a scapegoat. He blames DETI for a failure to plug the gap and the working group for not making enough progress. I believe that that is a cheap and easy way out.

Indeed, Mr McFall must be careful, because he is on thin ice. He has close associations with the Province, having served here as a direct rule Minister. He points the finger at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, but until the late 1990s, he was in charge of the Department that had those responsibilities. As Mrs Foster said, her Department did not have any legal authority to "go behind the backs" of professionals who were responsible for running companies.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Simpson: I will give way as long as I am given an extra minute.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. The negative attention that the Member is giving to the Treasury Select Committee and particularly to its Chairman, John McFall, is unfair. The report sought to bring sympathy to the plight of PMS savers, and it has done that. It also sought to inject urgency into the situation. The Member seems to be making the same mistake that others made in attacking a report that is there to help.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Simpson: I know where Mr Durkan is coming from. I realise that he has a personal friendship with the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee and, therefore, we should not rattle any cages. At the end of the day, however, the report did not give us any resolution to the matter. It blames everybody and their grandmother, but it does not give us any direction.

We should note that the Treasury has never identified any systematic weaknesses in the current DETI functions. Mr McFall is unfair in his criticism of the working group. Progress is being made, but due diligence is needed. Rather than blaming DETI and the working group, it is a great pity that the report does not identify a viable resolution, which is what we all want.

A pertinent question is raised in the motion: why have we not achieved a positive resolution? However, it asks that question of the wrong person and the wrong Department. Although we must all seek to play a full part in the search for a resolution, the buck stops ultimately with the Westminster Government. We need action now. The power and responsibility rest firmly with Her Majesty's Government, and they must rise to the challenge.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. The debate should not be about who is or who is not to blame; it should be about trying to get people's money back, particularly those who had life savings in the society of less than £20,000. A solution needs to be found, and the savers whom I have just spoken about did nothing wrong. They put their savings into the society, but they have no redress to get that money back. That is what we should concentrate on.

The Treasury Select Committee report sets out that the society's collapse occurred following a run on its deposits at a time when people everywhere were concerned about the collapse of the whole banking system. Indeed, people were withdrawing their money because they felt that it was not safe.

The Treasury Committee interviewed some members of the society who said that they had adhered to the savings policy. Up to one third of savers had adhered to the ceiling of £20,000 worth of shares. They were unaware that the society had invested their money in property development and that their savings were not safe. The onus was on the organisation to ensure that its members' interests were protected, either through its own protection scheme, as operated by similar societies, such as the credit unions, or the financial services compensation scheme.

In the case of the Presbyterian Mutual Society, the responsibility for registration lay with the

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, but the Department had no function in regulating the society. Therefore, there was no legal responsibility on the Department to advise that society to move into regulation. We heard that reiterated at a Committee meeting by the Minister and her officials at the time.

However, the society engaged in investment activities without the necessary authorisations. I will focus on that point. The society's assets grew from £24 million in 2002 to £309 million in 2008. As was said in Committee, the Department had no legal obligation, but it would have had access to the society's annual accounts and to the number of shareholders involved. Someone should have been alerted to those facts. The maximum shareholding of £20,000 was not being adhered to and almost two thirds of the society's investors were making loans to the PMS.

As mentioned, the society is now in a position whereby its creditors, or those who made loans to it, will get their money back first. That is most unfair on the other savers, some of whom are elderly people who put their life savings into the society.

It is not a matter of who is to blame for the collapse of the society. What is important now is that those savers who did nothing wrong and simply invested in an attempt to help their Church should get their money back. That applies particularly to those elderly people who invested £20,000 in the society. Processes should be put in place to ensure that this type of thing does not happen again.

Mr Neeson: I welcome and support the motion. The PMS has been a major issue for the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for some time. For various reasons, a large number of east Antrim residents invested all their savings in the PMS. I have been contacted by many distraught people who now suffer misery and pain. They believed that the PMS was an institution similar to a credit union. They believed that their money was as safe as houses, not realising that their money was invested in houses.

I welcome the report from the Treasury Committee. I was pleased to give evidence to it when it sat in Parliament Buildings. I have a great deal of respect for its Chairman, John McFall, whom I knew well when he was a Minister in Northern Ireland. Contrary to

comments made by other Members, he is an honourable man and remains dedicated to the people of Northern Ireland. The criticisms of his report by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and others distort the whole issue. The report was fair, and it was delivered much earlier than I expected. One of the major issues that we must consider is that the PMS's balance sheet for 2008 should have set alarm bells ringing.

I quote from the report:

"The case of the Presbyterian Mutual Society has demonstrated, once again, how little information was available to ordinary people about the organisations to which they entrusted their money. We consider that in future there has to be far clearer information given to those who make savings and investments about the way in which organisations are regulated, and the extent of any guarantee provided."

Furthermore, there is great dismay and uncertainty among PMS savers over the delay in publishing the report from the working group that the Government set up last year, and I totally agree with what the former Chairman of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment said about that. That report should have been delivered by October 2009.

Many people here ask why, if the Government can help Dunfermline Building Society savers, they cannot help people in Northern Ireland. There is further dismay at Judge Donnell Deeny's recent ruling that those who saved £20,000 or less in the PMS were shareholders and could not be classed as creditors. They are, therefore, not entitled to share in the £20 million of income that the society has generated since going into administration in 2008.

Mr Simpson: The Member accepts the Treasury Committee report, but does he agree that, although it contains criticism, the report offers no direction and no solution to the matter?

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Neeson: The report was fair, and it represented an honest attempt to help those who had put their savings in the PMS. The Treasury should have acted by now, and there is an onus on it to do so. The Government certainly could have done more by now. In fact,

we all believed that, as part of the Hillsborough settlement, the Government would assist those who had invested in the PMS. That did not happen, and I deeply regret that.

The Executive recently put forward three options. The most favoured of those was a takeover by another bank. We would all like to see that happen. Unfortunately, it has not happened yet. In the meantime, however, a hardship fund should be established for those who are struggling, and that, too, was one of the options. It is also worrying that the role of the administrator has been extended to 2015. That does not clarify whether there will be any early solution. I recognise that the PMS lacked regulation. What is important, however, is that what happened with the PMS should not be allowed to happen to any other society in Northern Ireland.

Mr Donaldson: Like many Members, I have constituents who have savings with the Presbyterian Mutual Society. I am sure that we have all met some of its savers. There is great anguish and frustration and some anger, all of which is understandable. Good people invested their money in good faith in a society that was linked to their Church, and they had every reason to believe that their savings were in a safe place.

The motion refers to the Treasury report, which criticises the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and claims that the Department should have taken a lead in identifying the problem. We must look first at the Department's legal responsibility, which clearly does not include regulation. Whether we like it or not, that is the reality and was the reality at the time that the PMS went into administration. Let us recall that, by putting legislation through the Assembly in record time, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, through her swift response, provided the basis on which the PMS was able to go into administration. If the Minister had not acted so quickly, the PMS savers would be facing a serious crisis because, at that time, there was no proper basis on which the PMS could have gone into administration. Therefore, when we criticise the Department, it is worth bearing that in mind.

I agree with the Member for East Antrim that there are flaws in the system that must be addressed and that we must learn lessons from what happened with the PMS. To ensure

that that does not happen again, there must be an urgent review of the regulatory system in Northern Ireland for friendly societies, co-operatives and savings vehicles such as the PMS.

It is wrong to simply lay the blame at the door of the Department, which fulfilled its legal responsibility. I remind the proposer of the motion that the PMS was formed in 1982, so we should not look only at the Department's role in recent years; we should look at the role that it played throughout that period. It is worth bearing in mind that, when Ian Pearson, who is now a Treasury Minister, was the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, he initiated a review of friendly societies and co-operatives in Northern Ireland. It is also worth bearing in mind that Sir Reg Empey, the leader of the party whose Members tabled the motion, was the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a lengthy period, and he did nothing about the regulation of the PMS.

If we are to talk about the history of the situation, let us at least be honest and open about it and recognise that others had their hands on the tiller when the Department looked at the annual reports of the PMS. If we are going to apply blame, let us be fair, even-handed and not selective about it. I am not interested in the blame game. I am interested in ensuring that we get a result for PMS savers, and that is what we need to focus on.

The Treasury Committee's report is an attempt to pass the buck to the Northern Ireland Executive. That is wrong; the Treasury also has a responsibility here, and it should take on that responsibility. In any solution that may be forthcoming, the Treasury, along with others, should contribute to the establishment of a fund to help the PMS savers who find themselves in this plight.

I say to the proposer of the motion that I know from contact with Ministers that every effort has been made to find a solution. Banks and other financial institutions have looked at the PMS, and we need to acknowledge that efforts have been made to find a way forward. It is not true that nothing has happened.

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

Mr Donaldson: I just hope that we can come together today and agree to find a solution to help those who are in need.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr Butler):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. By and large, I support the motion. I take on board the points made by my colleague the Member for Lagan Valley. He had some criticisms, which I understand. His final point was about how we might arrive at a solution to the problems with the Presbyterian Mutual Society. As Jeffrey Donaldson said, we have all been lobbied by people who had savings in the Presbyterian Mutual Society, and, at the end of the day, 9,000 or 10,000 people who had £20,000 or less in the society are suffering, so we must find a solution for them.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is not here to defend herself because, understandably, she is in America. Lessons must be taken from the report, which covers issues of regulation and registration. In a strict legal sense, the Minister is probably right: her Department's only role is in the registration of the Presbyterian Mutual Society and other provident societies. However, in the report, John McFall and his colleagues expressed concern about the need to address that regulatory gap. In future, there must be a unified system, a regime that enables the Assembly, the Treasury and the FSA to plug that gap. That is one of the lessons that must be learned, even though DETI says that, strictly speaking, it had no lawful right to intervene or to check whether the Presbyterian Mutual Society was involved in activities governed by regulations.

I welcome the report's mention of problems associated with the role of credit unions. It also recommends a Treasury review of insolvency laws. The judge's powers were probably limited in the recent court case concerning the Presbyterian Mutual Society. Many savers will be discriminated against because creditors must be paid first. Therefore, I hope that recommendations for action in respect of insolvency laws will be taken on board.

The prospect of the taxman coming after Presbyterian Mutual Society savers has been raised with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, I am sure, with other Members. However, the people who are being pursued cannot get access to their savings, which are tied up by the administrator.

Mr Donaldson: Is the Member aware that the Minister for Social Development has ruled that

PMS savers who cannot access their savings will not have those savings taken into account in calculating their entitlement to tax credits, pension credits and other benefits? Does he join me in welcoming that ruling?

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

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Yes. The Minister's interventions in a number of cases were raised in Committee, as was the fact that she had written to HMRC on the issue. I welcome that, and I know that the Committee has also taken up the matter.

I am sure that the Minister will respond, but it is unfortunate that the working group has not yet pointed the way forward for the PMS issue. The working group comprises the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, Treasury officials and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. Had that group reported by now, the Treasury Committee report might not have come out. However, the working group's recommendations on how to deal with the whole issue, particularly for savers, may provide some light at the end of the tunnel.

In broad terms, we should learn lessons from the experience of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. Although I understand the Minister's defensiveness — she is not here to defend herself — we should look beyond that to what the Assembly can do. To be fair, everyone here — all the political parties, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and Minister of Finance and Personnel — have been doing all that they can on behalf of the many savers who have money tied up in the Presbyterian Mutual Society. That is what we should do.

Mr Bell: The subject matter of the debate is difficult because I am conscious that many families across Strangford placed their faith not only in their Church but in the Presbyterian Mutual Society to deal with critical financial aspects of their life. Some people lodged their redundancy money, and others who came to my North Street office placed their pension money in the society. I am talking about real people who will get no second chance if this matter is not resolved. People get only one pension and one pension payout. Many people who invested their money in good faith and in the expectation that it would be handled well are very worried at the minute. I know of one gentleman in

Ballywalter who invested all his money in the society. He now struggles to buy the basic groceries that we take for granted. The House must recognise people's concerns.

2.45 pm

In many cases, the report generated more heat than light. I was always taught to bring solutions rather than problems, and people in Strangford and right across Northern Ireland are looking for solutions. The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel led this House correctly — I hope that I can say that — when she said that there was no legal regulation on the Minister. I am proud of Minister Foster for what she has achieved. She would be here today to stand over a very honourable record, but she is in America to fight for jobs for our children right across Northern Ireland at a critical time. We wish her well. She is a high-calibre Minister who moved with all urgency and due diligence to bring to the House the legislation that has provided the only sense of hope. The House should stand with her and commend her.

There is a saying in Strangford that, if a person points a finger, three fingers point back at them. Fingers were pointed in poorer parts of this report, but I could not help but think that three fingers were pointing backwards at John McFall, Ian Pearson and Sir Reg Empey. Those three fingers point back at any criticism that is given.

I do not know what planet some people are on when they talk about the people with less than £20,000. The vast majority of the people whom I have the privilege of representing have less than £20,000. For those whose money is genuinely tied up and who find themselves being pursued by the Inland Revenue for tax, there needs to be a sympathetic approach. Equally, there is a need for the Treasury to step up to the plate. We want a solution, not an identification of the problem. We all understand what the problems are. It would be good if the House could bring cross-party consensus to the Treasury.

Genuine people, through no fault of their own, placed their faith in a society and trusted others who they believed had greater financial acumen than they to manage their funds. We will not get a second chance. We need a solution. People who are living out their retirement will not get a chance to live these days again. They should not have to live in financial hardship. It is incumbent on the Treasury to step up to the plate. It should

not shirk the challenge. It should not point the finger but should provide answers. It should not generate the heat that the report did but should provide light and give whatever can be given back to the genuine people to improve the quality of their lives.

Mr McFarland: I declare an interest: my mother is a saver with the PMS. This is a vexed issue in which 10,000 or so savers, many of whom are small savers, find their life turned upside down through no fault of their own. They are unable to access their money. In many cases, that has caused deep hardship. This is a serious issue.

The original rules of the game stated that people were allowed to have up to £20,000 in the society. Many of the savers cannot understand when the rules changed. We know from evidence that some savers have up to £1 million in the society. That is confusing. The crisis was set off by the Prime Minister and the rescue of the banks and the guarantees for banks and building societies. That resulted in people hurriedly withdrawing their money from the PMS, leaving it with no funds. Therefore, there is an onus on the Prime Minister and the Government to examine whether their actions precipitated the run on the PMS.

The second issue is whether the PMS and DETI understood what was going on. The society was out of control and operating well beyond the boundaries of financial regulations. If anyone wants proof of that, they can look at the accounts. In 2002, the society had assets of £24 million, and by 2008 it had assets of more than £300 million. It is surprising that no one wondered what was going on. Recently, I studied the accounts for 2006-07 and 2007-08, and the administration costs alone had increased from £400,000 to £1 million. The bad debt provision had moved from about £3,000 up to £556,000, which is an increase of £553,000. You would have thought that someone who read those accounts might have realised that there was something going on.

I am also disappointed by the Church's reaction. Although it was not legally responsible for the society, every year at the general assembly, the Church and all the members extolled the virtues of the PMS and encouraged Presbyterians to invest their savings in it. The Church's initial reaction to the crisis was not good and did not show it in a good light. In fact, it is fair to say that its members felt abandoned — so much

for pastoral care. When people got into difficulty, their Church said it had nothing to do with it. Furthermore, the behaviour of some individuals, particularly the speed with which they took their money out of the PMS, does not show Christian values in a good light. The expression "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" comes to mind. What do we do about this situation?

Mr Cree: Does the Member agree that the returns from the PMS last year show that it has potential, that it is an ongoing project and that the solution is for a bank to take over the assets and liabilities of the PMS, with a guarantee from the Treasury, the Executive and perhaps the Church?

Mr McFarland: I agree with my colleague. The Government now own several of the banks, and one would have thought that the Prime Minister, perhaps accepting some responsibility for setting the ball rolling, would consider asking one of the banks to take on the PMS and provide a degree of stability. Perhaps the Treasury could guarantee part of it, and the Executive might turn their mind to providing a partial guarantee to bring some stability to the situation. Indeed, given the Church's initial reaction to the situation, it might consider setting up some sort of fund as a safety net.

Unfortunately, the whole debacle has resulted in simple, innocent folk, who thought that they were doing the right thing by looking after their savings, being seriously disadvantaged and, in some cases, ending up in severe hardship. Surely it is not beyond the bounds of reason for our Government, the Government in London and others, to get their act together and bring some closure to the matter soon, so that people know where they are and can access their savings. I support the motion.

Mr Durkan: I support the motion and join other Members in hoping that we have a unanimous outcome today. However, that cause is not helped by the debate being used to target criticism unduly at the Treasury Committee's report.

For a long time, all that the frustrated and exasperated PMS savers have been hearing from the powers that be in London are statements calling them investors or statements implying that it is the fault of the PMS and that the Treasury has no liability. It has been said that the Treasury cannot do anything because the PMS is not on a par with other cases.

Then we had the Treasury Committee come to Northern Ireland, at the request of a number of us, and produce a report that provided sympathy and understanding for the savers of the Presbyterian Mutual Society and tried to inject some urgency into the situation — urgency that was directed at the Treasury.

What we have here today and what we had in reaction to the Treasury Committee's report is a misguided reaction by the Department, because it felt that there was undue or misplaced criticism of it in relation to the background to the PMS collapse. Since the Department and civil servants felt a bit sensitive about some of that, Ministers focused on that aspect, rather than trying to use, as a case in aid to the Treasury, the important, positive and timely aspects of the Select Committee's report.

The Treasury Committee received evidence here from Ministers about the ministerial working group, and it is clear that the Treasury Committee was not particularly enthused or excited by what it heard about the work of the group. It is also true to say that the many members of the PMS who were in the Public Gallery that day were not particularly encouraged or impressed by what they heard from the ministerial working group. However, I hear Members say today that the ministerial working group is making progress. That has been said before, but let us look for that progress, rather than attacking a Treasury Committee report that is helpful to us.

When the powers that be in London have been dealing with this issue, they have come up with layers of obfuscation, the first of which is to blame the PMS and say that there were flaws with it. They referred to the fact that the FSA said, as a result of its investigation, that some illegal activity had been carried out by the PMS. Therefore, they point out that mistakes were made by the society. They also point to the question of the regulatory flaws or what some might call regulatory failure.

There was a twilight zone between the registration roles being conducted by the Department, which everyone, including the Department, was calling regulation. When we first brought the Department before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, we called it in as regulator, and it was describing itself in those terms as well. That was another reason given by the Treasury as to why the collapse was nothing to do with it.

One must remember that in all other savings collapses and potential collapses, whether in building societies or banks, there was institutional failure by the bank or building society. There was misjudgement, misinvestment and sins of excess. No saver had to pay the price for those institutional failures, but we are being told that that has to happen with the PMS. Similarly, in every one of those other situations, the Treasury Committee, among others, found that there were regulatory oversights, flaws, failures and twilight zones.

The Treasury Committee's findings in relation to wider regulatory issues came forward in similar tones to those which the Treasury Committee has referred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Department, therefore, should not be so sensitive. Some Members could say that they were personally criticised in the report, because the Treasury Committee said that the Assembly or the Committee should have, perhaps, known. Perhaps that is true. If we are out to help the PMS savers, perhaps we should roll with the punches and take the case where it needs to be taken and not be fighting here.

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

Mr Durkan: In his opening remarks, Mr Cree made all his points about the Department as a corporate body. Not once did he criticise any Minister personally. I certainly will not criticise the Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question Time begins at 3.00 pm. The debate on the report on the Presbyterian Mutual Society will resume at 3.30 pm, when Mr George Robinson will be called to speak.

The debate stood suspended.

3.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Departmental Solicitor's Office: 'Spotlight' Programme

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why it is not appropriate to provide details of the instructions that his Departmental Solicitor's Office sent to counsel requesting provision of an opinion on allegations raised in the BBC 'Spotlight' programme of 7 January 2010. (AQO 945/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I refer to my responses to the questions for written answer of 2 March 2010, 20 February 2010 and 15 February 2010, in which I informed Members that advice was sought in relation to the allegation in the 'Spotlight' programme that the First Minister acted in breach of the ministerial code, the ministerial code of conduct and the Pledge of Office and that it was not appropriate to provide details of the instruction given to counsel.

The Member will be well aware that the relationship between an individual and his legal adviser has long been recognised as requiring confidentiality; not only on advice that is given but on the exchange of information between client and lawyer and that it attracts legal professional privilege. That enables free exchange of information and applies equally to instructions and advice. It ensures trust between adviser and advised. Those are important principles and qualities that protect that relationship. They apply to the Government and to private individuals equally.

The Member will recall the words of a former Lord Chief Justice of England who said that if a balancing exercise with regard to disclosure were ever required in the case of legal professional privilege, it was performed once and for all in the sixteenth century and that, since then, it has applied across the board in every case, irrespective of the client's individual merits.

Apart from principle in that case, an additional factor that weights the balance against

disclosure is that there is a police inquiry into aspects of the allegations that were made in the 'Spotlight' programme. In all those circumstances, it is inappropriate to waive legal professional privilege and to provide details of instructions that were given.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his reply. Of course, I, and all Members in the House, accept that any opinion or instructions are privileged. However, given the gravity of the situation and the personality who is the office-holder, the First Minister, it is fit and proper for that privilege to be relaxed. The First Minister said that he is willing to have that opinion and the instructions that went with it revealed at some stage. At present, it seems unbelievable that it could not be released. I ask the Minister to ask the First Minister to waive his privilege in that matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before the Minister replies, I ask Members not to walk in front of a Member who is speaking in the Chamber.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I want to make it clear that the matter is not just about the First Minister waiving his privilege; it is about professional legal privilege that Departments seek regularly. I am sure that, occasionally, the Member has been asked to give clients advice and that he is aware that, for the most candid advice to be given, it is important that legal professional privilege be protected.

Indeed, one could argue that if legal advice could be disclosed in a case as important as that, it could be disclosed in every other minor case in which legal advice is given. The Member knows that if that were the case, Departments would not receive the quality of legal advice that they require; the entire basis for legal professional privilege would be reduced, and that that would be detrimental.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister advise the House how much the legal advice cost the taxpayer?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I cannot answer that question because, to date, no bill has been received from the barrister.

Mr Cree: My question is along similar lines. Will the Minister confirm whether the First Minister obtained the legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office, which was, presumably, paid for by public funds? If so, is that not a matter

of public information to which the public is, therefore, entitled?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: If the Member had done some research before asking that question, he would have known that legal advice is not covered by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The very reason that it is not covered by the Act is that there is a need for professional and legal protection, and I have outlined why such advice is privileged. Of course that advice is paid for by Departments out of the public purse. The purpose of non-disclosure is to ensure that advice that is sought and given is not disclosed and that full and frank advice can be given to Departments and Ministers. They can then make up their minds on the basis of that advice.

Departmental Budgets

2. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what mechanisms his Department has in place to ensure that Departments spend their budget allocations and that there is no money returned to central government. (AQO 946/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It must be recognised that the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is not responsible for managing individual Departments' budgets. Indeed, any attempt by me or my Department to micromanage in that way would be resisted by all Ministers. However, measures are taken to try to ensure that Departments do not overspend or severely underspend but rather spend according to the plans for which the money was given.

First, quarterly in-year monitoring rounds provide an opportunity for Departments to surrender to the Executive resources that are not required. Those resources can then be allocated elsewhere, and the Executive discuss those matters four times a year. Secondly, Departments are fully aware of the risk of surrendering reduced requirements too late in the year; for example, money surrendered in the February monitoring round may not be able to be spent and could be lost, if not for ever, at least in the short term, if it becomes part of the EYF stock. Thirdly, Departments are required to provide a monthly out-turn and forecast information that shows actual spend against forecast expenditure. That information usually gives a good indication of whether

there will be problems with underspends or overspends. Finally, each Department has a DFP Supply team to work closely with it. That team performs an ongoing challenge function by asking the kind of questions that need to be asked about a Department's spending to ensure that it is not heading towards an overspend or an underspend.

I hope that my response assures the Member that we try to monitor without interfering.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. He touched on some issues that I want to raise. In the February monitoring round, many Departments, including the Department for Social Development (DSD), ended up with massive amounts of money that needed to be spent in a very short period. Does the Minister advise other Ministers as the year goes on, and in the third quarterly monitoring round, that they are badly underspending some of their budget?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I expressed some concern about Departments leaving it to the final monitoring round of the year to declare underspend. Too many Departments did that, and I named them in the House to shame them. Some 25% of reduced requirements were declared in the final monitoring round, which, of course, left little time for other Departments to spend the money.

I think that the Member is referring to money that was returned to DSD as a result of the underspend on swine flu. Each Department was given an option: if it could not spend the money to which it was entitled to have returned to it as a result of the underspend on swine flu, it could say that it could not spend it in this financial year. That money will be taken from the DHSSPS budget in next year's June monitoring round, which means that the Department would have had nearly a full year to spend it. The Minister for Social Development indicated that she could spend the money in the remaining months of this financial year, which is why she got some of it back.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I draw to the Minister's attention the tendency of the Department of Culture, Art and Leisure to return money unspent in the monitoring rounds. Can he speak directly to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure about funding for sports and arts projects that are ready to go ahead? For example, they own, or have a long-term lease on, land or premises, and planning permission

is in place to make use of capital money that is sometimes sent back to the centre.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We need a question.

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister have a word with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure about the tendency to send money back when it can be spent legitimately on capital projects for sport and the arts?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member is a diligent Member in the House, and he raises questions regularly. However, I would have thought that the best place to ensure that money is not sent back to the centre is in Committee. If money is sent back to the centre, it is not simply because a Department decided not to spend it. It is what is regarded by the Department as a reduced requirement: in other words, the money was allocated for certain projects and could not be spent because the projects no longer existed or there had been a change of policy. The Member is an assiduous Committee member, and I am sure that he is quite capable of bringing the Minister and his officials along and giving them a good grilling on the issue.

Mr O'Loan: My question is in a similar vein to those asked previously. Has the Minister established why there was such an abnormally and unexpectedly high surrender of money in the February monitoring round? I believe that he had difficulty in giving away some £5 million of capital money, which is a rare event. How confident is the Minister that those redistributed funds will be spent usefully?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The redistributed funds that have been allocated were allocated only on the basis that Ministers indicated that they could spend those funds towards the end of the year. Indeed, Ministers knew that there would be sanctions and penalties if they were unable to spend the funds. Why did some of the returns come so late? There were two reasons. First, some issues are demand-led, and Departments do not know until the last minute that there is no demand. Indeed, if they did not hold on to the money, they would be unable to meet the demand, and Members would criticise them for that. Secondly, if Departments hold on to money and the demand does not materialise, they have to return the money late in the day, which is forgivable.

However, it is not forgivable when Departments do not look ahead and see that they will be unable to spend money. Some Departments were guilty of that, and they have been notified. For example, the Departments knew that money would not be spent on staffing or on particular projects, and they could have seen ahead from one quarter to the next and taken action, but they did not do that. Those are the types of issues that I want Committees to pick up on when they scrutinise the spending of Departments.

Contracts

3. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he can provide an assurance that any contracts secured by his Department through public procurement tenders will be measured in terms of value for money and social outcomes. (AQO 947/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland procurement policy is delivering best value for money. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) measures value-for-money gains achieved when each contract is awarded. In the 11 months to February 2010, CPD recorded value-for-money gains of £21 million: in other words, it examined projects and thought that they could be done better. That compares with £17.5 million for the entire previous year. Therefore, there has been some improvement as far as value for money is concerned.

Departments must determine the sustainable and social impact that they wish to achieve from their programmes and projects. The role of procurement professionals is to facilitate the delivery of those outcomes via the procurement process, ensuring that it is compliant with EU and UK law. For example, since 2008, social clauses have been included in construction projects where appropriate: for every £2 million spent, one apprentice should be employed; and for every £5 million spent, one long-term unemployed person should be taken on. Those are the guidelines, and they have had an impact on projects.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. That is the point that I was trying to make. Will his Department and the Central Procurement Directorate actively promote the use of social clauses by other Departments and make it compulsory for them to do so in relation to

long-term unemployed apprenticeship schemes by building such clauses into contracts?

3.15 pm

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

As I said, that is already being done with construction projects. I should have some figures here somewhere about some of the projects where that has happened. For example, it has happened in my constituency at the Northern Regional College skills centre at Newtownabbey. That project has led to one long-term unemployed person and four apprentices being employed. Two long-term unemployed people and five apprentices have been employed in the OMAC theatre in Belfast as a result of clauses that were built into the procurement contract there.

It is a bit more difficult to promote the use of social clauses with service contracts, because they tend to be smaller and more fragmented by their nature. However, we are looking at how we can build in some social requirements to those contracts as well.

Mr K Robinson: Given that we are a small-business economy, what progress can the Minister ensure is made to make sure that public procurement tenders are more accessible to small firms across Northern Ireland?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A number of things have been done. Again, I have to give caveats to all my answers by indicating that we have to comply with EU law in particular, much as it sticks in my gullet to say that. Given the regulations that are laid down as a result of EU legislation, especially on procurement, we cannot discriminate in favour of small local firms. However, we have tried to do things in a number of ways. For example, we have encouraged consortia of firms to apply for contracts and we have looked at the supply chain to try to ensure that small firms have an input, even where the huge contracts are concerned. The Construction Employers Federation in Northern Ireland has been very helpful in giving us some useful guidelines on how we can do that.

Of course, there is always a balance to be struck in getting economies of scale; we can have huge procurement projects and break them down into smaller contracts. We have done that with cleaning contracts, for example, in that we regionalised some of the contracts so that small

local firms could apply, rather than the project being Northern Ireland wide. We have done the same with some consultancy projects. A mixture of things can be done, but it all has to be in the context of some very detailed procurement law.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Bearing in mind the answer that the Minister has just given, what is his assessment of the recent report from the Finance Committee on public procurement? He talked about compliance with EU laws, but has his Department had any communication with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) through the Departmental Solicitor's Office about the widely reported incident involving Northern Ireland Water?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel:

First, we had a long debate on the Finance Committee's report on procurement in the House, and I congratulated the Committee on that report then. It was a balanced report; it was not one of those that sought only to pick holes and to get a cheap headline. It is a useful piece of work that Departments can work on. Of course, all its delivery is not for DFP, because it affects other Departments. As I indicated, although I may have some sympathy with some of the report's recommendations, I am not sure that it is possible to implement them. However, I also indicated that I am considering it and that I will come back to the Committee. We may even have another debate in the Assembly on it.

Northern Ireland Water and DRD have their own centre of procurement expertise (COPE). The matter is really a responsibility for the Minister for Regional Development, and, of course, he has acted by giving notice to a number of the directors already.

Dormant Bank Accounts

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the reason for the delay in introducing the dormant bank accounts scheme. (AQO 948/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The dormant accounts scheme is not an Executive scheme; I think that Members know that.

The timetable for the release of funds to the Big Lottery Fund, and, ultimately, the opening of the applications, is affected by a number of factors beyond the Executive's control. Steps are to be taken to set up the reclaim fund, and

the UK Government are working with the banks, the building societies, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and the Co-operative Financial Services (CFS) to ensure that the reclaim fund is in operation as soon as possible. If the work on the reclaim fund proceeds as planned, it is expected to be operational later this year. Surplus funds will then be transferred to the Big Lottery Fund, which is the nominated distributor.

My Department also has to carry out work. We have conducted the consultation, and, shortly, I hope to bring the proposed spending priorities to the Executive for consideration. Once we have adopted the spending priorities, they will be passed on to the Big Lottery Fund.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. If any moneys can be acquired, will they be used for additional services rather than to replace or supplement funding that is already in place?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: As I said, I will bring a paper to the Executive on the priorities and the criteria. We undertook a consultation on which we received fairly good feedback. The Executive will either adopt my proposals or change them. I have no doubt that, once that happens, a debate will take place in the House on the dormant bank accounts scheme, given the interest in it. I am sure that the Committee for Finance and Personnel will want to bring departmental officials or me before the Committee to talk about the scheme, so ample opportunity will be available to discuss in the Assembly the way in which the fund will be distributed, as should be the case.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the concerns that many faith-based organisations have about accessing funding, particularly from lottery sources, will the Minister reassure the House that he will continue to support the introduction of a scheme that will be to the advantage of faith-based organisations and make it easier for them to access money that they so desperately need?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am well aware of the fact that many faith-based organisations do excellent work in difficult areas with difficult groups, especially with young people, for environmental and social purposes, for which the money is intended. In the consultation, we asked what could be done to help faith-based groups to apply. That does not mean that we can make funds available

exclusively to faith-based groups, because we must comply with legislation.

However, we have ensured that, although the funds are being distributed through the Big Lottery Fund, it will be a totally separately branded operation. In the past, many faith-based groups faced the impediment that all the money from the Big Lottery Fund came from what they regarded as gambling, and they did not want to touch it. The branding issue should no longer be a difficulty for faith-based groups, and, as I said in my answer to Mr Boylan, ample opportunity will be available for the Assembly to have an input into the final criteria. I am sure that Mr Storey will wish to ensure that his views are reflected.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I thank the Minister for his responses. What measures are in place to ensure that former private owners, or their heirs, of assets that are seized under the dormant bank accounts scheme can retrieve those assets?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: One of the reasons that there has been some delay with the scheme is that people's ability to retrieve funds must be safeguarded. The regulator is working with the FSA and the banks to ensure that a reclaim method is available. As more money goes into the reclaim fund, less remains to go into the dormant accounts fund.

The second major issue is the length of time that money should be held in the reclaim fund. All those issues must be sorted out, and that why there has been some delay.

10-Day Prompt Payment

5. **Mr Burns** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the general level of compliance with the 10-day payment rule throughout the public sector. (AQO 949/10)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am committed to ensuring that the 10-day prompt payment target is met as far as possible across the public sector. That is a particularly challenging target, because we must balance the need to ensure that public money is paid to those who provide goods or services against the need to ensure that invoices are properly authorised, approved and accounted for. It is, therefore, a balancing act.

The processing of invoices for Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments is carried out on a

centralised basis through Account NI, which is one of the shared services delivered by my Department. However, the process is strongly dependent on suppliers and Departments ensuring that invoices are submitted correctly. I saw some of the difficulties that can arise when I visited the processing operation. Those difficulties are not always caused by the Departments. In fact, they are sometimes caused by the suppliers. Separate and more disparate arrangements are in place in the wider public sector, for which I am not responsible.

Mr Burns: Will the Minister tell the House whether there is any substance to the rumours that some arm's-length bodies, such as the health trusts, are not making a serious attempt to achieve the 10-day target? Does he have any figures on that?

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The wonderful file that my officials gave me contains many answers. As the Member was asking his question, I flicked over the page, and it just so happens that I found the very figures that he requested. The first part of his question was whether the health trusts are trying to achieve the 10-day target. I cannot comment on whether the health trusts are making an effort to do so, whether they have made it a priority or whether the Health Minister has given them directions on payment. The Member should, therefore, take up that matter with the Health Minister.

I do not have figures for the individual trusts. However, across the health trusts, the compliance rate for the 10-day target varies from 32% to 48%, which is considerably below the almost 60% compliance rate that Account NI achieves.

Mr T Clarke: I do not want to take away from the Minister's answer about the health trusts. However, I am intrigued by Mr Burns's question, given that it took the Department for Social Development (DSD) 218 days to pay an invoice, which is a whole lot more than 10 days.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not wish to comment on an individual invoice, and I would not like to think that that gives a clear picture of that Department's performance. The processing of an invoice involves a host of factors. Account NI has been trying to educate Departments and suppliers on how to get an invoice processed quickly. Invoices must contain all of the relevant information, and suppliers should be made aware of what information is required, such as job numbers,

so that the invoice can be processed quickly. The 10-day period is measured from the day on which Account NI receives the invoice from the Department, and about 60% of invoices are processed within 60 days. Many of those that are not processed in 60 days are returned because of inadequate information.

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Presbyterian Mutual Society: Treasury Committee Report

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern the conclusions of the House of Commons Treasury Committee report 'The Failure of the Presbyterian Mutual Society' and, in particular, the conclusion that "the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment should have taken a lead in identifying the problem, and in seeking a solution"; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to advise the Assembly of the reasons why it has not been possible to achieve a positive resolution to date. — [Mr Cree.]

Mr G Robinson: I declare an interest as a member of the Presbyterian Church. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Someone has their mobile phone switched on. I ask all Members to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off.

Mr G Robinson: I refute all perceived criticisms of my colleague the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment, Mrs Foster, and her Department in their handling of the PMS situation. I know about the strenuous efforts that she and others have made to save or to rectify the situation long before now. Blaming easy targets will not solve the ongoing problem. Criticism has also been levelled at the Westminster Government, the very Government with which the Minister has been vigorously trying to find a resolution, and some could perceive that as the perfect opportunity for that Government to pass the buck to our devolved Assembly and to our Minister and her Department.

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

I had a conversation with a senior Presbyterian clergyman at a social event during the past year, and the praise and thanks that he expressed for efforts that were made by the Minister and others was genuine and sincere. In light of that, we hope that the proposers of the motion are not playing politics with a serious situation rather than making a genuine effort to help to resolve it.

We should all concentrate on the poor people who are suffering. The savers and the

congregations who entrusted their hard-earned savings to the PMS are foremost in my mind, and I hope that that is also the case with all other Members. It is for those people that a resolution must be found as quickly as possible.

The Minister and her Department have sought tirelessly to find a resolution. However, in his report, Mr McFall did not point to a resolution or how it could be achieved as a matter of urgency. Could that have something to do with the fact that, at one time, he had the same responsibility for overseeing the PMS as Mrs Foster and her Department do now?

Politicians from all parties, including our own First Minister and Minister of Finance and Personnel, have been supportive of those affected by the PMS situation and that should be welcomed. If all Members put their efforts into supporting the Minister and her Department's numerous attempts to find a resolution, it would be a big help in resolving this serious matter.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel

(Mr S Wilson): I thank all Members who participated in the debate, which could have been a difficult one. It would have been very easy for Members to have turned the debate into a point-scoring exercise, which would not have helped to advance the cause of those for whom we are seeking to find redress nor would it have done the image of the House a great deal of good, because it would simply have been perceived as jumping on others' misfortune. Therefore, I thank all Members for the way in which they approached the debate. Some things were said that I did not like, that I did not agree with and that were simply wrong. Nevertheless, everyone has approached the debate on the basis of the knowledge that they have and on the basis that we want to find an answer. If certain things must be fixed afterwards because they were done incorrectly, we must sort those out as well. However, I was pleased that the debate has not been treated as a blame-game exercise, albeit Members have been fairly forthright in where they believe things went wrong and about whom they believe should provide some of the remedies.

A number of Members were sensitive about some of the criticisms that were made about the Treasury Select Committee's report into the PMS. I spoke to John McFall before he came here, and he indicated that he wanted to help.

However, like all politicians, he could not resist the opportunity of a good headline, which meant pointing the finger, and it is unfortunate that parts of the report reflect that. I have said that to him privately in the House of Commons, so it is not a criticism of which he is unaware.

Two issues were raised today that are worthy of consideration. First, how did we get to this situation? It is important to reflect on that question for a moment or two, because although there may be repercussions some time down the line, we should be asking what we can do to avoid the same thing happening again and asking where the mistakes and gaps were in the process.

I am not an expert on the issue. I was going to say that I am the new Arlene Foster, but she would be quite angry if I said that in the House.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: No wonder. *[Laughter.]*

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am not an expert. However, from my knowledge of the matter, it is clear that DETI played the role of the registrar. As registrar, its responsibilities included receiving the annual returns from industrial and provident societies, ensuring that the information in those returns was compliant with the reporting requirements of the legislation, and ensuring that that information was made a matter of public record. It is not, and it was not, the role of the registrar either to scrutinise or to analyse the financial statements that were filed with the registry, other than to say that the information was presented in a way that conformed to the legislation.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mr A Maginness): I understand the Minister's point. However, in defence of DETI officials, the Minister said that although the registrar received the report, alarm bells would not have been set ringing, even if the report had been studied notionally.

As I said in my contribution, certain aspects of the report should have caused concern. I appreciate that the registrar was not a regulator. Nonetheless, alarm bells could have been set off if the report had been looked at more carefully. The report would not have had to be analysed in depth; it could have been looked at superficially.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: When preparing for the debate, I also asked that question. The Member asked why the Department

did not see that mortgages were involved. However, even under section 20 of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, those mortgages would have been permitted without being subject to FSA regulation that would have required security on real or personal property. Therefore, even if the mortgages had been seen, there would have been no cause for concern.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment: That is an interesting point. I could be entirely wrong, but the extent to which mortgages were lent by the society was such that anyone looking at the records must have been concerned. That is my point. It might have been legal for the society to provide mortgages, but the extent to which it provided them should have raised concern.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I am loath to get involved in a debate on the issue across the Floor without having full knowledge of it. However, the Act is clear that no limits are set and that an industrial and provident society is entitled to make advances of money on the security of real or personal property. Therefore, mortgages would probably not have raised concern.

The other point was that the society would have produced auditor reports, and the auditor would have supplied information to the Department. All the information that accompanied the reports showed that the accounts were not unqualified. They contained no reference to the need for regulation. The directors, who were obliged to report on business events, made no reference to the need for regulatory requirements. The directors' reports gave minimum information about the society's business activities, and the annual returns included a signed statement by a PMS officer to the effect that the company was not accepting deposits under the meaning that is laid out in the Banking Act 1987. Furthermore, the annual returns did not provide information about the frequency or extent to which the society accepted deposits or offered mortgages, or about how the funds were being invested.

I want to emphasise that in respect of all those matters, the registrar's comments on the returns, the comments of the professionals who examined them and the comments of the PMS directors did not give any cause for concern. We could argue all day about whether a mechanism should be in place. The fact is that it was not,

and, therefore, there was no reason to inform the FSA about activities.

Members have asked what has been done to help investors. We need to address that matter. I welcome the fact that, today, every party in the House has indicated that it wants a resolution. Questions have been asked, quite rightly, about why the working group has not reported.

The Treasury report is unfair. It suggests that there was some lethargy in Departments in Northern Ireland and that no action was taken. The First Minister, the deputy First Minister, my predecessor, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, some of the best officials in my Department, the head of the Civil Service and I have all worked closely on the issue. No effort has been spared. We fought an uphill struggle because, as Members have pointed out, when the crisis began, the Treasury and the Government said that the issue was none of their concern because the society members were investors rather than savers. Technically, that is correct, and they are still investors rather than savers.

Lord Morrow: The Minister is coming to the important kernel of the matter. He said that every contributor in the House agreed on the need to find a resolution. I will draw the Minister's attention to Jennifer McCann's comments. I do not know whether she spoke in her capacity as Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel or as a private Member; that is not important. She and others said, quite helpfully, that we need a resolution. I respectfully tell the Minister that, quite frankly, every man and woman in the House expects movement and a speedy resolution to the issue. I ask the Minister to raise the matter at the Executive's next meeting.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: That is one reason why I am encouraged by today's unanimity in the House. The working group has eventually met to work on various solutions. We faced an uphill struggle from the start. The Treasury simply wanted to wash its hands of the matter, and a commercial solution, which would have involved the banks, was sought. That involves complex legal and financial considerations, and the matter has dragged on because the banks had to conduct due diligence exercises. That was often outside the control of the working group because of the decision to seek a commercial resolution.

That difficult task of finding a resolution has engaged senior members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and a number of Ministers, and we are working towards that goal.

3.45 pm

I am encouraged by what has been said today. The Executive's endorsement will be required to put forward a plan to the Treasury to resolve the issue. Therefore, the Treasury will be involved. I have taken on board what Members have said, and I hope that the message has gotten through. The Presbyterian Church also has a responsibility to find a resolution to the problem, and I hope that as a result of the concerted and agreed action by Assembly parties, the support of the Government at Westminster and the conversations that we have had with Treasury Ministers, we can work our way towards a resolution.

I understand the urgency. We know that the administrator is under pressure and we know about the problems that individual investors in the Presbyterian Mutual Society are experiencing. Some Members raised issues relating to tax and benefits. I must say that HM Revenue and Customs has been sympathetic where its attention has been drawn to certain cases, and it has been prepared to wait for tax payments relating to money that is tied up in the PMS. All those things need to be done.

I know that Members would love me to spill out a plan to deal with this situation. There are grave difficulties, which is why, I believe, people have expressed frustration. We are limited in what we can say publicly about the issues at hand. Although it may be good for a headline in the paper, and it may be good for a Minister's credibility to be able to say that he is doing this or that, if it does not help to resolve the situation, it would be doing a disservice.

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

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: For that reason, we must remain circumspect for the moment.

Mr Beggs: The debate has been worthwhile, and it has been useful to hear the contributions of Members. I declare an interest: my parents have an investment in the PMS, and as a committee member of Raloo Presbyterian Church, I believe that there is a small investment involved there.

Several constituents have told me about the distress that the current uncertainty is causing. I am thinking of one particular family who were in the process of moving home, and who, during that transaction, put the entire value of their home into the PMS. They thought that they had parked the money somewhere securely and were caught up in the situation and lost the value of their home. The situation is very serious for some people, and it must be resolved.

Presbyterians are, generally, fairly cautious investors. I thought that the PMS was largely involved in investing money to enable other Presbyterian churches to renew their premises, and I suspect that many others thought the same. Leslie Cree said that, in the early days, it could easily have been thought that the PMS followed that format and would have fitted the description of an industrial provident society or a credit union. In the early days, it appeared that the PMS was involved in that type of lending. However, it is clear that that changed. Mr Cree said that DETI had a duty other than a simple strict regulatory role. The regulator was receiving information that the society's role was changing.

Surely, DETI had a duty to review the eligibility of the society or, for that matter, other societies? After the collapse of the society, the Department was able to carry out a desk-top study of approximately 180 different societies that fitted that description. It determined that no one else was following that model, and that there was no matter for concern. Why could that type of survey not been carried out earlier?

To reiterate what a number of Members have said: this is not about trying to pin blame on one individual Minister — far from it. Collectively, we are saying that there has been corporate failing in DETI over a long period. I do not want to blame the current Minister. I do not expect her to read every annual report that comes into her Department. However, I would have thought that some official in DETI would have been carefully scrutinising what was happening.

One of the most important conclusions that Leslie came to at the end of his contribution was the idea of needing a guarantee from the Treasury for the Northern Ireland Executive. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment did have a role to play, and we have to accept that. If we want a solution, we will have to contribute to that solution if we have contributed to the problem. Perhaps the Church will have to

contribute. I welcome the Minister's comments that we may be moving towards a firm proposal.

As Members are aware, Gordon Brown indicated that not one British saver had suffered as a result of the financial difficulties. I am thinking of the buy-over of Northern Rock, the Dunfermline Building Society, and the billions of pounds that went into the Icelandic banks. On that scale of things, the £100 million discrepancy in the PMS is not a huge amount of money. Where there is a will, there will be a way of resolving that.

Alban Maginness commented on the Presbyterian Mutual Society working group and how there is perception of a lack of progress there. Certainly, that is how people believe things are. Ultimately, unless there is an outcome, there will be little to show for having had so many meetings.

Members want to hear the outcome, and they want to see a firm proposal going to the Treasury. Mr Maginness also highlighted the financial reports indicating mortgage advances of £174 million and investment properties. Given the increasing valuation of property investment at that time, any reasonable investor should have been taking great care, because what can go up can only come down, which indeed is what happened.

David Simpson tried to defend the Minister by saying that the DUP had set up the working group. However, colleagues indicated to me that the working party was set up as a result of John McFall talking to Woodward in the House of Commons. At that point, it was discussed on the Floor of Parliament. Maybe the DUP is trying to claim for something else that it did not first suggest.

David also tried to put all the blame on DETI. If we proceed with that idea alone, there may be a difficult outcome. It is better that we all accept a degree of responsibility for the role that the Executive, through DETI, may have played. I accept what others have said: the Presbyterian Church, of which I am a member, gave an impression that this was a secure form of funding. The Church has to look at how it can make a contribution towards a solution.

Jennifer McCann said that we should be looking at responsibility rather than blame. However, establishing the degree of responsibility for the problem will dictate the level of responsibility to find the outcome, and it is healthy to have gone into that.

Sean Neeson from East Antrim highlighted how the 2008 report should have rung warning bells about how the society was changing. One useful feature of the Treasury's report is that it highlights the fact that during the period 2002 to 2008, there was an annual increase in turnover of 58%.

Surely anyone who was following that should have recognised that there was a danger that things would go astray. Big changes happened in that period, so it is unhelpful to try to pass responsibility to the Executive of the first Assembly. Let us accept that DETI had corporate difficulties. The situation could have been improved if a prudent civil servant had drawn the appropriate people's attention to the information that existed. However, I wish to leave those comments there.

Jeffrey Donaldson tried to say that the situation was neither DETI's fault nor responsibility. I acknowledge that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment moved swiftly to enable the society to go into administration rather than into liquidation or face some sort of emergency fire sale. Although that is correct, DETI had some corporate responsibility.

Paul Butler highlighted the individual circumstances of savers, and he discussed how the collapse has caused stress for many people who put their savings or pensions into the society. Jonathan Bell indicated that he had come across people who had put redundancy payments, pensions and money that they had gathered over many years into the society. Those people relied on that money to boost a basic pension in their latter years, and, therefore, the PMS collapse has left some people in very difficult economic situations.

My colleague Alan McFarland highlighted that significant changes had occurred in the PMS since 1982. There was previously a £20,000 limit on investments, but some investors had put almost £1 million into the society. That should have sounded warning bells about how the organisation had changed. He also expressed disappointment at how the Presbyterian Church initially reacted to the difficulty. Mr McFarland helpfully suggested that all sides must acknowledge some culpability so that everyone can contribute to finding a solution.

Mark Durkan indicated that it was not helpful simply to blame the Treasury Select Committee. I met a group of PMS savers recently, and

they were not critical of the Treasury Select Committee. They found it helpful that the Committee had shone a light on the situation by exposing it, and they also found it useful in that it provided an objective point of view and brought evidence out into the open.

I am pleased with the Minister's indication that ideas seem to be coming together.

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

Mr Beggs: We must have concern about many of the report's conclusions and acknowledge that DETI should have done more. I ask Members to support the motion unanimously.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the conclusions of the House of Commons Treasury Committee report 'The Failure of the Presbyterian Mutual Society' and, in particular, the conclusion that "the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment should have taken a lead in identifying the problem, and in seeking a solution"; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to advise the Assembly of the reasons why it has not been possible to achieve a positive resolution to date.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Roof Extensions in North Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members who speak will have approximately 10 minutes.

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful to the House for allowing the matter of roof extensions in North Belfast to be raised in an Adjournment debate. On the face of it, it does not appear to be a terribly important or vital issue. However, it is an important and vexed issue for people in North Belfast who have extended their homes through roof extensions. Unfortunately, and largely through no fault of their own, some of those people did not apply for, or were not granted, planning permission. As a result, they face enforcement action by planners over what are termed “unauthorised developments”.

I will give a little bit of background to the issue. Over the past 10 to 15 years, a number of roof extensions have been built in areas of North Belfast such as Ardoyne, the Bone and Old Park. In the main, the reason why people have got roof extensions is that they live in two-bedroom houses. Those dwellings became inadequate for the needs of growing families and, in particular, for the needs of older families. When children reached their teens, there was a need for more room in the house. Therefore, people living in areas such as Ardoyne deemed it appropriate to extend their homes. One might ask why those homes were not extended laterally, rather than vertically; it was because of confined space. Many of those homes have long gardens, but to build the house out along the garden would have broken the line and, in addition, room to extend backwards was very restricted. The only really effective answer to the problem of finding more space was to extend upwards.

Given the architecture of many of those homes, height is limited. Extending only into the roof space would have provided only six feet in headroom, which is clearly inadequate for any normal adult. For most houses, therefore, the roof extensions had to extend beyond the ridge,

with the result that the occupants were able to gain an extra room and, sometimes, convert the roof space into a bedroom and a small bathroom. Others chose to have an additional bedroom only.

4.00 pm

Such extensions assisted enormously with meeting the needs of growing families. The costs of the extensions varied from £10,000 to £20,000. The mean figure is roughly £15,000. We are not talking about people who enjoy high incomes. Most of those people are on lower incomes. Money that they have expended, by way of a loan or through the receipt of lump sums such as redundancy payments, was used — usefully, as they saw it — to bring about an increase in the space for their families.

However, many of those who invested in roof extensions did not apply for planning permission. That has to be accepted. No one in this House will argue that those developments are not unauthorised, in the language of the planners. Most did not apply because they were ignorant of the law pertaining to such extensions and were not aware of the need to apply. The builders who carried out the work were either ignorant of the position or did not disclose the necessity for planning permission. Nonetheless, it is accepted that, in the main, those who got the extensions did so unaware of the need to submit a planning application. However, it is accepted that that was wrong and illegal.

The question then arises about what the planners do. The situation has been extant for some time. For at least 10 years, roof extensions were seen as the way for families to increase accommodation. One has to take into account the fact that that was common practice, with which the planning authorities did not interfere. Over the past year or so, however, the planning authorities have acted against those developments, with the result that quite a number of people — the figures vary from 25 to 50, but some say more — have been told to remove the roof extensions.

In a strict application of the law, that is the correct thing to do. However, the law and the planning rules must have some social objective. It is unfair in the circumstances, creates great resentment and causes great social misery if people are being asked to take down those extensions. They cost, on average, probably about £15,000. To take them down would cost

about £10,000. If the planners proceed with enforcement, those individuals face that further expense. They will also lose the initial £15,000 that was spent on creating the extension, so their overall loss is at least £25,000 and they are left with a house that is clearly inadequate for their needs.

Mr K Robinson: I am conscious of what the Member said and about how that situation has arisen historically. However, residents may face a further hurdle down the line even if the Planning Service treated the matter sympathetically. If an owner wanted to pass a house on because it had outlived its use, the building control service may have an interest in the property at that stage.

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful for the Member's intervention. Ironically, in most of those cases, the residents applied for and were granted building control. However, the Member is quite right to say that if residents were compromised by not restoring properties to their original state, their good title would be affected. In other words, they would not be able to sell their homes because no solicitor would convey a property with an outstanding planning permission issue and a continuing enforcement notice. In that situation, they would not be able to transfer good title. Therefore, even if they decided to get out of that terrible situation by selling the house, they could not sell the house because no one would buy it under such circumstances.

People are in a terrible fix. They are told by the planners that they do not have planning permission. At the same time, some applied for retrospective planning permission and were refused.

They proposed various adaptations to the original development, but the Planning Service took a fairly strict line, stating that any extension beyond the roof ridge would result in the refusal of planning permission.

I say to the Minister and to the Planning Service that there must be a common-sense solution to the problem. There must be a design for roof extensions that satisfies planners, permits occupiers to enjoy the benefit of such extensions and solves the problems of good title and enforcement notices. A common-sense solution is required, and it is not right and proper for the planners to stand on the purity of the law and simply say that those residents

have broken the law by failing to satisfy the planning requirements and, therefore, must continue in the terrible mess in which they find themselves. In such circumstances, people with little income who cannot afford to make restoration are being asked to do the impossible. A solution to the problem is possible.

I had informal discussions about the problem with the Minister and with Planning Service officials in Belfast. They are not without sympathy, but there must be a realistic, common-sense solution. We cannot simply stand on the law and apply it rigorously. The proportionate effect of the law on people's lives and on the homes in which they have to live must be taken into account. Moreover, reaching a compromise would be a good social end. I am not saying that the roof extensions should not be modified, but surely the planners could agree to a modification that would enable those people to get on with their life. They will be put to additional expense but not to the extent that I described. Therefore, in those circumstances, the planners will find a solution with which people can comply and which satisfies planning conditions.

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

Mr A Maginness: That will be the basis of a compromise.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for securing the debate, which is important to north Belfast residents. Although the problem has been brought forward as a north Belfast one, as planners search proactively, they may find that it extends much further.

Alban Maginness covered many of the relevant points, but I will put the issue into context. North Belfast is an area of multiple deprivation, and, by necessity, people had to expand within the confines of a one-up-one-down house to keep their children at home so that they did not have to go into hostels. The housing list in north Belfast is huge, so it is difficult to be rehoused. The issue has been ongoing for at least 18 months, and several parties, including the SDLP and Sinn Féin, have had meetings with residents and planners. I agree that the planners are somewhat sympathetic, but they, like everybody else, are bound by the law. It was good to hear Mr Maginness — a barrister — saying that maybe we might bend the law a wee bit in the

circumstances and that we should try to find a way for the Minister to do that.

4.15 pm

Householders have been told to return homes to their original condition, which is a hugely expensive undertaking. I will put that in context. Those people may have gone to a credit union, received redundancy payments or whatever. Perhaps they have been able to get some money that they must pay back. Given the nature of the estates that we are talking about — the Bone, Ardoyne and other such places — the amount of money involved is huge. That burden could not come at a worse time than during the current economic downturn. Some of the people who are affected are now losing their job as well as being told to return their home to its previous condition and to pay £10,000 or £15,000 to do so.

We have to consider how this happened. There are a small number of cowboy builders. I am not sympathetic to the view that builders made a mistake in advising residents that planning permission was not needed for roof extensions. Real builders know planning law, and, if they know the law, it is their duty to tell someone from whom they are trying to get money for renovations that planning permission is required. I do not accept that sort of excuse, and builders need to be concentrated on. The cowboys represent a small minority. There are very good builders about who put up very good extensions, but they have to pay a price. Perhaps the Minister will look at how difficult it is for them to do that under current law. An extension is done by a cowboy builder who then uses that as an example of work that caused no planning problems, even though that was because the planners did not know about it. More people then become convinced that they do not need planning permission. I have been told that one builder who is involved in extensions is moving into south Belfast, where he is trying the same moves. He must know that what he is doing is wrong.

The difficulty is that the owner is liable and will bear the expense of doing the much-needed work and returning the home to its original state. As has been pointed out, problems accumulate because roof extensions are built in the first place to deal with a lack of space. It is a cumulative and difficult problem.

I listened to the debate on the PMS and the difficulties that that issue poses for many

people. Most of that argument involves the British Treasury, but the point is to find a flexible way to alleviate hardship. I know that this issue is not on the same scale, but there is a question that we can ask of the Minister: is there a way that we and the Minister, as Members who are elected to help people, can create some flexibility to deal with roof extension issues and the planners? Can we amend the law? Is an amnesty feasible?

I understand absolutely that, if there is a health issue, if wiring is wrong and there is a danger to occupants, that cannot be allowed to continue. I also know that one of the other acceptable planning restrictions is aesthetic: the line of the houses in a given area must be adhered to and cannot be broken. However, I argue that the real issue is health and safety. As long as health and safety is not compromised, is there a less expensive way of assisting people to deal with the issue?

I understand that the Minister will not want to set a precedent that allows people or builders to think that there is an open door to allowing such work to be carried out everywhere. I do not think that anybody is arguing for that. We must create a situation that allows people to deal with the issue without getting into massive debt. We must then find a way to ensure that cowboy builders cannot tell people lies about the great extension work that they can do on their houses. In the past few weeks, my colleague Fra McCann, who is Sinn Féin's housing spokesperson, wrote to Minister Poots, as did other parties.

A number of issues are involved, one of which is unscrupulous builders. We must find some way of dealing with them. I do not know whether that can be done in these cases, but, in the future, the liability must be transferred from the homeowners to those who give false advice or pretend that they do not know planning law. We must be proactive on that matter.

The planners are sympathetic, so we should try to use that sympathy. Nobody is advocating breaking the law, but perhaps it could be amended. If some flexibility meant that people would have to spend much less than is currently the case to return their house to its former state, that would go a long way to help. Sometimes, we do not have much power to help people in such circumstances. I am sure that the Minister will speak about that. In these circumstances,

however, we can find a way to be less strict on the implementation of planning laws. People need time to get through the situation.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend my colleague Alban Maginness for securing this important Adjournment debate. I welcome the Minister's presence and that of Members from other constituencies. Somewhere down the line, I suspect that we will all find ourselves in a situation in which we are trying to help residents to feel a sense of having received social justice. It may not be through the type of roof extensions about which we are talking or through planning, but it is something that we will face as elected representatives.

Alban Maginness and Gerry Kelly outlined the housing situation in north Belfast. The issue has been raised during other debates in the House. That area has the worst waiting list in the entire North. The particular stress in north Belfast is on family homes because families are growing. Historically, the housing shortage led many families to build up rather than move out, because moving out, to be honest, was not an option. For reasons that all our constituencies share, people rely on their extended family for support, to enable them to go out to work and so forth. On most occasions, people simply could not afford to move.

The people affected have done their best to improve their homes to accommodate their growing families. Any of us who have reared or are rearing children knows that kids need much more space as they grow up. As anyone who has memories of teenagers or kids growing up will know, that may even mean space to allow some peace of mind in the house. The issue has not arisen through people trying to make their house more outstanding than the one next door but through their attempt to accommodate the practical needs of their family.

I am sure that the Minister will remark on the fact that he received correspondence on the issue and has dealt with it recently. Gerry Kelly and Alban Maginness made a strong case about the cost to the families. It is no joke: it will cost anything from £20,000 to £30,000 to put right, and those families simply do not have that kind of money.

Mr F McCann: I have spoken to the current and previous Minister about this issue. I am sure that the point has been made to the Minister

that many of the people we are talking about are severely financially stretched. Many of them are in low-paid jobs and took out second mortgages to get the work done. Given the waiting list, their only options were to build up or move out. In the conversations that the Member and I had with some of the planners, we detected that, if they were given the option, they would be prepared to show a degree of flexibility. However, they deal purely on points of law.

Gerry Kelly and Alban Maginness touched on one of the problems, which is that builders have totally misled people. One option that we looked at in Belfast City Council was getting building control officers to ask people whether they had planning permission so that people were aware that they had to apply for it. However, that option would not affect anybody who has already built a roof extension.

Some cases that we have dealt with involve people who moved into their house when they had two children and who now have eight. They had no option but to build up. However, they face financial ruin because they will have to try to borrow money from somewhere to have the extension removed or move into a family hostel to try to get rehoused. It has a knock-on effect not only on the people who live in the house but on the pressure on waiting lists. It is not only a Belfast phenomenon or a north Belfast phenomenon. I have spoken to the Minister about it, and it stretches throughout the North. Does the Member agree with that?

Ms Ní Chuilín: "Yes" is the short answer to that lengthy intervention. Ivan Little would be proud of you for being able to say the word "phenomenon" without three or four retakes.

All joking aside, the issue that Fra raised about cost has been raised by everybody: it is a huge cost and a massive burden to put something right. We know the families involved, and we know the communities that we represent. I do not think that anybody is trying to pull a fly one. No one is trying to pull a move by saying, "It is built now; what are you going to do about it?". People are very worried. It is putting massive stress on them, and many of them have been poorly advised.

A moratorium or some other flexibility would be welcomed not just by Members for North Belfast but by everyone because it is an issue that affects many families. We are asking for a social justice approach to be taken to ensure

that the families concerned will not be further disadvantaged. Nobody is supporting them in breaking the law, but they did not know that they were breaking the law. None of us supports the idea that we should ignore an unstable extension, and that is worth repeating.

As Gerry Kelly pointed out, there have been other debates where people thought that it was totally impossible to reverse a decision or to support people who are going through a difficult time. Indeed, we discussed the Presbyterian Mutual Society earlier. However, that is what this House is for: to help people who cannot help themselves. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. Hopefully, he will take a flexible and supportive approach, particularly for families who are preparing to go to court for enforcement.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): I thank the Member for North Belfast for raising the issue through the Adjournment debate. It is an issue that he has sought to address with me on a number of occasions. Other Members have also raised it with me, and I have sought to supply answers to those who raised questions individually. I welcome the opportunity to provide some background and up-to-date information in so far as that is possible.

The issue raised today is specific to the Ardoyne area of north Belfast, but it applies to other areas in Belfast, including Newtownabbey and Castlereagh. There are 70 cases of unauthorised roof extensions, more commonly referred to as dormers, at various stages of investigation. As has been pointed out, many of the occupiers extended their home in that manner without the benefit of planning approval. However, I recognise that many of them had building control approval — it is always important to have such approval — but they were blissfully unaware that they required planning approval. Perhaps the advice that they received from their agent or builder was flawed.

That is not the responsibility of the Planning Service. Nonetheless, the problem rests with us to some extent, and that has created its own problems.

4.30 pm

Conversions of roof spaces are a common occurrence, particularly in the traditional small, terraced houses in the city, where they offer the opportunity of providing extra accommodation

space for growing families. The Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 allows minor additions and alterations to be undertaken to properties without the need for planning permission. Perhaps that is where some of the difficulties have arisen. There are permitted development rights for roof-space extensions. However, as is the case with all permitted development rights, there are exceptions. One key exception is that any alteration to the roof line at the front of a dwelling needs planning permission, but some extensions to the rear do not. Therein may lie a potential solution for some of the individuals involved.

The majority of the current investigations in the Ardoyne area are for unauthorised extensions to the front of dwellings or, in some cases, extensions that span the whole of the roof. Some of those extensions are obtrusive; have an impact on the dwelling and the wider streetscape; are constructed in contrasting materials to the dwelling; and are out of keeping with the general area. That is a major issue for the Planning Service. Planning officials who are investigating those cases have had them brought to their attention by members of the public. The Planning Service has not gone out looking for them; members of the public have reported them to the Planning Service, which has followed up on those reports. Some of those people have gone through the proper procedures to gain planning approval, or, perhaps, have had planning applications for similar extensions turned down. We need to ensure that everyone involved is treated equally.

I mentioned earlier that current investigations are at various stages, and the enforcement team in the Belfast division has entered negotiations with householders to try to regularise the position and make the unauthorised structures acceptable. Pursuing formal enforcement action is not something that the Department takes lightly; it is not how we wish to resolve matters. In fact, we prefer to use it as a last resort. If there is an opportunity, therefore, to resolve the case or to make acceptable an unauthorised development, staff will negotiate and give guidance to the public. Bearing in mind what I said earlier about planning permission being required for dormers to the front of buildings but not always for dormers to the rear of buildings, there may be the opportunity to leave a lot of the internal structures intact and to put the roof back to its original condition at the front of the house

and put the dormer extension to the rear of the building. There will be an expense involved, but it would regularise matters.

There are situations in which, unfortunately, the only course of action is to request the removal of unacceptable and inappropriate development. Unfortunately, that has been the case in a number of properties in Ardoyne, as well as in other parts of the city. The Planning Service has served around 20 formal enforcement notices requesting the removal of unauthorised roof extensions. The Planning Appeals Commission has become involved, because members of the public have sought to have some other process whereby they could have their cases heard. As an independent body, it has dismissed those appeals and supported the Department's stance.

Enforcement of planning control is an integral and vital part of the planning system, and it cannot be ignored. To extend a property without regard to the need for planning permission is not within the planning law and is, therefore, wrong. Guidance is available for householders in the Planning Service's publication, 'Your Home and Planning Permission', and Planning Service staff are available to provide advice and guidance. The public should avail themselves of all such guidance when proposing to carry out a development and ensure that the advice that they are receiving from agents or builders is correct.

I have considerable sympathy for the individuals who are involved, most of whom are ordinary people with families who are, probably, on limited incomes; they simply want to ensure that their homes are suitable for and meet the needs of their families. The Department is, however, caught on the horns of a dilemma — not for the first time and, I am sure, not for the last — particularly when roof lines have been altered, which has significant impact on streetscapes.

I have sought to indicate that, wherever possible, the Department will seek to accommodate extensions through regularising the process and identifying amendments and modifications that can be made to bring them into line with planning regulations. However, in a number of cases, we will not be at liberty to do that under present arrangements. I am aware that people have spent a great deal of money on their homes and will be extremely unhappy if they have to spend a considerable amount of money to undo that work. If the Department can help, it will seek to do so.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister and his officials in Planning Service consider a design model that would be useful in adapting existing unauthorised roof extensions? Would that be a helpful way forward? Although I appreciate that the Minister has emphasised that negotiations have taken place between applicants and planners, to my knowledge, those negotiations have failed in most instances. Therefore, the situation will continue to fester until a model is devised that is acceptable to planners and which also accommodates those people's needs. I ask the Minister to consider that seriously. Such compromise is the only way forward in that difficult situation.

Finally, when someone who has limited or no income is taken to court and an enforcement notice is upheld, how can that person remedy the situation? What will planners do when someone says that he or she simply cannot put unfinished building work back together again? In those circumstances, how does that help to value and uphold the law?

The Minister of the Environment: Unfortunately, Planning Service cannot deal with people's personal circumstances; that is not within its gift. However, the Member makes a valid point, which is that, basically, someone can be put on the street because he or she has started work, is fined for doing so, and cannot undo that work. As I indicated, he or she might have limited income and, therefore, cannot undo the work. That person's house has no value because it is illegal to sell it. All of that is hugely problematic.

The first issue that the Member raised was whether an acceptable model could be found. I would be happy if the Member and other colleagues met senior planning officials in the Belfast division to see whether there are means of dealing with that issue. As I say, it is not my desire or that of Planning Service to deal harshly with people. We want an outcome that is to the wider community's benefit.

Although certain planning problems will be insurmountable, let us see whether we can find a way through on that matter so that people's homes, which are extremely important to them, are not removed from them as a consequence of decisions that we have taken.

At the same time, we can ensure that good planning policy prevails in the city and that streetscapes, many of which have existed for many years, are treated with respect. Let us

also send a clear signal to others who may be considering a roof-space extension that they must be sure to follow due process and carry out any work in a way that conforms to planning requirements. I trust that this debate will help to highlight the issue so that others do not find themselves in the terrible situation in which many currently find themselves. That is as far as we can go today, and I trust that the meeting that Mr Maginness suggested will take place in due course.

Adjourned at 4.40 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

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Regional Development

Rathlin Island

Published at 11am on Tuesday 2 March 2010

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I am pleased to inform Assembly members that the Executive has endorsed its Policy for Rathlin Island on 25 February 2010.

Public consultation on the draft Policy concluded on 18 September 2009 with a total of 14 responses received from organisations and individuals, including a combined response from the Islanders. The responses were supportive of the overall policy and its aims and objectives and also the proposed Forum and Action Plan.

Officials from my department held a very productive and successful consultation event on Rathlin Island on 7 October 2009. The event was attended by around two thirds of the Islanders who among other things expressed a desire for a healthy community with affordable housing and education all playing their part; better roads; help for farming and fishing industry; nursing cover and efforts to keep young people on the Island. There was also the suggestion that a Rathlin brand should be created, i.e. a green island with a neutral carbon footprint; to expand the use of renewable energy and recyclables; to maximise the use of local produce; to extend the attractions beyond the puffin season; and to establish an island of festivals.

The issue of post primary education provision was identified as an additional strategic objective and has been subsequently incorporated into the policy.

Copies of the final policy are available in the Assembly Library.

Work has now commenced on the development of an Action Plan designed to implement the policy and officials from my Department are continuing to engage and work closely with the islanders, other government departments and bodies who are all participating in its development.

I am very conscious that we will be developing the Action Plan at a time of increasing pressure on our finances. The purpose of the Action Plan is to identify priorities for the island, to make progress in addressing the needs of the islanders but also to manage their expectations.

A Forum will be established to monitor progress chaired by myself and will include island representatives and senior officials from relevant government Departments and local bodies.

I intend to make a further statement when the draft action plan has been prepared.

Regional Development

NI Water: Independent Review Team Report into Procurement Governance

Published at 9.00am on Friday 12 March 2010

The Minister for Regional Development

(Mr Murphy): I have recently received the report of an Independent Review Team which was examining procurement governance failures in NI Water.

The report finds that there has been a serious breakdown in the governance and control framework of NIW in relation to contract approvals, and that this is a serious matter for those responsible, namely the NIW Board and Executives responsible for ensuring compliance.

I will take firm action to implement the recommendations in the report. As part of this, I want to inform the Assembly that I am today dismissing four non-executive directors from the Board [Chris Mellor – the chairman, John Ballard, Ruth Thompson and Declan Gormley]. I have taken this step after a great deal of consideration of all the evidence in order to provide a firm basis for the company to establish governance arrangements, and to move forward with the confidence of the community.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for the Environment

18 March 2010

Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill (NIA 5/09)

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Dolores Kelly (Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Jonathan Bell
Mr John Dallat
Mr David Ford
Mr Danny Kinahan
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Daithí McKay
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Ken Bradley	
Mr Paul Byrne	<i>Department of the</i>
Mr Mike Meharg	<i>Environment</i>
Mr Chris Savage	

The Chairperson (Mrs D Kelly): The PSNI's submission about the Bill has been provided in members' packs. Are members content to include that submission in the Committee's final report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Also included in the packs is a research paper on snare technology and snaring guidelines, as was requested at the meeting on 11 March. Members have also been provided with a copy of the clause-by-clause analysis table. Paul Byrne, Ken Bradley and Chris Savage from the Department will join us to take us through clauses 27 to 30 and will answer any queries that members may have.

Mr Ken Bradley (Department of the Environment): Thank you very much for inviting us to the

Committee this morning. Chris will start our session and we will perhaps ask Paul for clarification on some issues, such as areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs).

Mr Chris Savage (Department of the Environment): Good morning. I apologise for Mike Meharg's absence. He has been delayed.

Clauses 27 to 30 propose amendments to the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 and are concerned with the declaration and protection management of ASSIs. I will try to place that in context for the Committee. We do not plan to undertake a major review of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. The proposed amendments merely further enhance the existing framework. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill provides us with a legislative opportunity to make those amendments, which are largely an attempt to maintain parity with the recent changes that were made to the equivalent legislation in England and Wales.

The stakeholders raised specific concerns about certain clauses and some other more general points. I will address both as I go through each clause.

Clause 27 seeks to create two new offences. The first is about public bodies meeting their obligation to inform the Department of areas in which they are giving authorisation or consent to operations that are carried out by third parties. At the moment, if public bodies fail to meet that obligation, there is no sanction upon them. Therefore, we propose to close that loophole. The clause creates a second third-party offence that is designed to deter people from causing damage to ASSIs. That complements the existing offence in the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. In current cases in which damage is caused by a third party, the third party can be prosecuted only if they knew that what they were doing was causing damage to an ASSI. The new offence does not have the ignorance defence; hence, a lesser penalty applies.

The Chairperson: If members have no comments on clause 27, we will move on to clause 28.

Mr C Savage: Clause 28 concerns notification of change of ownership. The Department is seeking to place a requirement on owners and occupiers to notify the Department when there is a change of ownership or a change in the occupation of the land. The main concern that

was raised by stakeholders was that the Department should seek to rely on the Land Registry system, rather than place the onus on owners or occupiers. Members should bear in mind that a declaration of an ASSI is subject to a statutory charge. The statutory charges regime would inform owners or occupiers of where that has changed, and perhaps their legal representatives would inform them of a charge on the land. However, that is quite different from them notifying the Department about the change. It is important that the Department is kept abreast of changes in ownership or occupation of any land so that new owners or occupiers are fully aware of their obligations under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002.

Mr Beggs: If it is the duty of Land Registry to know who legally owns a piece of land, why is there a need for the Department to be advised of that? Can arrangements not be made with Land Registry so that the register is automatically updated without an additional layer of bureaucracy?

Mr Kinahan: It is two or three years behind.

Mr Beggs: Is that right?

Mr C Savage: The Land Registry records are not always completely up to date.

Mr Beggs: Why not?

Mr Kinahan: It is because it does not have enough resources.

Mr Weir: Land law in Northern Ireland can be complex in nature. There has been an attempt over the past 10 years to start to modernise it and try to bring portfolios up to date, but in many ways, land law still reflects a sort of neo-feudal type situation. By way of some of the changes being made, for example, the ability of people to buy out ground rent and therefore take the full legal title, it is not as straight forward as it appears.

Mr Beggs: So, there are still no explanations given, but a reason why something else should be changed.

Mr Weir: I see the feudal landlord nodding in agreement with me. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: One of the best ways to try to find out who owns the mosses is to try and cut turf on them. You will soon find out who

owns them then. *[Laughter.]* Are there any other comments?

Mr Ford: At the risk of extending Peter's point further, will the officials confirm whether that would extend literally as far as an 11-month conacre let, by way of notification having to be given?

Mr K Bradley: No, it would not be on letting; it is purely on sale.

Mr Ford: The term "occupier" might be taken by some to include —

The Chairperson: We might need clarification in the guidance.

Mr Ford: My understanding is that someone involved in conacre was an occupier, although clearly not the owner. That is why I am slightly concerned. If the Department is prepared to confirm that that does not apply, that is fair enough, but we need to be sure.

Mr Weir: The question is about whether it refers to occupiers and does not include conacre. I assume that "occupier" includes someone with a long-term lease. That would mean that the ownership would not change but would have major alterations on that aspect. It may be worthwhile to add in a subclause for clarification or a definition of "occupier".

Mr C Savage: That is something that we can look at.

Mr Ford: If a person is involved in conacre and the landowner is clearly in control of the land other than the day-to-day operations, that should be all that is required by the Department.

Mr Beggs: There has to be no doubt. If it does not apply to conacre, that ought to be clearly defined rather than be left to a whim or subsequent changes. I prefer a clear understanding. Perhaps it could be dealt with by a ministerial statement on the Bill or whatever is appropriate so that there is no doubt that an additional layer of bureaucracy will not be placed on tenants.

Mr Kinahan: If there were regular meetings with the stakeholders, in other words, the owners of the land plus all those involved, the issues would be resolved, because in talking to them, it would become clear that land is changing hands. There should be six-monthly, yearly or quarterly meetings to keep the information up to date.

Mr K Bradley: That is sensible. Unfortunately, the problem gets worse as more sites are designated and more land is involved. A substantial area of Northern Ireland is designated, and that problem will be exacerbated as more sites come on stream. Each year, 20 to 25 additional sites come on stream.

Mr Kinahan: Each site should be subject to a meeting.

The Chairperson: The overall point is that it is clearly not open to interpretation by an official.

Mr C Savage: Clause 29 concerns giving the power to the Department to place notices and signs on land within an ASSI. Clearly, there may be occasions when it is necessary to do that to maybe warn people about certain operations that are not allowed on that land. For instance, on occasions, we have had to put warning signs up to deter peat-cutters. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: Does anyone have a guilty past that they want to confess to?

Mr C Savage: The main concern that was expressed by stakeholders was that there could be biosecurity issues, and concerns were also raised about the police powers. The Department has standard operating procedures to mitigate any concerns about that.

One stakeholder recommended that we add additional wording, similar to that used in Scotland, to include words such as “take such other action as considered appropriate”. I do not believe that that is necessary. We are quite happy with the existing clause as it provides the power that we require and is something of a catch-all.

Clause 30 deals with the serving of notices and declarations. We want to change the process to ensure that there are no loopholes so that the legal effect of such notices will not be compromised. The main concern of stakeholders was that the Department should continue to be obligated to inform all landowners and occupiers, and that it should take all necessary steps to do so, for instance, by issuing advertisements in the press, sending out notices by registered first-class post and even putting signs up. We do not want any possible legal loophole that could compromise the declaration of a site or the effect of certain management notices.

The Chairperson: If members have no comments or questions, we will move on.

Mr C Savage: A number of general issues were raised about the proposal. Some stakeholders believe that certain aspects that are not included in the Bill should be. There was some concern that the initial policy proposals to introduce stop notices and reinstatement notices have not been included in the Bill. During the process of drafting the Bill, we became aware of developments in GB, where the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008 has been introduced and there was a wide-ranging review of penalties and sanctions for environmental regimes.

The Department is proposing to prepare similar proposals for Northern Ireland. There will be a wide-ranging review with a view to introducing a wide-ranging and holistic regime of penalties and sanctions, which will apply to all major pieces of environmental legislation. We feel that it is important to await those developments, because they will introduce a more appropriate sanction regime and achieve a better balance for ASSIs between persuasion and sanction. We feel that, on balance, we should not pursue the options at this point, but should await that broad review. We do not believe that there would be a significant risk in the interim to the management and protection of our sites.

Mr Ford: I can see why the Department might feel that that is a tidy way of doing things. Can you give us any predictions of the likely timescale to complete that process? Contrary to what you said, is there not the potential for danger if we leave the legislation on ASSIs lacking because of something that might take five or 10 years to do?

Mr Paul Byrne (Department of the Environment):
[Inaudible.]

Mr Ford: I can repeat only that it may be two to three years, and smile and hope.

The Chairperson: A cynic in the making.

Mr Ford: Surely not.

Mr Bell: Not “in the making” surely.

Mr C Savage: One or two stakeholders felt that the overall duty on the Department to designate sites should include specifying the different reasons for doing that; for instance, sites should be representative of diversity in

geographic arrangement of natural features. We are aware that Scotland has a similar legislative provision. However, the ASSI guidelines to which the Department operates make several references to the need for ASSI assessments and selections to take into consideration the variety of scales; for instance, to enable the scientific importance of each site to be seen in its regional, national and international context.

Those principles underpin the declarations of ASSIs and have helped to underpin them since 1985. There is no need for it to be enshrined in legislation.

The Chairperson: A witness and representatives from the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group commented about sites of local nature conservation importance (SLNCI) and about legislative protection for such sites. What is the Department's view on that?

Mr Mike Meharg (Department of the Environment): When the ASSI programme is carried out, the top sites are selected for statutory protection. However, we survey a lot of the sites and, although those that do not quite come up to the mark are important and useful, they have not reached the point of achieving statutory protection. A few years back, we decided to see whether another level of protection, outside the ASSI programme, could be afforded them. Local councils are involved through their biodiversity action plans, and they focus in on the sites of local nature conservation importance. Therefore, some action is carried out for those sites. Through the planning process and the area plans, the SLNCIs are endorsed as sites where there is a presumption against certain developments or they should be taken into account on hazard maps and so forth. From the outside, those sites were not seen as important enough to merit statutory protection, but they are afforded a level of protection.

The Chairperson: Is there any redress available if the site is used or dumped on?

Mr Meharg: Many of those sites are in public or private ownership. If they are in public ownership, we hope that the council or whomever owns the site will take appropriate action. If the site is in private ownership, we talk to the landowners and explain to them, through local biodiversity officers, that those sites are important. However, there is no statutory

protection for them, because they did not meet those higher criteria.

The Chairperson: You are such an optimist, Mike.

Mr Meharg: There have been issues about the number of sites that were put forward as ASSIs, so there are two sides to that. If the site does not make the mark, the situation is as I outlined.

The Chairperson: Am I correct to say that the Department is not considering any legislative protection for such sites?

Mr Meharg: That is correct.

Mr C Savage: It is difficult to see what mechanism could be applied to protect those sites.

Mr Beggs: If no legislative protection is being planned, are there incentives for owners to sensitively manage such sites? Are any environmental grants available?

Mr Meharg: Within the grant-aid programme of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency selection criteria, a site of local nature conservation importance will receive a higher level of priority when grants are distributed.

Mr Dallat: Presumably, these are not grants to drain them?

Mr Meharg: No. These are grants to have the sites protected.

Mr Dallat: I ask because that is what happened in the past.

The Chairperson: It might be useful to liaise with other officials to consider applying more carrot, if there is no stick. Is that judgement to be made by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) or your Department?

Mr Meharg: We make it.

The Chairperson: It might be useful for the Department to take that on board.

Do any other members wish to ask questions about the issues that have been outlined in the tabled paper, or is there anything that the officials want to highlight?

Mr C Savage: There are a number of other issues, including protection for sites of local nature conservation importance and hedge-cutting. We highlighted that the hedge-cutting

season is not defined in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 but in DARD's cross-compliance scheme. The Department has no strong view about whether to reduce the hedge-cutting season; however, if it was felt that it should be reduced, we would like to consult the relevant stakeholders. In the past, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) successfully lobbied for the season to be extended to the end of August, so, in similar circumstances, consultation would have to take place. In any event, such decisions lie outside the Bill.

Mr Ford: Did we receive further papers on that subject from the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU)?

The Chairperson: No, but we received papers from the RSPB.

Mr Ford: We received contradictory papers from the RSPB.

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mr Bell: Is the badger vaccination programme just another issue that is being considered?

Mr Meharg: Badgers are protected, and disease control is an issue for DARD rather than us.

Mr Bell: Is that programme included in the submission just for information?

Mr Meharg: We were simply putting forward stakeholders' views, but that issue is for DARD.

Mr Bell: Should we pass that information to DARD?

The Committee Clerk: We can do. It is included here to establish whether it is relevant to the Bill, and the advice is that it is not.

The Chairperson: We could forward the information to DARD.

Mr Bell: Incidentally, how is a badger vaccinated? Do they have to present their cubs before they are six-months old?

Mr Meharg: They are vaccinated using medicated bait.

Mr Dallat: How is wildlife shot at night? Do people blow them off fences?

Mr C Savage: The legislation does not allow shooting at night. Some of the shooting interests wanted to be allowed to shoot during moonlight hours at certain times of the month,

when there is a full moon. Many sporting interests want to shoot wildfowl under a full moon. It occurs in GB, but we have never allowed it here. The Department gave the matter some consideration but, from a conservation point of view, it is not a big issue. The greatest concerns would probably come from residents in areas in which night-time shooting might take place so, on balance, we decided not to propose such a change.

Mr Dallat: That sounds like a very wise decision. Even considering it worries me.

Mr Kinahan: I want to return to clause 29. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) said that the new powers could be misused to frustrate lawful activity. If someone has shooting rights to land in an ASSI, are they allowed to exercise those rights so long as they follow the guidelines?

Mr K Bradley: It depends on the ASSIs designation. If shooting is not detrimental to the feature, there should be no problem.

Mr Kinahan: It may just be closed. I know of many families in England who hold massive shooting rights in Northern Ireland but, even though they are of value, they are in limbo. I was just wondering how that affects ASSIs.

Mr Byrne: The nature of the ASSI feature determines whether shooting or keeping livestock is appropriate. In most instances, the ASSI, whether notifiable or upwards, will allow shooting to continue. Only in certain circumstances, for example, for certain birds, will restrictions be put in place.

Mr Beggs: I raised this point before, but I am seeking clarification. It is proposed to reduce the close season for deer by changing the close date from 31 October to 30 September, yet in all other regions of the British Isles, the close date is either the 31 October or the 20 October.

Bearing in mind some of the latest evidence that we received from John Hetherington, who questioned the issue, why are we proposing to have a shorter closed season? I have not heard the argument as to why it has been brought forward to the end of September.

Mr C Savage: In the previous discussion, we said that a reduction in the closed season is necessary to allow for proper deer management. The Bill proposes to bring forward the end date of the closed season by one month, to 30

September. However, following discussions with the key deer stakeholders, it was felt that we should make the reduction at the other end of the season. The consensus view was to delay the start of the closed season until 1 April. As I mentioned earlier, the Department intends to propose an amendment to that effect.

The Chairperson: That will be when the deer are in calf.

Mr Kinahan: Yes, just before the deer have their young.

The Chairperson: That would meet some of Mr Hetherington's needs, but at the other end.

Mr C Savage: I did not get the impression that there was any concern about reducing the closed season. The concern related to which end should be changed.

The Chairperson: I think that you dealt with that on Tuesday. We will come back to that during the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny.

Mr C Savage: A couple of other amendments will not yet have been brought to the attention of the Committee. This winter, for the first time, the Department made a severe weather order, under powers in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, to protect wildfowl. The extreme weather conditions prompted that move. That experience indicated one or two slight legislative changes that we would like to bring forward. For instance, we were not able to put woodcock and snipe into the order, because they are protected under the game laws. There is no provision for severe weather orders under the game laws, so we would like to make a change to allow those two species to be protected by them.

Article 29 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 states that we have to consult with district councils before making an order. The purpose of the severe weather order is to act quickly. There would not be time to consult with councils, so we are going to seek a slight amendment so that we will not have that requirement. A separate requirement in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 requires us to liaise with the shooting interest, and that will remain. That is part of the protocol that the Department follows before making such an order.

The Chairperson: Will those be included in existing clauses, or will you bring forward additional clauses?

Mr C Savage: We will have to bring forward an additional clause.

The Chairperson: We will have that in writing for next week.

Mr Beggs: Is that an order or a question?
[Laughter.]

The Chairperson: He said yes. See what you can do.

Mr C Savage: On Monday, we talked about schedules. Some stakeholders wanted Chinese water deer and roe deer to be added to schedule 9. The Department will propose to add them to that.

The Chairperson: OK. That is useful.

Mr Ford: On Monday, I raised the issue of the precise level of protection for the hare during the closed season, with regard to possession of hares. I understood that we would hear back from the Department. I am not as cynical as the Chairperson, so I presume that we will hear from the Department sometime soon.

Mr C Savage: I can confirm that we have checked the Game Preservation (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 and the power within it to allow those special protection orders. It does not mention possession.

Mr Ford: We knew that; what will we do about it?

Mr C Savage: I think that we could commit to making an amendment.

Mr Ford: Good gracious.

Mr Kinahan: We are jumping about a bit. Did you say that the roe deer and the Chinese water deer will be protected?

Mr C Savage: They will be placed on our list of invasive non-native species in schedule 9. We do not want people bringing them in and releasing them.

Mr Kinahan: OK, so it is the opposite.

Mr K Bradley: There are two additional legislative amendments to be considered in context with the Office of the Legislative Counsel. We will try our best to come back next week on those two.

The Chairperson: That is fine; thank you.

We now move to the formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill. The officials may remain and answer questions, if so requested, but this is the work of the Committee.

The League Against Cruel Sports has provided the Committee with a tabled paper on the use of snares, which is additional information relating to clause 10. As that paper has not yet been published, members are asked to treat it in confidence. Members have also been provided with an updated version of the clause-by-clause analysis table, which is the tabled paper that we have just been considering, and a copy of the Bill. I intend to go through each of the 36 clauses and the three schedules one by one to seek the Committee's position on them. At this stage, members are giving only their views on the clauses as drafted. To date, no amendments have been made by the Department.

Clause 1 (Duty to conserve biodiversity)

The Chairperson: The Department is considering amending clause 1(4) to replace "may" with "will" or "shall". Are members content with the clause, subject to that amendment? I understand that the Committee would like such an amendment to be made. If the Committee wishes to see clause 1 amended, it cannot accept the clause as currently drafted.

In addition, the Department has said that although the definition of conserving includes the concepts of maintaining and protecting, it is considering amending the wording of clause 1(3) to include those terms. The guidance will specify that anyway, so the amendment will simply provide further clarity.

The Committee Clerk: If members want those amendments to be made, they cannot accept the clause as drafted. We can come back to it next week, when we will hopefully have an amendment in writing from the Department. That might be the wisest course of action.

Mr Ford: Can we formally accept the clause today, subject to the amendments to those two subsections?

The Committee Clerk: Given that we do not have the Department's amendments in front of us, the Committee can only make a recommendation.

Mr Ford: Given that the Department has not managed to write the amendments, could we write them?

The Committee Clerk: We could write an amendment and bring it to the Department. However, it would then be a Committee amendment, not a departmental amendment.

Mr Ford: We are back here next week, so we can leave it until then.

The Chairperson: Are members content to defer discussion on the clause until next week?

Mr Beggs: I have made the point previously about a freshwater lake in Wales that is under threat from the rising sea level. Surely there would be an inordinate public expense involved in protecting or maintaining something like that. I have not heard a satisfactory explanation of how the inclusion of those words would impact on the Department's resources or those of other private or local authorities. I wish to be aware of that before we consider including the words "maintaining" and "protecting".

The Chairperson: Will the Department answer that question now?

Mr C Savage: I think that the answer lies in clause 1(1). The duty is meant to be consistent with the exercise of every public body's functions. We do not anticipate that they will have to go to huge lengths to meet that duty. They must do only what is consistent with their functions and scope.

Mr Kinahan: Is it, therefore, better to leave out the terms "maintaining" and "protecting", because "conserving" already covers those concepts?

Mr C Savage: It is our view that conserving involves protecting and maintaining. We have said that we will be producing guidance that will explain those concepts. We do not have huge concerns about putting those terms in the legislation, subject to the draughtsman's agreement.

Mr Ford: The logic was that if there is to be a certain explanation about what conserving includes, it is reasonable to include the terms "maintaining" and "protecting" as part of that explanation.

Mr Kinahan: However, the other argument is that that would make the definition too strong,

and would, therefore, add another unnecessary expense.

Mr Ford: I thought that this Committee's function was to strengthen the protection of the environment.

Mr Kinahan: Not always. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: That wording would meet some of the concerns of some of the environmental organisations.

Mr Beggs: However, the resources are then available to the Department and other bodies.

Mr C Savage: The purpose of clause 1(3) is not to provide a precise definition of "conserving". The word "includes" is key to that clause. It is saying that in conserving, restoring and enhancing are included. It serves as a reminder.

The Chairperson: That is a useful addition. We will defer consideration of clause 1 until we see the Department's amendments.

Clause 1 referred for further consideration.

Clause 2 (The biodiversity strategy)

The Chairperson: Is the Committee content with clause 2? Am I right in thinking that the Department is considering amending clause 2(4) to say that the Department will report every three years?

Mr Ford: The amendment should read: no less than every five years.

Mr K Bradley: That is Mr Ford's amendment, which will be put forward.

Mr Ford: If I have agreed with the Department, you have no mission.

Clause 2 referred for further consideration.

Clause 3 (Biodiversity lists)

The Chairperson: It was requested that clause 3(3) be expanded to include "public bodies". Does the Committee want to defer consideration of clause 3 until we see the Department's amendments?

Mr Boylan: Can we not agree the clause, subject to amendment?

Mr Kinahan: I am sure than we can.

The Chairperson: I would have thought that the insertion of "public bodies" would have been fairly straightforward. Will the Department include that?

Mr K Bradley: The discussion arose because the biodiversity duty applies across the board to non-departmental public bodies and other public bodies, and not just to the DOE. Therefore, we would be content, subject to Office of the Legislative Counsel agreement, to include "public bodies".

The Chairperson: OK, members, the Department is quite clear that the clause includes other public bodies.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Protection of nests of certain birds)

The Chairperson: There will be further amendments to clause 4 to include other species. We will defer consideration until we see the amendment next week.

Clause 4 referred for further consideration.

Clause 5 (Offences: recklessness)

The Chairperson: The Department has provided the Committee with a definition of recklessness. If members are content with that definition, I will put the Question.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 (Protection of basking sharks from disturbance)

The Chairperson: The Department is considering amending clause 9(4)(a) to include both seal species.

Clause 9 referred for further consideration.

Clause 10 (Snares)

The Chairperson: We now move to clause 10, on snares — I knew that there was a trap waiting for me. *[Laughter.]*

Would members consider suggesting amendments proposing an incremental process of licensing and increasing the inspection time from every 24 hours to every 12 hours?

Mr Kinahan: Is that practical?

The Chairperson: I do not know.

Mr Beggs: If snares continue to be an option, they should be regulated and licensed.

Mr Boylan: If we are going to go down that road, we will support regulating and licensing, but my party supports a total ban on snares.

The Chairperson: Sinn Féin is opposed to the use of snares.

Mr McKay: There is research before us today that we have not considered or read over. The decision should be deferred until we consider the matters arising.

Mr Ford: I concur. What has been presented today leans the balance towards a total ban. Therefore, at the very minimum, there should be a strict licensing regime.

The Chairperson: Next week, there will be a discussion on whether we should support an outright ban or a regulated licensing scheme as a compromise. I would appreciate it if, where relevant, members give the Committee Clerk an indication of their party's stance. She could then bring us wording for amendments for a complete ban and a regulated licensing scheme, and Committee members can decide which they support next week.

Mr Dallat: I am not up to date on this matter. I have my own feelings about snares, but, to be honest, I have not asked the party about its views. Is there still a whole range of traps, such as booby traps and bear traps, lurking about?

The Committee Clerk: There are already some constraints on snares in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, but the recommendation is that those are taken further. We have had quite a lot of information from stakeholders suggesting that it should go further still or, indeed, that there should be a complete ban. The Committee has been provided with further research and information from one particular stakeholder today, and that might help to inform the Committee's decision.

The Chairperson: Members can read that information and take account of it next week.

Mr Boylan: We requested more information, which we now have, and I think that we need some time to look over that.

Clause 10 referred for further consideration.

Clauses 11 to 13 agreed to.

Clause 14 (Licences under Article 18)

Mr Kinahan: Have we left any room in the Bill to allow for a group licence, to fit how Talnotry Avian Care Trust works?

Mr Meharg: We would prefer not to have group licences, because we have certain concerns about the long-term keeping of animals. Under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 there is no licence requirement for anyone who wishes to take in an injured animal and release it into the wild when it recovers. That is a perfectly legal activity.

Mr Kinahan: Then we shift to zoo legislation.

Mr Meharg: The situation shifts towards zoo licensing if animals are being kept with a view to forming a collection for a charity or a business.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 14 agreed to.

Clause 15 (Discharging firearms, etc. from vehicle)

The Chairperson: We now move on to clause 15, on discharging firearms, etc from a vehicle.

Mr Beggs: What is the party's view on that clause? *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: Yes, what is Sinn Féin's view?

Mr Boylan: Do I have to declare an interest? *[Laughter.]*

We should defer to Mr Kinahan; he knows a wee bit more about this area.

The Chairperson: On the basis of the evidence from the deer farmers, who have asked that clause 15 be retained, are members content with the clause as drafted?

Mr Ford: I thought that a considerable number of concerns were expressed when we discussed this last.

The Chairperson: Yes, there were.

Mr Kinahan: I thought that we were going to drop it.

Mr Beggs: The evidence that was presented gave me the impression that the insertion of the words: “when the vehicle is moving or when its engine is running”

allowed a person to discharge a weapon while the vehicle is stationary. The professional person who gave evidence about culling species indicated that he did not have a difficulty with the total ban. The banning of shooting from vehicles would make it more difficult for poachers to operate, because they could not use the defence that their vehicle was stopped when they shot. If that were the case, there should never be firing residue in a vehicle.

The Chairperson: I should point out to members that the PSNI supported the inclusion of the clause.

Mr Beggs: Is the PSNI aware of the other factors? Can we pass on that information to the PSNI?

The Chairperson: We could defer our decision on clause 15.

Mr Boylan: We should defer our decision. We heard from Mr Hetherington; we know that poaching is going on, and he is concerned about that. There seems to be some indecision among members.

Mr Dallat: Are we talking about shooting the deer or shooting the poachers?

The Chairperson: Let us hope that it is the deer.

Clause 15 referred for further consideration.

Clause 16 (Licences relating to deer)

The Chairperson: Does the Department intend to table a further amendment to clause 16 in relation to roe deer and Chinese water deer?

Mr C Savage: It is in connection with schedule 9.

The Chairperson: It will not require any change to clause 16.

Mr C Savage: No, not to clause 16.

Mr Kinahan: I have one concern. DARD said that it is prepared to consider taking responsibility for deer licensing. My experience with DARD, through other matters that I am involved in, is that it is a very slow organisation. I am not sure

whether the responsibility for deer licensing should be placed with DARD.

The Chairperson: That is outside the scope of this legislation. We will seek further clarification on that matter.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clauses 17 to 23 agreed to.

Clause 24 (Review of Schedules to the Wildlife Order)

The Chairperson: The Committee supported proposals for five-yearly reviews. As the Department is prepared to do that, no amendment is necessary.

Mr K Bradley: That is correct.

Mr Ford: The Committee supports the clause but not the schedules to which it relates.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 24 agreed to.

Clause 25 (Amendments to Schedules 1 to 9 to the Wildlife Order)

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 25 as drafted?

Mr Ford: Can we be content with clause 25 if we are not content with schedule 1? Can we be content with a clause if we do not yet know the schedule to which it relates? Clause 24 concerns the principle behind the schedule but clause 25 concerns the schedule specifically.

The Chairperson: Perhaps we can defer that and seek clarification?

Mr C Savage: Mr Ford is correct. Members would have to be content with the content of the schedule before agreeing to the clause.

The Chairperson: Thank you, Mr Ford. You must have been getting training.

Clause 25 referred for further consideration.

Clause 26 referred for further consideration.

Clause 27 agreed to.

Clause 28 (Notification of change of owner or occupier)

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 28 as drafted?

Mr Ford: There is still a need for the clarification of “occupier”.

Clause 28 referred for further consideration.

Clauses 29 to 31 agreed to.

Clause 32 (Sale of game)

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 32?

Mr Ford: Clause 32 is, presumably, where the Department may introduce the amendment about possession of hares.

The Chairperson: Is the Department considering that?

Mr C Savage: That would possibly require a separate clause, because it is not connected to the sale of game. However, it will be in the Bill.

The Chairperson: OK. Therefore, we can anticipate a further clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 32 agreed to.

Clauses 33 to 36 agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Amendments to schedules to the Wildlife Order)

The Chairperson: We will move on to the schedules. I have been advised to go through, species by species, those that should be included. The golden plover is currently a quarry species. The Department is not minded to include the golden plover, but it is concerned about the numbers and will review that next time. Are members content with that approach?

Mr Weir: Was the golden plover raised earlier in the week? Did departmental officials say that they were flexible on the golden plover, as they are on the curlew?

Mr C Savage: The curlew —

Mr Weir: I remember the curlew. You said that one species fell into a similar category as the curlew.

The Chairperson: It was the whinchat, lapwing and redshank.

Mr Weir: They were keen to shift in three species. They said that they were happy enough to have the curlew shifted in and that they would not lose a great deal of sleep if it was; there was a marginal decision. I am trying to remember whether the golden plover fell into the same position.

Mr C Savage: It is a quarry species, similar to the curlew, but we have proposed taking it off the quarry list. The Committee asked for some up-to-date information on the population data of certain species, which the Department is sending. The golden plover is included in that.

The Chairperson: We cannot defer that to next week, but we could ask the Committee Clerk to prepare a proposed amendment to include the golden plover, which will depend on the information that we receive from the Department. We will have a proposed amendment drafted, and we will consider the Department's paper.

The Department said that it will consider including an amendment to include the curlew. We will defer that matter to await that amendment. We will return to that issue next week.

The bullfinch and reed bunting are widespread and the former may cause damage to orchards. The Department did is not minded to include those species. The whinchat, lapwing and redshank are rare, and the Department will consider an amendment to include them. The Committee wishes to see that amendment. The number of ravens has increased, and the Department is not minded to include that species.

Some amendments are to come forward next week to schedule 2 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, so we will wait to see those amendments, one of which will be to remove the curlew. There is also a proposal to add the ruddy duck. The Department's view is that an assessment of the impact of shooting on the status of all quarry species is expensive and would be best done at UK or EU level.

We need to consider removing the golden plover from that schedule as well. Again, the Committee Clerk will draft a proposed amendment and the Committee can decide next week whether to promote that amendment.

Schedule 1 will also amend schedule 4 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The Northern Ireland system differs from the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland, one third of license holders are subject to annual monitoring and inspection.

Mr Ford: A point was made by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group about excluding all insectivorous birds. How suitable does the Department consider that?

Mr Meharg: The concern was about the availability of food, and we understand that the supplies of mealworm or insectivorous food is readily available.

The Chairperson: Schedule 1 also proposes to amend schedule 5 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. That schedule relates to the Irish hare. According to the Department, the population has stabilised, and the decline was due to habitat loss. Furthermore, the species action plan is on target. The Department is minded to continue with the current approach, which provides year-on-year protection. Do members wish to see that remain or —

Mr Ford: If that remains the Department's position, I request the Committee Clerk prepares an amendment to include *lepus timidus hibernicus* in that list.

Mr I McCrea: How does that translate?

Mr Ford: It means "the Irish hare".

Mr Kinahan: So that allows us both ways.

The Chairperson: Yes. The Committee may well support and endorse that proposed amendment so that the hare be added to the list of protected species. Let us see what will happen next week.

According to the Department, there is no evidence of white, black or long-nosed skate in Northern Ireland waters. The common skate is known by different names, but only one Latin name. That is most fortuitous, I would have thought.

Bats are already protected under EU legislation.

Pollan is commercially fished in parts of Northern Ireland. The Department will need to explore that before adding to schedule 5.

All three species of lamprey have been found to be more common than expected. The

Department has no intention of including those in the schedule, but will review that after five years.

Mr Ford: Is the Department satisfied that it does not need to do anything but review the situation after five years as opposed to adding lamprey to the protected list and review that after five years?

Mr Meharg: Under the water framework directive, there has been a new level of survey of fish species throughout Northern Ireland over the past few years. Up until then, only salmonids were recorded. Since recording other species, it seems that lamprey are much more widely spread than was thought. We feel, therefore, that that monitoring can carry on for the five years, and that it is best to review it at that stage. We do not feel that there is a need to put lamprey into the schedule, not because the numbers were low, but because we feel that they were under-recorded. Once recording started, we found higher than expected numbers. That suggests that they were under-recorded rather than their numbers being low.

Mr Ford: It is, presumably, also possible that numbers fluctuate from year to year, as was suggested may happen with the Irish hare. Therefore, it may be appropriate to consider protection and do the monitoring for five years.

Mr Meharg: We do not feel that there is not a requirement for that.

The Chairperson: OK, there will be a review after five years.

The angel shark cannot be protected beyond six nautical miles because the EU common fisheries policy.

Mr Weir: They can be protected within six nautical miles, but not beyond it.

The Chairperson: Yes.

Mr Weir: Do we put up signs or something?
[Laughter.]

The Chairperson: The Department is to provide numbers of species to support its position.

The bluebell will be added to schedule 8 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

The purpose of amending schedule 9 is to identify highest risk species. The Department sees little gain in listing species that have become naturalised and widespread. That is

where the Department was considering including deer, so an amendment is required.

Mr Kinahan: Are there not two types of bluebell?

Mr C Savage: There is the native bluebell and the Spanish bluebell. The Spanish bluebell is a non-native invasive species, which is causing some concern. Protection is being provided for the native bluebell.

Mr Kinahan: There is one that we are trying to protect, and one that can be bought at garden centres.

Mr K Bradley: The small Spanish bluebell can be bought at garden centres.

Mr Beggs: Will that be dealt with as an invasive species?

Mr K Bradley: No.

Schedule 1 referred for further consideration.

Schedule 2 (Amendments)

The Chairperson: The Committee suggested that special protection orders should include “possession” as an offence, as well as taking and killing. We have dealt with that. Are members happy with schedule 2?

Mr Ford: Not if that is where the further amendment to the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928 will go.

The Chairperson: Is that where it will go? Was that about the hare?

Mr Ford: It is aimed at amending the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928, which is mentioned at the start of schedule 2.

Mr C Savage: Yes, it is likely to be mentioned there.

Schedule 2 referred for further consideration.

Schedule 3 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Mr K Bradley: Thank you, Chairperson and members, for your time.

The Chairperson: We hope to continue next Thursday.

Mr Boylan: Before we go, I want to point out that the Irish hare will be an issue for next week’s discussion and will be the subject of an amendment. A special protection order has been in place, year-in, year-out. We have been told that their numbers have stabilised, but we need to determine what the exact position is. The special protection order was made because the numbers of Irish hares had been low. If we agree the protection order, it will protect the species for five years. I would like to have as much information as possible before we make a decision on that issue either way.

The Chairperson: Would a population graph that illustrates the measures that must be taken be of any help?

Mr Meharg: We can provide a population graph. The 2010 survey is ongoing. I can try to find out how that information looks at the moment, but it would be unsubstantiated, because the survey is not yet complete. I will forward the 2010 data with a caveat.

The Chairperson: That would be very helpful.

Mr K Bradley: Special protection orders were introduced as a temporary measure to facilitate the species action plan for the Irish hare. The 2010 target is to increase the population from one hare to two hares per square kilometre. If the survey shows that the numbers are still stable, the Department will not propose any further special protection orders.

The Chairperson: It would not propose any special protection orders at all? In that case, the Committee could consider the Department’s proposal to remove it altogether, our proposed amendment to retain the special protection orders or a separate amendment.

Mr C Savage: No. The decision is whether the protection order should go into schedule 5 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. The special protection order facility will always be there, but we feel that now is the time to make a decision. We hope that we will have no further need for special protection orders.

Mr K Bradley: The special protection orders are only a temporary measure to allow a game species to recover. We took our position on the understanding that the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 would sort out the long-term protection needs for the Irish hare. As a

game species, the Irish hare is protected during the closed season.

The Chairperson: OK. You will come back to us next week with further information. Thank you very much.

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 5 March 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on (i) Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 1; and (ii) Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2.

(AQW 4391/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The information which you requested is set out below and has been provided by respective departments.

TABLE A – ISNI 1

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
e-HR [Subsequently changed to “HR Connect”]	35.8	Completed	Target for full implementation was November 2008. The final HR Connect service went live in August 2009. Total project capital expenditure is forecast to remain within budget.
Government accommodation	75.0	Cancelled	The Workplace 2010 procurement process was effectively terminated in February 2009 when the 2 bidders who had progressed to Best and Final Offer stage wrote to the Department withdrawing their bids.
DEL-Queen's University Library	16.7	April 2009	The capital grant for this project was increased from £10m to £16.7m as a result of additional applications to the Department for funding. This meant that the deadline for completion was moved back to April 2009 to allow time for the additional work to be carried out. Completed within budget (capital grant offered was not exceeded).
DEL-UU Belfast Campus	10.0	June 2006	Completed on time and within budget (capital grant offered was not exceeded).

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DEL-Orchard Project	6.5	April 2010	Original completion date was revised to April 2010 to allow time to assess the full working of a new biomass boiler. There had been problems with the boiler installation but these have now been addressed. Contained within original capital grant budget.
DEL-Fermanagh College (Now campus of South West College)	8	August 2007	Killyhevlin Skills Centre built within budget but delivered in July 2009. A revision to the business case was required and this took some time to complete.
DETI-Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities (GCVE)	19.5	Mid - 2012	The original proposal for new visitor facilities was, in the absence of any other project promoter, to be taken forward and paid for completely by DETI. Following a series of events in 2007/08 including the refusal of planning permission for an alternative private sector led proposal, the National Trust, in partnership with Moyle District Council, decided to become project promoter. The project, which is based on the design commissioned by DETI, secured planning approval in 2009 and is valued at £18.5m. NITB is currently considering a funding application from National Trust for £9.25m. National Trust has committed £6.25m to the project and has recently secured an additional £3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. A final decision on NITB funding is expected in March 2010.
DOE-Waste Management (including grants to district councils)	285	N/A	ISNI 1 included an estimate of future waste management capital investment required to comply with the EU Landfill Directive (1999). The original ISNI documentation explains that a final decision had not been reached on whether this would be funded by the Department of the Environment (DoE) or local government (district councils). In the interim, ISNI 1 provisionally allocated this investment to DoE. ISNI 1 was superseded by ISNI 2, covering the period 2008-2018. ISNI 2 includes £436m of capital investment in Waste Management, with £200m capital funding from the Executive.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DSD-Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park			Scheduled for completion in 2017 but Masterplan is still to be approved. A conservation programme for the gaol is currently underway at a cost of £4.7 million over the next year.
OFMDFM-Maze/Long Kesh	Not stated	Not realised	OFMDFM Ministerial decision on 8 April 2009 to end the procurement linked to the 2006 Masterplan. OFMDFM Ministers announced that a Development Corporation (DC) would be established to take forward the redevelopment of the site and officials are processing the necessary legislation to set up the DC. Substantial demolition and remediation works have been completed to prepare the site for future use. Remediation and site preparation work is ongoing.
OFMDFM-Ebrington	Parade Ground – £7.2m. Peace Bridge - £13m this is being funded under the EU Peace III Programme. Several other projects ongoing on site.	On Target	Substantial works will be completed on the Peace Bridge and the Parade Ground by 2011. The substantial demolition project at Ebrington is now completed, a number of conservation projects are ongoing and the initial development of the Parade Ground at Ebrington is due to commence shortly. Ilex are phasing development plans in line with available funding.
DRD-Total for Roads Packages 1 and 2	474	Mar-11	The previous estimate was supplied prior to the Contracts being signed for both packages. The differences include increased land costs and changes in scope including additional schemes.
DRD-Derry to Dungiven Dual Carriageway	320-390	n/k	The previous estimate was supplied in the initial planning stage. The extent of the scheme is now more defined following the announcement of the preferred route.
DRD-A1 Loughbrickland to Beechill	25	Nov-06	Compensation events and delays resulted in additional costs and a later completion date.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DRD-A5 Omagh Throughpass	14	Aug-07	Compensation events and delays resulted in additional costs and a later completion date.
DRD-Belfast Sewers Project	162	Dec-09	This project was substantially completed in December 2009 with additional cost due to changes in scope.
DRD-North Coast Wastewater Treatment Works	48	May-07	This project was completed on time with additional cost due to changes in scope.
DRD-Belfast Lough Wastewater Treatment Works	23	Aug-06	This project was completed in August 2006 with additional cost due to changes in scope.
DCAL-Dungiven New Library	1.2	June 2010	Originally estimated to be completed in 2007-08 and to cost £0.6m. Original design was deemed inadequate and a larger facility was designed (at a higher cost). Approvals process had to be restarted as a result. Project to be completed within revised budget and timescale.
DCAL-Bangor Library upgrade	2.7	September 2008	Originally estimated to be completed in March 2008 and to cost £2.4m. Project was delayed and cost increased due to problem with floor screed and design changes. Completed within revised timescale.
DCAL-Lyric Theatre*	9.79	March 2011	Originally estimated to be completed in March 2010. DCAL contribution increased from original £6m during the design development process and an Addendum to the Original Economic Appraisal was approved by DFP. The project is currently on time and on budget within the agreed revised programme.
DCAL-Crescent Arts Centre*	4.5	March 2010	A review of the original project carried out by CPD resulted in an increase in costs from the original £2.5m and an Addendum to the original Economic Appraisal was approved by DFP. The project is currently on time and on budget within the agreed revised programme.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DCAL-Waterways Ireland Headquarters	10.9	September 2009	The DCAL contribution to the total capital cost was £8.9m (previously revised from £8.2m). The building is complete with payments of £8.8m paid to date. The remainder of payments are due to be made within the allocated budget before the end of March 2010.
DCAL-Refurbishment of Armagh Planetarium	2.78	December 2005	The difference between the projected and actual capital spend is due to the projected cost (£2.3m), as approved by DFP, being based on the Economic Appraisal. This preceded the tendering process which resulted in tendered prices being higher but still within the 10% tolerance limits set by DFP. Completed within revised timescale.
DCAL-Refurbishment of Ulster Museum	17.2	October 2009	The scope and timescale of the project was extended at design stage to incorporate additional works/enhancements, best/most economically undertaken at the same time as the rest of the refurbishment programme plus health/safety/fire requirements. These additional elements also included a new Applied Art Gallery funded solely from private donations, an Art Discovery Centre and a new security system. This increased the cost from £11.5m to £17.2m and was approved by DCAL and DFP. DCAL's contribution increased from £7.1m to £11.1m with £4.5m from the Heritage lottery Fund. Completed within revised timescale.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Jobs & Benefits Project	43.6 (based on OBC estimates)	May 2014	<p>Work on the remaining 8 offices has yet to commence, therefore no capital costs have been incurred yet.</p> <p>Planned office completion dates:</p> <p>Newcastle – January 2012</p> <p>Strabane – March 2012</p> <p>Cookstown – August 2012</p> <p>North Belfast – October 2012</p> <p>Newtownards – October 2012</p> <p>Downpatrick – October 2012</p> <p>Bangor – December 2012</p> <p>Ballynahinch – May 2014 (this last office is the only one likely to miss the key milestone under Social Key Goals of the Investment Strategy due to the fact that the new Downpatrick needs to be completed to take Ballynahinch staff during its construction phase)</p>

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Education Projects	-	-	<p>In ISNI 1 the Department of Education had 106 major capital projects. Of these 48 have been completed, construction work is currently underway on 15 projects and a further 31 projects are still at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>While the majority of these projects may not have been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available. The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>A total 12 of projects are no longer being taken forward at this time, mainly due to concerns over enrolments and subsequently their long term viability; planning issues; and the need to consider other options such as rationalisation.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety Projects	-	-	<p>The Minister of Health Social Service and Public Safety has commented that the DHSSPS capital investment programme has changed significantly from those published in ISNI 1 (2005) and ISNI 2 (2008) due, in the main, to the available funding envelope which falls far short of what is needed to address the legacy of under-investment within health and also to changing and emerging priorities. The lack of clarity about the level of budget cuts expected in the next CSR period prevents him finalising decisions on my capital investment programme and it would be inappropriate for him to provide information in the format requested at this time since both ISNI 1 and ISNI 2 cover a 10 year period. He further commented that the ISNI profile for DHSSPS is unworkable in the current economic climate.</p>

TABLE B – ISNI 2

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	Opening of the M1/ Westlink and M2 upgrades in 2009	X					
	An enhanced ferry service for Rathlin Island by 2009						
	The establishment of a new International Communications link in the North West directly connected to North America and Europe by the end of 2009	X					
	Opening of the Dungannon to Ballygawley dualling in 2010	X					
	Opening of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dualling in 2010	X					
	The first phase of 20 new trains coming into service by 2011			X			Procurement of the new trains is around £20m more than what was indicated in ISNI due to adverse movements in Exchange Rates.

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	By the end of 2011, working with the private sector, the delivery of widespread access for businesses to a next generation broadband network			X			
	Starting work on the first rapid transit line in greater Belfast by 2011				X		
	Dualling key parts of the A6 during the lifetime of the Strategy			X			
	Opening the A5 and the remaining section of the A8 dualling schemes during the lifetime of the strategy			X			
	A new campus for Belfast metropolitan College open by 2010				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Skills	New accommodation at the North West Regional College's main campus by 2010			X			
	New accommodation at the South Eastern Regional College's campuses in Lisburn, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Ballynahinch open by 2011			X			
	A new Belfast Central Library open by 2015			X			
	Taking forward major works at over 100 schools across the region in the period 2008-2011, including eight schools for pupils with special educational needs.	<p>In ISNI 2 the Department of Education were taking forward major capital works at 108 schools. To date 24 of these projects have been completed and 16 are currently on site. The remaining 68 are at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>The timing of construction of announced projects can be affected by a number of factors including changes over time to the long term viability of a school, planning issues and the availability of capital resources. While the majority of DE projects have not been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available.</p>					
	From 2012, commencement of a broader programmes of schools modernisation, based firmly on cross-sector area plans and linking with other public service.	<p>The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Health	A new local enhanced hospital at Downpatrick by 2009	Please see above the comments from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Table A of this answer.					
	First phase of Ulster Hospital redevelopment complete by 2010						
	Opening five new health and care centres by 2011 in Andersonstown, Castlereagh, Shankill, Grove (Shore Road) and Portadown						
	A new acute hospital serving the South West by 2012						
	A new local enhanced hospital in Omagh by 2013						
	A new mental health crisis centre at Gransha by 2010						

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	Co-location of all the previously separate benefit delivery and job assistance services in single offices by 2012				X		Funding has only been made available until March 2011 as it is aligned with the current CSR funding window. However, the timetable for delivery of the remaining 8 offices extends beyond March 2011 and funding for work beyond this date has yet to be secured.
	Delivery of 10,000 new social and affordable houses by 2013, working with housing associations and the private sector			X			
	Completion of a new 50m swimming pool in time for the Olympicsx			X			
	Delivery of the agreed overall objectives of the West Belfast and Greater Shankhill Taskforce			X	X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	The commencement of a major mixed-use regeneration scheme in the North East Quarter of Belfast City Centre by 2011 leveraging in significant private sector investment				X		
	Substantial parts of Ebrington and Fort George in Derry/ Londonderry built out by 2011				X		
	And Crumlin Road Gaol / Girdwood Barracks				X		
Environment	Completing the Belfast Sewers Project by 2010 in order to significantly reduce the risks of flooding in parts of the city	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Upgrading water treatment and distribution infrastructure in a phased manner, to comply with existing water quality regulations across the region by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Alpha (to upgrade water treatment facilities) by 2009	X					
	Upgrading wastewater treatment infrastructure in a phased manner to bring the region in to compliance with current EU standards by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Omega (to upgrade wastewater treatment and sludge disposal facilities) by 2010.	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Supporting local authorities to deliver the waste management infrastructure by 2011 (with up to £200 million or 50% of the capital cost, whichever is less)				X		The Executive's capital contribution to the Waste Infrastructure Projects is capped at £200m. DoE has allocated £1.824m of capital funding support to local government up to Dec 2009. The majority of the capital support to local government will be required in the next budget period when construction commences - the Department has already notified DFP of this.
Productive	A major review of surplus public sector sites by 2008, with a view to identifying significant sites with industrial development potential across the region	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Helping the farming community into compliance with Nitrates Directive by 2009	X					
	By 2011 acquire and / or develop 200 acres of serviced land for InvestNI client companies in the main hubs, as defined by the regional development strategy.			X			
	Support for 20 farm / agri-food businesses in a £10m scheme to create renewable energy from agri-food waste by 2014			X			
	By 2013 £25 million of public and private investment will be made in the fishing industry through the European Fisheries Fund Programme				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Completion of the 2010 contract in 2009, with Investment to upgrade & modernize public sector accommodation and systems.					X	<p>The Workplace 2010 procurement process was effectively terminated in Feb 2009 when the 2 bidders who had progressed to Best and Final Offer stage wrote to the Department withdrawing their bids.</p> <p>Target for full implementation of the IT Assist Programme was April 2009. All departments migrated to the ICT Shared Service Centre by target date. Project is being managed on schedule and within budget.</p>

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if all projects within Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 1 were completed and finished on budget and on time; and if not, to provide an explanation.

(AQW 4394/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The information which you requested is set out below and has been provided by respective departments.

TABLE A – ISNI 1

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
e-HR [Subsequently changed to “HR Connect”]	35.8	Completed	Target for full implementation was November 2008. The final HR Connect service went live in August 2009. Total project capital expenditure is forecast to remain within budget.
Government accommodation	75.0	Cancelled	The Workplace 2010 procurement process was effectively terminated in February 2009 when the 2 bidders who had progressed to Best and Final Offer stage wrote to the Department withdrawing their bids.
DEL-Queen’s University Library	16.7	April 2009	The capital grant for this project was increased from £10m to £16.7m as a result of additional applications to the Department for funding. This meant that the deadline for completion was moved back to April 2009 to allow time for the additional work to be carried out. Completed within budget (capital grant offered was not exceeded).
DEL-UU Belfast Campus	10.0	June 2006	Completed on time and within budget (capital grant offered was not exceeded).
DEL-Orchard Project	6.5	April 2010	Original completion date was revised to April 2010 to allow time to assess the full working of a new biomass boiler. There had been problems with the boiler installation but these have now been addressed. Contained within original capital grant budget.
DEL-Fermanagh College (Now campus of South West College)	8	August 2007	Killyhevlin Skills Centre built within budget but delivered in July 2009. A revision to the business case was required and this took some time to complete.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DETI-Giant's Causeway Visitor Facilities (GCVE)	19.5	Mid - 2012	The original proposal for new visitor facilities was, in the absence of any other project promoter, to be taken forward and paid for completely by DETI. Following a series of events in 2007/08 including the refusal of planning permission for an alternative private sector led proposal, the National Trust, in partnership with Moyle District Council, decided to become project promoter. The project, which is based on the design commissioned by DETI, secured planning approval in 2009 and is valued at £18.5m. NITB is currently considering a funding application from National Trust for £9.25m. National Trust has committed £6.25m to the project and has recently secured an additional £3m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. A final decision on NITB funding is expected in March 2010.
DOE-Waste Management (including grants to district councils)	285	N/A	ISNI 1 included an estimate of future waste management capital investment required to comply with the EU Landfill Directive (1999). The original ISNI documentation explains that a final decision had not been reached on whether this would be funded by the Department of the Environment (DoE) or local government (district councils). In the interim, ISNI 1 provisionally allocated this investment to DoE. ISNI 1 was superseded by ISNI 2, covering the period 2008-2018. ISNI 2 includes £436m of capital investment in Waste Management, with £200m capital funding from the Executive.
DSD-Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Park			Scheduled for completion in 2017 but Masterplan is still to be approved. A conservation programme for the gaol is currently underway at a cost of £4.7 million over the next year.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
OFMDFM-Maze/Long Kesh	Not stated	Not realised	OFMDFM Ministerial decision on 8 April 2009 to end the procurement linked to the 2006 Masterplan. OFMDFM Ministers announced that a Development Corporation (DC) would be established to take forward the redevelopment of the site and officials are processing the necessary legislation to set up the DC. Substantial demolition and remediation works have been completed to prepare the site for future use. Remediation and site preparation work is ongoing.
OFMDFM-Ebrington	Parade Ground – £7.2m. Peace Bridge - £13m this is being funded under the EU Peace III Programme. Several other projects ongoing on site.	On Target	Substantial works will be completed on the Peace Bridge and the Parade Ground by 2011. The substantial demolition project at Ebrington is now completed, a number of conservation projects are ongoing and the initial development of the Parade Ground at Ebrington is due to commence shortly. Ilex are phasing development plans in line with available funding.
DRD-Total for Roads Packages 1 and 2	474	Mar-11	The previous estimate was supplied prior to the Contracts being signed for both packages. The differences include increased land costs and changes in scope including additional schemes.
DRD-Derry to Dungiven Dual Carriageway	320-390	n/k	The previous estimate was supplied in the initial planning stage. The extent of the scheme is now more defined following the announcement of the preferred route.
DRD-A1 Loughbrickland to Beechill	25	Nov-06	Compensation events and delays resulted in additional costs and a later completion date.
DRD-A5 Omagh Throughpass	14	Aug-07	Compensation events and delays resulted in additional costs and a later completion date.
DRD-Belfast Sewers Project	162	Dec-09	This project was substantially completed in December 2009 with additional cost due to changes in scope.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
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DRD-Belfast Lough Wastewater Treatment Works	23	Aug-06	This project was completed in August 2006 with additional cost due to changes in scope.
DCAL-Dungiven New Library	1.2	June 2010	Originally estimated to be completed in 2007-08 and to cost £0.6m. Original design was deemed inadequate and a larger facility was designed (at a higher cost). Approvals process had to be restarted as a result. Project to be completed within revised budget and timescale.
DCAL-Bangor Library upgrade	2.7	September 2008	Originally estimated to be completed in March 2008 and to cost £2.4m. Project was delayed and cost increased due to problem with floor screed and design changes. Completed within revised timescale.
DCAL-Lyric Theatre*	9.79	March 2011	Originally estimated to be completed in March 2010. DCAL contribution increased from original £6m during the design development process and an Addendum to the Original Economic Appraisal was approved by DFP. The project is currently on time and on budget within the agreed revised programme.
DCAL-Crescent Arts Centre*	4.5	March 2010	A review of the original project carried out by CPD resulted in an increase in costs from the original £2.5m and an Addendum to the original Economic Appraisal was approved by DFP. The project is currently on time and on budget within the agreed revised programme.
DCAL-Waterways Ireland Headquarters	10.9	September 2009	The DCAL contribution to the total capital cost was £8.9m (previously revised from £8.2m). The building is complete with payments of £8.8m paid to date. The remainder of payments are due to be made within the allocated budget before the end of March 2010.

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
DCAL-Refurbishment of Armagh Planetarium	2.78	December 2005	The difference between the projected and actual capital spend is due to the projected cost (£2.3m), as approved by DFP, being based on the Economic Appraisal. This preceded the tendering process which resulted in tendered prices being higher but still within the 10% tolerance limits set by DFP. Completed within revised timescale.
DCAL-Refurbishment of Ulster Museum	17.2	October 2009	The scope and timescale of the project was extended at design stage to incorporate additional works/enhancements, best/most economically undertaken at the same time as the rest of the refurbishment programme plus health/safety/fire requirements. These additional elements also included a new Applied Art Gallery funded solely from private donations, an Art Discovery Centre and a new security system. This increased the cost from £11.5m to £17.2m and was approved by DCAL and DFP. DCAL's contribution increased from £7.1m to £11.1m with £4.5m from the Heritage lottery Fund. Completed within revised timescale.
Jobs & Benefits Project	43.6 (based on OBC estimates)	May 2014	<p>Work on the remaining 8 offices has yet to commence, therefore no capital costs have been incurred yet.</p> <p>Planned office completion dates:</p> <p>Newcastle – January 2012</p> <p>Strabane – March 2012</p> <p>Cookstown – August 2012</p> <p>North Belfast – October 2012</p> <p>Newtownards – October 2012</p> <p>Downpatrick – October 2012</p> <p>Bangor – December 2012</p> <p>Ballynahinch – May 2014 (this last office is the only one likely to miss the key milestone under Social Key Goals of the Investment Strategy due to the fact that the new Downpatrick needs to be completed to take Ballynahinch staff during its construction phase)</p>

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Education Projects	-	-	<p>In ISNI 1 the Department of Education had 106 major capital projects. Of these 48 have been completed, construction work is currently underway on 15 projects and a further 31 projects are still at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>While the majority of these projects may not have been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available. The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>A total 12 of projects are no longer being taken forward at this time, mainly due to concerns over enrolments and subsequently their long term viability; planning issues; and the need to consider other options such as rationalisation.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety Projects	-	-	The Minister of Health Social Service and Public Safety has commented that the DHSSPS capital investment programme has changed significantly from those published in ISNI 1 (2005) and ISNI 2 (2008) due, in the main, to the available funding envelope which falls far short of what is needed to address the legacy of under-investment within health and also to changing and emerging priorities. The lack of clarity about the level of budget cuts expected in the next CSR period prevents him finalising decisions on my capital investment programme and it would be inappropriate for him to provide information in the format requested at this time since both ISNI 1 and ISNI 2 cover a 10 year period. He further commented that the ISNI profile for DHSSPS is unworkable in the current economic climate.

TABLE B – ISNI 2

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	Opening of the M1/ Westlink and M2 upgrades in 2009	X					
	An enhanced ferry service for Rathlin Island by 2009						
	The establishment of a new International Communications link in the North West directly connected to North America and Europe by the end of 2009	X					
	Opening of the Dungannon to Ballygawley dualling in 2010	X					
	Opening of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dualling in 2010	X					
	The first phase of 20 new trains coming into service by 2011			X			Procurement of the new trains is around £20m more than what was indicated in ISNI due to adverse movements in Exchange Rates.

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	By the end of 2011, working with the private sector, the delivery of widespread access for businesses to a next generation broadband network			X			
	Starting work on the first rapid transit line in greater Belfast by 2011				X		
	Dualling key parts of the A6 during the lifetime of the Strategy			X			
	Opening the A5 and the remaining section of the A8 dualling schemes during the lifetime of the strategy			X			
	A new campus for Belfast metropolitan College open by 2010				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Skills	New accommodation at the North West Regional College's main campus by 2010			X			
	New accommodation at the South Eastern Regional College's campuses in Lisburn, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Ballynahinch open by 2011			X			
	A new Belfast Central Library open by 2015			X			
	Taking forward major works at over 100 schools across the region in the period 2008-2011, including eight schools for pupils with special educational needs.	<p>In ISNI 2 the Department of Education were taking forward major capital works at 108 schools. To date 24 of these projects have been completed and 16 are currently on site. The remaining 68 are at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>The timing of construction of announced projects can be affected by a number of factors including changes over time to the long term viability of a school, planning issues and the availability of capital resources. While the majority of DE projects have not been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available.</p>					
	From 2012, commencement of a broader programmes of schools modernisation, based firmly on cross-sector area plans and linking with other public service.	<p>The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Health	A new local enhanced hospital at Downpatrick by 2009	Please see above the comments from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Table A of this answer.					
	First phase of Ulster Hospital redevelopment complete by 2010						
	Opening five new health and care centres by 2011 in Andersonstown, Castlereagh, Shankill, Grove (Shore Road) and Portadown						
	A new acute hospital serving the South West by 2012						
	A new local enhanced hospital in Omagh by 2013						
	A new mental health crisis centre at Gransha by 2010						

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	Co-location of all the previously separate benefit delivery and job assistance services in single offices by 2012				X		Funding has only been made available until March 2011 as it is aligned with the current CSR funding window. However, the timetable for delivery of the remaining 8 offices extends beyond March 2011 and funding for work beyond this date has yet to be secured.
	Delivery of 10,000 new social and affordable houses by 2013, working with housing associations and the private sector			X			
	Completion of a new 50m swimming pool in time for the Olympics			X			
	Delivery of the agreed overall objectives of the West Belfast and Greater Shankhill Taskforce			X	X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	The commencement of a major mixed-use regeneration scheme in the North East Quarter of Belfast City Centre by 2011 leveraging in significant private sector investment				X		
	Substantial parts of Ebrington and Fort George in Derry/ Londonderry built out by 2011				X		
	And Crumlin Road Gaol / Girdwood Barracks				X		
Environment	Completing the Belfast Sewers Project by 2010 in order to significantly reduce the risks of flooding in parts of the city	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Upgrading water treatment and distribution infrastructure in a phased manner, to comply with existing water quality regulations across the region by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Alpha (to upgrade water treatment facilities) by 2009	X					
	Upgrading wastewater treatment infrastructure in a phased manner to bring the region in to compliance with current EU standards by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Omega (to upgrade wastewater treatment and sludge disposal facilities) by 2010.	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Supporting local authorities to deliver the waste management infrastructure by 2011 (with up to £200 million or 50% of the capital cost, whichever is less)				X		The Executive's capital contribution to the Waste Infrastructure Projects is capped at £200m. DoE has allocated £1.824m of capital funding support to local government up to Dec 2009. The majority of the capital support to local government will be required in the next budget period when construction commences - the Department has already notified DFP of this.
Productive	A major review of surplus public sector sites by 2008, with a view to identifying significant sites with industrial development potential across the region	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Helping the farming community into compliance with Nitrates Directive by 2009	X					
	By 2011 acquire and / or develop 200 acres of serviced land for InvestNI client companies in the main hubs, as defined by the regional development strategy.			X			
	Support for 20 farm / agri-food businesses in a £10m scheme to create renewable energy from agri-food waste by 2014			X			
	By 2013 £25 million of public and private investment will be made in the fishing industry through the European Fisheries Fund Programme				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Completion of the 2010 contract in 2009, with Investment to upgrade & modernize public sector accommodation and systems.					X	<p>The Workplace 2010 procurement process was effectively terminated in Feb 2009 when the 2 bidders who had progressed to Best and Final Offer stage wrote to the Department withdrawing their bids.</p> <p>Target for full implementation of the IT Assist Programme was April 2009. All departments migrated to the ICT Shared Service Centre by target date. Project is being managed on schedule and within budget.</p>

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on each capital project within Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2, including whether each is on schedule and on budget.

(AQW 4395/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The information which you requested is set out below and has been provided by respective departments.

TABLE A – ISNI 1

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
e-HR [Subsequently changed to “HR Connect”]	35.8	Completed	Target for full implementation was November 2008. The final HR Connect service went live in August 2009. Total project capital expenditure is forecast to remain within budget.
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DOE-Waste Management (including grants to district councils)	285	N/A	ISNI 1 included an estimate of future waste management capital investment required to comply with the EU Landfill Directive (1999). The original ISNI documentation explains that a final decision had not been reached on whether this would be funded by the Department of the Environment (DoE) or local government (district councils). In the interim, ISNI 1 provisionally allocated this investment to DoE. ISNI 1 was superseded by ISNI 2, covering the period 2008-2018. ISNI 2 includes £436m of capital investment in Waste Management, with £200m capital funding from the Executive.
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Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Education Projects	-	-	<p>In ISNI 1 the Department of Education had 106 major capital projects. Of these 48 have been completed, construction work is currently underway on 15 projects and a further 31 projects are still at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>While the majority of these projects may not have been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available. The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>A total 12 of projects are no longer being taken forward at this time, mainly due to concerns over enrolments and subsequently their long term viability; planning issues; and the need to consider other options such as rationalisation.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>

Project Name	Capital Value £m	Estimated Completion Date	Comment
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety Projects	-	-	<p>The Minister of Health Social Service and Public Safety has commented that the DHSSPS capital investment programme has changed significantly from those published in ISNI 1 (2005) and ISNI 2 (2008) due, in the main, to the available funding envelope which falls far short of what is needed to address the legacy of under-investment within health and also to changing and emerging priorities. The lack of clarity about the level of budget cuts expected in the next CSR period prevents him finalising decisions on my capital investment programme and it would be inappropriate for him to provide information in the format requested at this time since both ISNI 1 and ISNI 2 cover a 10 year period. He further commented that the ISNI profile for DHSSPS is unworkable in the current economic climate.</p>

TABLE B – ISNI 2

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	Opening of the M1/ Westlink and M2 upgrades in 2009	X					
	An enhanced ferry service for Rathlin Island by 2009						
	The establishment of a new International Communications link in the North West directly connected to North America and Europe by the end of 2009	X					
	Opening of the Dungannon to Ballygawley dualling in 2010	X					
	Opening of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dualling in 2010	X					
	The first phase of 20 new trains coming into service by 2011			X			Procurement of the new trains is around £20m more than what was indicated in ISNI due to adverse movements in Exchange Rates.

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Networks	By the end of 2011, working with the private sector, the delivery of widespread access for businesses to a next generation broadband network			X			
	Starting work on the first rapid transit line in greater Belfast by 2011				X		
	Dualling key parts of the A6 during the lifetime of the Strategy			X			
	Opening the A5 and the remaining section of the A8 dualling schemes during the lifetime of the strategy			X			
	A new campus for Belfast metropolitan College open by 2010				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Skills	New accommodation at the North West Regional College's main campus by 2010			x			
	New accommodation at the South Eastern Regional College's campuses in Lisburn, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Ballynahinch open by 2011			X			
	A new Belfast Central Library open by 2015			X			
	Taking forward major works at over 100 schools across the region in the period 2008-2011, including eight schools for pupils with special educational needs.	<p>In ISNI 2 the Department of Education were taking forward major capital works at 108 schools. To date 24 of these projects have been completed and 16 are currently on site. The remaining 68 are at various stages of the planning and approval process.</p> <p>The timing of construction of announced projects can be affected by a number of factors including changes over time to the long term viability of a school, planning issues and the availability of capital resources. While the majority of DE projects have not been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available.</p>					
	From 2012, commencement of a broader programmes of schools modernisation, based firmly on cross-sector area plans and linking with other public service.	<p>The costs of those projects that have been completed or are currently on site have been met from within the Department's approved capital budget allocations.</p> <p>It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework the Minister of Education is putting in place. On 15 October 2009 the Minister announced a review of all capital projects still in planning to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.</p>					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Health	A new local enhanced hospital at Downpatrick by 2009	Please see above the comments from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Table A of this answer.					
	First phase of Ulster Hospital redevelopment complete by 2010						
	Opening five new health and care centres by 2011 in Andersonstown, Castlereagh, Shankill, Grove (Shore Road) and Portadown						
	A new acute hospital serving the South West by 2012						
	A new local enhanced hospital in Omagh by 2013						
	A new mental health crisis centre at Gransha by 2010						

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	Co-location of all the previously separate benefit delivery and job assistance services in single offices by 2012				X		Funding has only been made available until March 2011 as it is aligned with the current CSR funding window. However, the timetable for delivery of the remaining 8 offices extends beyond March 2011 and funding for work beyond this date has yet to be secured.
	Delivery of 10,000 new social and affordable houses by 2013, working with housing associations and the private sector			X			
	Completion of a new 50m swimming pool in time for the Olympicsx			X			
	Delivery of the agreed overall objectives of the West Belfast and Greater Shankhill Taskforce			X	X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Social	The commencement of a major mixed-use regeneration scheme in the North East Quarter of Belfast City Centre by 2011 leveraging in significant private sector investment				X		
	Substantial parts of Ebrington and Fort George in Derry/ Londonderry built out by 2011				X		
	And Crumlin Road Gaol / Girdwood Barracks				X		
Environment	Completing the Belfast Sewers Project by 2010 in order to significantly reduce the risks of flooding in parts of the city	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Upgrading water treatment and distribution infrastructure in a phased manner, to comply with existing water quality regulations across the region by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Alpha (to upgrade water treatment facilities) by 2009	X					
	Upgrading wastewater treatment infrastructure in a phased manner to bring the region in to compliance with current EU standards by 2014. This will include service commencement of Project Omega (to upgrade wastewater treatment and sludge disposal facilities) by 2010.	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Environment	Supporting local authorities to deliver the waste management infrastructure by 2011 (with up to £200 million or 50% of the capital cost, whichever is less)				X		The Executive's capital contribution to the Waste Infrastructure Projects is capped at £200m. DoE has allocated £1.824m of capital funding support to local government up to Dec 2009. The majority of the capital support to local government will be required in the next budget period when construction commences - the Department has already notified DFP of this.
Productive	A major review of surplus public sector sites by 2008, with a view to identifying significant sites with industrial development potential across the region	X					

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Helping the farming community into compliance with Nitrates Directive by 2009	X					
	By 2011 acquire and / or develop 200 acres of serviced land for InvestNI client companies in the main hubs, as defined by the regional development strategy.			X			
	Support for 20 farm / agri-food businesses in a £10m scheme to create renewable energy from agri-food waste by 2014			X			
	By 2013 £25 million of public and private investment will be made in the fishing industry through the European Fisheries Fund Programme				X		

Pillar	Project	Delivered / On site	Ahead of schedule	On schedule	Behind schedule	Cancelled /under review	Comments if not on budget.
Productive	Completion of the 2010 contract in 2009, with Investment to upgrade & modernize public sector accommodation and systems.					X	<p>The Workplace 2010 procurement process was effectively terminated in Feb 2009 when the 2 bidders who had progressed to Best and Final Offer stage wrote to the Department withdrawing their bids.</p> <p>Target for full implementation of the IT Assist Programme was April 2009. All departments migrated to the ICT Shared Service Centre by target date. Project is being managed on schedule and within budget.</p>

Lifetime Opportunities Strategy

Mr J Shannon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister where the Lifetime Opportunities strategy sits within their Department; and how they are taking this strategy forward.

(AQW 4725/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Overall responsibility for co-ordinating policy on poverty and social inclusion matters as outlined in the ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ strategy lies with OFMDFM’s Central Anti-Poverty Unit.

As you will recognise, however, OFMDFM is not in itself a spending department in this area and, therefore, the implementation and delivery of actions and targets arising from ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ is reliant on the programmes and initiatives delivered through other Northern Ireland Departments.

In adopting the broad ‘architecture’ and principles of ‘Lifetime Opportunities’, the Executive further agreed to the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee on poverty and social inclusion, which has responsibility for agreeing the priorities and key Executive actions to tackling poverty and social inclusion here. Its remit also extends to agreeing the monitoring and reporting mechanisms associated with the strategy.

The first two meetings of this Executive Sub-Committee were held last year, and since then OFMDFM officials have undertaken significant work with Departments, examining what programmes are currently being delivered and what potential exists for further actions to benefit those in greatest objective need.

It is expected that the third meeting of the Executive Sub-Committee, due to be held in the near future, will decide on priority action areas and agree the monitoring and reporting framework for 'Lifetime Opportunities'. The Executive's formal approval will then be sought on the priority actions identified.

Community Relations Posts in Local Councils

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many local Council staff posts are currently funded wholly, or partly, by the Community Relations Unit; and to list the jobs titles of these posts.

(AQW 4738/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister:

Council	Community Relations / Good Relations Officer	Assistant Community Relations / Good Relations Officer	Admin. Support Staff = FTE (Full Time Equivalent)	Notes
Antrim	1	-	Nil	
Ards	1	-	0.2	
Armagh	2	-	1.0	
Ballymena	2	-	0.80	GRO manager prorata salary and 1 FTE GRO.
Ballymoney	1	-	Nil	
Banbridge	2	-	0.70	
Belfast	4	1	Nil	
Carrickfergus	1	-	0.50	
Castlereagh	1	-	0.50 0.15	2 support staff.
Coleraine	2	-	0.25	1 = GRO manager prorata salary and 1 part-time GRO.
Cookstown	1	-	0.33	
Craigavon	1	1	Nil	
Derry	3	2 part-time Shared City posts	0.50 0.50	2 support staff.
Down	1	-	0.80	
Dungannon	2	-	0.54	1 GRO manager prorata salary and 1 FTE GRO.
Fermanagh	1	1	0.50	

Council	Community Relations / Good Relations Officer	Assistant Community Relations / Good Relations Officer	Admin. Support Staff = FTE (Full Time Equivalent)	Notes
Larne	1	-	Nil	
Limavady	1	1 (Public Relations post)	0.50	
Lisburn	1	-	0.25	2 support staff.
Magherafelt	1	-	0.30	
Moyle	1	-	Nil	
Newry & Mourne	3	1	1.0	
Newtownabbey	1	-	Nil	
North Down	1	-	0.50	
Omagh	1	1	-	Both posts are part-time.
Strabane	2	-	Nil	

The District Council Community Relations Programme provides funding towards agreed salary and associated administration costs and agreed programme activity costs up to a maximum of 75% with the balance of 25% being met from within Council resources.

Victims' Groups

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many victims' groups are funded by their Department.

(AQW 4788/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In 2009/10, 157 groups and organisations providing support for victims and survivors were funded by OFMDFM.

Forty-four groups have been in receipt of funding from the Core Funding Scheme and 148 benefitted from the Development Grant Scheme, both schemes administered by the Community Relations Council on our behalf. Nine groups also received funding from the Interim Capacity Funding arrangements administered by the Victims Unit.

A number of groups received funding from two or all of the above schemes.

Victims' Groups

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the eligibility criteria for victims' groups seeking funding from their Department.

(AQW 4789/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM administer a number of funding schemes for victims and survivors groups. These include the core funding scheme and the development grant scheme. Core funding is currently closed to new applications and has been since 2003.

The eligibility criteria for both schemes is as follows.

Core Funding

In 2003, when the victims and survivors sector was funded by the NIO, groups were invited to apply for the core funding scheme under the following essential criteria:

- The group/organisation was to be a non-statutory group based in N. Ireland.
- The group/organisation had to contribute to the aims and objectives of the Scheme which were:
 - To help victims/survivors regain fulfilment of their lives and where appropriate to reintegrate them as members of society.
 - To emphasise the benefits of work with individual victims/survivors.
 - To give priority to organisations/groups which provide support services to victims/survivors which they cannot access elsewhere.
- The need for the group's work had to be clearly identified and demonstrated i.e. the application had to provide details of the:
 - Number of clients (individual victims/survivors supported).
 - Type(s) of service.
 - Relationship to other services within geographical location.
 - Benefit of the work to users.
 - The group's work was to be well planned and have clear aims and objectives.
 - The application had to include eligible costs.
 - The application had to show openness and accountability to users and have a high degree of user involvement in decision-making.
 - It had to show a degree of co-operation with other organisations/groups working in the sector.
 - It had to show a needs assessment.
 - It had to show the development of and involvement in partnerships with parallel service providers, voluntary or community organisations/groups and/or with the statutory sector.

Development Grant

Development Grant scheme applications must reflect the principal aim of the scheme and must include at least one of the following elements:

- Projects that can demonstrate how they will help people to begin to make the transition from "victim" to "survivor" as part of a process of healing and recovery.
- Projects and activity programmes for victims of community conflict that will support the training of volunteers and staff in relevant support services to assist the healing and reconciliation process (groups will need to demonstrate work that supports the promotion of best practice).
- Assistance with organisational development and operational/strategic planning for groups involved in supporting victims and survivors to become active members of society.
- Projects that will explore the causes and effects of the Troubles and which will facilitate sharing and the development of trust and understanding between participants and an awareness of their needs amongst a wider community.
- Assistance with small-scale research costs involved in evaluating the effectiveness of projects involving victims groups and the development of models of good practice.
- The provision of small-scale seeding support for new groups working in the area of victim support. (Funding will only be allocated to newly established groups i.e. in existence for up to 1 year).

British-Irish Council Workstream

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they will examine the scope for adding autism to the British Irish Council workstream.

(AQW 4790/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: A Strategic Review of the British Irish Council (BIC) is currently underway. The review has focused on the Council's work programmes, working methods and support arrangements.

In relation to the BIC work programme, decisions have already been taken at recent BIC Summits to conclude work in some workstreams, which had reached a natural conclusion, and to add new workstreams. Therefore, the BIC work programme currently comprises the following: Digital Inclusion, Energy, Housing, Collaborative Spatial Planning, Demography, Environment, Early Years Policy, Misuse of Drugs, Social Inclusion, Transport and Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages. This brings the current total number of BIC workstreams to 11.

While autism does not fall within any of the existing workstreams, it is possible for Ministers to ask the British Irish Council to consider new work areas that could produce collective benefits.

Although the work programme element of the BIC Strategic Review has already been completed, additional proposals for new work sectors could be considered. These would be subject to the following steps:

- The Minister with responsibility for the area would propose it to Executive colleagues as a new work sector;
- the Executive would consider the proposal of the new work sector and, if approved;
- the proposal would be brought to a BIC Summit (normally this would imply a willingness by the proposing Administration to lead the new work sector if accepted), and finally;
- the British Irish Council would consider and decide on adoption of the proposal.

Programme for Government

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all strategies in the Programme for Government aimed specifically at (i) adults; and (ii) older people.

(AQW 4792/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister:

- (i) The Programme for Government makes reference to the following Strategies, which are specifically targeted at adults:
 - Preparing for Success – A Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy for Northern Ireland.
 - The development and implementation of a Higher Education Strategy.
 - Development and implementation of a regional strategy to widen participation in Higher Education by groups who are currently under-represented, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority ethnic communities, and students with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- (ii) The Programme for Government makes reference to the following Strategies, which are specifically targeted at older people:
 - Ageing in an Inclusive Society

Additionally, it contains a commitment to “Extend the Concessionary Fares Scheme during 2008 to provide free public transport to everyone aged 60 and over.” This was extended on 1 October 2008.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has a number of strategies aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of adults and older people. While these strategies are not

specifically listed in the Programme for Government (PfG) 2008-2011, the outcomes they are intended to secure are reflected in various PfG goals and indicators.

Department of Justice Bill

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if they are aware of any delay in the granting of Royal Assent to the Department of Justice Bill; and if they requested this delay.

(AQW 4812/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Following completion of its Final Stage in the Assembly on 1 December 2009, the Department of Justice Bill was laid before Parliament by the Secretary of State on 3 December 2009 for a statutory period of 20 sitting days, in accordance with section 15 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This is a normal step for any Assembly Bill which has required the consent of the Secretary of State under Part II of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The statutory period expired on 26 January 2010, and the Bill was then submitted by the Secretary of State for Royal Assent. This was obtained on 12 February 2010.

We did not request a delay at any stage in the process.

Public Relations Services

Mr J Spratt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has spent on public relations services from (i) PriceWaterhouseCoopers; (ii) KPMG; (iii) Deloitte; and (iv) Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

(AQW 4849/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our Department has not spent any money on public relations services from (i) PriceWaterhouseCoopers; (ii) KPMG; (iii) Deloitte; and (iv) Weber Shandwick in the period since May 2007.

Reform Programme

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 3573/10, to detail how their reform programme will achieve a world class public service.

(AQW 4906/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are taking forward, through our Programme for Government, the most wide ranging reform of public services for a generation. At the heart of this reform programme is a commitment to world class public services which meet the needs of the economy and wider society. Modernising the infrastructure and processes of the civil service is a key part of our reform programme. Our aim is to reduce costs and cut out bureaucracy by sharing key corporate services such as human resources, finance and ICT across Departments.

The Shared Service organisation was created in January 2010 with the aim of achieving a sharper focus on customer service and effective and efficient delivery of shared services. Going forward, there should be a stronger emphasis on continuous improvement to meet customer needs. This focus on continuous improvement includes comparisons with other organisations. Some external benchmarking activities have already been carried out by the key projects with favourable results.

Currently the Shared Service Organisation brings together a number of services including Account NI; Centre for Applied Learning; HR Connect; ICT Shared Service Centre; Network NI; and Records NI. A number of these services are delivered in partnership with the private sector.

There are examples of early benefits of this reform programme emerging. For example, IT Assist has compared the full cost of the existing service catalogue provision with sound public sector comparators e.g. the Cabinet Office Flex contract. The cost for the full IT Assist Service now equates to £1,200 per person per year, producing over £4.5 million savings to date. This rate compares favourably to recently

published GB data for their shared service programme (£1,700) and the estimated average cost for the provision of desktop and infrastructure services in GB Government (£2,400).

The Centre for Applied Learning compares its prices with similar courses provided by external training providers (including both the private sector and the National School for Government). The creation of the shared service has resulted in a reduction of 20% in course prices and cash-releasing savings of £1.3 million in 08/09 and a total to date of £3.9 million. Network NI has also produced a saving to date of over £1.5 million.

These significant savings will be redirected to delivering key services direct to the public.

Child Poverty

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are used to define child poverty.

(AQW 4943/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The three statistical measures which have been used to assess child poverty here are firstly the relative income poverty measure; secondly the absolute income poverty measure; and a third measure which combines both low income and material deprivation. These three measures reflect slightly different aspects of poverty and together provide a more comprehensive picture than could be achieved using only one measure of child poverty.

A child is defined as living in relative income poverty if the household in which he/she lives has an equivalised¹ income that is less than 60% of the contemporary median² income level for all households in the UK. Household income is on a before housing cost basis. Relative income poverty is a measure of whether the poorest are keeping pace with the incomes in the population as a whole.

Absolute child poverty is a measure of whether the poorest families are seeing their incomes rise in real terms. The baseline year for target is 1998/99. The 1998/99 UK median is adjusted year on year for inflation and a child living in a household with an income less than 60% of the 1998/99 median value adjusted for inflation is defined as living in absolute poverty. This is a measure of whether the poorest households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms.

The third measure combines low income and material deprivation. A child is defined as poor on this measure if the household in which he/she lives has a household income less than 70% of the contemporary UK median and a deprivation score of 25 or more reflected by enforced lack of adult and child goods and services. Such goods and services include: enough money to keep home in decent décor; hobby or leisure activity and holidays away from home one week a year (not staying with relatives). This is a wider measure of living standards.

Since 1998 there has been a downward trend in the numbers of children living in relative income poverty here in Northern Ireland. However, over the most recent period for which statistics are available the figures have remained fairly static at around 24%, on a par with the rest of the UK.

In terms of absolute income poverty, 29% of children were in poverty in 1998/99 with the most recent estimate for 2007/08 being 15%. However, as with relative income poverty over more recent years the figures have remained fairly static.

The mixed income and material deprivation measure was first recorded in 2004/05. At that time it estimated 21% of children to be poor compared to 20% in 2007/08.

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- 1 Equivalisation is the process by which household income is adjusted to account for variation in household size and composition.
 - 2 The median income is the mid point of all household incomes. In other words, if all household incomes were placed in order from lowest to highest then half of all households would have an income above the median amount and half below.
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South Belfast Constituency

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what projects they have initiated or funded since May 2007 which have a direct impact on residents of the South Belfast constituency.
(AQW 5111/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our Department has not initiated any projects but has provided funding or part funding through others for a number of projects which focus on, include or were held in South Belfast. A list of these projects is provided in the table below.

Financial Year	Project
2007/08	Al Nisa
	Belfast Islamic Centre
	Chinese Welfare Association
	Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
	Northern Ireland Muslim Families Association
	South Belfast Partnership Board/South Belfast Roundtable
	HAVEN (Help and Advice with Victims Every Need)
	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
	Queens Film Theatre
	Community Convention Development Company (West & South)
	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
	Greater Village Regeneration Trust
	Sandy Row Residents Association
	Finaghy Crossroads Group
	Markets Development Association
	Education Welfare Project
2008/09	ArtsEkta
	Belfast Islamic Centre
	Chinese Welfare Association
	Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
	Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
	South Belfast Partnership Board/South Belfast Roundtable
	Voluntary Service Bureau
	Youthaction
	HAVEN (Help and Advice with Victims Every Need)
	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
	Taughmonagh Community Forum Ltd
	Creative Writers Network
	Queens Film Theatre
	Sandy Row Residents Association
	An Droichead
	Markets Development Association
	Belfast Reconciliation Consortium
	Greater Village Regeneration Trust

Financial Year	Project
2009/10 to date	ArtsEkta
	Barnardos Tuar Ceatha
	Belfast Islamic Centre
	Belfast Jewish Community
	Chinese Welfare Association
	Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
	Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
	South Belfast Partnership Board/South Belfast Roundtable
	Youthaction
	HAVEN (Help and Advice with Victims Every Need)
	Arellian Nursery School
	Village Focus Group
	Finaghy/Horn Drive Community Centre Committee
	National Union Students
	Finaghy Crossroads Group
	Markets Development Association
	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
	Annadale and Haywood Residents Association
	St John Vianney Youth Club
	An Droichead
	Belfast Reconciliation Network
	Greater Village Regeneration Trust

Poverty and Social Inclusion

Mr J Bell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made by the Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion.

(AQO 838/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Executive Sub-Committee is responsible for agreeing the priorities and key Executive actions for tackling poverty and social inclusion here, and also agreeing the monitoring and reporting mechanisms associated with the ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ anti-poverty strategy.

To date the Executive Sub-Committee has met twice and during the course of its first two meetings it has:

- agreed its Terms of Reference;
- been informed as to the extent of poverty here;
- agreed that work should be undertaken to identify the key co-ordinated priority actions that are needed to benefit those areas, groups and individuals and particularly those families and children, in greatest objective need;
- considered and agreed initial proposals in respect of a monitoring and reporting framework for the ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ Strategy; and
- agreed to an early re-establishment of the Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum.

The third meeting of the Executive Sub-Committee is due to be held on 29 March and at this meeting Ministers will consider further proposals with regard to priority action areas and the monitoring and reporting framework for ‘Lifetime Opportunities’.

Victims Strategy

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of a strategy for victims, including a comprehensive needs assessment and a new Victims Service.

(AQO 839/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Key elements of the strategy are already in place. The Commission for Victims and Survivors is established and taking forward a range of tasks outlined in its agreed work programme.

A key target is the establishment of a Victims and Survivors Forum, which continues to meet in pilot format.

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment is an important piece of work which is being taken forward by the Commission. The outcome of this work will be vital in informing how the new Service will address the needs of victims and survivors. The Commission expect to have completed the Comprehensive Needs Assessment by November 2010.

We are considering the next steps in the establishment of the new Victims Service in light of the responses to the recent public consultation exercise, the views of the Committee and those of the Commission for Victims and Survivors. Work on designing the Service will begin shortly and it is our intention to have the Service established as soon as is practically possible.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr L Cree asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to protect the interests of savers and shareholders with holdings of less than £20,000 in the Presbyterian Mutual Society.

(AQO 840/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Members of this Assembly will know that on Friday 12th February we met with Gordon Brown to discuss the current circumstances of the PMS.

On the same day a judgement made in the High Court ruled that shareholder members who invested up to £20,000 in the PMS cannot be regarded as creditors. This means that, at present, they would be excluded from any distribution of the assets accumulating to the Society while it remains in administration. The Administrator will advise members and creditors of the full implications of this ruling in due course.

The judgment that small savers cannot be treated as creditors of the Society will, of course, be a disappointment for those members. The hardships being caused by the present status of the PMS has ever been in our thoughts. We can assure the Assembly that we are working to secure the best outcome we can for PMS savers.

Salaries of External Bodies

Mrs M O'Neill asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the need to review the salaries of people working, on behalf of the Executive, on external bodies, following the resignation of the Chief Executive of the Strategic Investment Board.

(AQO 842/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are fully conscious of the present constraints on public expenditure and the concerns that have been widely expressed over the pay arrangements for some top level posts in the public sector.

In the case of the Strategic Investment Board the remuneration package for the outgoing Chief Executive was the subject of contractual arrangements agreed before we took office. These arrangements will now be reviewed.

The recruitment of a new Chief Executive for the Strategic Investment Board will be a matter for the Board of the company. However, we wish to make clear that the remuneration offered to the new Chief Executive will require our approval.

It is vital that such an important position is filled by someone of the necessary skills and experience and SIB will seek to attract candidates of suitable calibre.

However, it is also vital to maintain confidence that salaries for senior positions in public service are fair but not excessive and fully reflect the position announced by the Minister for Finance and Personnel on bonuses in the Senior Civil Service.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mrs N Long asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

(AQO 843/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Improving relationships between and within communities here and building a shared and better future continues to be a high priority for this Department and the Executive. As we stated on 23rd February we have agreed the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. Over the coming weeks we will ask government departments for their input into the programme. The strategy will then be presented to the OFMDFM Committee before being submitted to the Executive. The strategy will then be subject to a full public consultation.

Whilst we have been working intensively towards this 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 us and the whole Ministerial team.

We have increased funding by a third for the period 2008-2011, from £21 million in the previous CSR period to almost £30 million in the current one. That means that vital work on the ground and with both existing and new communities is better resourced than ever.

We have increased funding to minority ethnic groups by two-thirds and increased funding for youth and interface workers by one-quarter. Statistics from both the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and the Good Relations Indicators report show that the work that we fund and resource, is delivering real and meaningful outcomes. Since 2005/06 there has been a 31% reduction in sectarian motivated crimes and almost 70% of young people in 2008 reported that relationships between Protestants and Catholics were getting better.

There are many other examples of our commitment:

- Junior Minister Gerry Kelly and Junior Minister Robin Newton continue to chair the north Belfast Working Group focusing on interface issues in Belfast and across Northern Ireland.
- Last summer we spent £500,000 on resourcing summer interventions work, bringing our total investment on this type of work to 1.5m since devolution in 2007.
- In our District Councils' Community Relations Programme we have spent since May 2007 £4.372m with a budget of £2.759m for the current financial year.
- In Coleraine we have been working proactively with our key partners both statutory and non-statutory following the death 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 the Council for good relations activities.
- We have also chaired meetings relating to issues in Craigavon and Lurgan.

These examples show that we are not complacent – we are leading and driving change in our society and in our work – through the Department and the Executive to deliver a shared and better future for all our people.

Victims' Groups

Mr S Moutray asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money has been spent in small grants to victims groups in the last year; and how many projects and groups have benefited from this funding.

(AQO 844/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In 2009/10 the Development Grant scheme including the Small Capital Grants scheme had an allocation of £2,637,198.

One hundred and forty eight (148) groups and organisations providing support for victims and survivors were funded by OFMDFM.

Nine (9) groups also received funding from the Interim Capacity Funding arrangements administered by the Victims Unit.

Over 500 individual projects benefited from Development Grant funding this financial year.

Good Relations

Mr A Bresland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the level of funding available for good relations work within local councils; and for an indication of the overall progress on the Good Relations strategy.

(AQO 845/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister administers the "District Councils Community Relations Programme" which has been developed to support local community relations initiatives in all 26 District Councils. The budget for the 2009/10 financial year is £2.76m.

The funding is used towards agreed good relations activities and salary and associated administration costs of at least one dedicated Good Relations Officer in each council. In addition to the OFMDFM funding, each council is required to provide match funding of at least 25%, which is met from within council resources.

With regard to the Good Relations Strategy, we are currently refining the final draft of the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration with a view to publishing it in the very near future. The strategy will be subject to a full public consultation after the general elections.

Bank Accounts

Mrs C McGill asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister if, as part of their lead role in addressing poverty, they have had any discussions with the banks regarding the need to review the processes for allowing members of the public to open a bank account.

(AQO 846/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have met with key players from the Banking and Financial sector in response to the economic downturn and the difficulties faced by the general public. The main problem that arises from financial exclusion is one of illegal doorstep lending to the disadvantaged and most vulnerable in our society.

This issue was discussed at the Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy sub-group of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum, chaired by the Junior Ministers, and at a roundtable event held to discuss this issue, also chaired by the Junior Ministers. There are a number of recommendations arising from this sub-group and work on addressing this issue is continuing. In the first instance we have commissioned some scoping research to gauge the extent of the problem and we will continue to work with key stakeholders to resolve difficulties.

We would also wish to highlight the ongoing work of the Northern Ireland Financial Capability Partnership in this regard. The Partnership, which is headed up jointly by the Consumer Council and the FSA is actively looking at issues of financial exclusion and working with the Banks, Credit Unions and other financial institutions through the 'Money Made Clear' programme to ensure better access to appropriate financial products and improved consumer education in respect of finance.

Planning Appeals

Mr J Wells asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress is being made in clearing the backlog of planning appeals currently being considered by the Planning Appeals Commission.
(AQO 848/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Planning Appeals Commission has made significant progress in clearing the backlog of planning appeals which has reduced from its height of over 3000 cases in 2007 to a figure of 846 cases at the end of January 2010. This has been made possible through the delivery of our PSA 21 commitment to provide increased resources to the Commission to enable it to address the backlog of planning appeals.

Fair Employment Monitoring

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the methodology for fair employment monitoring.
(AQO 849/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 imposes legal obligations on certain employers. One of these obligations is to monitor the composition of their workforce.

Under the Order, all employers in the public sector and those in the private sector with 11 or more employees are required to register with the Equality Commission and to provide it annually with information about the composition of their workforces and of those applying to fill vacancies. Public sector bodies and private sector concerns with more than 250 employees must also include information on the composition of those leaving the concern and those being promoted within the concern. Composition refers to the number of persons determined as belonging to the Roman Catholic or Protestant Community in Northern Ireland.

The Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 require employers to determine the community background of their employees by reference to their answer to a direct question. This requires the employee or applicant to state in writing whether they belong to the Roman Catholic or Protestant Community, or belong to neither. Where persons state they belong to neither community, employers may make a determination of community background for monitoring purposes only. The Regulations set out a number of ways in which community background can be established. This entails consideration of any relevant information which employees or applicants have provided, in writing, about themselves. If the information tends to show that they have a connection with both communities, they are treated as belonging to the community with which, in general, it tends to show they have the stronger connection. Where neither method ascertains the community background, the employer shall treat a person as if the community background to which they belong cannot be determined.

The information to be included in an annual monitoring return to the Equality Commission is prescribed by the Monitoring Regulations. The Regulations require employers to submit information detailing the composition of their workforce by community background, sex and occupational grouping, and whether they were employed for more or less than 16 hours per week.

The Equality Commission uses composite monitoring information to keep under review patterns and trends in employment and to target employers for the promotion of affirmative action measures and to monitor change in individual concerns. The Commission publishes annually a report on the profile of the Northern Ireland workforce based on the information contained in the monitoring returns.

Monitoring is essential to enable the proper assessment of progress being made towards fair participation in the workforce by both communities.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Land Covered by Environmental Enhancement Agreements

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total (i) percentage; and (ii) acreage of agricultural land covered by environmental enhancement agreements in (a) January 2000; (b) January 2008; and (c) January 2010.[R]

(AQW 4803/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): DARD records the area of agricultural land under environmental enhancement agreement in hectares, not in acres. The details are as follows:

Year	(i) Percentage	(ii) Hectares
January 2000	12%	134,000 ha
January 2008	40%	454,000 ha
January 2010	42%	468,000 ha

Grants from the European Fisheries Fund

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why fishermen here are denied the opportunity to buy shares in boats which is afforded to fishermen in Scotland through grants from the European Fisheries Fund.

(AQW 4880/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The scheme in Scotland is operated under Axis 1 of the European Fisheries Fund. It provides an opportunity for fishers under 40 years old to apply for a 15% grant (maximum of €50,000) towards the cost of securing part or total ownership of their first vessel. The vessel must be less than 24 metres in overall length and between 5 to 30 years old and already equipped for fishing at sea.

My department has not received any EFF applications for grants to buy boats, or shares in boats because that EFF measure is not open.

Two Axis 1 Measures (Vessel Modernisation and Small-scale Coastal Fishing) will open to our fishermen in April. Other Axis 1 measures will be rolled out later this year when I have had the opportunity to consider the recommendations of the Fisheries Forum and when the business cases have been completed and approved for those measures.

Licence for Fishing of White-fish

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if a licence is required for the (i) commercial; and (ii) private fishing of white-fish; and to outline the criteria involved in applying for such a licence.

(AQW 4883/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) A sea fishing vessel licence is required for anyone who wishes to catch and sell sea fish. No new licences are issued due to EU fishing capacity limits. A person wishing to fish commercially must purchase a licensed fishing vessel or licence entitlements sufficient to cover the capacity of the

vessel that he/she wishes to licence. License entitlements state the capacity of the vessel in terms of tonnage and engine power that may be licensed. Further help and advice is available from DARD Port Offices or the DARD sea fisheries licensing section in Dundonald House.

- (ii) Recreational fishing for white fish is permitted without a licence provided fish is not sold.

Single Farm Payments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to detail the amounts of modulation money deducted from Single Farm Payments; and (ii) to provide a percentage breakdown of the amount collected from (a) Lowland Areas; and (b) Less Favoured Areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4934/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Modulation is now deducted from the Single Farm Payment budget at source by the EU Commission and transferred to the Rural Development budget. The amounts deducted in the last three scheme years are as follows;

2007	2008	2009
€28,692,175	€34,259,288	€38,700,000

It is not possible to provide a precise figure in terms of a percentage breakdown between lowland areas and less favoured area because a significant number of farm businesses have land in both regions. My Department estimates that between 60% and 65% of modulation reductions relate to less favoured areas. There would be little change in the percentage breakdown from year to year.

European Fisheries Fund

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has received applications for grants to buy boats, or shares in boats, under the most recent tranche of the European Fisheries Fund.

(AQW 4949/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The scheme in Scotland is operated under Axis 1 of the European Fisheries Fund. It provides an opportunity for fishers under 40 years old to apply for a 15% grant (maximum of €50,000) towards the cost of securing part or total ownership of their first vessel. The vessel must be less than 24 metres in overall length and between 5 to 30 years old and already equipped for fishing at sea.

My department has not received any EFF applications for grants to buy boats, or shares in boats because that EFF measure is not open.

Two Axis 1 Measures (Vessel Modernisation and Small-scale Coastal Fishing) will open to our fishermen in April. Other Axis 1 measures will be rolled out later this year when I have had the opportunity to consider the recommendations of the Fisheries Forum and when the business cases have been completed and approved for those measures.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by her Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities outside the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 4969/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Section 75 of the NI (Good Friday Agreement) Act 1998, requires DARD, like all designated public authorities, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability and persons without
- persons with dependants and persons without

In addition, we are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

DARD has an Equality Scheme, which sets clearly out how we will comply with our current Section 75 equality duties. It also explains how and when business areas are required to carry out screening exercises on their policies to identify possible equality implications; and gives guidance on how to conduct a formal equality impact assessment (EQIA) and consultation exercise.

The statutory duties make equality considerations central to the whole range of public policy and decision-making. This 'mainstreaming' approach means that DARD is required to engage directly with equality issues at an early stage in policy development. Taking pro-active measures to find out about the possible impact of our policies on different groups will help determine if our policies could have an adverse impact, even if it is unintentional. This requires DARD to consult with people who may be affected by our decisions, and seek their views as part of the policy making process.

DARD's Section 75 consultees list includes various organisations including the Baha'i Council for NI, NI Islamic Centre, Belfast Jewish Community, Belfast / Omagh Traveller Support Group, Chinese Welfare Association, Indian Community Centre, NI African Cultural Centre, NI council for Ethnic Minorities, NI Muslim Family Association, Oi Kwan Chinese Women's Group, Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group, Polish Association NI, Sikh Community Centre and the Sikh Women's and Children's Association. These organisations are written to on a regular basis to see if they wish to receive any of DARD's upcoming consultations and are also advised of previous screening exercises carried out by the Department

DARD has carried out informal pre-consultation with a wide range of equality groups across all Section 75 categories including representatives for ethnic minorities whilst carrying out a number of EQIA's, including the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 and DARD Direct.

In carrying out pre-consultation for the Equality Impact Assessment of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007 - 2013, Rural Development Division met with a number of groups representing people whose identities lie outside the two main perceived traditions in the north of Ireland.

These included the Alliance Party, the Conservative Party, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Labour Party, NI Women's Coalition, Chinese Welfare Association, Indian Community Centre, the Workers Party, Wah Hep Chinese Community Association, and Traveller Movement NI.

Also, when completing equality monitoring questionnaires, respondents are able to choose from a range of options under political opinion, religious belief and racial group, and are not restricted to choosing either of the two main perceived traditions in the north.

Customer Service Improvement Branch (CSIB) carried out an EQIA for the roll-out of DARD Direct in 2008. As part of the pre-consultation in November 2007, CSIB wrote to a range of bodies representing section 75 groups, customers and staff and met with some of these groups. One of the groups contacted was NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM). However, they did not engage with DARD at the pre-consultation stage.

When the draft EQIA was written it was sent out to all the relevant groups on DARD's list of Section 75 consultees, which included the Ethnic groups, Bahai's Council for NI, Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group & NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM). A 9 week consultation period then ran through to September 2008.

As part of this consultation, CSIB met with a representative of NICEM on 26 August 2008 to gather their views on the draft EQIA and these views were considered when compiling the final EQIA report.

These pre-consultations have made a huge difference in helping equality groups understand the business of the Department, what DARD services are available to them, and what funding opportunities are available. In addition to the valuable information we gathered, this engagement process has also helped to reach groups with whom we previously had limited contact.

The Department has an Equality Steering Group (ESG) which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary. ESG meets every quarter and it currently includes representatives at a senior level from each of DARD business areas. Regular updates and a summary of the progress towards equality targets are provided to DARD senior management. Guest speakers at ESG meetings have included Anna Lo, MLA, then Chief Executive of the Chinese Welfare Association and Patrick Yu, Executive Director of the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM). Both speakers provided a valuable insight into the work of their organisations, outlined the issues which affect under-represented ethnic minority people living in rural areas, and provided some suggestions for DARD to consider which would help make our services even more accessible.

Forest and Woodland

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department is on course to meet the Programme for Government target of an increase of 1650 hectares of forest and woodland by 2011.

(AQW 5041/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Up to the end of December 2009, 426 hectares of new woodland have been created by farmers and landowners under the Woodland Grant Scheme, which is less than planned at this stage of the PfG target period.

In order to encourage more farmers and landowners to create their own woodland, I announced increases in grant rates of up to 30 per cent in November 2009. Since then, there has been a steep rise in applications (more than a three fold increase in December 2009 and January 2010 compared with the same period last year). Although it is too early to predict whether this interest will be sustained, I believe that this renewed interest in woodland creation, together with Forest Service's continued promotion of the forestry schemes, will put us back on course for meeting the PfG woodland target.

Rose Energy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any members of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute have a commercial relationship with Rose Energy, either through shareholdings in Rose Energy or through other companies which have shareholdings in Rose Energy.

(AQW 5106/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am not aware of any commercial relationship between individual members of staff at the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute and Rose Energy, either through shareholdings or through other companies which have shareholdings in Rose Energy.

Foaming on the Surface of Larne Lough

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute investigation into incidents of foaming on the surface of Larne Lough near Ballylumford Power Station.

(AQW 5110/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department requested the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to conduct studies on shellfish growth in Larne Lough and the possible relationship with "foaming" arising from Ballylumford Power Station in 2007, after poor growth results were obtained as part of a project to assess the carrying capacity of five sea loughs, including Larne Lough.

As the NI Environment Agency (NIEA) has the statutory role in regulating discharges to loughs, a collaborative study between AFBI and NIEA has been undertaken in the lough. Results obtained in 2007 and 2008 indicated the presence of an, as yet unexplained, toxicological response by shellfish larvae to Larne Lough sea water. Further studies in 2008 and 2009 on the health of both Pacific oysters and mussels from the lough have shown both species to exhibit a degree of stress at the cellular level in comparison with specimens from other NI sea loughs which may impact on productivity. Mussels were the most affected. The findings from the collaborative investigation, and AFBI's recent studies that show good growth by Pacific oysters in the Lough, have been reported to local stakeholders at a public meeting on 17 February.

While these studies relate to shellfish health, I understand that the Food Standards Agency is aware of the AFBI work and is content that its current classification system is protecting public health

Forestry Production

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQO 759/10, to clarify why the land at Enniskillen and Cookstown is not suitable for forestry production.

(AQW 5127/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The land at Enniskillen Campus comprises Thornhill Farm (32 hectares) and Wilson's farm (14 hectares). Both parcels of land were assessed by Forest Service in approximately 2004/05 and were deemed unsuitable for forestry production. This was due to the presence of an electricity power line running across Thornhill and because of the siting and small scale of Wilson's. That remains the case.

The land at Cookstown is at Tullyhoge Farm (7.34 hectares) which contains Tullyhoge Fort. This area has scheduled monument status and plantation is not allowed under Article 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995.

Portavogie Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much has been spent on improvements to Portavogie Harbour in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5148/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The NI Fishery Harbour Authority has spent the following amounts on capital works at Portavogie harbour over the past 5 years:

2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
£16,848	£659,766	£49,623	£197,706	£62,545

The main capital works undertaken were repair of the harbour walls, a new chill room at the fish market and upgrades of the slipway.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ethnic Minority Arts

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to develop a policy to promote ethnic minority arts, similar to those promoted by arts councils in the England, Wales and Scotland.

(AQW 4981/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): Ethnic minority arts are vital to help develop and celebrate diversity in terms of our own identity. Diversity is one of the core values of the Arts

Council and through it they aim to provide equal access to opportunities for all sections of society. Any organisation securing funding from the Arts Council must comply with the Equality and Good Relations policy of the Council.

The Arts Council funds a number of organisations which support ethnic minorities such as the Indian Community Centre, Chinese Welfare Association, An Munia Tober and Arts Ekta. In addition the Arts Council is placing priority on ethnic minority communities availing of grassroots arts programmes in order to develop understanding of the multiculturalism in Northern Ireland today.

Windsor Park Football Stadium

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when the last health and safety inspection took place at Windsor Park football stadium; (ii) what assessment has been made of the West and North Stand turnstiles; and (iii) if his Department has discussed the replacement of these turnstiles with the Irish Football Association and Linfield FC.

(AQW 4984/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Under The Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, Belfast City Council is responsible for undertaking health and safety inspections at Windsor Park football stadium. In 2006, however, Linfield FC, the owners of the venue, with support from my Department and the Irish Football Association (IFA), which owns the North Stand, commissioned an independent audit of Windsor Park. This audit also entailed an inspection of existing health and safety arrangements. The audit recommended, amongst other matters, that the turnstiles in the West and North Stands should be replaced in the long term. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), with support from Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), has engaged in discussions with Linfield FC and the IFA in order to encourage them to implement the independent audit's recommendations. Linfield FC and the IFA, with support from DCAL and SNI, are also considering undertaking a major re-development of Windsor Park. In the interim, DCAL and SNI have approved a business case to assist the IFA and Linfield undertake emergency works at the venue.

'Invest to Save' Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what bids his Department has made in relation to the 'Invest to Save' initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5059/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Finance and Personnel commissioned an Invest to Save exercise in December.

Given pressure on budgets, the purpose of this exercise is to identify areas where departments could make efficiency savings in 2010/11 and beyond if they had assistance with upfront costs. It does not, therefore, provide an opportunity to increase spending on front line service.

PRONI site at Balmoral Avenue

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consultation his Department intends to carry out with local residents in relation to the vacation and future use of the PRONI site at Balmoral Avenue, south Belfast.

(AQW 5062/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: On 28 January 2010 DCAL officials organised two meetings, one for elected representatives for the area, the other for the local residents, at the Balmoral Avenue site to provide information on the actual vacation of the site and to present for discussion draft proposals for the future use of the PRONI site. One political representative and 30 residents attended the meetings.

Any further consultation on the proposals will be dealt with by Planning Service as part of the planning process when the application for Outline Planning Permission has been submitted. This is scheduled for the end of March 2010.

Those who requested further information after the meeting and the local residents association will be advised by PRONI when the application has been submitted.

Access to the Arts

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures his Department has taken to improve access to the arts for primary school children in south Belfast.

(AQW 5063/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL funding for the arts is disbursed by the Arts Council and Northern Ireland Screen.

The Arts Council, through its Annual Support for Organisations Programme and Lottery Programme, supports a number of projects which deliver arts activities for primary school children within the formal education sector. Many of the arts organisations involved are based in the Belfast area and have developed links with schools across the city.

Examples of projects operating in primary schools in South Belfast include Poetry in Motion for Schools, which gives young people the opportunity to work with poets of national and international standing; Dance and One World Culture, a multimedia arts programme exploring cultural diversity; and multimedia Carnival Workshops. Arts Council funded Youth Arts organisations working in the area and delivering arts programmes within the formal and informal education sector include New Belfast Arts Initiative, ArtsEkta, Streetwise Community Circus, Young at Art, Cahoots NI, Kids in Control, Youth Action Northern Ireland, Wheelworks, Ulster Association of Youth Drama, New Lodge Arts, and the Ulster Youth Orchestra.

Northern Ireland Screen also fund a number of projects which are available to young people in South Belfast such as the Cinemagic Film and Television Festival for young people; After School Film Clubs; Studio ON, which offers a range of projects exploring creative use of digital media technologies and operates a partnership programme for schools; and the Digital Film Archive which contains items covering drama, animation, documentaries, news and film.

Irish Language

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department has assisted projects which encourage the use and growth of the Irish language in the South Belfast and East Belfast constituencies.

(AQW 5065/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department does not directly fund Irish language projects. However funding has been made available by Foras na Gaeilge, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen for projects which encourage the use and growth of the Irish language in the South Belfast and East Belfast constituencies.

Foras na Gaeilge and the Arts Council have supplied information relating to projects supported in 2009.

FORAS NA GAEILGE

South Belfast constituency		
Tonnta Ltd	Ag Nearthú tonnta Raidio - Clár Traenála (Strengthening Radio Waves – Training Programme)	Computer assisted learning

South Belfast constituency		
An Droichead	Campa Samhraidh 1 (Summer Camp 1)	Scéim Campaí Samhraidh / Summer Scheme
An Droichead	Campa Samhraidh 2 (Summer Camp 2)	Scéim Campaí Samhraidh / Summer Scheme
An Droichead	Óige Feirste! Clár Óige an Fhómhair 2009 (Autumn 2009 Youth Programme)	Scéim Óige /Youth Scheme
Tonnta Ltd	Cumann Iarscoile (tSleibhe Duibh & An Droichead) (Afterschool Club) Clár Radio	Scéim óige /Youth Scheme
An Droichead	Irish language Community Scheme	Community Officers Scheme
East Belfast constituency		
Short Strand Community Centre		Local scheme

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Arts Council of NI have not funded any organizations in the East Belfast constituency who work through the medium of the Irish Language, but they are of course eligible to apply for arts projects delivered through that medium.

South Belfast constituency		
An Droichead	Access to Traditional Arts and Community Arts	Local scheme supported by Lottery funding

Northern Ireland Screen

The Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) has funded three series of the Irish language drama ‘Seacht’ which is filmed in and around Queens University Belfast (QUB).

Imagine Media and Stirling TV Productions are both based in South Belfast and both companies have been and are in receipt of funding from the ILBF to produce programmes for young people such as Seacht (Seven), Na Dódaí (pre-school programme), Déan Damhsa Liom (Dance with me), An Bhearna Bhaoil (The Gap of Danger), Gaisce Gnó (Be the Business).

The Picture House, a post production facility, is based in East Belfast, it has provided post production services on Uachtaran Na hEireann (President of Ireland) and Scil (Skill), and produced An Mhuc Dhubh (The Black Pig)

Sign Language

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he has taken since coming to office to enhance the development and use of sign language; and what financial assistance his Department has made available to support the British and Irish Sign Languages since May 2007.
(AQW 5072/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG), which is chaired and co-ordinated by DCAL, was established in 2004 as a forum to bring together government

departments and organisations representing the deaf community. The objective of the group is to improve access to public services in Northern Ireland for users of British and Irish Sign Language.

Between May 2007 and March 2011, DCAL awarded £338k to support a range of Sign Language projects that have contributed to that objective.

Projects supported by the SLPG have had a significant impact. They have increased awareness amongst those involved in the delivery of public services of the needs of Sign Language users. They have also resulted in an increase in the numbers of Sign Language professionals operating and based in Northern Ireland.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been spent by his Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5088/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In each of the last three financial years, the Department incurred the following expenditure on fees for staff attending courses and conferences:

7-07	8-08	9-09
£199,509	£172,022	£124,138

Travel costs are stored at summary level on the Department's financial system and the Department cannot separate travel costs incurred in respect of courses and conferences attended by staff from other travel costs without disproportionate effort.

The Department is therefore unable to provide the level of detail required by part (ii) of this Assembly Question.

Re-imaging Communities Programme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the proposal by the Arts Council to extend the Re-imaging Communities programme.

(AQW 5154/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Funding for the Re-Imaging Communities programme is due to finish at the end of March 2010 and I understand that the Arts Council is in discussions with potential funders with a view to continuing the programme.

The Arts Council has submitted an application to the Peace III Programme which builds upon the key successes of the Re-Imaging Programme and looks to the development of artistic interventions on an intra-community, cross-community and cross-border basis.

The application to the Peace III programme is currently in the assessment stage and an economic appraisal for the proposed programme is underway. It is anticipated that a decision will be reached by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) by June 2010.

I understand that the Arts Council is giving consideration, in light of its 2010/11 budget allocation, to continuing to support the programme until the outcome of the Peace III application is known.

Ulster-Scots Television Channel

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what can be done to set up an Ulster-Scots television channel.

(AQW 5157/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Broadcasting remains a reserved matter under the joint responsibility of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform.

The establishment of a television channel is a commercial matter and outside my Department's remit.

Irish Language

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department has assisted projects in north Antrim which encourage the use and growth of the Irish language.

(AQW 5158/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department does not directly fund Irish language projects. However funding may be available through Foras na Gaeilge, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and NI Screen for projects which encourage the use and growth of the Irish language in north Antrim.

Projects supported by Foras na Gaeilge in 2009 are:-.

Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2008-2010 (Irish Language Community Scheme 2010)	Pobal an Chaistil (Ballycastle Community group)	Ballycastle
An Ghaeilge sa Phobal (2009) (Irish in the Community)	Glór Dhál Riada (Voice of Dalraida)	Ballycastle area
Scéim Óige – Imeachtaí Óige (Youth scheme)	Bunscoil an Chaistil (Ballycastle primary school)	Ballycastle

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland have confirmed that they have not funded any organisations in the north Antrim constituency who work through the medium of the Irish Language, but organisations are eligible to apply for arts projects delivered through that medium.

NI Screen has advised that there are no production companies based in the north Antrim area who have availed of the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) to date, however areas in north Antrim such as Giants Causeway, Ballycastle, Glens of Antrim and Rathlin Island have featured in programmes on TG4 and BBC NI (Tobar Productions), Taisce na Tuaithe (Treasures of the Countryside). There is also a series yet to be aired on BBC NI (Imagine Media), Ait is ansa liom (My Favourite Place).

Access to the Arts

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures his Department has taken to improve access to the arts for primary school children in North Down.

(AQW 5182/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL funding for the arts is disbursed by the Arts Council and Northern Ireland Screen.

The Arts Council, through its Annual Support for Organisations Programme and Lottery Programme, supports a number of projects which deliver arts activities for primary school children within the formal education sector. Many of the arts organisations involved work at a regional level and have developed links with schools in the North Down area.

Examples of projects operating in primary schools in North Down include Magic Medicine – The Honey Pot, which focuses on the needs of children with physical, sensory and intellectual learning needs; Math a Magic which draws on illusion, music and performance to increase opportunities for young people to learn and think creatively through the arts and Ecology Prints which explores ecology issues through the arts.

Other Youth Arts organisations delivering arts programmes within the formal and informal education sector include Belfast Community Circus, Streetwise, Young at Art, Cahoots NI, Kids in Control, Youth Action Northern Ireland, Wheelworks, Ulster Association of Youth Drama, New Lodge Arts, Ulster Youth Orchestra and the Ulster Orchestra.

Northern Ireland Screen also fund a number of projects which are available to young people in North Down such as the Cinemagic Film and Television Festival for young people; After School Film Clubs; Studio ON, which offers a range of projects exploring creative use of digital media technologies and operates a partnership programme for schools; and the Digital Film Archive which contains items covering drama, animation, documentaries, news and film.

Public Library at Monkstown Community High School

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the closure of the Public Library at Monkstown Community High School, to detail (i) the number of users of this library in each of the five years prior to its closure; and (ii) the increase in the number of users in the libraries at (a) Cloughfern; (ii) Rathcoole; and (iii) Greenisland, following the closure of the Monkstown library.

(AQW 5184/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: (i) Monkstown Library was closed in June 2005. Data on the number of active borrowers* of the library, prior to closure, is only available for a 3 year period from 2002 – 2005.

NUMBER OF BORROWERS BEFORE CLOSURE

Year 3 – 2002/3	Year 2 – 2003/4	Year 1 – 2004/5
395	334	688

(ii) The following table shows the change in the number of active borrowers at Cloughfern, Rathcoole and Greenisland in the year after the closure of Monkstown Library.

NUMBER OF BORROWERS AFTER CLOSURE OF MONKSTOWN

Library	2004/5	2005/6
(a) Cloughfern	813	1159
(b) Rathcoole	1424	1291
(c) Greenisland	1095	986

*Figures stated relate to ‘active borrowers’ – visitors who carried out at least one transaction during the previous 365 days.

Public Libraries

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the total number of users; (ii) the number of users in school groups; (iii) the number of users aged 16 years or under; (iv) the number of adult users; and (v) the number of adult users of pension age, who visited the public libraries at (a) Glengormley; (b) Rathcoole; (c) Cloughfern and (d) Greenisland, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5186/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The following tables show the number of users in each category in Glengormley, Rathcoole, Cloughfern and Greenisland public libraries from 2005 to present:

(a) Glengormley	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	Year to date 2009/10
Total number of users	5,303	5,141	4,763	5,215	5,343
Number of users in school groups*				528	324
Number of users 16 years or under	1,765	1,766	1,595	1,757	1,682
Number of adult users (17-59)	2,520	2,363	2,196	2,411	2,541
Number of users of Pension age (age 60+)	954	947	915	987	1069

(b) Rathcoole	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	Year to date 2009/10
Total number of users	1,291	1,114	1,167	1,253	1,303
Number of users in school groups*				444	154
Number of users 16 years or under	360	338	380	417	412
Number of adult users (17-59)	573	443	469	545	412
Number of users of Pension age (age 60+)	293	264	259	241	258

(c) Cloughfern	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	Year to date 2009/10
Total number of users	1,159	858	849	931	894
Number of users in school groups*				300	217

(c) Cloughfern	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	Year to date 2009/10
Number of users 16 years or under	472	361	370	383	385
Number of adult users (17-59)	479	324	309	363	326
Number of users of Pension age (age 60+)	191	166	159	172	171

(d) Greenisland	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	Year to date 2009/10
Total number of users	986	962	912	1,098	1,097
Number of users in school groups*				239	161
Number of users 16 years or under	394	376	345	453	460
Number of adult users (17-59)	378	378	367	419	418
Number of users of Pension age (age 60+)	205	198	188	218	212

* The number of pupils attending libraries as part of a class visit programme has only been recorded from 2008.

The year to date figures, provided by Libraries NI, are as of 1 March 2010.

Please note that the library management information system does not record the age of all library users. Consequently, the sum of the users categorised by age will not be equal to the total number of users stated.

Public Libraries

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what changes have been made to the opening hours of the public libraries located at (i) Rathcoole; (ii) Cloughfern; (iii) Glengormley; and (iv) Greenisland, in each of the last five years; and to outline what public consultation took place prior to any changes.

(AQW 5188/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The following table shows the total weekly opening hours of Rathcoole, Cloughfern, Greenisland and Glengormley public libraries for the period 2005 – present.

TOTAL WEEKLY OPENING HOURS

Library	Year 2005/6	Year 2006/7	Year 2007/8	Year 2008/9	Year To Date 2009/10
(i) Rathcoole	45.5 hrs	44 hrs	44 hrs	44 hrs	44 hrs
(ii) Cloughfern	20.5 hrs	18 hrs	18 hrs	18 hrs	18 hrs
(iii) Glengormley	55 hrs	55 hrs	57 hrs	57 hrs	57 hrs
(iv) Greenisland	32 hrs	32 hrs	32 hrs	32 hrs	32 hrs

Public consultation on changes to opening hours took place as part of the Strategic Review of the NEELB Library Estate between 18 March and 30 April 2005. As a result of the Review weekly opening hours changed across the NEELB area to align with a model of ‘flagship’ and ‘satellite’ library provision.

Sports Museum at the Eddie Irvine Sports Arena in Bangor

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has had any discussions with Mr Eddie Irvine to discuss the application for a sports museum at the Eddie Irvine Sports arena in Bangor. **(AQW 5195/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware that The Ulster Sports Museum Association is currently working with a range of sporting groups and Government Departments regarding their plans to establish a Sports Museum in Northern Ireland.

To date neither I nor my officials have had direct contact with Mr Eddie Irvine on an application to establish a sports museum at the Eddie Irvine sports arena in Bangor.

I welcome any efforts by the private sector to recognise our sporting achievements.

Lough Neagh and Upper Bann

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his Department’s assessment of the business case for the viability of a Navigation Authority for Lough Neagh and the Upper Bann River. **(AQO 867/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In October 2008 my Department commissioned a Business Case to assess the viability of establishing a navigation authority for Lough Neagh and the Rivers Blackwater and Upper Bann. Together with Department officials, I have now had an opportunity to consider the completed Business Case.

I have concluded that within current N.I. budgetary constraints and priorities, the capital and resource implications of implementing the recommended Business Case option of extending the remit of Waterways Ireland are unaffordable.

It will be worthwhile reconsidering this issue strategically with the benefit of total experience to be drawn from completion of the project being taken forward by Waterways Ireland – with Irish Government funding – to re-open the Clones to Upper Lough Erne section of the Ulster Canal in 2013.

Within our remit we continue to explore the scope for developing the recreational and navigational potential of inland waterways, including Lough Neagh, throughout Northern Ireland.

Libraries

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action is being taken to make libraries more accessible for migrant workers and people from ethnic minority communities. **(AQO 871/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The public library service is a vital resource for people from ethnic minority communities and migrant workers. DCAL recognises that the library service should provide targeted support to ethnic minorities and those for whom English is a second language.

Libraries provide a welcoming and neutral environment where people from these groups can find assistance to integrate into the community.

For example individual libraries have organised welcome events. Such events typically include music, food, an opportunity to use the library computers and to join the library.

Some other examples of services which the libraries provide include:

- Books and newspapers in other languages;
- Early years literacy programmes, such as the Bookstart scheme, in a range of languages;
- Hosting English language courses;
- Free internet access.
- Access to the EISODOS website. This is an extensive migrant communities information resource which is on the Libraries NI website.
- Information leaflets translated into other languages.

Libraries NI work in partnership with local groups such as councils, migrant worker support groups, Traveller groups and health organisations to host information days for ethnic minorities providing information about rights, health, housing and GP 'sign up sessions'.

Libraries NI has also provided many of their staff with cultural awareness training.

Arts Funding

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on funding for the arts.
(AQO 872/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL's total budget for the Arts is £30.7million for 2009/10.

Following the outcome of the Executive's review of 2010/11 spending plans, DCAL is required to find savings of £5.9million in current expenditure, and £20million in capital investment in 2010/11.

After careful consideration, proposed budget allocations have been drawn up which include a £1.1million reduction in the Arts Council's revenue budget as compared to the indicative budget allocation previously quoted.

However, I am pleased to say that the Arts Council's revenue budget for next year will still increase from its 2009/10 opening position of £15.2million to £15.5million.

The Arts Council's indicative capital allocation for next year has also increased significantly to £16.5million, compared to the previously indicated budget figure of £9.6million. This increase of almost £7m will ensure that sufficient funding is available to complete the major arts infrastructure projects currently underway.

Overall, therefore, the Arts budget in 2010/11 will increase to a total of £34million under the proposed new figures.

Whilst I am aware that arts organisations will be disappointed that the indicative revenue allocation has been revised, I would stress that the focus going forward must be on prioritisation, efficiency and effectiveness, to ensure the best possible use of the funding available.

Tollymore Mountain Centre

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the benefits that the recent upgrade of the Tollymore Mountain Centre will have for visitors to the Mourne Mountains.

(AQO 873/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is anticipated that the upgraded facilities at Tollymore Mountain Centre will have wide-ranging benefits for visitors to the Mourne Mountains:

- It is anticipated that the new facilities will attract 5,000 new visitors per annum after its third year in operation;
- The centre, through a partnership approach with the Mourne Heritage Trust, will be an information point for tourists providing information on access and suitable walks;
- Will be a focal point for those seeking information, advice and training in relation to adventure sports in the Mournes;
- Will be an example of best practice in sustainable use of the environment, in relation to adventure sports;
- Provide increased access to adventure sports for young people and adults;
- Provide opportunities for training of leaders/instructors and performers for all sectors of our community; individuals, schools, youth groups, public and private sector organisations and staff from other outdoor centres; and
- Improved training facilities for high level performers in adventure sports.

Northern Ireland International Air Show

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding his Department was prepared to offer the 2010 Northern Ireland Air Show.

(AQO 874/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Coleraine Borough Council applied for £20,000 funding from my Department's Events Growth Fund for the 2010 Northern Ireland International Air Show. The event, which received support in 2008/9 of £18,000 and 2009/10 of £18,000, was offered £3,250 towards the marketing of the event largely due to limits on the level of public funding in year 3.

The Air Show, the only event of its kind in Northern Ireland, has been a tremendous success for Coleraine Borough Council and for its sponsors, the Kennedy Group. I hope that as economic conditions improve the event can once again attract private sector sponsorship and form part of Northern Ireland's annual events calendar.

Creative Businesses

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline his strategy for expanding creative businesses, which are increasingly important in a high wage economy.

(AQO 875/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In 2008 my Department launched an Interim Strategic Action Plan for the Creative Industries to support creativity and creative talents and in particular their expression in business activities.

The Plan guided the Priorities for Action of the £5M Creative Industries Innovation Fund which aims to support creativity and innovation within businesses in Northern Ireland. The fund, which will run until March 2011, is administered by the Arts Council and its priorities are to support:

- Innovation in business;
- Innovation through people and knowledge; and

- Innovation through sectoral infrastructure and knowledge.

Moving forward, my Department will evaluate the outcomes and impact of the Fund and work with key stakeholders to further develop policy and strategies to support and enhance the creative industries in Northern Ireland.

My Department is also the sponsor department for Northern Ireland Screen, which seeks to develop a dynamic and sustainable local screen industry and culture, and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland which provides considerable support to individual artists and creative businesses. Both organisations fuel the emergence of creative people, services and enterprises that directly strengthen the Northern Ireland economy.

Ulster-Scots Funding

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what funding is available to Ulster-Scots groups.

(AQO 876/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There are several funding schemes available to Ulster-Scots groups from Agencies funded by my Department.

Ulster-Scots Agency

The Ulster-Scots Agency through its Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS) provides funding for Ulster-Scots community groups and individuals involved in the promotion of Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language. The Agency anticipates that grant allocations through the FAS in 2010 will amount to a figure in excess of £1million.

Arts Council and Northern Ireland Screen

The Arts Council and Northern Ireland Screen do not have any specific funding programmes aimed at Ulster-Scots groups. However, Ulster-Scots groups are eligible to apply to any of their funding programmes provided they meet the criteria of the specific funds.

Cultural Activities: South Belfast

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures his Department is taking to encourage young people to engage in cultural activities in South Belfast.

(AQO 877/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL, through the work of its associated Arms Length Bodies, provides a range of opportunities for young people in the South Belfast area to engage in cultural activities. For example;

- Libraries in South Belfast provide a range of cultural activities to engage children and young people including Rhythm and Rhyme Times for pre-school children, storytelling and occasional events with authors or poets.
- In the current financial year the Arts Council of Northern Ireland has approved funding for 76 projects in South Belfast, including, for example Wheelworks' Art Cart which is a mobile arts vehicle increasing opportunities for young people to access high quality artistic activity.
- Northern Ireland Screen fund a number of projects which are available to young people in South Belfast such as schools Film Clubs, Studio ON and the Digital Film Archive which contains items covering drama, animation, documentaries, news and film.
- The Education programme at the Ulster Museum includes art, history and science programmes and the use of new Art, History and Science Discovery Areas. 49 school groups (primary, secondary and special) from South Belfast comprising 1086 children have used the service from October to February and a further 280 children in 21 groups are booked in for the period to end June 2010.

- Both the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge support various activities and schemes in South Belfast aimed at increasing and developing cultural activity for children and young people. These include among other things after school clubs, school workshops and drama projects.

Sports Facilities

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has any plans to bring the numbers and standards of sporting facilities into line, proportionately, with those in the Republic of Ireland and in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQO 878/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My recently published Sports Strategy for Northern Ireland, "Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019", already recognises that, in terms of numbers and standards of sports facilities, Northern Ireland is currently under provided for in comparison with other regions in the UK and in Europe. To help address this problem, Sport Matters sets out 26 high level targets, to be achieved over the next 10 years, which reflect the current and anticipated needs of sport in Northern Ireland. This includes 6 targets, under the theme of Places for Sport, designed to increase the number and improve the standard of both regional and local sports facilities.

In order to take Sport Matters forward, I have recently written to the Minister of Social Development, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety asking them to nominate a senior official to join a DCAL led Sport Matters Monitoring Group which I plan to set up. It is my intention to chair that Monitoring Group which will oversee the delivery of Sport Matters.

Department of Education

Non-teaching Staff

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of non-teaching staff in (a) the maintained sector; and (b) the integrated sector; and (ii) the overall costs associated with them, including salaries, and building and maintenance costs.

(AQW 4428/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards and my Departmental officials that the numbers of non-teaching staff are as follows:

- Maintained sector – 8599;
- Integrated sector – 862 (242 in Controlled Integrated schools and 620 in Grant Maintained Integrated schools);
- Controlled sector - 9088.

Maidir leis an dara cuid de do cheist, is iad na costais fhoirne i ngach earnáil ná:

- *An earnáil faoi Chothabháil – tuairim is £83 milliún;*
- *An earnáil Chomhtháite – tuairim is £17 milliún (cuimsíonn an figiúr seo Scoileanna Rialaithe agus Scoileanna Comhtháite faoi Chothabháil Stáit araon)*
- *An earnáil rialaithe- tuairim is £66 milliún*

With regard to the second part of your question the staffing costs for each sector are as follows:

- Maintained sector – approximately £83 million;
- Integrated sector – approximately £17 million (which includes both Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated);
- Controlled sector - approximately £66 million

It is not however possible to correlate the specific building and maintenance costs to these non-teaching staff.

Preparatory School Funding

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education if she can confirm that her Department will have a sufficient resource budget to accommodate all preparatory school children who wish to transfer to primary schools in September 2010.

(AQW 4632/10)

Minister of Education: The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, highlighted the issue of the funding of Preparatory Schools. In respect of the allocation of the education budget, it stated:

“Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity. The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget”.

One of the key recommendations of the Bain Report (recommendation 5) was that:

“The rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed”.

The Equality Commission has adopted a position where it considers that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education. In relation to its position on the funding of Preparatory Departments, the Commission has stated that:

“Preparatory Departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependant on a parents /families ability to pay additional substantial costs. We do not believe a public subvention to this sector is the best possible use of public funds when there are other areas that we have prioritised for intervention in the above document”. (“Above document” refers to Every Child an Equal Child)

I gcomhréir leis an mholadh seo, thug mo Roinn údarás don Roinn Airgeadais agus Pearsanra chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhaoiniú do ranna ullmhúcháin scoileanna gramadaí agus chun tuairisc ar na torthaí a sholáthar don Roinn.

In line with this recommendation my Department commissioned the Department of Finance and Personnel to undertake a review of funding to preparatory departments of grammar schools and to provide a report on their findings to the Department.

The report concludes that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

The proposal to withdraw funding from preparatory departments of grammar schools is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and no final decision has been taken by me at this stage. It is, therefore, not possible to estimate how many children, if any, would transfer from preparatory schools to primary schools if this proposal is accepted.

The draft Equality Impact Assessment went out for consultation on 7 January 2010 and the deadline for responses is 4 March 2010.

The Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools can provide assistance to grant-aided schools where the number of children enrolled increases following the October Census. Funding for this in-year growth can be provided, pro rata, for the remainder of the financial year.

Preparatory School Funding

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how many additional primary school places her Department can afford to fund from September 2010 for preparatory school children who may be affected by her proposals on preparatory school funding.

(AQW 4634/10)

Minister of Education: The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, highlighted the issue of the funding of Preparatory Schools. In respect of the allocation of the education budget, it stated:

“Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity. The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget”.

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The Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools can provide assistance to grant-aided schools where the number of children enrolled increases following the October Census. Funding for this in-year growth can be provided, pro rata, for the remainder of the financial year.

Area Planning for Schools in East Antrim

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on any outcomes in relation to Area Planning for schools in East Antrim; (ii) to outline the process her Department uses to prioritise capital

spending for new school building projects; and (iii) when new funding for major works schemes will be announced.

(AQW 4647/10)

Minister of Education:

- (i) Beidh freagracht iomlán ar an Údarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna, nuair a bhunófar é, as pleanáil de réir ceantair, a chuimseoidh limistéar Oirthear Antroma, a fhorbairt. San idirthréimhse, oibreoidh mo Roinn go gar le húdaráis bhainistíochta scoile chun cur chuige straitéiseach ar phleanáil a fhorbairt ar mhaithe le gach duine óg sa cheantar.
- (i) The Education and Skills Authority, when established, will have full responsibility for bringing forward an area-based plans which will include the East Antrim area. In the interim period my Department will work closely with the school managing authorities to develop a strategic approach to planning in the best interest of young people in the area.
- (ii) & (iii) You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework, I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need. The progress of all projects will be dependent upon the outcome of the review, which will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate. Projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial years taking account of available resources.

Irish-Medium Education

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on Irish-medium education in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4770/10)

Minister of Education: The latest complete financial year for which information is available to answer this question is 2008/09.

Tá an méid airgid a chaith mo Roinn ar an Ghaeloideachas sna cúig bliana airgeadais ón bhliain 2004/05 go dtí an bhliain 2008/09 le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The amount spent on Irish-medium education in the 5 financial years from 2004/05 to 2008/09 by my Department is shown in the table below.

£000S

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Recurrent	8,145	9,242	10,294	11,394	13,216
Capital	3,055	1,996	364	520	843

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.

Integrated Education

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on integrated education in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4772/10)

Minister of Education: The latest complete financial year for which information is available to answer this question is 2008/09.

Tá an méid airgid a chaith mo Roinn ar an Oideachas Comhtháite sna cúig bliana airgeadais (ón bhliain 2004/05 go dtí an bhliain 2008/09) le fáil sa tábla thíos.

The amount spent on Integrated Education in each of the last five financial years (2004/05 to 2008/09) by my Department is shown in the table below.

£000s

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Recurrent	62,229	70,037	75,508	82,508	89,222
Capital	11,997	3,370	32,322	5,927	11,030

School Maintenance

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4385/10, to detail the type of maintenance that is outstanding for school property in the 'highest' classification of need.

(AQW 4797/10)

Minister of Education: Déanann Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne clár rollach maidir le daonáirimh choinníollaigh scoileanna. Cuirtear réadmhaoin a bhreithníonn Boird go bhfuil siad ar chaidhdéan an-bhocht san aicmiú riachtanais is airde sa riaráiste cothabhála. Leagtha amach thíos atá sonraí ar an riaráiste cothabhála i ngach gné de na daonáirimh choinníollaigh maidir le réadmhaoin san aicmiú riachtanais is airde sna scoileanna sin a bhí cuimsithe in AQW 4385/10.

Education and Library Boards carry out a rolling programme of condition surveys of schools. Property that Boards consider to be in very poor condition is placed in the highest classification of need in the maintenance backlog. Details of the latest backlog in each element of the condition surveys, for property in the highest classification of need in those schools covered by AQW 4385/0, are set out below.

Condition Survey Element	Backlog (£000s)
Grounds	2,425
Roof (Flat)	1,779
Roof (Pitched)	827
Structure	5,494
External Walls	879
External Windows	5,476
External Doors	196
External Ramp	5
External Stairs & Ramps	129
External Decoration	528
Internal Walls	2,015
Internal Windows	48
Internal Doors	131
Ceilings	699
Floors	340
Internal Stair	51
Internal Decoration	530

Condition Survey Element	Backlog (£000s)
Fire Fighting Equipment	5
Plumbing Services	2,350
Laboratory Services	104
Heating System	22,054
Ventilation	245
Electrical - Internal	14,788
Mechanical Engineering External Services	55

Preparatory School Funding

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education what discussions she held with her Executive colleagues prior to announcing that she would be withdrawing funding for preparatory departments.

(AQW 4819/10)

Minister of Education: The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, highlighted the issue of the funding of Preparatory Schools. In respect of the allocation of the education budget, it stated:

“Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity. The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget”.

One of the key recommendations of the Bain Report (recommendation 5) was that:

“The rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed”.

The Equality Commission has adopted a position where it considers that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education. In relation to its position on the funding of Preparatory Departments, the Commission has stated that:

“Preparatory Departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependant on a parents /families ability to pay additional substantial costs. We do not believe a public subvention to this sector is the best possible use of public funds when there are other areas that we have prioritised for intervention in the above document”. (“Above document” refers to Every Child an Equal Child)

I gcomhréir leis an mholadh seo, thug mo Roinn údarás do Sheirbhís Comhairleachta Gnó na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra chun athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar mhaoiniú do ranna ullmhúcháin scoileanna gramadaí agus chun tuairisc ar na torthaí a sholáthar don Roinn.

In line with this recommendation my Department commissioned the Department of Finance and Personnel's, Business Consultancy Service, to undertake a review of funding to preparatory departments of grammar schools and to provide a report on their findings to the Department.

The report concludes that the Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

I have accepted the main findings in the report and have indicated that the recommendation to withdraw funding from preparatory departments should be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment before a final decision on implementation is taken.

The draft Equality Impact Assessment went out for consultation on 7 January 2010 and the deadline for responses is 4 March 2010.

I do not consider that discussion with Executive colleagues was necessary prior to the review of funding to preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Capital Projects

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what criteria her Department will use to prioritise capital projects during 2010/11.

(AQW 4821/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mo Roinn ag déanamh athbhreithnithe ar gach tionscadal caipitil faoi láthair lena chinntiú go bhfuil an t-infheistiú san earnáil oideachais i gcomhréir agus tacúil leis an chreat beartais atá mé á chur i bhfeidhm lena chinntiú go mbaineann muid amach ár ndualgais reachtúla ar chomhionannas agus ar spriocdhírú ar bhonn riachtanais oibiachtúil.

My Department is currently reviewing all capital projects to ensure that the investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of objective need.

The outcome of the review will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate

Consultants' Fees

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education whether any of her Department's capital budget for 2010/11 will be spent on consultants' fees; and if so, how much her Department has set aside for consultants' fees, broken down by each planned capital project.

(AQW 4822/10)

Minister of Education: Chun tionscadail chaipitil a fhorbairt tríd na próisis bhreithmheasa agus fhaofa, tabhaíonn mo Roinn caiteachas ar réimse seirbhísí gairmiúla.

In order to progress capital projects through the appraisal and approval processes, my Department incurs expenditure on a range of professional services.

As you are aware, I have commissioned a review of all planned capital works to ensure they are consistent with the overall policy framework and adhere to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. The outcome of the capital review will be assessed against availability of resources to ensure effective use of the capital budget to deliver an improved education estate.

For major works projects currently under construction, £560k has been budgeted for professional fees in 2010/11.

Until it is determined which additional projects can be advanced in 2010/11, it is not possible to detail the total level of expenditure on professional services in 2010/11.

Consultant's Fees

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how much of her Department's budget has been set aside for consultant's fees in the next financial year.

(AQW 4828/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mé ag meas roghanna faoi láthair chun na coigiltí breise atá riachtanach ón bhuiséad oideachais sa bhliain 2010/11 a dhéanamh. Ní féidir, mar sin, buiséid a dhearbhu don bhliain seo chugainn a dhearbhu faoi láthair. D'iarr mé ar m'fheidhmeannaigh measúnú comhionannais

a dhéanamh ar gach réimse atá á bhreithniú le haghaidh íslithe agus ní dhéanfaidh mé aon chinneadh go dtí go bhfeicfidh mé toradh na hoibre seo.

I am currently considering options for delivering the additional savings required in 2010/11 from the education budget and to address education pressures. It is therefore not possible to confirm at this stage budgets for next year. I have asked my officials to carry out an equality assessment on each of the areas under consideration for reduction and I will not make any decisions until I have seen the outcome of this work.

Attacks on Teaching Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of attacks on teaching staff in each of the last two years.

(AQW 4829/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education does not collect the information requested.

Bailítear staitisticí ar na fáthanna ar fhionraíocht agus díbirt daltaí gach scoilbhliain ó na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne. Soláthraíonn an tábla thíos eolas ar líon na n-ócáidí a fionraíodh nó a díbríodh daltaí mar gheall ar ionsaí fisiciúil ar fhoireann i ngach bliain den dá scoilbhliain a chuaigh thart:-

However, statistics on the reasons for suspensions and expulsions of pupils are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below provides the number of occasions where pupils were suspended or expelled for physical attack on staff in each of the last two school years:-

	Number of suspensions for physical attack on staff	Number of expulsions for physical attack on staff
2007/08	228	1
2008/09	612	2

Notes

1. These figures relate to all pupils undertaking Key Stage 1-4 in primary and post-primary schools.
2. The information reflects the number of individual suspensions, as opposed to the number of pupils suspended. Pupils may be suspended more than once.

A working group was established last year under the aegis of the Teacher Negotiating Committee (TNC) to examine the problem of abuse of teachers, whether physical, verbal or electronic. A new document, Tackling Violence against Teachers, has been agreed by the TNC and will issue to schools shortly. The document includes guidance on the handling, recording and reporting of violent incidents against staff in schools.

Public Relations Services

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Education how much her Department has spent on public relations services from (i) PricewaterhouseCoopers; (ii) KMPG; (iii) Deloitte; and (iv) Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

(AQW 4847/10)

Minister of Education: *Níor thabhaigh an Roinn Oideachais aon chaiteachas ar sheirbhísí caidrimh phoiblí le ceann ar bith de na comhlachtaí atá liostaithe thuas ó mhí na Bealtaine 2007.*

The Department of Education has not incurred any expenditure on public relations services with any of the companies listed since May 2007.

Newbuild for St Teresa's School, Lurgan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education when the conclusions of the BREEAM report in relation to the new build for St Teresa's, Lurgan, will be available.

(AQW 4854/10)

Minister of Education: Planning of the project to provide a new school for St Teresa's Primary School has experienced a number of delays since it was first included in my Department's Major Capital Programme. The delays can be attributed to the school authorities requesting a change in the scope of the project in 2008, which required an addendum to the Economic Appraisal, major re-design work and a new planning application. In addition, the Long Term Enrolment for the school was revised which resulted in a reduction from a 10 classbase school to 7 classbases.

A BREEAM Pre-Assessment report based on the revised proposals was received by my Department and was being considered by Technical Advisers. However, my Department has very recently been informed that the school authorities have now decided to revert back to the original proposal to provide the new school building for St Teresa's. As a result, the school's Project Manager has confirmed that the BREEAM report submitted is now invalid and that a new report will have to be undertaken. Until this has been received my Department is unable to comment on the BREEAM aspect of this scheme.

Is riachtanach a chinntiú go bhfuil an t-infheistiú san earnáil oideachais i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais atá á chur i bhfeidhm agam. Ar 15 Deireadh Fómhair 2009, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil lena dhearbhu go bhfuil siad go léir i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais agus, mar sin, go mbeidh siad inmharthana san fhádtéarma. Cinnteoidh an t-athbhreithniú seo go n-úsáidtear gach acmhainn atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach is fearr don cháinócóir a bhaint amach.

It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. On 15 October 2009 I announced a review of all capital projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term. This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.

Until the that review is completed I will not in a position to state when the new build project for St Teresa's P.S. will be completed.

Newbuild for St Teresa's School, Lurgan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline the timescale for the completion of the new build of St Teresa's primary school, Lurgan.

(AQW 4855/10)

Minister of Education: Planning of the project to provide a new school for St Teresa's Primary School has experienced a number of delays since it was first included in my Department's Major Capital Programme. The delays can be attributed to the school authorities requesting a change in the scope of the project in 2008, which required an addendum to the Economic Appraisal, major re-design work and a new planning application. In addition, the Long Term Enrolment for the school was revised which resulted in a reduction from a 10 classbase school to 7 classbases.

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Until the that review is completed I will not in a position to state when the new build project for St Teresa's P.S. will be completed.

Irish Classes for Departmental Staff

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the cost of her proposed initiative for teaching Irish to Departmental staff; and (ii) whether this proposed initiative has been equality proofed. **(AQW 4857/10)**

Minister of Education:

- (i) Ag an chéim seo, tá mo Roinn ag meas an leibhéil shuime sna ranganna agus ag iniúchadh cén dóigh a bhféadfaí iad a sholáthar; ní heol costais a bhaineann leo go fóill, mar sin, ach bítear ag súil go mbeidh siad íosta.
- (ii) At this stage my Department is gauging the level of interest in the classes and exploring how these might be provided; cost is therefore not yet known, but is expected to be minimal.
- (iii) The offer of voluntary classes in Irish goes some way to meet the Government's obligations under both the Good Friday Agreement and the European Charter for Regional or Minority languages to promote, facilitate and encourage the use of the Irish language in speech and in writing. It is also in line with the commitments made by my Department in its Language Policy for Irish. As an increasing volume of the work of my Department is carried out in Irish it is desirable for more staff to have an appreciation and understanding of the language hence the classes have been offered to all DE staff.

Irish Classes for Departmental Staff

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail what response she has had to her proposed initiative to arrange classes for teaching Irish to Departmental staff. **(AQW 4858/10)**

Minister of Education: Léirigh 37 ball d'fhoireann na Roinne spéis i bhfreastal ar ranganna lóin deonacha Gaeilge.

A total of 37 Departmental staff have expressed an interest in attending voluntary lunchtime Irish language classes.

International Fund for Ireland

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what funding has been made available to her Department from the International fund for Ireland; and for what purposes. **(AQW 4861/10)**

Minister of Education: Tá an Ciste Idirnáisiúnta d'Éirinn faoi riarachán Bord neamhspleách a cheapann Rialtas na hÉireann agus Rialtas na Breataine le chéile agus baineann gach saincheist i dtaca le tionscadail a mhaoiú an Ciste leis an Bhord sin. Cuirfidh mé d'iarratas ar aghaidh chuig Cathaoirleach an Chiste Idirnáisiúnta d'Éirinn agus iarrfaidh mé air freagra a thabhairt duit go díreach.

As the Member may know, the International Fund for Ireland is administered by an independent Board appointed jointly by the British and Irish Governments and all matters pertaining to the projects supported by the Fund are a matter for that Board. I will forward your request to the Chairperson of the International Fund for Ireland and ask him to respond to you directly.

Pupil Enrolment

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education how many pupils enrolled for the 2009/10 academic year at (i) Whitehead primary school; (ii) Kilcoan primary school; (iii) Mullaghduh primary school; and (iv) Ballycarry primary school.

(AQW 4869/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

ENROLMENTS AT 2004/05 AND 2009/10

School name	2004/ 05	2009/ 10
Whitehead Primary School	397	414
Kilcoan Primary School	81	53
Mullaghduh Primary School	63	45
Ballycarry Primary School	117	92

Source: School census

Note:

- Figures for Whitehead primary school include a nursery class containing 52 pupils in both of the years listed.

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(AQW 4870/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is contained in the table below.

ENROLMENTS AT 2004/05 AND 2009/10

School name	2004/ 05	2009/ 10
Whitehead Primary School	397	414
Kilcoan Primary School	81	53
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Ballycarry Primary School	117	92

Source: School census

Note:

- Figures for Whitehead primary school include a nursery class containing 52 pupils in both of the years listed.

Young People not in Education, Employment or Training

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what preventative programmes her Department has in place for young people not in education, employment or training; and (ii) the current level of funding for all such programmes.

(AQW 4871/10)

Minister of Education: Tá fócas mo Roinne dírithe ar thacú le páistí agus daoine óga de bheith bainteach le hoideachas tairbheach le linn na tréimhse a chaitheann siad i scolaíocht oibleagáideach.

The focus for my Department is on supporting children and young people to remain engaged in beneficial education throughout their period of compulsory schooling.

All pupils benefit from the revised curriculum which is less prescriptive and gives teachers more scope to tailor what they teach to best suit the needs, interests and circumstances of their pupils and to use teaching approaches that make education more enjoyable, motivating and engaging for today's young people. The new area of Personal Development & Mutual Understanding at primary and Learning for Life and Work at post-primary better equips young people to deal with the challenges of life.

At Key Stage 4, when pupils can be more inclined to disengage from education, the more flexible revised curriculum, coupled with the Entitlement Framework, widens the options for 15 and 16 year olds and beyond, and opens access to professional and technical courses alongside the more traditional subjects.

The Youth Service also exists to support and encourage children and young people to mature and reach their potential as valued individuals and responsible citizens. It provides them with opportunities to build self esteem, work as part of a team, make friends, socialise and take part in structured activities in a safe environment. By allowing young people to gain for themselves knowledge, skills and experience through active participation, they overcome barriers to learning and achieve positive outcomes which helps them fulfil their full potential.

Non-formal and informal learning are important elements in the learning process and are effective instruments for making learning attractive, developing lifelong learning and promoting the social integration of young people. They are of practical relevance to the labour market by helping young people back into education to acquire knowledge, qualifications and other key skills. More than £28m has been invested into the work of the Youth Service in 2009/10.

Pastoral care arrangements are in place in every school to support pupils when they are experiencing stress which might present as a barrier to learning. These pastoral care arrangements are augmented by support from a broad range of services provided to schools and pupils by the Education and Library Boards.

All Boards have Behaviour Support Teams which can provide advice on programmes to modify pupil behaviour including short-term support for individual pupils, advice on how to respond to serious incidents and advice on classroom management skills and whole school approaches to discipline. The Education Welfare Service supports pupils referred because of concerns about attendance and who have become disengaged from school. The Boards also make alternative education provision for pupils who cannot cope with the mainstream school regime.

Resources to support this work are allocated directly to schools through the Common Funding Formula or through the Boards' black grant. In addition, a further £9.8m ear-marked funding has been allocated to the Boards for pupil support services in 2009/10.

In addition, all post-primary schools which wish it have access to independent professional counselling support for young people during difficult and vulnerable periods in their lives. Counselling contributes to tackling barriers to learning which may result from personal trauma, difficult home circumstances, stress, bullying and child abuse. The funding for this support during 2009/10 is £1.8m.

Finally, my Department is developing a Pupils' Emotional Health and Well-being Programme which will contribute to the building of resilient emotional health. It is intended to be a vehicle for providing the

“glue” to integrate, at school level, curriculum activities, policies and support systems which promote pupil wellbeing in a consistent and coherent way and prevent disengagement from education.

International Fund for Ireland

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what funding has been made available to her Department from the International fund for Ireland to address the needs of young people aged 16 and 17 who are not in education, employment or training; and (ii) how this money will be used and the measures under which it will be provided.

(AQW 4873/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an Ciste Idirnáisiúnta d'Éirinn faoi riarachán Bord neamhspleách a cheapann Rialtas na hÉireann agus Rialtas na Breataine le chéile agus baineann gach saincheist i dtaca le tionscadail a mhaoiú an Ciste leis an Bhord sin. Cuirfidh mé d'iarratas ar aghaidh chuig Cathaoirleach an Chiste Idirnáisiúnta d'Éirinn agus iarrfaidh mé air freagra a thabhairt duit go díreach.

As the Member may know, the International Fund for Ireland is administered by an independent Board appointed jointly by the British and Irish Governments and all matters pertaining to the projects supported by the Fund are a matter for that Board. I will forward your request to the Chairperson of the International Fund for Ireland and ask him to respond to you directly.

Catholic Maintained Primary Schools

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail (a) the number of Catholic maintained primary schools; and (b) the number of pupils attending each institution for the academic year 2008/09; and (ii) the amount of funding each institution received for the academic year 2009/10.

(AQW 4875/10)

Minister of Education: *Mar gheall ar an méid eolais a iarradh, cuireadh an freagra ar fáil i Leabharlann an Tionóil.*

In view of the amount of information requested, the answer has been placed in the Assembly library.

Irish-medium Primary Schools

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail (a) the number of Irish-medium primary schools; and (b) the number of pupils attending each institution for the academic year 2008/09; and (ii) the amount of funding each institution received for the academic year 2009/10.

(AQW 4876/10)

Minister of Education: Ba í an bhliain dheireanach dona bhfuil sonraí ar fáil ná an bhliain 2008/09. Mionsonraíonn an tábla thíos an méid maoiniú athfhillteach tarmligthe agus neamhtharmligthe agus caiteachas caipitil ó na Boird a fuair gach Gaelscoil. Cuimsíonn an tábla seo sonraí rollaithe don bhliain acadúil 2007/08 mar go mbaineadh úsáid as na figiúirí seo chun maoiniú athfhillteach a áireamh.

The latest full financial year for which data is available is 2008/09. The amount of delegated and non-delegated recurrent funding and capital expenditure by the Boards that each Irish-medium primary school received is shown in the table below. This table also includes enrolment data for the 2007/08 academic year as these figures were used to calculate recurrent funding.

School Name	Enrolment 2007/08	Total Recurrent Funding (£) for 2008/09
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain	71	298,079
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	294	880,507
Gaelscoil Na Bhfál	211	765,227

School Name	Enrolment 2007/08	Total Recurrent Funding (£) for 2008/09
Bunscoil An Tsléibhe Dhuibh	168	610,835
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin	119	431,464
Scoil An Droichid	103	462,048
Gaelscoil An Damba	29	83,416
Gaelscoil Na Móna	72	353,865
Gaelscoil An Lonnáin	44	265,246
Bunscoil Cholmcille	159	557,305
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	130	473,760
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	135	496,273
Bunscoil An Traonaigh	27	176,968
Gaelscoil Na Gcrann	45	200,883
Bunscoil An Chastil	75	275,799
Gaelscoil Na Speiríní	23	138,386
Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	19	136,190
Gaelscoil Éanna	12	131,474
Scoil Na Fuiseoige	133	515,574
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	48	218,103
Bunscoil An Iúir	102	401,888
Gaelscoil Uí Néill	113	408,188

Note:

1. Enrolment figures sourced from annual school census. They include nursery, reception and Year 1 – 7 pupils.
2. As well as the Irish medium primary schools listed, there are 634 pupils in Irish medium units in other primary schools. Funding 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.

Education Sector - Spending

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of spending by each education sector in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4877/10)

Minister of Education: Is í an bhliain dheireanach dona bhfuil na sonraí sin ar fáil ná an bhliain 2008/09. Tá an méid caiteachas tarmligthe agus neamh-tharmligthe ar gach earnáil oideachais sna blianta airgeadais 2006/07, 2007/08 agus 2008/09 léirithe sa tábla thíos:

The latest full financial year for which this data is available is 2008/09. The amount of delegated and non-delegated recurrent expenditure for each education sector in each of the financial years 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 is shown in the table below.

Financial Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
School Phase & Type	Total Delegated and Non-Delegated Expenditure £		
Controlled Nursery	12,666,724	13,620,872	15,075,927
Maintained Nursery	6,023,216	6,603,584	6,993,280
Controlled Primary (Includes data on Nursery Units – see footnote)	241,100,902	258,174,242	275,563,697
Controlled Integrated Primary (Includes data on Nursery Units – see footnote)	6,630,344	7,827,697	9,868,442
Maintained Primary (includes data on Nursery Units and Irish-medium Units – see footnote)	234,099,028	249,342,139	258,434,275
Irish Medium Primary (includes data on Irish- medium Nursery Units – see footnote)	6,433,950	7,444,409	8,262,508
Controlled Secondary	170,990,232	174,682,522	177,454,775
Controlled Integrated Secondary	8,939,315	11,118,969	11,328,481
Controlled Grammar	59,346,350	63,698,235	66,998,210
Maintained Secondary (includes data on Irish- medium Units – see footnotes)	194,728,244	201,831,749	210,843,241
Irish Medium Secondary	2,080,504	2,124,752	2,706,299
Grant-Maintained Integrated Primary	15,767,311	17,223,990	19,113,709
Grant-Maintained Integrated Secondary	41,626,579	43,988,882	47,792,902
Voluntary Grammar	198,617,015	207,049,601	215,369,311
Total	1,199,049,714	1,264,731,643	1,325,805,057

Footnote:

- (i) Funding information in relation to all Nursery Units, Irish-medium Nursery Units and Irish-medium Units attached to host schools is included in the funding of the host school. It is not possible to disaggregate the funding of the Unit from the host school.

Transfer 2010 Criteria

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how many post-primary schools use all of the Transfer 2010 criteria for selection.

(AQW 4889/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education's Transfer 2010 Guidance neither requires, nor does it recommend, a rigid set of admissions criteria that all post-primary schools should use. The Transfer 2010 Guidance provides a menu of recommended criteria for schools to draw upon in developing admissions criteria but allows adaptations to be made that reflect a school's priorities for admission. No school is required to use all of the Transfer 2010 recommended criteria.

Ní dhéanann an treoir aon trácht ar an ord ina n-úsáidfidh critéar molta aonair, ach amháin gur chóir don chritéar um theidlíocht béile scoil bheith mar chéad chritéar scoile le haghaidh iontrála.

The guidance makes no comment on the order in which each individual recommended criterion should be used, except that the recommended free school meal entitlement criterion should be a school's first criterion for admission.

For these reasons it is not possible to analyse the criteria used by schools in the manner invited by this question.

School Visits

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail what (a) primary schools; (b) secondary schools she has visited since coming into office: and (ii) whether the primary schools were (a) Catholic; (b) Protestant; (c) integrated; (d) Irish-medium; (e) special needs; or (f) other; and (iii) whether the secondary schools were (a) grammar; or (b) non-grammar.

(AQW 4908/10)

Minister of Education: *Seo a leanas na scoileanna sna hearnálacha éagsúla ar thug mé cuairt orthu:-*

I visited the following schools in the various sectors as follows:-

Primary		
Maintained	St Marys Star of the Sea (Damaged in Fire)	Belfast
	St John the Baptist Boys and Girls Primary	Belfast
	St Therese of Liseux Primary	Belfast
	St Mary's Primary	Belfast
	St Malachy's Primary	Belfast
	St Matthew's Primary	Belfast
	Holy Family Primary	Belfast
	St Oliver Plunkett Primary	Belfast
	St Joseph's Primary	Belfast
	Holy Children Primary	Derry
	St Conor's Primary	Omagh
	St Teresa's Primary	Sion Mills
	All Saints Primary	Omagh
	St Mary's Primary	Portglenone

Primary		
Maintained	St MacNissius Primary	Antrim
	St Brigid's Primary	Ballymena
	New Row Primary	Magherafelt
	St John Bosco Primary	Ballymena
	Anahorish Primary	Toomebridge
	Anahorish Primary	Toomebridge
	St Brigids Primary	Magherafelt
	St Colmcille's Primary	Ballymena
	St Patrick's Primary	Saul
	St Josephs Primary	Carryduff
	St Patrick's Primary	Castlewellan
	St Bernard's Primary	Belfast
	St Colman's Primary	Lambeg
	St Malachys Primary	Kilkoo
	St Malachys Primary	Castlewellan
	St Mary's Primary and Nursery	Newcastle
	St Oliver Plunkett Primary	Dundalk
	St Malachy's Primary	Armagh
	Dromintee Primary	Newry
	Christian Brothers Primary	Armagh
	St Malachy's Primary	Armagh
	St Oliver Plunkett's Primary	Newry
	St Patricks Primary	Newry
	St Patricks Primary	Crossmaglen
	Killeen Primary	Newry
	St Brigid's Primary	Newry
	St Clares Covent Primary	Newry
	Carrick Primary	Warrenpoint
	Carrick Primary	Warrenpoint
	St John's Primary	Newry
	St Patrick's Primary	Mayobridge
	St Mary's Primary	Rathfriland
	St Marys Primary	Rathlin
	St Patrick's Primary	Hilltown

Primary		
Maintained	St Mary's Primary	Banbridge
	St Colman's Primary	Banbridge
	St Malachy's Primary	Camlough
	St Malachys Primary	Newry
	St Mary's Primary	Mullaghbawn
	St Mary's Primary	Newry
	St Joseph's Primary	Newry
	Jonesborough Primary	Newry
	St Francis Primary	Banbridge
	St Colmans Primary	Kilkeel
	St Colman's Primary	Newry
	Primate Dixon Primary	Coalisland
	St Bronagh's Primary	Rostrevor
Controlled	Belmont Primary	Belfast
	Strandtown Primary	Belfast
	Edenbrooke Primary	Belfast
	Botanic Primary	Belfast
	Groarty Primary	Derry
	McClintock Controlled Primary	Omagh
	Ardstraw Primary	Newtownstewart
	Garryduff Primary	Ballymoney
	Woodburn Primary	Carrickfergus
	Whitehouse Primary (Damaged in Fire)	Belfast
	DH Christie Memorial Primary	Coleraine
	Millburn Primary	Coleraine
	Leaney Primary	Ballymoney
	Harpurs Hill Primary	Coleraine
	Ballysally Primary	Coleraine
	Castle Gardens Primary	Newtownards
	Ballynahinch Primary	Ballynahinch
	Gilnahirk Primary	Belfast
	Moy Regional Primary	Moy

Primary		
Integrated	Hazelwood Integrated Primary	Newtownabbey
	Omagh Integrated Primary	Omagh
	Oakgrove Integrated Primary	Derry
	Millennium Integrated Primary	Saintfield
	Ballycastle Integrated Primary	Ballycastle
	Kindle Integrated Primary	Downpatrick
	All Children's Integrated Primary	Newcastle
Irish-medium	Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	Belfast
	Bunscoil an Tsleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
	Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	Belfast
	Scoil an Droichead	Belfast
	An Droichead	Belfast
	Bunscoil Na Móna	Belfast
	Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh	Strabane
	Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir	Derry
	Bunscoil an Traonaigh	Lisnaskea
	Gaelscoil na gCrann	Omagh
	Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach	Belfast
	Gaelscoil Eanna	Glengormley
	Bunscoil an Lúir	Newry
Special Needs	Fleming Fulton Special	Belfast
	Harberton Special	Belfast
	Mitchell House Special	Belfast
	Fleming Fulton Special	Belfast
	Glenveagh Special	Belfast
	St Francis de Sales Special	Belfast
	St Gerard's Educational Resource Centre	Belfast
	Belmont House Special	Derry
	Foyle View Special	Derry
	Knockavoe Special	Strabane
	Rossmar Special	Limavady
	Dunfane Special	Ballymena

Primary		
Special Needs	Roddensvale Special	Larne
	Riverside Special	Antrim
	Rathore Special	Newry
	Ceara Special	Lurgan
Pre-school	New Lodge Irish Medium Nursery	Belfast
	Our Lady's Nursery	Belfast
	Holy Trinity Nursery	Lisburn
	St Therese Nursery	Belfast
	Naíscoil Choin Rí Uladh	Ballymena
	Naíscoil uí chléirigh	Dungannon
	Naíscoil na Deirge	Castledearg
	Naíscoil an Iuir	Newry
Secondary/Grammar	St Mary's High	Downpatrick
	St Colms High	Dunmurray
	St Columbanus College	Bangor
	St Colmans College	Ballynahinch
	St Malachy's High	Castlewellan
	St Malachys HS	Castlewellan
	St Malachy's College	Castlewellan
	De La Salle High	Downpatrick
	De La Salle Boys High	Downpatrick
	De La Salle College	Belfast
	Shimna College	Newcastle
	Shimna Integrated College	Newcastle
	Strangford IC	Carrowdore
	Blackwater Integrated College	Downpatrick
	Ashfield Girls' School	Belfast
	Ashfield Girls' School	Belfast
	Girls' Model School	Belfast
	St Patricks College Bearnagheeha (vandalised)	Belfast
	St Louise's	Belfast

Primary		
Secondary/Grammar	St Rose's High	Belfast
	Glen Road Christian Brothers'	Belfast
	Corpus Christie High	Belfast
	Coláiste Feirste	Belfast
	Coláiste Feirste	Belfast
	Coláiste Feirste	Belfast
	Hazelwood College	Newtownabbey
	Limavady High	Limavady
	Limavady High	Limavady
	Lisneal College	Derry
	Newry High	Newry
	St Mary's College	Derry
	St Mary's College	Derry
	St Marys College	Derry
	St Fancheas College	Enniskillen
	St Joseph's College	Enniskillen
	St Eugene's High	Castlederg
	Dean Maguirc College	Omagh
	St Peter's High	Derry
	St Cecilians College	Derry
	St Brigid's College	Derry
	Immaculate Conception College	Derry
	Holy Cross College	Strabane
	Holy Cross College	Strabane
	Our Lady of Lourdes	Ballymoney
	St Colm's High	Draperstown
	St Paul's College	Coleraine
	Edmund Rice College	Glengormley
	St Benedict's College	Antrim
	St Mary's High	Downpatrick
	St Colms HS	Dunmurray
	St Columbanus College	Bangor
	St Colmans College	Ballynahinch
	St Malachy's High	Castlewellan

Primary		
Secondary/Grammar	St Malachys HS	Castlewellan
	St Malachy's College	Castlewellan
	De La Salle High	Downpatrick
	De La Salle Boys High	Downpatrick
	De La Salle College	Belfast
	Priory College	Holywood
	Lagan College	Belfast
	Shimna College	Newcastle
	Shimna Integrated College	Newcastle
	Strangford Integrated College	Carrowdore
	Blackwater Integrated College	Downpatrick
	St Patrick's High School	Banbridge
	St Paul's Junior High	Craigavon
	St Mary's High	Newry
	St Marys HS	Newry
	St Mark's High	Warrenpoint
	St Mary's High	Newry
	St Marks High	Warrenpoint
	St Ciarain's High	Dungannon
	St Pauls High Bessbrook	Newry
	St Joseph's	Crossmaglen
	St Patrick's High	Keady
	Lismore High	Craigavon
	Lismore Comprehensive	Craigavon
	St Catherine's College	Armagh
	Holy Trinity College	Cookstown
	Bangor Grammar	Bangor
	Sullivan Upper	Holywood
	St Patricks Grammar	Downpatrick
	OLSPCK	Belfast
	St Louis School	Kilkeel
	St Louis	Kilkeel
	St Colman's College	Newry
	St Colmans College	Newry

Primary		
Secondary/Grammar	St Colmans College	Newry
	Belfast Royal Academy	Belfast
	St Dominic's Grammar	Belfast
	St Malachy's College	Belfast
	Aquinas Grammar	Belfast
	Victoria College	Belfast

GSCE Irish

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4542/10, in relation to GSCE Irish entries in 2007/08 and 2008/09 to provide a breakdown of the 'other managed' management type to allow for the interrogation of figures in the controlled, controlled integrated, grant maintained integrated, and voluntary grammar sectors.

(AQW 4929/10)

Minister of Education: Tá miondealú ar an chineál bainistíochta 'bainistithe i tslí eile' d'iontrálacha sa GCSE Gaeilge cuimsithe sna táblaí thíos:

A breakdown of the 'other managed' management type for GCSE Irish entries is contained in the tables below:

Management Type	Female	Male
Other maintained	36	37
Grant maintained integrated	23	12
Voluntary	0	0
Controlled	0	0
Total	59	49

2007/08 GCSE other managed Irish entries		
School management type	Female	Male
Other maintained	52	35
Grant maintained integrated	#	#
Voluntary	*	0
Controlled	0	*
Total	72	60

Source: RM Data Solutions

Notes:

* = relates to fewer than 5 cases.

= figure has been suppressed to prevent the identification of small cell values.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to provide details of the (i) assessment; inspection; and quality aspects of teaching of the Primary Languages programme; and (ii) how this compares to other peripatetic services offered to primary schools.

(AQW 4930/10)

Minister of Education: D'fhonn mo chlár um Theangacha Bunscoile a sholáthar, bunaíodh Grúpa Nua-Theangacha Bunscoile (GNTB) chun réimse teagascóirí taistil a earcú, a oiliúint agus a bhainistiú. Choinnigh sé cur chuige seasmhach ar bhainistiú agus soláthar an chláir.

In order to deliver my Primary Languages programme, a regional Primary Modern Languages Group (PMLG) was established to recruit, train and manage a range of peripatetic tutors. It has maintained a consistent approach to the management and delivery of the programme.

The PMLG maintains the quality of the programme by providing ongoing support and training to tutors and teachers which includes specific training in classroom activities by closely monitoring tutor evaluation reports and feedback provided by schools/teachers participating in the programme. It is currently planning to consult with pupils involved in the programme.

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out an evaluation of the programme, which was published in August 2009. The report was positive. It indicated that the quality of education provided through the programme is good and that it has important strengths in most of its provision. It concluded that the programme has made a positive start and is contributing significantly to the teaching of modern languages in our primary schools. The report also contained recommendations for some areas of improvement and development which are currently being taken forward.

The full report can be accessed via the Department's website or by the following link

http://www.etini.gov.uk/primary_modern_languages_programme_final_version.pdf

Capital Build Projects

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the capital build projects for schools in the (a) Larne Borough Council; (b) Carrickfergus Borough Council; and (c) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, which are currently waiting for clearance by her Department; and (ii) the stage at which each proposal is.

(AQW 4933/10)

Minister of Education: B'fhéidir gurb eol duit gur choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú i mí Dheireadh Fómhair 2009 ar gach tionscadal caipitil lena dhearbhu go bhfuil siad i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais atá mé ag cur i bhfeidhm lena chinntiú go mbaineann muid ár ndualgais reachtúla amach ar chomhionannas agus ar spriocadh ar bhonn riachtanas sainaithnithe. Braithfidh dul chun cinn na dtionscadal seo ar thoradh an athbhreithnithe, a chuideoidh le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitiúil agus bhainistiú an eastáit scoile. Ina dhiaidh seo, cuirfear tionscadail in ord tosaíochta le haghaidh dul chun cinn sna blianta airgeadais atá le teacht, ag cur infhaighteacht acmhainní san áireamh.

You may be aware that in October 2009, I commissioned a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework, I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need. The progress of all projects will be dependent upon the outcome of the review, which will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate. Projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial years taking account of available resources.

Capital Build Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when her Department intends to announce which capital build projects will go ahead and which will be postponed in 2010/11.

(AQW 4942/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé don AQW 4821 a chuir Mervyn Storey, Comhalta Aontroim Theas, síos a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil dé hAoine 26 Feabhra 2010.

I would refer the member to my reply to AQW 4821/10 tabled by Mervyn Storey, Member for North Antrim, which was published in the Official Report on Friday 26 February 2010.

Capital Build Projects

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education to list the capital building projects which have been completed since May 2007 in the South Belfast constituency, those currently underway and those which are at the planning stage.

(AQW 5011/10)

Minister of Education: There have been no major capital school projects completed in the South Belfast constituency since May 2007 and there are none currently on site.

The following 3 major capital school projects are currently at various stages of the planning process:-

School Name	Project Details
Methodist College	Extension & Refurbishment
Taughmonagh Primary School	New school on existing site
Victoria College	Extension & Refurbishment

Tá sé riachtanach a chinntiú go bhfuil infheistiú san earnáil oideachais i gcomhréir agus tacúil leis an chreat beartais atá mé ag cur i bhfeidh lena chinntiú go mbaineann muid ár ndualgais reachtúla amach agus go spriocann muid ar bhonn riachtanas oibiachtúil. Ar 15 Deireadh Fómhair, mar sin, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil lena dhearbhu go bhfuil siad i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais, agus go mbeidh siad inbhuanaithe inmharthana san fhadtéarma mar gheall air sin.

It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. On 15 October 2009, therefore I announced a review of all capital projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.

New School for Lagan College

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the building of a new school for Lagan College.

(AQW 5012/10)

Minister of Education: Chríochnaigh mo Roinn a hiniúchadh ar an Chás Gnó Ceapacháin a chuir Seirbhís Oideachais na Comhpháirtíochta Príobháidí Poiblí i láthair agus, bunaithe air seo agus ar an Treoir reatha um Luach ar Airgead, tá an Roinn sásta ceadú a thabhairt don tionscadal a dhul ar aghaidh chun Tairgeoir Roghnaithe a cheapadh, agus chuir sí litir chuig Cathaoirleach Bhord an Tionscadail ar 22 Feabhra 2010 le hé seo a dhearbhu.

The Department has completed its examination of the Appointment Business Case presented by the PPP Education Service and based on this and current Guidance on Value for Money the Department is prepared to allow the project to proceed to the appointment of a Preferred Bidder and issued a letter to the Chair of the Project Board on 22 February 2010 confirming this. The appointment will be subject to the legal requirement of the Alcatel stand still period and any further details are commercial and in confidence until this period has expired.

Youth Projects

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Education what youth projects her Department is currently funding in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5014/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne chun Seirbhísí don Ógra a sholáthar ina gcuid ceantar. Is iad na Boird atá freagrach as an dóigh a leithdháileann siad a mbuiséid agus ní mór dóibh a chinntiú go riartar acmhainní ar bhonn cothrom agus go bhfuil leithdháileadh na n-acmhainní bunaithe ar riachtanas oibiachtúil.

The Department of Education provides funding to the Education and Library Boards for the provision of Youth Services in their areas. It is the responsibility of the Boards to decide how they distribute their budgets taking account of the need to ensure that resources are allocated on an equitable basis and based on an assessment of objective need.

The Chief Executives of the Belfast and the South Eastern Education and Library Boards who have responsibility for youth service provision in the South Belfast constituency area have provided the following information on projects/groups funded in the area in the financial year 2009/10:

FUNDED GROUPS/PROJECTS FUNDING (£)

104th Belfast Scouts	820
109th Girls Brigade	600
10th Antrim Scout Group	600
116th Girls Brigade	600
151st Belfast Guides	495
19th Belfast Brownies	600
19th Belfast Guides	600
20th Belfast Boys Brigade	600
21st Belfast Scout Group	600
44th Belfast Scouts (Malone)	600
62nd Belfast Scouts	600
68th Scout Group	600
81st Belfast Scout Group	600
Ballynaveigh Community Development Association	600
Belfast Community Circus School	600
Belvoir Pres Church Friday Focus	495
Belvoir Youth Club	37,212
Bethany Every Boys' and Girls Rally	600

Breakout Newtownbreda Youth Group	1,650
Cairnshill Methodist Church Youth Club	4,079
Cairnshill Methodist GB	495
Charter Youth Group	86,400
Christ Church Balmoral	600
City YMCA	7,000
Crescent Senior Every Girls Rally	600
Donegall Pass Youth Group	15,700
Finaghy Methodist Youth Fellowship	600
Finaghy Youth Group	72,500
Fisherwick Youth Group	600
Fitzroy Youth Club	600
Fleming Fulton Youth Group	5,500
Forestside Christian Centre Group	820
Knockbreda Guides 55th Belfast	820
Lower Ormeau Residents Group	600
Newtownbreda Baptist Campaigners	820
Nubia Youth Group	64,400
Rosario Youth Group	67,100
Sandy Row Community Forum Kite	600
South Belfast Area Project	74,500
Southcity Resource and Development Centre	600
St Brigid's Youth Group	3,800
St John Vianney Youth Group	64,000
St Malachy's Youth Group	14,900
Suffolk Youth Group	41,000
Taughmonagh Youth Group	38,300

In addition the Bytes project, which is funded by the Departments of Education and Employment and Learning, has a funded centre based in the constituency. A figure for the funding made specifically to that centre during this financial year is not available at this time.

StreetSafe Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what financial support her Department or its agencies are providing for the StreetSafe scheme.

(AQW 5032/10)

Minister of Education: Ní sholáthraíonn an Roinn Oideachais ná na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne maoiniú don scéim um Shábháilteacht ar na Sráideanna.

Neither the Department of Education nor the Education and Library Boards provide funding to the Streets Safe scheme.

Music Therapy for Children with Autism

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Education if her Department provides art and music therapy for primary school aged children with autism; and how this therapy can be accessed by these children and their teachers.

(AQW 5070/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) in iúl dom go soláthraítear teiripe ealaíne agus teiripe cheoil do gach páiste le huathachas, lena n-áirítear páistí bunscoile, má tá sé seo sonraithe i ráiteas ar riachtanais oideachais speisialta an pháiste.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that art and music therapy is provided for all children with autism, including primary aged children, if this is specified in the child's statement of special educational needs.

In most special schools art and music therapy is provided for all children, including those with autism.

As art and music therapy are recognised and regulated allied health professions and as such are the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), ELBs access these services from the appropriate health and social care trust.

The Centre for Autism at Middletown is providing training in musical intervention. The training will address how this can be used in school to facilitate communication, social interaction, creative and interactive skills for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorder. A number of teachers and ELB personnel have applied to attend this training.

Cost of Translation

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education the cost to her Department of translating publications into (i) Irish; (ii) Ulster Scots; and (iii) Braille in 2009.

(AQW 5075/10)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas an costas a bhí ar fhoilseacháin a aistriú go Gaeilge, go hAilbinis-Uladh agus go Braille sa bhliain airgeadais a chuaigh thart, idir Aibreán 2008- Márta 2009.

The cost of translating publications into Irish, Ulster-Scots and Braille for the last financial year, April 2008 – March 2009, was as follows:

Language	(i) Irish	(ii) Ulster-Scots	(iii) Braille
Cost	£39,422	£238	Nil

The information is collated on an annual basis and I am therefore providing details for the last financial year.

Buddy Bear Trust

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of the work being carried out by the Buddy Bear Trust; (ii) to detail the level of funding from her Department to the Buddy Bear Trust in the current financial year; and (iii) whether she can commit to long-term funding.

(AQW 5085/10)

Minister of Education: Bhuaill mé le Cathaoirleach an Buddy Bear Trust agus le dealagáideacht tuismitheoirí, páistí agus ionadaithe eile de chuid an Buddy Bear Trust ar 23 Eanáir 2008 chun plé a dhéanamh ar thograí maoinithe i dtaca le todhchaí Scoil Buddy Bear.

I met with the Chairperson of the Buddy Bear Trust and a delegation of parents, children and other Buddy Bear Trust (BBT) representatives on 23 January 2008 to discuss funding proposals in relation to the future of the Buddy Bear School.

At this meeting I was presented with a proposals document setting out several options regarding the future viability of the school and, on 12 June 2008, I responded to those proposals, comprehensively setting out the Department of Education's (DE) position in relation to them, and concluding that they were unviable.

On 28 November 2008, the BBT presented further proposals to DE in a different format from those previously presented. DE has consulted both in the north and south of Ireland as well as with the Office of the First Minister/deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS). Following detailed consideration of the funding options, DE again concluded that the proposed funding options continue to be unviable. I subsequently wrote to the Chairperson of the BBT setting out my response on 2 April 2009.

The Chairperson of the BBT, has recently written to me, Michael McGimpsey, the Minister for the DHSS&PS and OFMDFM asking to meet to discuss a position paper entitled "Hope for the Future".

It would be DE's opinion that the paper does not contain any new or significantly different proposals from those previously presented and I responded on 14 January 2010, in full detail, directly to the BBT on the contents of the paper. As a result the request for a meeting was declined in this instance.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that one Education and Library Board is paying school fees totalling £23,665 in the financial year 2009/10 in relation to placement in the Buddy Bear School.

While my Department does not directly fund schools in the independent sector, should an Education and Library Board place a child in any independent school they -

- (a) shall pay the fees payable in respect of the education provided for the child at the school;
- (b) may pay any fees payable in respect of board and lodging provided for the child at the school; and
- (c) may provide transport for the child to facilitate his or her attendance at the school.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Education how much money has been spent by her Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5090/10)

Minister of Education: Leagtha amach sa tábla thíos atá miondealú ar chaiteachas na Roinne Oideachais ar bhailt fhoirinn atá ag freastal ar chomhdhálaí agus ar chúrsaí i ngach bliain de na trí bliana a chuaigh thart:

A breakdown of expenditure by the Department of Education on staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years is set out in the table below:

	Fees	Travel and Subsistence Costs	Total
Financial Year	£	£	£
2006-07	129,999	40,550	170,549
2007-08	111,052	40,481	151,533

	Fees	Travel and Subsistence Costs	Total
Financial Year	£	£	£
2008-09	210,170	39,592	249,762
Total	451,221	120,623	571,844

Rural Schools

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps she intends to take to protect the future of rural primary and secondary schools which deliver a first-class education service but fail to meet the enrolment figures outlined in the Bain Report.

(AQW 5094/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé do Tommy Gallagher, Comhalta do dháilcheantar Fhearmanach agus Thír Eoghain Theas, ar AQO 103/10 a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 02 Deireadh Fómhair 2009.

I refer the Member to answer I provided to Tommy Gallagher, the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, to AQO 103/10 published in the Official Report on 02 October 2009.

Transport Needs of 16+ Students

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education if he has plans to address the transport needs of 16+ students who are attending full-time education courses in post-primary schools and colleges of further education.

(AQW 5101/10)

Minister of Education: Feadfar daltaí atá thar uasteorainn na haoise scoile reachtúla agus a leanann san oideachas ar scoil a mheas do chúnamh iompair faoin bheartas reatha um iompar, a fhad is a bhaineann siad na critéir cháilíochta amach.

Pupils who are over the upper limit of compulsory school age and continue their education at school can be considered for transport assistance under the existing transport policy, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.

The Home to College Transport budget, administered by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on behalf of the Department for Employment and Learning, is used to facilitate the attendance of students at further education colleges. Home to College Transport is implemented on the basis of the Department of Education's policy.

'Invest to Save' Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education what bids her Department has made in relation to the 'Invest to Save' initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5112/10)

Minister of Education: Níl sé de nós agam sonraí ar ghnó an Tionóil a nochtadh. Tá gach gné de ghnó an Choiste Feidhmeannaigh faoi rún.

It is not my practice to disclose details of Executive business. All aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Sure Start Centres

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the effectiveness of Sure Start centres.

(AQW 5120/10)

Minister of Education: Sure Start is designed and delivered at a local level through a network of local statutory agencies and community based organisations working in the fields of health, early education and family support. Each of the 32 Sure Start Programmes have a Lead and an Accountable Body whose roles are to manage the Programme's coordination and administration respectively, and which are accountable to the Sure Start Management Committee. Services are generally delivered across various locations and settings rather than within a single location or centre.

Is í is príomhaidhm do Thús Cinnte ná a chinntiú go bhfuil tús maith sa saol ag gach páiste, go háirithe na páistí sin laistigh dár sochaí atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste, trí obair chun forbairt intleachtach, fhisiceach, shóisailta agus mhothúcháin na bpáistí réamhscoile a chur chun cinn agus trí chuidiú a thabhairt dóibh le linn na luathbhlianta tábhachtacha seo- nuair atá siad sa bhaile agus nuair a thosaíonn siad ar scoil araon.

The main aim of Sure Start is to ensure as far as possible that every child has a good start in life, particularly those within our society who are disadvantaged, by working to promote the intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of pre school children, to help them flourish during those important early years - both at home and when they start school.

Sure Start is an important Programme and there is a need to ensure it is making a real and lasting difference to our young children and their families, particularly those who may need the most support. My Department is therefore currently giving consideration to the commissioning of a comprehensive evaluation of Sure Start in the north of Ireland. This will provide useful information in considering the future development of Sure Start.

Ulster-Scots Language and Culture

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the feasibility of a school dedicated to teaching Ulster-Scots language and culture.

(AQW 5156/10)

Minister of Education: The opening of any new school requires the publication of a Development Proposal.

Tugann próiseas an Togra Forbartha deis le haghaidh comhairliú áitiúil fairsing roimh fhoilsiú, agus bíonn tréimhse reachtúil chomhairlithe i ndiaidh foilsithe fosta. Ag deireadh na tréimhse sin, cuirim san áireamh gach eolas ábharthach i dtaca leis an togra, lena n-áirítear gach iarratas a cuireadh isteach, an t-éileamh atá ar an fhoráil agus an tionchar a bheadh ar scoileanna bunaithe, agus chun mo chinneadh a dhéanamh, ní mór dom bheith sásta go mbeadh an toradh ina chúis le scoil inmharthana, a sholáthraíonn oideachas ar chaighdeán maith dá daltaí.

The Development Proposal process provides an opportunity for extensive local consultation before publication as well as a statutory two-month consultation period following publication. At the end of that period, I take into account all relevant information relating to the proposal, including all representations made, demand for the provision and the impact on established schools, and in making my decision would need to be satisfied that the outcome would result in a viable school, providing good quality education for its pupils.

Newbuild Schools in Holywood

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education for an update on replacement new build schools in Holywood.

(AQW 5159/10)

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 to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need. In October 2009, I commissioned a review of current projects, including those for Priory Integrated College, an amalgamated Holywood and Redburn Primary School and Holywood Nursery School, to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

Braithfidh dul chun cinn na dtionscadal seo ar thoradh an athbhreithnithe, a chuideoidh le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitiúil agus bhainistiú an eastáit scoile. Ina dhiaidh seo, cuirfear tionscadail in ord tosaíochta le haghaidh dul chun cinn sna blianta airgeadais atá le teacht, ag cur infhaighteacht acmhainní san áireamh.

The outcome of the review will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate and projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial years.

Use of 'Northern Ireland' in Written Communication

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Education if she has given a decree that staff in her Department should not refer to 'Northern Ireland' in written communication.

(AQW 5160/10)

Minister of Education: Níor thug mé forógra riamh nár chóir go dtagródh baill foirne sa Roinn do 'Tuaisceart Éireann', ach is fearr liom féin 'tuaisceart na hÉireann' a úsáid agus léirítear é seo i ngach cumarsáid ó mo Roinn.

I have never given a decree that staff in my Department should not refer to 'Northern Ireland', however it is my personal preference to use 'north of Ireland' and reflect this in all my Departmental communications.

Newbuild Schools for the East Antrim Constituency

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education for an update on replacement new build schools for the East Antrim constituency.

(AQW 5209/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé riachtanach a chinntiú go bhfuil infheistiú san earnáil oideachais i gcomhréir agus tacúil leis an chreat beartais atá mé ag cur i bhfeidh lena chinntiú go mbaineann muid ár ndualgais reachtúla amach agus go spriocann muid ar bhonn riachtanas oibiachtúil. Ar 15 Deireadh Fómhair, mar sin, d'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil lena dhearbhu go bhfuil siad i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais, agus go mbeidh siad inbhuanaithe inmharthana san fhadtéarma mar gheall air sin.

It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. On 15 October 2009, therefore I announced a review of all capital projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

Pre-school Nursery Provision

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to address the shortfall in pre-school nursery provision in the East Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5224/10)

Minister of Education: I refer you to my response to your previous AQW 4898/10 -To ask the Minister of Education (i) how many children are due to start nursery school in East Belfast in September 2010; and (ii) how many nursery school places are available.

Mar a léirigh mé sa fhreagra sin, tá an próiseas rollaithe don scoilbhliain 2010/11 fós ar siúl agus coinneoidh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an seasamh seo faoi bhreathnú lena chinntiú go mbaintear amach cuspóir beartais na Roinne chun áit chistithe réamhscoile a sholáthar do gach páiste ar mhian lena dtuismitheoirí ceann a fháil.

As indicated in that response, the enrolment process for the 2010/11 school year is still ongoing and the relevant Education and Library Boards will keep the position under review to ensure that the Department's policy objective to provide a funded pre-school place for every child whose parents wish them to have one is met.

Irish-Medium Unit at St Joseph's Convent, Donaghmore

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education when the Irish-medium unit at St Joseph's Convent, Donaghmore will open.

(AQW 5248/10)

Minister of Education: A Development Proposal to support the intention to establish an Irish-medium unit at St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore with effect from 1 September 2010, was published by the Southern Education and Library Board on 17 December 2009.

Chríochnaigh an tréimhse reachtúil de 2 mhí, lena linn go bhféadfar barúil nó agóid a thabhairt don Roinn, ar 17 Feabhra agus déanfaidh mé cinneadh ar an togra a luaithe agus is féidir.

The statutory 2-month period during which comment or objection could be offered to the Department ended on 17 February and I will be making a decision on the proposal as soon as possible.

Preparatory Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils enrolled in preparatory schools in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5254/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh soláthraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is provided in the table below

Pupils enrolled in Preparatory Departments 2005/06 – 2009/10

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Pupils	2,534	2,455	2,463	2,457	2,410

Source: School census.

Note:

1. Figures include children in nursery, reception and Year 1 – 7 classes.

Department for Employment and Learning

Steps to Work Programme

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the cost of the Steps to Work programme; (ii) the job target levels for the training providers; and (iii) if these target levels are being met.

(AQW 4784/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey):

- (i) The cost of the Steps to Work for the period September 2008 to January 2010 was £17.5m.
- (ii) Providers' performance is monitored across a range of indicators including the quality of provision and contract conditions. Job target levels for contracted providers were set prior to the introduction of the programme. They do not take account of the impact of the recession.
 - (a) 25% of leavers to achieve employment (within 13 weeks of leaving contracted provision) and to sustain that employment for 13 weeks; and
 - (b) 85% of those who have sustained employment for 13 weeks to sustain employment for a further 13 weeks i.e. 26 weeks sustained employment in total.
- (iii) The structure of the programme combined with the nature of the targets make it too early to provide performance outcomes. Emerging indications are that in the current economic climate targets may not be met.

Redundancies at the Seagate Factory, Limavady

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the number of people who are (i) receiving assistance for training; or (ii) receiving Job Seekers Allowance after being made redundant from the Seagate factory, Limavady.

(AQW 4839/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department does not collect information that identifies individuals who enrol on training programmes after being made redundant. However, the Department has a range of services that are available to those made unemployed, such as Bridge to Employment and Steps to Work.

Staff Attacked by Students

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) further education; and (ii) higher education staff who were attacked by students in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4890/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In the last five years five Further Education staff have been attacked by students; one during 2005/06, one during 2007/08, one during 2008/09 and two during 2009/10.

In that period, Queen's University Belfast has recorded one incident, in 2007, of a member of staff having been attacked by a student. The three remaining Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions have no recorded incidents of staff being attacked by students in the last 5 years.

Public Relations Services Provided by Weber Shandwick

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much his Department has spent on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

(AQW 4927/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning has not spent any monies on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by his Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities outside the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 4972/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In accordance with the requirements of Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act), my Department has published an Equality Scheme which sets out how it will fulfil the duties imposed by the Act. It also closely follows Guidance produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to ensure that all its policies are assessed for potential significant impact on equality of opportunity between the nine categories as listed in Section 75 of the Act which includes persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Baker Hughes

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress he is making in securing enhanced redundancy provisions for employees at Baker Hughes.

(AQW 5118/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: It is regrettable that Hughes Christensen, a division of Baker Hughes Ltd announced, on 29th January 2010, its plans for the collective redundancies of its 209 strong workforce. Following that announcement Hughes Christensen commenced a 90 day consultation period with employees and employee representatives, amongst other interested parties. To date, Hughes Christensen have made clear their intention to meet their obligations and honour redundancy packages historically agreed and set out in the terms and conditions of employment of the employees at the East Belfast site. Hughes Christensen have advised that the redundancy package available to employees is a much enhanced package when compared with that available to other employees in Baker Hughes Ltd. I understand that this enhanced package has been offered to employees and employee representatives of Hughes Christensen who have responded with a request for further enhancements which Senior Management at Baker Hughes, Houston are currently considering. Whilst a regrettable situation for all those involved at Hughes Christensen, it would, nonetheless, be inappropriate for me or my Department to become involved in what is a matter for employees, employee representatives and the Company. I should add that my Department's remit in this regard is to process redundancy payments for qualifying employees when a company is insolvent and unable to meet its statutory obligations. In this case, Hughes Christensen is neither insolvent, nor is it unable to meet its statutory obligations in respect of the announced redundancies. Also, when companies face redundancies, my officials work in partnership with organisations such as the local Further Education College, Lead Training Providers, Education and Guidance Service and the Social Security Agency to offer a wide range of services to those affected by the redundancy. These services include advice on employment, education, training, re-skilling, job search and advice on benefits.

I will be meeting the Company today in my capacity as MLA for East Belfast and I look forward to hearing at first hand how employees are being assisted in their preparation for the transition into other employment or training opportunities.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Closure of Seagate and Other Industries

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is available from her Department to establish a special taskforce (i) to address the continuing outfall from the closure of Seagate and other industries; (ii) to identify a use for the former army base at Ballykelly; and (iii) to address the continuing closure of shops and small to medium-sized enterprises in the Limavady Borough Council area.

(AQW 4768/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Should there be a proposal for such a task force, the role of my Department and Invest NI would be to contribute advice on a range of Invest NI and EU schemes and programmes to promote foreign direct investment and encourage innovation, R&D and entrepreneurship.

Broadband in the Rasharkin and Portglenone Areas

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to ensure that all households in the Rasharkin and Portglenone areas have access to broadband, particularly those who live in the Lisnagarran area and the Lisnahunshin Road.

(AQW 4817/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Broadband has been available across all of Northern Ireland, including Rasharkin and Portglenone, from December 2005 when work was completed under my Department's contract with BT for the delivery of 100% broadband access to a service of not less than 512Kbps. As a result of this contract, over 99% of premises can access broadband through a fixed wire line service, whilst the remaining premises have coverage through satellite technologies.

More recently I announced completion of one of the fixed wireless projects supported under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund. The company delivering the project, North West Electronics, is already offering broadband speeds ranging from 2Mbps to 100Mbps for businesses across these areas and the company will also be able to offer services more generally in these areas by the summer of 2010.

On 3 December 2009, I also announced a £48m project which will deliver Next Generation Services to 85% of businesses across Northern Ireland by 2011. The exchange areas that will benefit from this investment have been listed in response to AQW 3333/10 published in the weekly answer book dated 18 December 2009. More detailed information on the rollout programme will be available on the website www.fasterbroadbandni.com which is planned to be available from end-February 2010. Whilst this action is targeted at businesses access to faster broadband, I expect that households will also benefit from this investment.

Redundancies at the Seagate factory, Limavady

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the number of people who are (i) self-employed; or (ii) otherwise employed after being made redundant from the Seagate factory, Limavady.

(AQW 4838/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is not possible to answer this question as there are no official statistics available that record for each specific employer, the subsequent employment status of workers whom that employer has made redundant.

Stena Line

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to detail any discussions she has had with Stena-Line in relation to the change of the service from Belfast to Cairnryan; and (ii) how this change will impact the 'sail and rail' deal which operates from Belfast to Stranraer.

(AQW 4859/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have not held any discussions with Stena Line on this matter.

Stena Line, as part of their on-going rationalisation plan, has recently announced a significant investment in a new port facility at Loch Ryan, Scotland, which will by September 2011 replace the existing port in Stranraer. Stena Line has advised that they intend to continue providing their popular 'sail and rail' product from their new location.

Landfill Gas

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether landfill gas is a potential source of energy generation; and how she plans to develop this opportunity.

(AQW 4905/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: While landfill gas in Northern Ireland is likely to yield only around 15MW of generation capacity, it represents a useful addition to the renewables portfolio because it is able to generate on an almost continuous basis. I was pleased to open Belfast City Council's 5MW landfill gas generating station in August 2009.

In order to develop the potential of landfill gas, the Department successfully made the case to the European Commission last year that landfill gas generation in Northern Ireland should be retained at 1 Renewable Obligation Certificate (ROC) at a time when it was being reduced to 0.25 ROCs in the rest of the UK.

This agreed higher level of support for landfill gas in Northern Ireland will be brought into effect from 1 April 2010 should the Assembly approve the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 which will be laid before it next month.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she has had any discussions with the Monetary Policy Committee in relation to delivering a better economy for Northern Ireland firms.

(AQW 4946/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Through the Bank of England regional agency network, my Department has held discussions on the current position and future prospects of the Northern Ireland economy.

The information collated from these and other meetings makes a direct and valuable contribution to the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee, which sets the interest rate for the benefit of the whole of the UK economy, including Northern Ireland.

Interface Conflict

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action Invest NI is taking, along with the PSNI and the local community, to help prevent incidents of interface conflict on the Old Mackie's site on the Springfield Road.

(AQW 4964/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI is one of a number of landowners in this area and relies entirely on the PSNI to enforce law and order.

In response to the most recent disturbances the agency increased the frequency of its private security patrols on the site. It has also reviewed its procedures to ensure that breaches of, and damage to, the fence are identified and remedied as quickly as possible.

Since 2004 the agency has spent approximately £135,000 on fencing works, providing new fencing to a small portion of the site & replacing and repairing significant parts of the perimeter fence & gates that have been subject to theft & vandalism. To date this year, approximately £5,000 has been spent on remedying theft and damage to the perimeter works.

Invest NI has actively engaged with local community groups, the police and other statutory agencies in seeking to address concerns over ongoing incidents. Following on from Invest NI's representations, the PSNI has increased its level of patrolling in the immediate area.

The agency developed its landholding in order to promote economic development and it is actively marketed to potential investors. Continuing disturbances could, however, seriously impact its ability to secure such investment projects at Forthriver.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by her Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities other than the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 4975/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) undertaken by DETI are carried out in accordance with guidance produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and in line with commitments established in the Department's Equality Scheme. Accordingly, EQIAs on new or revised policies seek to identify and address any issues likely to impact upon equality of opportunity for the following nine categories established under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:

- Persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Men and women generally;
- Persons with a disability and persons without; and
- Persons with dependants and persons without.

EQIAs also seek to identify and address any issues which may impact upon good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Draft EQIAs are issued for full public consultation to all those on the Department's Equality Consultation List which includes a wide range of representative organisations covering all nine section 75 equality categories.

Promotion of the Belfast Hills

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has invested in promoting the Belfast Hills in each of the last five years; and (ii) what plans it has to promote and develop the Belfast Hills as a tourist attraction in the future.

(AQW 4980/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) expenditure on Marketing, Advertising & Promotion and Publications in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year:	Marketing, Advertising & Promotion:	Publications:	Total:
2004/05	£ 4,610,000	£ 332,000	£ 4,942,000
2005/06	£ 4,224,000	£ 314,000	£ 4,538,000
2006/07	£ 4,705,000	£ 223,000	£ 4,928,000
2007/08	£ 4,095,000	£ 221,000	£ 4,316,000
2008/09	£ 8,243,000	£ 411,000	£ 8,654,000
Total:	£ 25,877,000	£ 1,501,000	£ 27,378,000

This expenditure is Northern Ireland wide, and not attributable to specific constituencies, regions or areas.

NITB recognises that the Belfast Hills are an integral part of the Belfast tourism experience offering visitors panoramic views of the city and details on access are provided on the NITB consumer website discovernorthernireland.com. The Belfast Hills have also been mentioned in a Belfast City advertorial as part of NITB's wider spring 2010 marketing campaign.

The biggest development opportunity for the Belfast Hills is in walking. NITB through its Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Countryside Access and Activity Network (CAAN) is developing walks that give visitors the opportunity to access this area. CAAN works closely with the Belfast Hills Partnership and currently offers visitors and residents of Northern Ireland walks in Cave Hill Country Park, Carnmoney Hill, Belfast Castle Estate and Divis and the Black Mountain. NITB also has a SLA with the Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) for visitor information and specific marketing.

In addition, NITB has been working with Belfast City Council and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau to develop a Belfast Integrated Strategic Tourism Framework to drive forward Belfast tourism developments and opportunities over the next five years. This is being led by Belfast City Council. The draft of this framework is in its final stage and will be available for consultation within a few weeks.

People in Long-term Unemployment and Economically Inactive

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the 50 electoral wards with the highest proportion of people (i) in long-term unemployment; and (ii) economically inactive. **(AQW 5008/10)**

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Robust unemployment figures at electoral ward level are only available from the claimant count, which is a count of all those claiming unemployment related benefits.

It is not possible to provide the figures on the economically inactive by electoral ward.

The table below lists the fifty electoral wards (including corresponding district council and parliamentary constituency areas) with the highest proportion of resident working-age persons (females 16-59, males 16-64) who have been claiming unemployment related benefits for over one year at January 2010.

Ward	District	Constituency	Proportion
The Diamond	Derry	Foyle	4.2
Callan Bridge	Armagh	Newry & Armagh	3.6
East	Strabane	West Tyrone	3.5
Clonard	Belfast	Belfast West	3.3
Victoria	Derry	Foyle	3.2
Strand	Derry	Foyle	3.1
Ballymote	Down	South Down	3.1
Corcrair	Craigavon	Upper Bann	3.0
Glentaisie	Moyle	North Antrim	3.0
Shankill	Belfast	Belfast West	2.9
North	Strabane	West Tyrone	2.9
Creggan South	Derry	Foyle	2.8
Dungiven	Limavady	East Londonderry	2.8
Falls	Belfast	Belfast West	2.7
Upper Springfield	Belfast	Belfast West	2.7
Creggan Central	Derry	Foyle	2.7
Greystone	Limavady	East Londonderry	2.7

Ward	District	Constituency	Proportion
Whiterock	Belfast	Belfast West	2.6
Rosemount	Derry	Foyle	2.6
Westland	Derry	Foyle	2.6
Armoy	Moyle	North Antrim	2.6
Water Works	Belfast	Belfast North	2.5
Northland	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	2.5
Court	Craigavon	Upper Bann	2.5
Taghnevan	Craigavon	Upper Bann	2.5
Brandywell	Derry	Foyle	2.5
Devenish	Fermanagh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2.5
Camlough	Newry & Mourne	Newry & Armagh	2.5
Newbuildings	Cookstown	Mid Ulster	2.4
Ballysaggart	Dungannon	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2.4
Collin Glen	Lisburn	Belfast West	2.4
Harbour	North Down	North Down	2.4
Drumglass	Dungannon	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2.3
Twinbrook	Lisburn	Belfast West	2.3
Ballybot	Newry & Mourne	Newry & Armagh	2.3
Daisy Hill	Newry & Mourne	Newry & Armagh	2.3
Drumgullion	Newry & Mourne	Newry & Armagh	2.3
Fintona	Omagh	West Tyrone	2.3
Benvardin	Ballymoney	North Antrim	2.2
Newhill	Ballymoney	North Antrim	2.2
Beechmount	Belfast	Belfast West	2.2
Glencolin	Belfast	Belfast West	2.2
Woodvale	Belfast	Belfast North	2.2
Love Lane	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	2.2
Church	Craigavon	Upper Bann	2.2
Drumgask	Craigavon	Upper Bann	2.2
Killyleagh	Down	Strangford	2.2
Washing Bay	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	2.2
Irvinestown	Fermanagh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2.2
Feeny	Limavady	East Londonderry	2.2

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Sustainable and Environmentally Friendly Forms of Employment

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department has invested in the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly forms of employment, and if so, to detail the level of investment in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 5022/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI's objective is to work with and support those manufacturing and tradable services businesses in Northern Ireland, which have the potential and ambition to export, to improve their productivity and become more internationally competitive. The agency works with these businesses to stimulate investment projects that satisfy this objective by providing a wide portfolio of support. An increasingly important element of this support highlighted in Invest NI's Corporate Plan 2008 - 2011, particularly in response to the credit crunch and the need to save costs and resources, is that directed at adapting and exploiting sustainable and environmentally friendly technologies, processes and procedures.

Within this remit, Invest NI's Sustainable Development Team funds three UK wide resource efficiency Programmes – Envirowise, which has received funding of £1,795,000 from 2006 to date, the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme (NISP) – which has received funding of £882,004 from 2007 to date and the Carbon Trust which has received funding of £20,721,044 from 2005 to date. These Programmes provide different but complimentary support to enable business to improve competitiveness, productivity and sustainability. Invest NI also provides consultancy support to help businesses move from awareness of sustainable development issues into taking action – it is anticipated that more than 100 consultancy projects with a combined value of more than £300k will be supported between 2008/09 and 2010/11. Invest NI has also dedicated specific resources to working with businesses to investigate and promote the economic potential from the growth of the renewable energy sector. Invest NI is developing a strategy for the renewables sector but several activities have already been initiated to promote and stimulate the uptake by Northern Ireland businesses of the opportunities that are rapidly unfolding. One activity of note was the very successful Northern Ireland Energy & Environment Conference in October 2009 which more than 650 local businesses attended.

Invest NI is currently working with a number of clients providing products and services in a wide range of renewable energy sub-sectors – including both onshore and offshore wind, marine, biomass, anaerobic digestion and solar thermal. Since April 2009 clients within the Renewables Sector have received financial assistance amounting to £4.4 million against total investment costs of £16.6 million for a range of activities including research and development, training, job creation and the development of Collaborative Networks. A number of other projects are at various stages of development and it is likely that some of these will come to fruition in the next financial year.

The Sustainable Energy Inter-Departmental Working Group, mandated by the Executive, demonstrates a strategic, joined-up Government approach to Sustainable Energy. An economic sub-group, chaired by Invest NI, has been set up to look specifically at opportunities for 'green jobs' and skills development within Northern Ireland.

Recovery of Grant Monies

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4679/10, to detail from which companies the £28 million grant money was recovered; and under what criteria.

(AQW 5064/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The following entities repaid a total of £26.5m as the result of either closure of the company or the withdrawal of their NI operations:

- Xenosense Ltd
- AFA Systems (NI) Ltd
- ALR Waste Management
- Better Care Group Ltd

- Boxclever Systems Limited
- British Airways plc
- Buchanan Wire Mesh Ltd
- Castlewood Farm Products
- Courtalds Textiles (Holdings) Ltd
- Crane Furniture Ltd
- Curran Environmental Recycling Ltd
- Universal Meat Company
- Daewoo Electronics UK Ltd
- Diageo Global Supply IBC Ltd
- Dominic and Bronagh Crilly
- EFMB Ltd
- Emerging Business Trust
- Exus Energy Ltd
- F5 Networks Ltd
- Figure Retail Systems Ltd (Torex Retail)
- Flextronics (UK) Design Ltd
- Frances & Eithne McGuire
- Glen Dimplex Group
- Golden Vale/Rye Valley Foods
- Humax Electronics Co Ltd
- IJM Timber Frames Ltd
- Interior Trim Co Ltd
- Irlandus Circuits
- James Leckey Design Ltd
- Karl Construction Ltd
- Liam Seamus Brown
- Linian Knitwear Ltd
- Lucid Technologies Documentation Ltd
- M & M Software NI Ltd
- Marble Hill Soaps Ltd
- McCaw Allan & Co Ltd
- Mellon Country Inn
- Monlough Workshop Ltd
- Ms Catherine Johnston
- Nambarrie
- Nortel Networks Ltd
- Optech (NI) Ltd

- Loughford Timber Products
- Potato Pleasures Ltd
- Prudential Assurance Company Ltd
- Reed Managed Services plc
- RH Houston
- Rimedia Ltd
- Riverside Textiles Ltd
- Sanmina – SCI UK Ltd
- Seagate Technology Media (Limavady)
- Sendit.com Ltd
- Stitchwell Ltd
- The Zip Project
- Thermomax Ltd
- Thos McDonagh Ltd
- Trivirix International Ltd
- Tyrone Crystal Ltd
- Vision Business Solutions Ltd
- Vision Information Consulting Ltd
- Wavebob NI Ltd
- Wilson's Country Ltd
- Wind Synergy Ltd

The following entities repaid a total of £1.5m as the result of abandoning a previously supported project, disposal of previously grant assisted assets, or underperformance against agreed project targets:

- Energis (Ireland) Ltd
- Kiel Pharma Ltd
- Old Bushmills Distillery Company Ltd
- Sensor System Watchman Ltd

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what bids her Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5115/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI did not make any bids against the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative.

Costs for Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money has been spent by her Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5141/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

(i) The amount spent on course and conference fees in the last three financial years is:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Course Fees	£175,366	£164,271	£365,701
Conference Fees	£ 2,268	£6,117	£15,081

(ii) Information on travel and subsistence costs specifically for staff attending conferences and courses is not available as travel costs are not recorded at this level.

Employee Representatives of Baker Hughes

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to meet with employee representatives of Baker Hughes.

(AQW 5174/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I can confirm today that I do plan to meet the Employee Representatives from Hughes Christensen as soon as possible in order to discuss the current situation in more detail.

I share the distress of the employees and their families at the current situation and I am in ongoing liaison with my officials in Invest NI to ensure that everything possible is being done to reduce the impact of the situation.

Relocated or Decentralised Posts

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to posts within her Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5291/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: There are no proposals for the Department or its NDPBs to re-locate or decentralise.

Department of the Environment**Offshore Wind Farms**

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the need to amend planning policy to promote the development of off-shore wind farms.

(AQW 4005/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): Planning jurisdiction does not extend beyond the low water mark. Consequently, there is no need to amend planning policy to promote the development of off-shore wind farms.

Goods and Services Paid for Online

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) which goods and services provided by his Department can be paid for online; (ii) the total number of transactions processed by his Department for these goods and services in each of the last five years; (iii) the total number of these transactions which were (a) online payments; (b) payments by cheque; (c) postal order; (d) cash; or (e) other method; and (iv) the percentage of payments made online compared with other payment methods.

(AQW 4294/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department's Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) provides an online booking service for Driver and Vehicle Testing functions with all transactions being processed online by either a debit/credit card. The next Business Area to offer online services will be Planning Service when its new computerised system goes live during 2010-11.

The attached tables provide the information requested in relation to the DVA. Table 1 provides details for Driver Theory Testing and Table 2 provides details for Vehicle and Driver Testing.

TABLE 1

Driver Theory Testing	2009-10 to 31 Dec 09	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
Total number of transactions	29,171	36,165	30,333	20,017	13,017
% of bookings made by internet (online -card payment)	67	63	51	37	26
% of bookings made by telephone (online -card payment/cheques)	31	33	44	55	60
% of bookings made by post - card payment/cheques	2	4	5	8	14

TABLE 2

Vehicle and Driver Testing	2009-10 to 31 Dec 09	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07(on line service available from 10 January 07)	2005-06
Vehicle testing transactions	159,864	137,244	65,622	2,968	0
Driver testing transactions	28,690	32,484	20,133	1,052	0
Total number of transactions	188,554	169,728	85,755	4,020	0
* % of bookings made by internet (online -card payment)	24	18	9	4	0

Vehicle and Driver Testing	2009-10 to 31 Dec 09	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07(on line service available from 10 January 07)	2005-06
* % of bookings made by telephone (online –card payment/cheques)	37	39	42	43	0
* % of bookings made by post - card payment/cheques	39	43	49	53	0

* The percentage of payments made online compared with other payment methods information for Vehicle and Driver Testing are not available separately.

Availability of Council Minutes

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if he will ensure that all councils have a link to council minutes on the home page of their websites.
(AQW 4523/10)

Minister of the Environment: It is for councils, as statutory bodies, to determine how they wish to conduct their business operation. It will be a matter for individual councils to determine how to give effect to my proposed requirement for increased transparency in the operation of councils including the publication of the minutes of council meetings, as outlined in my answer to AQW 4180/10.

New Pitches Near the Burrenbridge Road, Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment when a decision will be made on the planning application made by the Down County Board on behalf of Bryansford Gaelic Athletic Club to build new pitches near the Burrenbridge Road between Newcastle and Castlewellan.
(AQW 4604/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Divisional Planning Manager met representatives of the Down County Board and their professional advisor on Wednesday 10 February, the day after the meeting between Roads Service and Councillor Jim Wells, MLA. The application remains under consideration and a decision will issue as soon as possible.

Compensation Claims

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4475/10 and AQW 4477/10, to detail the monetary value of the compensation claims, broken down by council area.
(AQW 4852/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Road and Street Signs

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4441/10, to detail for each of the last five years (i) the number of road and street signs which have been ordered by local councils and subsequently repaired or replaced due to (a) spelling mistakes; (b) punctuation mistakes; (c) other grammatical errors; (d) incorrect information; (e) missing information; and (f) any other similar reason; and (ii) the associated cost of correcting these errors, broken down by district council area.

(AQW 4956/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the annual running cost of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last three years; and (ii) the number of staff currently employed.

(AQW 4957/10)

Minister of the Environment: The annual running costs of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last three years was as follows:-

2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
£26.4 million (estimated)	£28.1 million	£28.2 million

Annual running costs comprise staff salaries and wages, accommodation, service contracts and other general administrative expenditure.

The total number of staff currently employed is 751.

Lecale Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how much weight he intends to attach to the recommendations of his departmental consultant as opposed to the views of the two statutory body consultees in relation to the proposed exclusion of a stretch of coast between Rossglass and Tyrella in the Lecale coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

(AQW 4986/10)

Minister of the Environment: I await a report, which will shortly be submitted by NIEA officials, in which the criteria for designation of the proposed Strangford and Lecale AONB will be outlined together with a balanced account of the consultation with statutory consultees and the public. This will enable me to consider and confirm the final boundary taking account of all the relevant factors.

Advertising to Promote Road Safety

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been spent in each of the last three years on (i) television advertising; (ii) commercial radio advertising; and (iii) other forms of advertising to promote road safety.

(AQW 5001/10)

Minister of the Environment: In last three financial years my Department has spent the following amounts on road safety advertising:

	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
TV	£1,070,868.51	£1,037,129.02	£891,448.41

	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010
RADIO	£97,402.83	£97,822.20	£121,861.90
OTHER	£251,303.27	£225,075.76	£114,593.93

Over this period of time an additional £432,879.74 was spent on the production of new ad campaigns.

Building in Green Belt Areas

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what advice is given to planning officers to ensure that developers deliver on agreed enhancements to compensate for loss of amenity when building in green belt areas.

(AQW 5004/10)

Minister of the Environment: Former Greenbelt policies have now been superseded by PPS 21. However, in the consideration of any planning application there are certain measures available to my Department to ensure that development is carried out in a satisfactory manner.

My Department may impose conditions when granting planning permission. This power is contained in Article 25 and 27 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. Conditions can enhance the quality of development and enable many development proposals to proceed where it would otherwise have been necessary to refuse planning permission. Article 76A of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 Order provides the Department with the legislative authority to issue a Breach of Condition Notice where a condition has clearly been breached.

Article 40 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 enables my Department to enter into a planning agreement with any person who has an estate in land by way of a legal document.

Guidance for planning officers on the use of conditions and Article 40 agreements is set out in the Development Management Manual.

Planning Officers

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what guidance, including training, is given to planning officers to ensure that lobbying by elected members in relation to planning issues does not stray into interference in the planning process.

(AQW 5009/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has a statutory duty to consult District Councils on planning matters such as applications and development plans, as well as taking into account any representations received. In order to assist the planning process, guidance has been provided for planning officers when consultation with the Council is required. This guidance clarifies the role of my Department, as well as the Council and in some cases third parties. It also highlights which matters can be raised by Councils and legitimately considered by my Department. This guidance is contained in internal staff documents including the Development Management Manual and Planning Circulars.

Planning Applications

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether Mr Sammy Wilson made any representations to the Planning Service in relation to planning applications in the East Antrim constituency during his tenure as Environment Minister; and to list these planning applications.

(AQW 5016/10)

Minister of the Environment: I have attached for your consideration a list drawn from my Department's records of all planning applications on which Sammy Wilson MP MLA made representations to the Planning Service in relation to the East Antrim constituency during his tenure as Environment Minister. The list includes details of correspondence where it related to specific planning applications and also

applications discussed in office meetings with the Ballymena Divisional Planning Manager. As you will be aware these applications are open to public scrutiny on request through the appropriate Divisional Planning Office.

ANNEX 1 AQW 5016 10
BALLYMENA DIVISION
GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2008/0330/F	Larne Road, Larne	Paintball Centre
V/2008/0077/F V/2009/0124/F	66 Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use of yard area for storage of commercial vehicles for bus travel business ■ Proposed retention of parking area for 2no family owned 33-seater buses to lands south of and within the domestic curtilage of 66a Woodburn Road.
F/2008/0068/F	Land at 40 Brustin Brae Road, Larne	Residential development
F/2006/0012/F	Craigyhill, Larne	New Cemetery
F/2006/0030/F	26 Glenfall Road, Glenoe	8 no. Dwellings and 2 no. Apartments.
F/2007/0107/F	31a Deerpark Road, Glenarm	Proposed replacement dwelling
F/2008/0036/F	Dickeystown Road, Glenarm	Replacement dwelling
V/2007/0158/F or V/2008/0308/F	Tesco Store, Carrickfergus	Extension
F/2008/0338/F	Adjacent to Redland Road, Larne	Proposed Vodafone Broadband Service Mast
F/2008/0123/F	152-158 The Roddens Larne	Development comprising of 2 no. 2½ storey units consisting of 8 apartments, 4 garages, bin & bicycle store, parking & associated works
F/2007/0472/F	22 Hillhead Road, Ballycarry	Build dwelling and integral garage with temporary access through adjoining land to the rear to the Lislavan Road
F/2007/0427/F	10 Chaine Memorial Road, Larne	Additional windows
V/2008/0157/F	95 Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus	Retrospective change of use
F/2008/0263/F	8 Ballycoose Road, Cairncastle, Larne	Two storey rear extension to dwelling with minor alterations to existing

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2008/0242/F	58 Ballyboley Road, Larne	Development
V/2006/0246/F	Oakland Park, Carrickfergus	Hot Food bars
F/2007/0275/F	15 Main Street, Larne and 28 Point Street, Larne	3 no. retail units, 5 no. apartments and 5 no. offices
V/2005/0289/F, V/2005/0297/F, V/2005/0050/F, V/2005/0314/F	75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Residential development of 176 units with associated landscaping and access road ■ Proposed local foodstore and associated parking. ■ Document storage warehouse including ancillary office space and sprinkler tank. ■ Demolition of existing industrial buildings and construction of distribution warehouses, 2 no. car showrooms, enterprise park, office building and ancillary retail facilities.
F/2008/0017/F & F/2008/0279/F	21 Tureagh Road, Raloo, Larne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Erection of new 179 Sqm underground slurry store and 147 sqm shed directly above ■ Retrospective permission for 252m2 livestock shed with under ground slurry tank in existing farmyard complex.
F/2007/0088/F:	opposite Ballygally Castle Hotel, Ballygally	Change of use of existing craft shop and extension to the east side to form hotel suite. New hotel suite to the east of similar size and character
F/2007/0424/F	Harbour Highway to the north east, Circular Road, to the north west and the Inver River	Erection of 2no retail warehouse units with a total gross floorspace of 3562sq m, associated landscaping, access, infrastructure and riverside walkway with fishing points
F/2008/0080/F	Junction Road, Ballyboley	Change of house type- to that previously approved under ref:- F/2006/0129/RM involving increased ridge height and additional sunroom.

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2008/0030/F	28 Regents Park, Larne	Two storey extension to south side of existing dwelling, new garage with bedroom and bathroom over
F/2006/0281/O, F/2007/0012/O F/2008/0011/F	Adj. to 40 Craiganee Road, Larne	Replacement dwelling & garage
V/2009/0015/F:	13 Rhanbuoy Park, Carrickfergus	Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 3 no apartments and 1 no townhouse.
F/2007/0268/A	100 Glenarm Road, Larne	Free-Standing Rectangular Sign (amended position, 3m from boundary with no. 102)
V/2005/0297/F	Lidl foodstore at site 80m northeast of Hotel, 75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim	Proposed local foodstore and associated parking
F2007/0470/F	11 Glenburn Avenue, Glynn, Larne	2 Storey extension to the south of the dwelling to include, garage, lounge, upstairs & downstairs bathroom and 2 No. bedrooms (amended plans)
F/2007/0262/F	41 and 43 Ballystrudder Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Alterations and extension to dwelling to include granny flat attached at side and rear, and a detached garage.
V/2006/0196/F:	Site adjacent to both 80 Cable Road, & 22 Belfast Road, Whitehead.	Residential development consisting of 10 apartments (Amended Scheme)
F/2000/0049/F F/2004/0392/F F/2005/0154/F	24 Whinfield, Larne	Request for a report on Dwelling

**ANNEX 2 AQW 5016 10
BALLYMENA DIVISION
DIRECT CORRESPONDENCE**

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2006/0310/F	Lands adjacent to Bashfordsland and Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus	Development of apartments and associated parking, landscaping and open space (48 units)
F/2007/0467/F	130-136 Curran Road, Larne	15 two bedroom apartments and associated site works

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2007/0418/F	Land at junction of Redlands Crescent and Redlands Road, Larne	Mixed use development
F/2007/0467/F	130-136 Curran Road, Larne	15 two bedroom apartments and associated site works
F/2009/0065/F	Drumalla House, 111 Bay Road, Carnlough including lands to the west of 17a and 17b Ballymena Road, Carnlough	Demolition of existing "Drumalla House" Field Study Centre and development of 18 residential units with associated gardens, access road and amenity spaces
F/2008/0199/F	11 and 13 Tower Road, Larne	Housing development consisting of 12 units with associated site works
V/2009/0085/F	184m North of 19 Main Bentra Road, Ballycarry	Erection of a 150kw wind turbine
F/2009/0177/F	Topping Meats, Old Belfast Road, Millbrook, Larne	Change of use from chilled carcase holding/boning into a multi-species butchery incorporating slaughtering, chill holding and further processing.
F/2009/0182/F	82 Coast Road, Drains Bay, Larne	First floor development including replacement roof
F/2009/0206/F	Ballystrudder Waste Water Treatment Works, Lough Road, Larne	Re-development of Ballystrudder WWTP to include pumping station, screening facility, storm storage tanks and retention of existing control house
F/2007/0410/F	Land between 75 and 79 Millbay Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Residential development – 25 residential units
F/2007/0410/F	Land between 75 and 79 Millbay Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Residential development – 25 residential units

ANNEX 3 AQW 5016 10
BALLYMENA DIVISION
OFFICE MEETINGS

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2005/0154/F	24 Whinfield, Larne	Retrospective amendment to previously approved house type & retention of 2 Gabbion walls.

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2007/0088/F	Ballygally Castle Hotel, Coast Road, Ballygally	Change of use of existing craft shop and extension to the east side to form hotel suite. New hotel suite to the east of similar size and character
F/2007/0418/F	Land at junction of Redlands Crescent and Redlands Road, Larne	Proposed mixed-use development comprising food superstore, multi screen cinema/restaurants, stand alone restaurant, car parking and other associated site works
F/2008/0001/F	109A Drumahoe Road, Larne	'Drumahoe Court' Site of proposed development of 10 no. 2 bedroom apartments and 4 no. 3 bedroom apartments with associated parking and amenity areas (amended proposal).
F/2008/0092/F	41 Drumcrow Road, Drumcrow, Glenarm	Application for change of use of barn (formerly shop) to Saddlery
F/2008/0123/F	134b The Roddens, Larne (land adjacent to no. 1 Dunboyne Park)	Development comprising of 2 no. 2½ storey units consisting of 8 apartments, 4 garages, bin & bicycle store, parking & associated works
F/2008/0179/O	Land 150m East of 115 Ballymena Road, Carnlough	Erection of greenhouses, plant packing facilities & nursery areas adjacent to new woodland planted to naturalise shade loving speciality plants underneath for existing mail-order plant business
F/2008/0191/F	65m North of No. 4 Junction Road, Ballyclare	Proposed Farm Store and relocation of entrance-new access location to superceed access approved in applications F/2008/0080/F and F/2006/0129/RM.
F/2008/0240/F	36 Waterfall Road, Larne	Replacement Dwelling 30m North East of Existing Farm Dwelling & Yard
V/2005/0297/F	Lidl foodstore at site 80m northeast of Hotel, 75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim	Proposed local foodstore and associated parking.

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2007/0213/F	13 Rhanbuoy Park, Carrickfergus	Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 6 No. Sea Front Apartments (2 bedrooms)
V/2008/0096/F	26 Victoria Avenue, Whitehead	2No. 3 bed apartments
V/2008/0105/F	37 Knockfergus Park, Greenisland	Two storey extension to side elevation to include carport at ground and bedroom at first. Two storey extension to rear to extend kitchen at ground and bedrooms at first. Also single storey sun-lounge to rear (amended proposal)
F/2007/0424/F	Land at Circular Road, Larne (adjoining The Harbour Highway to the north east, Circular Road, to the north west and the Inver River to the south west)	Erection of 2no retail warehouse units with a total gross floorspace of 3562sq m, associated landscaping, access, infrastructure and riverside walkway with fishing points
F/2008/0030/F	28 Regents Park, Larne	Two storey extension to south side of existing dwelling, new garage with bedroom and bathroom over
F/2008/0036/F	54 Dickeystown Road, Glenarm	Replacement Dwelling House
F/2006/0281/O	Adj. to 40 Craiganee Road, Larne, BT40 3JE	Replacement dwelling & garage
F/2006/0298/F	8 Marine Road, Carnlough, Ballymena	Proposed demolition of existing dwelling and garage and construction of a single retail unit and 2 No. 3 bedroom apartments (Revised Scheme).
F/2007/0268/A	100 Glenarm Road, Larne	Free-Standing Rectangular Sign (amended position, 3m from boundary with no. 102)
F/2007/0469/F	9 Millvale, Ballygally, Larne	Replacement double garage with non-commercial workshop above
F/2007/0472/F	Site is between 18 and 22 Hillhead Road, Ballycarry	Proposed new build dwelling and integral garage with temporary access through adjoining land to the rear to the Lislayan Road
F/2008/0011/F	40 Craiganee Road, Larne	Change of access to serve sites approved under planning reference F/2006/0281/O & F/2007/0012/O (amended access position)

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2008/0092/F	41 Drumcrow Road, Drumcrow, Glenarm	Application for change of use of barn (formerly shop) to Saddlery
F/2008/0179/O	Land 150m East of 115 Ballymena Road, Carnlough	Erection of greenhouses, plant packing facilities & nursery areas adjacent to new woodland planted to naturalise shade loving speciality plants underneath for existing mail-order plant business
F/2008/0191/F	65m North of No. 4 Junction Road, Ballyclare	Proposed Farm Store and relocation of entrance-new access location to superceed access approved in applications F/2008/0080/F and F/2006/0129/RM.
V/2006/0246/F	1 & 3 Oakland Park, Carrickfergus	Amended proposal. Proposed change of use from retail unit (3 Oakland Park) to hot food bar. No. 1 Oakland Park to remain in retail use.
V/2008/0198/F	2 Donegall Gardens, Whitehead	2no Semi-Detached Dwellings (amended proposal)
F/2007/0241/O	To the rear of 19 Largy Road, Carnlough	Site for new 4 bed wing to rear of existing residential home to accommodate specialist group
F/2007/0453/F	8 Branch Road, Drainsbay, Larne	Demolish existing dwelling and erect one no 1 ½ storey block of apartments (5No.) to front of site and a 2 storey block to rear of site (4No.) - Total 9 apts & associated parking
F/2008/0001/F	109A Drumahoe Road, Larne	‘Drumahoe Court’ Site of proposed development of 10 no. 2 bedroom apartments and 4 no. 3 bedroom apartments with associated parking and amenity areas (amended proposal).
F/2008/0199/F	11 & 13 Tower Road, Larne	Proposed housing development consisting of 12 no. units with associated site works.
Temp/ba/2008/1757	Land Ajacent to Quarry Cottages, Quay Lane, Whitehead	Proposed site for mobile home
V/2005/0297/F	Lidl foodstore at site 80m northeast of Hotel, 75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim	Proposed local foodstore and associated parking.

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2007/0213/F	13 Rhanbuoy Park, Carrickfergus	Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 6 No. Sea Front Apartments (2 bedrooms)
F/2006/0360/O	Site adjacent to 68 Millbay Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Retirement Dwelling for Owner of Island Shellfish
F/2007/0183/F	1 Whinfield, Larne	Demolition of existing dwelling and replacement with 1 apartment and 2 duplex units
F/2007/0252/F	Site 250 West of 411 Old Glenarm Road, with access off School Hill	Retirement dwelling and garage for retiring farmer.
F/2007/0470/F	11 Glenburn Avenue, Glynn, Larne	2 Storey extension to the south of the dwelling to include, garage, lounge, upstairs & downstairs bathroom and 2 No. bedrooms (amended plans)
V/2005/0297/F	Lidl foodstore at site 80m northeast of Hotel, 75 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim	Proposed local foodstore and associated parking.
V/2007/0154/F	54 Scotch Quarter, Carrickfergus	Change of use from residential to commercial (office use, non retail)
V/2007/0213/F	13 Rhanbuoy Park, Carrickfergus	Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of 6 No. Sea Front Apartments (2 bedrooms)
F/2005/0320/O	to rear of 63/65 Victoria Road, Larne	2 No. semi-detached town houses
F/2006/0051/F	Drumnagreagh, 408 Coast Road, Glenarm, Antrim, BT44 0BB	Refurbishment of existing hotel buildings with extension to provide 15 residential units with associated car parking and landscaping.
F/2008/0068/F	Lands at 40 Brustin Brae Road, Ballycraig, Larne	Residential redevelopment for 19 dwellings including improvements to existing access and associated amenity space.
F/2008/0274/F	100m South West of Larne Golf Club Clubhouse, 54 Ferris Bay Road, Islandmagee.	Proposed housing development - 10 No. dwellings -3 No. Detached single storey, 1 No. Detached 2 storey & 6 No. 2 storey semi-detached
F/2008/0330/F	250m South West of the Junction of Deerpark Road & Larne Road, Ballynure	Proposed change of use from agricultural land to paint ball leisure complex & associated facilities (amended plans)

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2009/0009/F	83m East of 209 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Erection of a "Bonus 150KW" wind turbine height 30m.
F/2009/0010/F	28m East of 275 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne.	Erection of a "Bonus 150KW" wind turbine height 30m.
F/2009/0025/F	Field South of 209 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne.	Moveable huts for the storage of animal food stuff and clay pigeon traps (Huts are 1850 x 1850 mm square)
F/2009/0048/F	169 Gobbins Road, Islandmagee, Larne.	Replacement dwelling with retention of existing dwelling.
V/2006/0293/F	Lands to the South east of 1-9 Priory Drive and 1-5 Langford Close (fronting Sloefield Road and Belfast Road) Carrickfergus	Proposed residential development of 130 no. dwellings comprising of 39 no. apartments and 91 no. dwellings including new vehicular access onto Sloefield Road and associated siteworks
V/2008/0105/F	37 Knockfergus Park, Greenisland	Two storey extension to side elevation to include carport at ground and bedroom at first. Two storey extension to rear to extend kitchen at ground and bedrooms at first. Also single storey sun-lounge to rear (amended proposal)
F/2003/0214/F	10 Chainé Memorial Road, Curran And Drumaliss, Larne, Northern Ireland, BT40 1AD	Demolition of existing dwelling and erection of one block of 7 apartments
F/2005/0320/O	to rear of 63/65 Victoria Road, Larne	2 No. semi-detached town houses
F/2007/0088/F	Ballygally Castle Hotel, Coast Road, Ballygally	Ballygally Castle Hotel, Coast Road, Ballygally
F/2007/0157/DCA	8 Marine Road, Carnlough, Ballymena	Demolition of existing dwelling, garage and boundary walls with temporary weather proofing of the exposed gable on 6 Marine Road and construction of a single retail unit and 2 No. 3 bedroom apartments.
F/2007/0503/F	67-69 Pound Street, Larne and area behind properties	Erection of retail development with 18 residential apartments over on ground & 3 upper levels, along with car parking and landscaped entrance court

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
F/2008/0001/F	109A Drumahoe Road, Larne	'Drumahoe Court' Site of proposed development of 10 no. 2 bedroom apartments and 4 no. 3 bedroom apartments with associated parking and amenity areas (amended proposal).
F/2008/0008/F	81-103 Main Street, Larne Northern Ireland	Mixed use development comprising of ground floor retail, 57 no. apartments, gym and 57 no. car park spaces.
F/2008/0043/F	9 Harbour Road, Carnlough, Ballymena	Proposed replacement of old railing fence at front of school with new 1.6m steel rail fencing at front of school on boundary edge between pavement and playground
F/2008/0085/F	Ballygally Castle Hotel, 274 Coast Road, Ballygally	Extension to existing function room together with 24 No New bedrooms on 2 floors located to the North west side and linked to existing block together with landscaping as required.
F/2008/0092/F	41 Drumcrow Road, Drumcrow, Glenarm	Application for change of use of barn (formerly shop) to Saddlery
F/2009/0065/F	Drumalla House, 111 Bay Road, Carnlough, Ballymena, including lands to the West of Nos 17a & 17b Ballymena Road, Carnlough, Ballymena	Demolition of existing 'Drumalla House' Field Study Centre, and development of 18 residential units with associated gardens (front and rear), access road and amenity spaces.
F/2009/0100/F	Site to rear of 63-65 Victoria Road and 9-11 Prince's Gardens, Larne	Single storey dwelling with associated siteworks and landscaping
F/2009/0298/Q	Lands adjacent and West of 138 Shore Road, Magheramorne	Proposed extension to existing garden centre business to provide educational facility, retail outlet and restaurant
V/2008/0077/F	Adj. 66 Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus	Use of yard area for storage of commercial vehicles for bus travel business
V/2008/0157/F	95A Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus	Retrospective change of use from domestic double garage to mechanical workshop (amended red line on site location plan)

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2009/0057/F	2 Donegall Gardens, Whitehead.	Proposed 2 Semi Detached Dwellings.
F/2006/0360/O	Site adjacent to 68 Millbay Road, Islandmagee, Larne	Retirement Dwelling for Owner of Island Shellfish
F/2007/0503/F	67-69 Pound Street, Larne and area behind properties	Erection of retail development with 18 residential apartments over on ground & 3 upper levels, along with car parking and landscaped entrance court
F/2008/0008	81-103 Main Street, Larne Northern Ireland	Mixed use development comprising of ground floor retail, 57 no. apartments, gym and 57 no. car park spaces.
F/2008/0093/O	Lands North & North East of No.55 Raloo Road, Mounthill, Larne	Site of Residential Development
F/2008/0105/F	121 Ballyboley Road, Larne and lands to the East of this property	Demolition of single storey dwelling construction of 102 residential units (38 detached, 24 semi detached, 26 townhouses & 14 apts, associated landscaping & new access onto Ballyboley Road and road improvements (Amended description and amended road alignment drawings submitted)
F/2008/0330/F	250m South West of the Junction of Deerpark Road & Larne Road, Ballynure	Proposed change of use from agricultural land to paint ball leisure complex & associated facilities (amended plans)
F/2009/0134/F	30m East of no.8 Branch Road, Larne	Single storey dwelling with integral garage
F/2009/0135/F	6 Cairnhill Crescent, Ballygally, Larne	Demolition of existing dwelling and provision of 4no 2 storey dwellings & 4no apartments, with associated gardens, parking etc.
V/2003/0093/F	Grounds of Glynn Park, 102 Prince Andrew Way, Carrickfergus	Residential Development (24 Dwellings).
V/2009/0121/F	109 Belfast Road, Whitehead	Proposed single dwelling adjacent to 109 Belfast Road

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2009/0124/F	66a Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus	Proposed retention of parking area for 2no family owned 33-seater buses to lands south of and within the domestic curtilage of 66a Woodburn Road.
V/2009/0125/F	15 Tern Crescent, Carrickfergus	Single storey extension to side of dwelling for garage and single storey extension to rear of dwelling for sun room
F/2007/0062/O	7 Tower Road, Larne, Co. Antrim	Residential development (apartments).
F/2009/0027/F	96 Ballyvallagh Road, Larne.	Retrospective change of use from Aviary and Aviculture Sales to farm machinery and vehicle repair business. (within existing 58m2 structure).
F/2007/0280/O	Adj. to 10 Upper Cairncastle Road, Larne	Site of Dwelling and Garage.
F/2009/0113/O	260m North West of 91 Ballymena Road, Carnlough	Site of dwelling on a farm
F/2009/0123/F	Site 140m North of 17 Island Road Lower, Ballycarry	Dwelling and double garage
F/2009/0172/O	Rear Of No 12 Sallagh Road, Cairncastle, Larne	Site Of Farm Dwelling Under Policy CTY10
F/2009/0173/O	80M South Of 7 Ballyrickard Road,Larne	Site Of Farm Dwelling Under Policy CTY10
F/2009/0177/F	Topping Meats, Old Belfast Road, Millbrook, Larne	Change Of Use from chilled carcase holding/boning into a multi-species butchery incorporating slaughtering, chill holding and further processing. This will provide a needed high quality facility with total traceability for organic and other animals produced locally
F/2009/0204/F	Site consisting of 10 Croft Road, Ballygally and existing car-park between Coast Road & Croft Road, Ballygally	Proposed replacement dwelling (to replace 10 Croft Road), 2no ground floor retail units with community centre above
V/2009/0024/O	Adjacent to 80 Paisley Road, Carrickfergus.	Site of Dwelling and Garage.
V/2009/0085/F	184m North of 19 Main Bentra Road, Ballycarry	Erection of a “Bonus 150KW” wind turbine (height 24m)
V/2009/0121/F	109 Belfast Road, Whitehead	Proposed single dwelling adjacent to 109 Belfast Road

Reference	Site/Address	Detail
V/2009/0167/Q	Health and Care Centre, DeCourcy Centre, Carrickfergus	Health and Care Centre

ANNEX 4 AQW 5016 10
BELFAST DIVISION
GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

REFERENCE	SITE/ADDRESS	DETAIL
U/2008/0358/A	Sanda Road	Totem Sign
U/2001/0551/F	Edenmore Court	Sewerage problems
U/2004/0756/F	755a Shore Road	Infill development
U/2008/0332/F	38 – 39 Old Manse Road	Residential Development
U/2009/0154/F	133-135 Jordanstown Rd	Apartment Development
U/2007/0517/F	16 – 18 Old Manse Rd	14 units for Sheltered Accommodation
U/2009/0003/F	Lands to the north of 8 – 10 Berry Drive and to the South of 16-20 Berry crescent	4 detached dwellings
U/2008/0034/F	6 Glenkeen Avenue, Jordanstown	Erection of 3 dwellings
U/2008/0378/F	Rear of 67 – 85 Circular Road	Erection of 2 semi – detached dwellings
U/2007/0713/F	Jordanstown Schools, 85 Jordanstown Road	Replacement special school
U/2008/0399/F	Site running from Railway viaducts, to Monkstown ABC including paths to Ards Drive, Devinish Drive and Glenville Road.	Construction of 2.92km cycle paths/footways and construction of 1no footbridges
U/2008/0340/O	Lands opposite 584-598 Antrim Road, Belfast, BT15 4DX	Mixed use development: storage/ distribution unit, start up business enterprise units, hotel with restaurant, local retail convenience unit with associated parking, landscaping
U/2007/0595RM	Glen House, Shore Road	Residential development of 35 units (13 dwellings and 22 apartments)
U/2009/0117/F	173 Braepark Road, Ballyclare	Agricultural shed for storage of farm implements.

ANNEX 5 AQW 5016 10
BELFAST DIVISION
DIRECT CORRESPONDENCE

REFERENCE	SITE/ADDRESS	DETAIL
U/2006/0062/F	42 Circular Road	13 Residential Units
U/2007/0678/F	31 Sallybush Road	Erection of dwelling and detached garage.
U/2009/0004/F	103-105 Monkstown Road, Monkstown, Newtownabbey, BT37 OLG	Extension of existing dental practice, incorporating neighbouring vacant residential dwelling, to provide additional treatment rooms and provision of additional car parking facilities, with external alterations including alteration to roofline, roof dormers and new external finishes
U/2008/0283/F	133-135 Jordanstown Road, Monkstown, Newtownabbey	Demolition of existing detached houses and erection of 17 apartments, formation of courtyard and vehicular entrance
U/2009/0003/F	Lands to the North of 8-10 Berry Drive and to the South of 16-20 Berry Crescent, Jordanstown	2 detached dwellings with carport, access landscaping and other associated site works
U/2009/0117/F	Braepark Road, Ballyclare	Agricultural shed for storage of farm implements
U/2009/0131/F	Rear of 67-85 circular Road, Jordanstown	Two storey dwelling and detached garage to rear of terrace

Planning Applications in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Constituency

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment whether Mrs Arlene Foster made any representations to the Planning Service in relation to planning applications in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency during her tenure as Environment Minister; and to list these planning applications. **(AQW 5017/10)**

Minister of the Environment: An electronic search of the 20/20 database and Planning Service Correspondence Tracking System has identified three formal representations from Mrs Arlene Foster during her tenure as Environment Minister.

1. L/2007/1496/F

An objection on behalf of a number of constituents to a proposed change of use from Quarry to Tyre Recycling Facility involving outdoor tyre storage, two external processing plant, storage building, 1 internal plant within portal frame structure, 2 portacabins, car parking and external palisade fence.

Located at Mageradunbar Quarry, Magheradunbar, Loughshore Road, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

2. L/2007/0558/F

Deane Public Works – An objection on behalf of a constituent to a proposed Residential development comprising of 4 no. town houses, 36 no. semi detached, and 2 no. detached, 6 no. single garages and 6 no. double garages.

Located adjacent to & South of Silverhill Manor to rear of nos 1-10 Cinerama Court and nos 58-62 Loughshore Road, Silverhill, Enniskillen.

3. L/2007/0927/F

Ashmour Developments Ltd – An objection on behalf of a constituent to a demolition of existing dwellings and proposed construction of 1 no. apartment block, 3 storey (5 no. apartments), 2 no. semi-detached blocks, 3 storey (4 no. townhouses), bin/cycle store and new facing brick boundary wall and beech hedge.

Located at 5-7 Cooper Crescent, Enniskillen, BT74 6DQ

However, the Planning Service has identified 5,827 applications that fall under the timeframe and area of this request. In order to identify and obtain copies of all other information within this request will require a manual search of planning application files. This would require the diversion of staff from their normal duties and would have an adverse impact on Planning Service's ability to provide a statutory public service for which it is obligated.

The Department has concluded that the wider public interest is best served by the Department not diverting its resources from delivering its public service to facilitate the provision of this information.

EU Directive 2003/20/EC

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment (i) if he is aware of the exemptions to EU Directive 2003/20/EC regarding the requirement to use appropriate child restraints when travelling in a car, van or goods vehicle; and (ii) if he intends to take any steps to remove these exemptions.

(AQW 5052/10)

Minister of the Environment: EU Directive 2003/20/EC deals with the compulsory use of child restraints and seat belts in cars, goods vehicles and buses and provides for a small number of exemptions for use in exceptional or emergency situations. I am fully aware of these exemptions and the rationale behind their inclusion in the legislation.

The law states that children under 3 years must use the child restraint appropriate for their weight in any vehicle (including vans and other goods vehicles). There is only one exception – a child under three years may travel unrestrained in the rear seat of a taxi if the correct child restraint is not available.

In vehicles where seat belts are fitted, children from 3 years and up to 135cms in height or 12 years of age (whichever occurs first) must use the correct child restraint. In the rear seat only, three exemptions allow these children to use an adult belt if the correct child restraint is not available: (1) in a taxi; (2) for a short distance in an unexpected necessity; and (3) where two occupied child seats in the rear prevent the fitting of a third child seat.

The exemption in relation to travel in taxis recognises that it would be unreasonable to expect taxis to carry child seats or booster seats for the wide possible variety and combinations of children they might be asked to carry.

Similarly, the exemption in relation to an unexpected necessity ensures that no child is left in a potentially more dangerous situation and allows the police to apply discretion as an alternative to enforcement action if they are convinced of the circumstances.

I am content that the implementation of EU Directive 2003/20/EC has strengthened seat belt legislation in Northern Ireland. The exemptions it provides are only to be used in limited circumstances and do not apply to regular school runs or other journeys that are planned in advanced. Stiff penalties

are in place for those drivers who fail to ensure that child passengers use seat belts or appropriate child restraints

In light of all of the above, I am not planning to take any steps to remove these exemptions which have been included for important reasons and which still remain valid.

Osbourne Hotel Building, Warrenpoint

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the health and safety risks to local residents and members of the public due to the condition of the now derelict Osbourne Hotel building in Warrenpoint.

(AQW 5082/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not have any powers to assess the health and safety risks to local residents and members of the public of derelict buildings and, consequently, has taken no such action.

Newry and Mourne District Council has powers under Article 65 of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and Section 107 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 to deal with premises in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance.

I understand that as the building is currently secure, the Council is not proposing to take any action due to its condition at this stage.

Review of Public Administration

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what measures his Department has taken to ensure that equality and fair and inclusive local government will be an integral part of the outcome of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 5089/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Local Government aspects of the Review of Public Administration will be taken forward with the introduction of the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill, which will, inter alia, make provision for the governance arrangements that will apply to the new councils. The proposals will provide councils with the ability to select from a limited number of specified models the method it wishes to use for the allocation of positions within the council and on external bodies. The proposals also provide for a system of checks and balances to be put in place in relation to the decision making process.

These proposals have been developed mindful of the need to ensure effective and inclusive local democracy, to protect the rights of minorities, to prevent any direct or indirect discrimination, and to promote the need of equality of opportunity, as announced by Minister Foster in her statement to the Assembly on 31 March 2007.

Vehicles Clamped or Seized

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles have been clamped or seized in the last 12 months in the Carrickfergus area.

(AQW 5092/10)

Minister of the Environment: In the last 12 months, 64 unlicensed vehicles were clamped or seized in the Carrickfergus area.

Planning Applications in Carrickfergus

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications in Carrickfergus have been refused or are undetermined due to inadequate sewerage infrastructure, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5104/10)

Minister of the Environment: As this information is not readily available electronically a manual search of applications would have to be carried out. This would incur a significant and disproportionate cost.

A search of applications has been carried out limited to those received from the beginning of January 2009 to the end of February 2010. During this period no applications in Carrickfergus have been refused or remain undetermined due to inadequate sewerage infrastructure.

Carrickfergus Masterplan

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment if financial assistance will be made available to the owners of listed buildings under the Carrickfergus Masterplan proposal.

(AQW 5105/10)

Minister of the Environment: Financial assistance, by way of the listed buildings grant-aid scheme, is available for works of repair or maintenance of original fabric for most listed buildings throughout Northern Ireland. This is available to the owners of eligible listed buildings, and is provided irrespective of master planning etc.

Full details of the scheme, including eligibility, may be found at

http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/built-home/conservation_2/historic_buildings/historic_buildings_grants-2.htm

Planning Applications

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications the Planning Service has received (i) for houses in multiple occupation; and (ii) for building conversions to flats or apartments, in the South Belfast constituency, since January 2007.

(AQW 5122/10)

Minister of the Environment: I regret that Planning Service's current IT system does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested. Accurate figures for the years in question could only be provided through a manual exercise at a disproportionate cost.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he has received legal advice in relation to the request from the George Best Belfast City Airport to remove the 'Seats for Sale' limit in its planning agreement; and to detail this advice; and (ii) for his assessment of whether this change would remove an important control in the Airport's planning agreement and possibly make the agreement enforceable.

(AQW 5124/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently awaiting legal advice on the validity of the request by George Best Belfast City Airport to remove the seats for sale restriction from the 2008 Planning Agreement. No assessment of the request has been undertaken pending the outcome of the legal advice. As such, I am not in a position at this time to comment on the implications of any possible future change(s) to the planning agreement.

High Hedges Consultation Document

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the High Hedges consultation document (i) to outline what is meant by the term 'affected residential property' and if this includes (a) hindering access to a property; and (b) reducing natural light to a property; and (ii) if there will be a stipulated distance between an affected property and the offending hedge before the hedge meets the term 'restricting access to light'

(AQW 5144/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the draft High Hedges legislation, "affected residential property" means a dwelling or connected garden or yard.

The term "access" in the Bill refers to "access to light" as opposed to "physical access" to a property.

The legislation as currently drafted does not specify a stipulated distance between a hedge and an affected property. In each case it will be for the local council to decide as to whether or not a high hedge is affecting a domestic property detrimentally.

High Hedges Consultation Document

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the High Hedges Consultation document, what will be classified as 'evidence to resolve the problem' of the offending hedge between parties.

(AQW 5145/10)

Minister of the Environment: Evidence to resolve a high hedge problem between parties will take a variety of forms but may include records of discussions or attempts at discussion between the parties or copies of letters sent to the hedge owner by a complainant in which they have explained the issues and problems the hedge causes for them. Where appropriate, it may also include records of meetings attended by the parties and facilitated by mediation service providers.

High Hedges Consultation Document

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment what is the definition of 'reasonable height' in relation to the council issuing a remedial notice to a hedge owner to reduce the height of the offending hedge to a reasonable height, as detailed in the High Hedges consultation document.

(AQW 5146/10)

Minister of the Environment: Each council will treat each case on its merits and will decide what constitutes a "reasonable height", having taken account of the specific circumstances in the case in question.

High Hedges Consultation Document

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the High Hedges consultation document, how long the process will take from a complaint being received by the council in relation to an offending hedge and remedial action being instigated resulting in the offending hedge being reduced to a reasonable height.

(AQW 5147/10)

Minister of the Environment: This will be an operational matter for each council and will depend on the specific circumstances of each case.

Hedge Cutting Season

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he will consider extending the hedge cutting season to accommodate people who could not enter fields due to the recent bad weather.

(AQW 5151/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has responsibility for wildlife legislation but has not specified a closed period for hedge cutting. The dates of the closed period are set by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) taking account of the nesting behaviour of hedgerow birds in Northern Ireland.

Should DARD consider that there are grounds to consider extending the hedge cutting season, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency would be happy to consult with relevant stakeholders, including NGOs who have expressed views on this matter in the past.

Vehicles Clamped or Seized

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many vehicles have been (i) clamped; or (ii) seized in the last 12 months, in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 5177/10)

Minister of the Environment: Figures are held by postal town rather than by constituency, so for the purposes of this answer figures are being provided for vehicles clamped and seized in the postal towns of Bangor, Holywood and Donaghadee, to represent the North Down constituency.

In the last 12 months 147 vehicles were clamped in these towns, and, of these, one vehicle was seized, that is, removed direct to the vehicle pound without first being clamped.

High Hedges Consultation Document

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the High Hedges consultation document, what fees may be levied against a complainant by a council when a complaint about an offending hedge is received; and would such fees be refunded if the council decides to uphold the complaint.

(AQW 5183/10)

Minister of the Environment: Under the draft legislation councils have discretionary powers to levy fees for complaints. Councils may decide to refund all or part of a fee in certain circumstances, for example where a complainant is financially disadvantaged. However it is not anticipated that councils will as a rule refund fees to complainants where a complaint has resulted in a remedial notice being issued and the height of a hedge reduced to a reasonable height.

Lisburn City Council's Planning Committee

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications, received by Lisburn City Council's Planning Committee, he has asked to be deferred since becoming Minister of the Environment; and to detail the name and location of these applications.

(AQW 5215/10)

Minister of the Environment: In line with current procedures on Council consultation planning officials ask Council to provide a reason why an application should be deferred. It is the corporate view of the Council that determines if a deferral is sought, not the view of an individual Councillor. Planning Service therefore does not keep a record of which Councillor initially requests the deferral of a planning application.

Planning Applications

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the time taken to process planning applications.

(AQO 856/10)

Minister of the Environment: First, can I acknowledge and welcome the recent report prepared by the Public Accounts Committee on the Performance of the Planning Service and the contribution made by the Member to that report in his role as Chairperson of the Committee. The report highlights a number of problem areas within the Planning Service. I have recognised for some time the problems identified by the Report and have been seeking to tackle these since I came into office.

Over the past year there have been a number of positive trends in the performance of the Planning Service. Application processing times have continued to show improvement and I am pleased to say that the Agency is now meeting its 2011 Programme for Government targets for intermediate and minor applications. By the end of 2009 the Planning Service had achieved 46% Major; 78% Intermediate; and 82% Minor compared to 2007/08 where performance against these targets was 40%; 51%; and 60%. Indeed, 70% of Intermediate applications were processed in 25 weeks compared to 35 weeks in 2008/09 and 80% of Minor applications were processed in 17 weeks compared to 24 weeks in 2008/09. This is a considerable improvement and I am confident that it will continue.

There also has been steady improvement on timescales for processing major applications. The numbers of decisions issued (or withdrawn) continues to exceed the number of applications received building on a trend since 2007. The scheme of streamlined council consultation is now operating successfully in all 26 councils and means that one in three decisions is now issued in an average of 33 working days. Indeed, this scheme recently won a prestigious UK and Ireland Royal Town Planning Institute Award.

In addition, 21 Article 31 applications representing investment in the region of £500 million, together with a further 17 applications of economic significance, have been processed (to recommendation or decision) by the Strategic Projects Teams.

These are encouraging signs, but I recognise that there is still some way to go. One of my first responsibilities when I took up my post as Minister of the Environment in July 2009 was to secure Executive agreement to a consultation on extensive and far reaching proposals for complete reform and overhaul of the system. I am continuing to drive that reform agenda forward and I am glad say that the Executive agreed to the final policy proposals at last Thursday's Executive meeting. This will now allow us to move forward to draft the legislation required to give effect to the reforms and to the transfer of the majority of planning functions to local government. I intend to make a statement to the Assembly tomorrow to outline the final policy agreed by the Executive.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; and for his assessment of the effectiveness of the process for developing area plans.

(AQO 857/10)

Minister of the Environment: The BMAP Public Inquiry concluded in May 2008, and the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) is currently considering all the information before it prior to completing its report and making its recommendations to the Department.

The PAC has indicated a preliminary timescale for delivery of the report to Planning Service as early summer 2010. Upon receipt of the report, Planning Service will consider the recommendations of the PAC, and the Plan will then be prepared for adoption.

The date of adoption will be dependent on the date that the PAC Report is received, and on its content. However, upon receipt of the PAC Report I will consider any available options for expediting the adoption of BMAP.

In terms of my assessment of the process of developing area plans, I have already acknowledged, through Planning Reform, that there are a number of problems with the current process. I believe that it currently takes too long to prepare, amend and adopt plans and that they are no longer providing an effective enough planning framework for today's fast changing society. Of particular concern has been the independent examination/public inquiry stage of the process, which has resulted in significant delays to plans in recent years.

To address these issues and others I am committed to extensive reform of the overall planning system. One of the most fundamental aspects of this are proposals for a new local development plan system which will take account of both the transfer of functions under RPA and the need for a more streamlined and effective plan system. The new local development plan system will be designed to speed up the plan preparation process, ensure more effective participation from the public and other key stakeholders early in the plan preparation process, and provide a more flexible approach that is responsive to change and capable of faster review.

Planning Service

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the work of the Planning Service since he came to office.

(AQO 858/10)

Minister of the Environment: First, can I acknowledge and welcome the recent report prepared by the Public Accounts Committee on the Performance of the Planning Service and the contribution made by the Member to that report in his role as Chairperson of the Committee. The report highlights a number of problem areas within the Planning Service. I have recognised for some time the problems identified by the Report and have been seeking to tackle these since I came into office.

Over the past year there have been a number of positive trends in the performance of the Planning Service. Application processing times have continued to show improvement and I am pleased to say that the Agency is now meeting its 2011 Programme for Government targets for intermediate and minor applications. By the end of 2009 the Planning Service had achieved 46% Major; 78% Intermediate; and 82% Minor compared to 2007/08 where performance against these targets was 40%; 51%; and 60%. Indeed, 70% of Intermediate applications were processed in 25 weeks compared to 35 weeks in 2008/09 and 80% of Minor applications were processed in 17 weeks compared to 24 weeks in 2008/09. This is a considerable improvement and I am confident that it will continue.

There also has been steady improvement on timescales for processing major applications. The numbers of decisions issued (or withdrawn) continues to exceed the number of applications received building on a trend since 2007. The scheme of streamlined council consultation is now operating successfully in all 26 councils and means that one in three decisions is now issued in an average of 33 working days. Indeed, this scheme recently won a prestigious UK and Ireland Royal Town Planning Institute Award.

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These are encouraging signs, but I recognise that there is still some way to go. One of my first responsibilities when I took up my post as Minister of the Environment in July 2009 was to secure Executive agreement to a consultation on extensive and far reaching proposals for complete reform and overhaul of the system. I am continuing to drive that reform agenda forward and I am glad say that the Executive agreed to the final policy proposals at last Thursday's Executive meeting. This will now allow us to move forward to draft the legislation required to give effect to the reforms and to the transfer of the majority of planning functions to local government. I intend to make a statement to the Assembly tomorrow to outline the final policy agreed by the Executive.

Road Safety: Legislation

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what legislation he plans to bring forward to improve road safety.

(AQO 859/10)

Minister of the Environment: There are a number of pieces of legislation both ongoing and planned which I will introduce to improve road safety in Northern Ireland.

I have a programme of subordinate legislation for the remainder of this Assembly term. This will include a suite of eight regulations to introduce a graduated fixed penalty and deposit scheme which will allow DVA to issue fixed penalty notices in respect of offences such as overloading, drivers' hours, tachograph records, driver licensing and vehicle excise duty. I will also be introducing regulations to improve the signage and lighting on school buses, to address road safety concerns particularly when children are getting on and off.

Following the recent passage through the Assembly of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 2010, I will be bringing forward a number of sets of Regulations to bring the new licensing regime into effect.

I will shortly be bringing forward a package of measures on drink driving. I will also be consulting on reform of the learner and R driver schemes and the introduction of a new system of graduated driver licensing the implementation of which would require legislative underpinning. I will also be consulting on a new road safety strategy which includes over 170 measures, some of which would require legislation.

DOE: Efficiency Savings

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his Department's efficiency savings under the Comprehensive Spending Review.

(AQO 860/10)

Minister of the Environment: As part of the CSR 2007 process, which covers the period 2008/09 to 2010/11, my Department's overall cash efficiency targets are £3.92m, £7.73m and £11.42m respectively.

In terms of progress my Department has met its efficiency target for 2008/09 and is on track to meet its efficiency targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Ringsend: Landfill Sites

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of the Environment if any discussions have taken place between his departmental officials and planners, and applicants for planning permission for three landfill sites in the Ringsend area; and for his assessment of the need for three landfill sites given increased recycling, landfill trends and region-wide waste management targets.

(AQO 861/10)

Minister of the Environment: There are three sites within the Ringsend area either currently the subject of a planning application or already in receipt of planning permission. They are known locally as Craigmore Landfill, Cam Road and Belraugh Road. I propose to deal with each in turn.

Craigmore Landfill is an approved landfill site and has been in operation since the mid 1970s. In 2005 three planning applications were submitted to Planning Service for consideration. These sought to upgrade the landfill such that it would be able to operate to current standards and to establish a waste transfer and materials recovery facility on the site. Planning permission was granted in all three cases. On 1 April 2008 the then Minister of the Environment met with local residents in relation to these proposals. In dealing with the planning applications my officials would have had an ongoing dialogue with the applicant and agents.

Cam Road is currently the subject of a planning application to develop a non-hazardous landfill facility. On 21 September 2009 I personally received separate delegations representing local residents and the applicant. This is an Article 31 major application and there have been regular meetings between planning officials and the applicant/agents.

Belraugh Road is the subject of a planning application for the development and operation of an inert landfill facility. Again my planning officials have had regular and ongoing discussions with the applicant/agents.

Waste management planning is a function of local government. The North West Waste Management Group has identified the Cam Road site as the preferred site to address their landfill needs into the future. The site at Belraugh Road is an application on behalf of a private operator designed to meet a specific need. Craigmore is already an approved facility. The current applications will be determined taking into account the relevant plan and policy provisions and all other material considerations. It would be inappropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of this process.

Tourism: Historic Sites

Mr S Neeson asked the Minister of the Environment what plans the Environment Agency has to make its historic sites more accessible to tourists.

(AQO 862/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is already engaged in a programme of upgrading signage, on-site interpretation and visitor facilities at many of the 190 historic monuments in State Care or Guardianship for which it is responsible.

Particular attention will be paid in the coming year to monuments which represent key tourist destinations within NITB signature project areas. These include Carrickfergus, Kinbane, Dunluce and Dundrum Castles, Inch and Grey Abbeys and Nendrum and Devenish Monastic Sites.

In the future NIEA plans to extend public access at Carrickfergus Castle to spaces currently closed to visitors, including the wall walk of the Norman Keep. The Agency also intends to extend car parking and improve traffic management at Dunluce Castle.

As resources become available NIEA plans to enhance the tourism value of the County Down Tower Houses by installing exhibitions.

NIEA will seek to acquire and develop public access to selected monuments with tourism potential where this is currently lacking, and to engage with community organisations over the opening and interpretation of smaller monuments of local interest.

Clean Neighbourhoods Bill

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment when the Clean Neighbourhoods Bill will be published for consultation.

(AQO 863/10)

Minister of the Environment: I am pleased to be able to announce that the consultation exercise on a draft Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill has been cleared by the Executive. I will be making a statement to the Assembly in the next few weeks.

DOE: Recruitment and Promotion

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment what effect the current moratorium on recruitment and promotion is having on his Department's ability to deliver an effective and improved service.

(AQO 864/10)

Minister of the Environment: Since the current embargo on recruitment and promotion in the General Service grades was introduced as recently as 10 February, it is not having any noticeable effect on the service my Department is delivering. I would assure members that my officials will continue to monitor the situation and take any necessary steps to ensure that the service DOE provides to the public is maintained to as high a level as practicable.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service Posts

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many new Civil Service posts have been created in each of the last five years, broken down by job title and grade.

(AQW 4208/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The information sought is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, for the purposes of monitoring the current and previous Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) periods (Budget 07 and CSR04 respectively) details of the new posts created over the past five years has been collated by Corporate HR, DFP. Details of the new posts created are set out in the table attached and where known, the job title and grade have been provided. The figures are shown on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis.

It should be noted that, in overall terms, during both the CSR 04 and Budget 07 period (to date) the overall number of FTE posts in the 11 Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments has reduced and this downward trend is expected to continue until the end of the Budget 07 period.

New Civil Service Posts created in the 11 Government Departments since 1 April 2005.

CSR 04 Period (1 April 2005 to 31 March 2008)				
Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DARD	22		1 Divisional Veterinary Officer 2 Veterinary Officers 7 Inspector Group1 12 Meat Inspector	Animal Testing for Dept of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
DCAL	7.5		1 Grade 7, 2.5 Deputy Principals (DP), 1 Staff Officer (SO), 1 Executive Officer 2 (EO2), 2 Administrative Officers(AO)	2012 Olympics

CSR 04 Period (1 April 2005 to 31 March 2008)				
Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DEL	83.5	Various: E01 Pathways to Work Team Leaders E02 Pathways to Work Personal Advisers AO Pathways to Work Admin Support.	E01 / E02 /AO	Pathways to Work
DETI	6	Trainee Health & Safety Officers. Gas Compliance Officers.	E01	New Work Pressures within Health and Safety ExecutiveNI
DFP	44 8		Various General Service grades AA - DP	Rates Collection Agency* Land Registry - increased work.
DOE	349		Various General Service and other grades	Driver and Vehicle Agency*, NI Environment Agency* and Planning Service* - includes non-NICS funded posts. Increased workload
DSD	68 30		Various administrative grades	Child Support Agency and Belfast Benefit Delivery Centre – increased work*, Pathways to Work
OFMDFM	8		Administrative grades	Crumlin Road Gaol, Records NI, NI Investment Strategy
Total	626			

Budget 07 period -to date. (1 April 2008 to date 1 January 2010)				
Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DCAL	19		1G7, 1 SO, 4 AO, 1AA, 12 Technical Grades – E01/2 equivalent	Transfer into the Department of the Fisheries Conservancy Board.
DEL	138	Various AO Job Search Officers and E02 Work Focused Adviser posts	AO / E02	Increased benefit uptake
DFP	28		Various administrative grades AA – DP	Transfer into the Department of procurement posts from Northern Ireland Office
DSD	212 197 13		Various administrative grades	Employment Support Allowance (decision still awaited as to the number of these posts which are temporary) Increased benefit uptake. New initiatives in Housing Directorate (fuel poverty).
DE	4	Programme Director Project Officer Finance Officer Admin Support	DP SO E02 AO	International Fund for Ireland (IFI) Education Programme*
Total	611			

Notes:

* Non-NI Block funded posts which are funded by receipts, GB Departments or other means.

Some of the new permanent posts created during the CSR 04 period have since ceased during the Budget 07 period.

FTE – Full Time equivalent

Advice Provided by Mr Paul Maguire QC

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 4452/10, (i) what guidelines or grounds he used to form the opinion that it would not be appropriate to publish details of the instructions sent to Senior Counsel; (ii) if he will publish the advice provided by Mr Paul Maguire QC on 3 February 2010; and (iii) what was the total fee paid to Mr Maguire.

(AQW 4806/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The relationship between legal adviser and client is based on confidentiality and this applies in government as in the private sphere. Confidentiality applies to protect the instructions sent to Counsel as well as the advice given by Counsel. The need for confidentiality is recognised by the Courts, by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and by the Freedom of Information Act.

I have no plans to publish the advice given by Senior Crown Counsel.

No fee note has been received from Counsel as yet.

Weber Shandwick

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

(AQW 4920/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department has not spent any money on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007

Transfer of Pensions

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the current arrangements for the transfer of pensions for public sector personnel leaving Northern Ireland to live in other parts of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 4953/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Individual pension schemes have arrangements for the transfer of pensions for public sector personnel leaving Northern Ireland to live in other parts of the United Kingdom to transfer their accrued pension benefits to any scheme in the United Kingdom.

These arrangements enable a transfer payment to be calculated by converting the value of the member's rights in each of the schemes to a current cash equivalent value using factors supplied by the scheme actuary. The receiving scheme then converts this to accrued benefits.

Civil Service Back Pay

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he intends to reconsider his decision not to award back pay to those civil servants who had retired before August 2008.

(AQW 4954/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I do not intend to reconsider the position of those civil servants who left or retired from the NICS before 1 August 2008, who are not eligible for inclusion in the NICS equal pay settlement.

Civil Service Back Pay

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if it is possible to consider the eligibility of retired civil servants for back pay on the basis of length of service.

(AQW 4955/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The terms of the NICS equal pay settlement have been agreed by the Executive and by NIPSA and there will be no further consideration of eligibility for those excluded from the terms of the settlement.

First Minister: Legal Opinion

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the remit of the QC who was appointed by the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a legal opinion on the conduct of the First Minister in relation to his wife's finances.

(AQO 847/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Departmental Solicitor instructed Senior Crown Counsel to provide legal advice in relation to the allegation in the Spotlight programme that the First Minister had acted in breach of the Ministerial Code, the Ministerial Code of Conduct and the Pledge of Office.

Lone Pensioners' Allowance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number and the total value of Lone Pensioners' Allowance awards made in the last financial year and in this financial year to date.

(AQW 5054/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As at 31 January 2010 there are 24,624 current awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance with a total value of £3,830,017.17

For the financial year ended 31 March 2009 there were 21,767 Lone Pensioner Allowance awards made with a total value of £2,994,541.53.

Severely or Profoundly Deaf Civil Service Staff

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people currently working in the Civil Service are severely or profoundly deaf; and how this figure compares to 2000.

(AQW 5073/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The NICS does not hold the information in the specific format requested, however, NICS equality monitoring data at January 2000 shows that 108 people had declared that they had a hearing impairment and in 2010 personnel records indicate that 145 staff have a hearing impairment.

It should be noted that this is a voluntary declaration by staff and it is possible that not all staff with a hearing impairment will have chosen to declare this. The information reported here can, therefore, only be considered to be an indication of the position.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Efficiency Plans

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's efficiency plans.

(AQW 3926/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The Department, as part of CSR2007, is tasked with delivering efficiency savings of 5% per annum over the period of the review. This cumulative 15% reduction in costs over the years 2008-2011 is approximately £5m recurrent. In addition the Department will have to fund its share of the equal pay settlement from 2010/11. This is expected to be around £0.5m per year, giving a total of some £5.5m by March 2011.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if any bid was received from the Western Health and Social Care Trust in the past three years for development of services or

facilities for people with a learning disability; (ii) to detail the funding sought and purposes set out in any such bids; and (iii) to provide details of any successful bids.

(AQW 4314/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Trusts have responsibility for the provision of services in Northern Ireland. Bidding for additional services is carried out on a regional basis as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The capital allocation process does not encompass a bidding process by Trusts to the Department. Capital projects are proposed by Trusts in conjunction with Commissioners based on identified need, highest priority and value for money. Allocations to the highest priority projects are made by the Minister taking account of financial constraints.

The table below details revenue bids made specifically by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for additional learning disability services and business cases received for learning disability capital schemes in the past 3 years.

ADDITIONAL REVENUE

Reason	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
Resettlement from LD hospitals	£750k	£235	-
Delayed discharges from hospital	-	£395k	-
Crisis intervention service	£175k	£90k	-
Adult day opportunities	£175k	£110k	£104k
Adult respite services	£44k	-	-
Children's and adult respite services	-	£80k	-
Domiciliary care	-	£80k	£100k
Allied health professional infrastructure	-	£40k	-
Advocacy services	-	£30k	-
RQIA requirements for residential respite	-	£200k	-

BIDS FOR CAPITAL SCHEMES

Scheme	Bid	Outcome
Replacement of Beltany Residential Respite Unit	£2.2m	Approved July 2009
Glenside Adult Training Centre (equipment)	£15k	Approved and £15k transferred in 2009
Omagh Local Hospital (which includes provision of specific Learning Disability services)	Under review	Under consideration

Management Costs Within the Health Service

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the total management costs within the Health Service during the current financial year; and how this figure compares to the 2006/07 financial year.

(AQW 4671/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The above information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Diabetes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address the statistic that three children are taken to A&E every week because of life threatening complications linked to diabetes.

(AQW 4678/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is extremely important that children diagnosed with diabetes in Northern Ireland have access to high quality diabetes care provided by the specialist paediatric diabetes teams. This enables children and their families to manage their condition effectively to minimise the risk of complications and emergency admissions to hospital. My Department, in partnership with the Department of Health and Children, is about to embark on a pilot project, a significant component of which will establish a Structured Education Programme targeted at children and adolescents with diabetes and their families. The pilot is being funded with a £1.6 million grant, secured from the EU INTERREG IVA Programme. It will be delivered on behalf of both Departments by Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT).

The programme is aimed at helping children and their families attain improved diabetes control and generally improve self-management of diabetes for this age group and prevent emergency hospital admissions.

Agenda for Change

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) former; and (ii) current Health Service staff have still to be paid arrears under Agenda for Change.

(AQW 4718/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Over 70,000 Health and Social Care staff have been paid their Agenda for Change arrears. There are 10,049 former employees and 121 (less than 1%) of the current Health and Social Care staff yet to receive arrears under Agenda for Change. Since April 2009 Agenda for Change arrears payments have been made to over 7,000 former staff and this process is continuing.

Health Service Dentists

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service dentists there are.

(AQW 4719/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures provided by Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation show that as at February 2010, there were 860 dentists registered to provide Health Service dental services in Northern Ireland.

Educating Children on Dental Care

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has a strategy in place to work with the Department of Education to educate school children on the importance of looking after their teeth.

(AQW 4720/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department's Oral Health Strategy, 2007, aims to improve the oral health of the Northern Ireland population and reduce inequalities in oral health within our community. The Strategy contains an entire section addressing the oral health of children and specifically makes some seven recommendations regarding the integration of oral health improvement into the education sector.

The Oral Health Strategy is available on the Departmental website: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/pgroups/dentalpubs.asp

Privately Run Residential Units and Foster Placements

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been placed in (i) privately run residential units; and (ii) privately funded foster placements, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4727/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is detailed below in Tables, 1 and 2 respectively. To avoid personal disclosure and to take account of the format in which some information was returned to the DHSSPS by Trusts, figures in Table 1 have been presented for the five year period from 2005 to 2010.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF CHILDREN PLACED IN PRIVATELY RUN RESIDENTIAL UNITS 2005/10

Year	2005/10
Number	39

Notes: 2005/10 relates to the period from 1 April 2005 to 22 Feb 2010. The information reported in Table 1, was provided by Health and Social Care Trusts, and has not been validated by the DHSSPS. The figure reported is a count of the number of children placed in privately run residential units. Multiple placements for the same child are counted once only.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF CHILDREN PLACED IN PUBLICLY FUNDED FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS WITH INDEPENDENT FOSTER CARE PROVIDERS 2005/06 TO 2009/10

Year	Number
2009/10	28
2008/09	36
2007/08	43
2006/07	35
2005/06	37

Notes: Yearly figures relate to the period ending 31 March, except 2009/10, which covers the period from 1 April 2009 to 22 Feb 2010. The information reported in Table 1, was provided by Health and Social Care Trusts, and has not been validated by the DHSSPS. The figures reported are a count of the number of children placed in publicly funded foster care placements with independent foster care providers. Multiple placements for the same child are counted once only.

Regional Guidance for Police Involvement in Residential Units

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current level of multi-disciplinary training that is available on the Regional Guidance for Police Involvement in Residential Units.

(AQW 4728/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following initial joint HSC/PSNI awareness/training sessions in each of the five Health and Social Care areas a number of training sessions have been carried out jointly by Trusts and PSNI personnel in their local areas. The guidance has also been referenced in Child Protection training sessions delivered to residential staff and to a broad multi-disciplinary audience.

In line with normal PSNI procedures the guidance is due to be reviewed to take into account lessons learnt during its initial operation which includes changes in police operational procedures as well as new approaches to sexual exploitation, abduction and the issue of bail conditions.

Once the review is complete the intention is that Trusts/PSNI personnel will re-run an improved awareness raising and joint training programme with the updated guidance.

Children and Young People in Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children and young people from Northern Ireland have been placed in (i) residential care; (ii) secure accommodation; and (iii) foster care placements in (a) Great Britain; and (b) the Republic of Ireland, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4729/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is detailed in Table 1. To avoid personal disclosure figures have been presented for the five year period from 2005/06 to 2009/10.

TABLE 1 NUMBERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM NORTHERN IRELAND PLACED IN RESIDENTIAL CARE, SECURE ACCOMMODATION AND FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND FROM 2005/06 TO 2009/10

	Residential Care		Secure Accommodation		Foster Care	
	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland
2005/06-2009/10	20	0	Less than 5	0	7	7

Notes: The five year period refers to 1 April 2005 to 22 February 2010. The information reported in Table 1 was provided by HSC Trusts and has not been validated by the DHSSPS. The figures reported are the numbers of children and young people in each placement type during the five year period, not the number of placements. Multiple placements for the same child or young person are counted once only within each placement type. Numbers less than five have been presented as 'Less than 5'

Umbilical Cord Blood

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the policy on the collection of umbilical cord blood for the purpose of (i) stem cell research; and (ii) stem cell transplant provision.

(AQW 4739/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Cord Blood Bank is a public cord blood bank, meaning that cord blood is donated by voluntary antenatal donors at the time

of delivery of their baby and banked for 'public' use. This means that it may be used for any patient worldwide who is in need of a stem cell transplant. All cords in the public bank are registered with the British Bone Marrow Registry (BBMR), which also registers the cords from the NHS Cord Blood Bank (formerly London Cord Blood Bank) and are available for international donor search. Registered cords are available for clinical transplantation, clinical trials and research use.

In addition, a smaller number of 'dedicated cords' are banked every year: these are cords that are donated for a specific patient. The patient is usually a sibling of the newborn and generally has an illness, which may require a stem cell transplant in the future, such as acute leukaemia.

Approximately 300 cord blood units are banked annually in Northern Ireland. All our cord blood donors undergo an in-depth health screen prior to acceptance as a donor and all cord blood is tested rigorously for any infective agents. At present (Feb 2010) there are approximately 1000 cord blood units banked in the Belfast Bank. Cord blood units are collected from Royal-Jubilee Maternity Hospital and Mater Infirmorum.

The cord blood bank is regulated and licensed by the Human Tissue Authority (HTA), which carries out frequent inspections.

NHS Cord Blood Bank

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether his Department has any targets which correspond with those set down for the NHS cord blood bank; (ii) if so, to detail those targets; and (iii) to outline any cooperation between the NHS cord blood bank and Northern Ireland facilities.

(AQW 4740/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At present there are two NHS 'public' cord banks in the UK – based in Bristol, and Belfast respectively. A public Cord Blood Bank in Scotland is currently in development. In addition, The Anthony Nolan Trust has recently set up a public cord bank and there are several 'private' cord blood banks in the UK.

The NHS Cord Blood Bank in Bristol, is the fourth largest in the world with 14,500 banked donations. By comparison, the Northern Ireland Cord Blood Bank has around 1000 cords. These cords are registered with the British Bone Marrow Registry (BBMR) and are available to Transplant Centres worldwide. NHSBT has announced their target of 20,000 banked units by 2013.

The Northern Ireland Cord Blood Bank has indicated to NHSBT / BBMR that it wishes to contribute to the planned strategic review of cord blood banking in the UK. As one of currently only two NHS Cord Blood Banks in the UK, they have an important role to play in the continued provision of cord blood units for transplantation, and will be working closely with the strategic review to shape the future of the Northern Ireland Cord Blood Bank.

Multiple Sclerosis Respite in Dalriada Hospital

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many of the 12 beds for Multiple Sclerosis respite in Dalriada Hospital will be withdrawn in 2010/11 or 2011/12.

(AQW 4741/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Although none of the 12 beds will be withdrawn within the 2009/10 year the Northern Trust is currently negotiating with the Health and Social Care Board as service commissioners to determine the number of these beds which will be required in the future.

Waiting Time for Occupational Therapists

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently awaiting an assessment by an Occupational Therapist; and the average and longest waiting times.

(AQW 4742/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

Cataract Surgery

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently awaiting cataract surgery; and the average and longest waiting times.

(AQW 4744/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people waiting for cataract surgery, at 30th September 2009, the most recent quarter for which official data are available, was 2,133. The average number of days waiting was 55 days, and the longest waiting time was 253 days.

Respite Care

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress is being made on the expansion of respite care.

(AQW 4745/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Targets for respite care were set under my Priorities for Action 2008-2011. These included 200 new or enhanced learning disability respite packages providing 800 people with respite care; 200 new or enhanced physical and sensory disability respite packages providing a further 800 people with respite care; and 2000 additional dementia respite places. Work is underway to collate monitoring information to determine progress towards achieving these targets.

Ambulance Service Vehicles

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there will be an investigation to ascertain why a Northern Ireland Ambulance Service vehicle burst in to flames while transporting a patient to hospital; and if all other Ambulance Service vehicles from the same manufacturer will be checked.

(AQW 4754/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) is currently carrying out a full investigation into the cause of the fire which broke out in an ambulance vehicle on 14 February. When the investigation is completed, NIAS will consider its findings and, if necessary, carry out any checks required on similar vehicles in its fleet.

Accident and Emergency Department of the Causeway Hospital

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any offensive weapons were detected in the Accident and Emergency Department of the Causeway Hospital in the last year; and if so, what action was taken.

(AQW 4759/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the last year there were no offensive weapons detected in the Accident & Emergency Department of the Causeway Hospital.

Obesity

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to combat obesity.

(AQW 4761/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department, in partnership with the Public Health Agency and other key stakeholders, undertakes a range of actions at both the local and regional level to encourage people to eat a healthy diet and participate in regular physical activity. In addition a range of initiatives are also in place through Fit Futures to prevent obesity in children and young people.

My 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. It is anticipated that this Prevention Framework will be launched in 2010.

During 2009, the Health and Social Care Board has piloted a limited bariatric surgery scheme. Some 150 potential patients have been identified and pre-surgery assessment is almost complete.

GP Practices, through the Long-Term Condition Management Directed Enhanced Service, provide early detection and subsequent follow-up services for patients with a BMI greater than 30. This enhanced service includes follow up clinical tests and repeat weighing and includes a resource kit detailing information on local opportunities for sport, leisure, and quality physical activity.

H1N1 Virus and Influenza Virus

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of deaths as a result of the H1N1 virus; (ii) the number of deaths as a result of the influenza virus; (iii) the number of vaccines administered for the H1N1 virus; and (iv) the number of vaccines administered for the influenza virus, in 2009.

(AQW 4767/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As of 6 February 2010 in Northern Ireland:

- (i) there have been 18 deaths as a result of H1N1 (swine flu) virus;
- (ii) there have been 3 deaths as a result of the influenza virus (as of 31 December 2009);
- (iii) 326,648 H1N1 (swine flu) vaccines have been administered;
- (iv) 319,431 seasonal flu vaccines have been administered (by 30 November 2009, latest data available on 2009/2010 flu season)

Hip Replacement

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of a patient receiving a hip replacement in Northern Ireland compared to the cost of the patient being sent elsewhere in the UK for the operation.

(AQW 4776/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The estimated cost of a hip replacement in Northern Ireland is £6220.

The current estimated cost of sending a patient to elsewhere in the UK for the operation is £6,939

Interpreters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on interpreters in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4777/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the interpreting costs for the Health and Social Care Trusts for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	Northern Health & Social Care Trust	South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	Southern Health & Social Care Trust	Western Health & Social Care Trust	Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
2007/08	£171,322.07	£229,880.79	£62,070.69	£582,285.00	£140,752.44	£1,101.00
2008/09	£251,520.17	£240,919.88	£68,121.66	£609,834.92	£121,191.51	£830.00
Total	£422,842.24	£470,800.67	£130,192.35	£1,192,119.92	£261,943.95	£1,931.00

Information for 2006/07 is not readily available as it includes pre-RPA reorganisation and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Home Help Visits

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if the Western Health and Social Care Trust has instructed its home help staff to spend a maximum of thirty minutes per visit with elderly patients; (ii) if so, to outline the reasons for this instruction; and (iii) for his assessment of the impact on service provision to these patients, given that many visits require more than thirty minutes.

(AQW 4779/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust has advised that all clients are assessed using Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. Clients are assessed according to level of need/risk and are prioritised. Staff have not been instructed that visits can last no longer than thirty minutes. The length of visit is determined by each client's needs.

Brain Injury as a Result of a Road Traffic Accident

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been admitted to hospital with a brain injury as a result of a road traffic accident in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 4785/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available on the number of people who have been admitted to hospital with a brain injury as a result of a road traffic accident.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nursing or residential homes are currently in operation; and how this figure compares to ten years ago.

(AQW 4802/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 30 June 2009, there were 251 nursing homes and 301 residential homes in Northern Ireland. This is a small decrease from 31 March 2000, at which there were 262 nursing homes and 312 residential homes in Northern Ireland.

Waiting Times

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current average and longest waiting times for (i) speech and language; (ii) physiotherapy; and (iii) occupational therapy (a) assessment; and (b) treatment.

(AQW 4808/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

Swine Flu

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been admitted with swine flu to each hospital since 1 September 2009.

(AQW 4809/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people admitted to hospital in Northern Ireland between 1 September 2009 and 21 January 2010 via A&E with a clinical diagnosis of swine flu broken down by hospital is given in the table below:

Hospital	Number of Admissions to Hospital via A&E with a Clinical Diagnosis of Swine Flu
Belfast City	9
Mater	38
RBHSC	145
Royal Victoria	92
Antrim	82
Causeway	12
Mid Ulster	-
Whiteabbey	0
Ards Minor Injuries Unit	0
Bangor Minor Injuries Unit	0
Downe	10
Lagan Valley	27
Ulster	76
Armagh	-
Craigavon	121
Daisy Hill	26
Mullinure	0
South Tyrone	0
Altnagelvin	54
Erne	-
Tyrone County	0

Note: Data is confidential. Cells with a value between 1 and 4 are anonymised and represented by a dash in the table.

Fracture and Orthopaedic Wards of the Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what cover was in place in the fracture and orthopaedic wards of the Royal Victoria Hospital when all the relevant consultants were on annual leave over Christmas 2009.

(AQW 4830/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All the relevant consultants in Royal Victoria Hospital's Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) wards were not on annual leave over Christmas 2009.

Midwifery Vacancies

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the long-term and short-term midwifery vacancies in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4832/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested can be found in the Health & Social Care Vacancy Survey publication on the DHSSPS website at: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/work_force/stats-research.htm

High Dependency Unit in the Mid-Ulster Hospital

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are plans to close the high dependency unit in the Mid-Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 4833/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: When inpatient surgical services were removed from the Mid Ulster Hospital in November 2009, the high dependency unit was retained to support patients receiving medical care, particularly those with acute cardiac problems. In continuing to provide acute medical services at the Mid Ulster Hospital, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust will ensure that patients are able to access the appropriate level of care within the hospital, including coronary care.

In the longer term, when the Mid Ulster becomes a local hospital as set out in Developing Better Services, it is not expected that patients who are admitted will require high dependency or coronary care. Rather, those who require such specialised care will be referred to an acute hospital where they will be able to receive the level of care appropriate to their clinical needs.

Child Protection Register

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children on the Child Protection Register in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years, broken down by age and gender.

(AQW 4840/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is detailed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 NUMBERS OF CHILDREN ON THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER IN THE SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST, IN EACH OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS BY AGE AND GENDER

Age Band	Year							
	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Under 1 Year	13	12	11	6	12	7	11	10
1-4 years	33	25	32	35	30	26	40	37

Age Band	Year							
	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
5-11 years	35	25	39	42	44	40	63	45
12-15 years	24	19	18	25	38	40	46	62
All Ages	105	81	100	108	124	113	160	154

Notes: The source of this information is Community Return CPR1, which is collected annually from Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland. Table 1 details the numbers of children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March each year.

Final figures for 2009 are not available

Doctors and Nurses Sick Leave

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) doctors; and (ii) nurses are currently on paid or unpaid sick leave and have been for a period of six months or more. **(AQW 4844/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department does not collect the data requested broken down by 'paid and unpaid sick leave'.

Information relating to sickness absence is published on a bi-annual basis on the departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm.

Ambulance Fire Incident

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how an ambulance caught fire on the hard shoulder of the M2 on 14 February 2010. **(AQW 4845/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 4754/10 on 2 March 2010.

Incidents of Fires Starting on board Health Service Vehicles

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of recorded incidents of fires starting on board (i) ambulances; and (ii) other health service vehicles, in each of the last 10 years. **(AQW 4846/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised that details of incidents in the period 2000-2006 could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The number of incidents from 2006-2009 are shown in the table below.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
No. of Fire Incidents	2	1	1	1

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has recorded one incident of a vehicle fire in 2004.

Public Relations Services

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on public relations services from (i) PriceWaterhouseCoopers; (ii) KPMG; (iii) Deloitte; and (iv) Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

(AQW 4848/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has not commissioned any public relations services from the organisations named. No expenditure has therefore been incurred.

Domiciliary Care for Elderly People

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to withdraw domiciliary care for elderly people in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4865/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to withdraw domiciliary care for older people in the SHSCT area and care will continue to be provided in accordance with the Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care.

Waiting Times

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently awaiting assessment by (i) an occupational therapist; (ii) a physiotherapist; and (iii) a speech and language therapist.

(AQW 4866/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

Cuts to Home-care Services

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the concerns of local external charitable and private home-care providers who have been informed of upcoming cuts to home-care services by Health and Social Care Trusts; and if the Health Trusts will be making these cuts.

(AQW 4878/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC Trusts have advised that, while they continue to consider how best to ensure that services are delivered within available resources, there are no current plans to reduce the level of services purchased from the independent and voluntary sectors.

However, in line with the cuts that were voted through the Assembly which will have a severe impact upon available monies, I cannot guarantee that this sector will be exempt

Home Help Services

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the number of visits undertaken by private home-help providers; and (ii) the impact on the quality and availability of home help services.

(AQW 4884/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested. Home help services can be provided by a range of providers including the HSC, voluntary sector and domiciliary care agencies as one of a range of services they may choose to provide.

All domiciliary care services are monitored by RQIA against minimum standards to ensure that, regardless of the provider, they are of suitable quality. RQIA inspects against these standards for both statutory sector providers and independent sector providers. These standards include the provision of a written agreement between the provider and the service user which sets out the care and services to be provided and arrangements for reviewing the agreement. In addition to the standards, the HSC undertakes regular reviews of service users needs to ensure that services provided remain appropriate to those needs.

Private Home Help Firms

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department monitors the service delivery standards of private home help firms to ensure that client needs are fully met.

(AQW 4885/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested. Home help services can be provided by a range of providers including the HSC, voluntary sector and domiciliary care agencies as one of a range of services they may choose to provide.

All domiciliary care services are monitored by RQIA against minimum standards to ensure that, regardless of the provider, they are of suitable quality. RQIA inspects against these standards for both statutory sector providers and independent sector providers. These standards include the provision of a written agreement between the provider and the service user which sets out the care and services to be provided and arrangements for reviewing the agreement. In addition to the standards, the HSC undertakes regular reviews of service users needs to ensure that services provided remain appropriate to those needs.

People Registered as Blind

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently registered as blind; and what percentage of these people are of pensionable age.

(AQW 4886/10)

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 (HSC) Trust. The information provided by the five HSC Trusts is detailed in the table below.

Persons Registered as Blind in HSC Trusts at 19th February 2010¹

HSC Trust	Aged under 65		Aged 65 and over		All persons	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Belfast	299	26	871	74	1170	100
Northern	384	33	781	67	1165	100
South Eastern	192	34	372	66	564	100
Southern	252	37	436	63	688	100
Western	236	45	284	55	520	100
Northern Ireland	1363	33	2744	67	4107	100

1 The information recorded by HSC Trusts is not a register of those blind, as people may refuse to have their names added to relevant HSC Trust records.

Blind Persons

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many blind persons are dependent on a weekly allowance to enable them to pay someone to read their confidential correspondence; and for his assessment of this situation with respect to their right to privacy, independent living and the right to read.

(AQW 4887/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently no people known to be dependent on a specific weekly allowance to enable them to pay someone to read their confidential correspondence. However, individuals in receipt of Direct Payments may choose to use this to appoint a personal assistant, who would assist with a number of tasks as per the individual's assessed need, including the reading of confidential mail. Three people are known to use their Direct Payment in this way. Individuals may also apply for Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, but as it is the client's individual choice as to how they choose to spend this money, it is not possible to estimate how many use it in this way. In other instances, service users may ask a social worker, carer, family member or voluntary organisation involved with them to read their mail.

Heart Operation Costs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average cost of a heart operation compared to the rest of UK and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 4888/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The most frequently performed heart operation in Northern Ireland is the coronary artery bypass graft.

The estimated average cost of a planned coronary bypass in Northern Ireland is £10,196. This does not include the cost of any coronary intensive care.

From English published reference costs the estimated average cost of a planned coronary bypass in England is £9,103. This does not include the cost of any coronary intensive care.

Please note - comparing the costs above in isolation can be misleading as clinical pathways may vary.

A comparable average cost of coronary bypass surgery in other UK regions and the Republic of Ireland is not available.

Transfer of Switchboard Services to Antrim Area Hospital

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) the cost of the transfer of switchboard services from the Mid-Ulster and Whiteabbey Hospitals to the Antrim Area Hospital will cost; (ii) when this transfer will take place; (iii) if staff at Antrim Area Hospital will be asked to take on any extra duties as a result; and (iv) to detail which staff and duties this will include.

(AQW 4904/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the total cost for this project, which is scheduled to take place before the end of June 2010, is £240,000. Included in this project are alarm upgrades, paging upgrades and improved contingency arrangements for the Northern Trust.

At this stage, it is not envisaged that staff at Antrim Area Hospital will be asked to take on additional duties. However if this does become necessary the Trust will work with the staff involved and ensure that all Human Resources policies and procedures are adhered to.

DHSSPS Planned Investment

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3530/10, to detail the Department's £680m of planned investment.

(AQW 4907/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I was allocated £728m under Budget 2008 despite a bid for £1.1 billion. As a result of the economic downturn and the resultant fall in income from disposal of assets my budget has reduced to £680m. The impact of Swine Flu and service pressures alongside proposed cuts of almost £22m in 2010/11 will further reduce my CSR capital budget to £626m – this is a reduction of over £100m from the original 2008 budget allocation.

The funding is needed to meet contractual commitments across the HSC and NIFRS sector – new buildings, fleet, ICT and equipment.

Inquiry into Child Abuse

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to explore the feasibility of establishing an inquiry into child abuse following the Assembly motion passed on 2 November 2009.

(AQW 4911/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Any decision to establish an inquiry into historical child abuse in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Executive as a whole.

My officials are finalising an options paper which will help the Executive to decide the way ahead on historical child abuse within Northern Ireland and have consulted with other Departments, including the two other key Departments and Ministers with specific current and historical responsibilities for institutions in Northern Ireland similar to those covered by the Ryan Report.

I am awaiting a response to a number of issues from the Minister of one of these key Departments.

Health Service Charity Accounts

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the proposed consolidation of health service charity accounts.

(AQW 4912/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware that under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) that International Accounting Standard (IAS) 27 requires consolidation of accounts where one body has a measure of control over another. Applying this to Charitable Trust Fund (CTF) accounts within Trusts and other health bodies, would mean that one consolidated account would need to be prepared where Trust staff act as trustees of the CTF. I am concerned this could lead to a loss of independence for CTF if their assets are consolidated with Trusts assets.

However Treasury/DFP are also aware of the issues particularly relating to the independence of CTFs, and on 5 February 2010 they deferred implementing this standard within the public sector for another year to enable a review of the NHS charities in the context of the government accounting framework. I await the outcome of this review.

Fragility Fracture Working Group

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to implement the nine recommendations made in the 'Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures

in Northern Ireland' report of the Fragility Fracture Working Group; and if he will involve the National Osteoporosis Society in implementing these recommendations.

(AQW 4913/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would very much want to see this important work taken forward quickly however progress towards the implementation of the report recommendations will be dependent upon the availability of adequate service development monies in 2010/11.

The health service is faced with delivering £700m of existing efficiencies and a 9% increase in demand along with a further proposed budget reduction of over £113m. If implemented, this would take my Department's settlement to a meagre 0.3% above general inflation in 2010/11 – effectively a stand-still budget with the consequence that the opportunities to progress service improvements such as those recommended in the Fragility Fracture Working Group report will be severely limited.

Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network has any plans to produce updated guidelines for the management of osteoporosis and fragility structures.

(AQW 4914/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed that this question refers to guidelines for the management of osteoporosis and fragility fractures.

My Department has established a formal link with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) under which all guidance published by the Institute from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to the HSC.

The Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network (GAIN) does not produce guidance where NICE has undertaken this work or is known to be undertaking work on a specific area of guidance. I am advised that NICE has announced its intention to re-start their guideline development on osteoporosis. GAIN therefore has no current plans to update its previous guidance ahead of this work to be undertaken by NICE.

National Hip Fracture Database

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to ensure that all hospitals treating fracture patients register with, and provide information to, the National Hip Fracture database.

(AQW 4915/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All trusts treating fracture patients in Northern Ireland are committed to submitting data to the National Hip Fracture database (NHFD). Presently two trusts provide data to the NHFD. The remaining trusts have submitted business cases to the HSC Board to allow their participation in the NHFD. The HSC Board expects to make a decision on taking these business cases forward in April.

Good Bone Health

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to encourage adults to gain sufficient amounts of vitamin D during the summer months, to promote good bone health.

(AQW 4916/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Vitamin D is necessary to build and maintain bone density. During the summer months, most people produce sufficient vitamin D in their bodies through normal daily exposure to sunlight. However certain groups, for example older people, may be

lacking in vitamin D and will need to seek medical advice in order to increase their levels through diet or supplements.

My Department is developing a new Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy which will be issued for public consultation later this year. The new strategy will focus primarily on the dangers of excess exposure to UV radiation in relation to skin cancer. The strategy will also highlight the importance of vitamin D for healthy bones and identify groups that are “at risk” of vitamin D deficiency.

Primary Medical Services (Direct Enhanced Services) Directive (NI) 2008 Scheme

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Primary Medical Services (Direct Enhanced Services) Directive (Northern Ireland) 2008 Scheme on osteoporosis and the secondary prevention of fractures, in improving the management of osteoporosis and fragility fractures.
(AQW 4917/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The 3 year Directed Enhanced Service (DES), for the identification, assessment and treatment of osteoporosis among older people who have already suffered a fragility fracture, came into operation in September 2008.

The effectiveness of the DES in preventing fractures cannot be properly assessed over such a short period of time as it is only 15 months since patient assessment commenced. Data on success rates will be readily available once the service becomes more established.

An in-depth review by the Health and Social Care Board of referrals to secondary care across N Ireland for DEXA scans on bone density noted a rise in referrals from GPs. This would suggest GPs are implementing the specification as directed.

Victims of Institutional and Clerical Abuse

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to (i) uphold the rights of victims of institutional and clerical abuse; (ii) seek redress on their behalf; and (iii) ensure they have full access to justice.
(AQW 4936/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is for the Executive as a whole to decide on a way ahead in relation to historical child abuse and subsequent compensation arrangements in Northern Ireland. My officials are finalising an options paper to help inform their decision.

Victims of abuse can seek compensation through the Northern Ireland Compensation Agency. They are also free to pursue civil action against the individual or organisation involved. It will be for the Executive to determine in conjunction with the Secretary of State what arrangements should be made.

Within Northern Ireland, the statutory framework requires that where allegations of child abuse come to light these must be reported immediately to the PSNI for investigation. I would strongly encourage anyone who has such information to report this immediately to the PSNI so that it can be investigated and, where appropriate, the perpetrators can be brought before the courts. This will ensure that perpetrators are dealt with justly and appropriately and that other potential victims can be protected from those individuals who are still alive and may continue to pose a risk.

Public Health Agency

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the initial start up costs; and (ii) the projected annual running costs of the Public Health Agency.
(AQW 4945/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to separately identify any expenditure related to starting up the PHA without disproportionate effort.

The projected annual running costs of the Public Health Agency in 2009/10 are £17.9m.

Purchase of Stand Alone Scanners for People with Blindness

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Insight Trust for the Blind has been dissolved, if he has any plans to provide non-means tested funding to assist economically inactive blind people and blind people who are not in education with the purchase of stand alone scanners.

(AQW 4952/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no such plans. Health and Social Care Trust Sensory Support Services provide specific services and support for people on the basis of assessed need, which may include access to aids and equipment. In addition, charitable organisations, such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Belfast Association for the Blind, and Gardner's Trust for the Blind, can also assist people with a visual impairment to secure stand alone scanners. Health and Social Care Trusts provide advice and support to service users in making applications for such financial assistance. Furthermore, work is already underway to establish the range of sensory equipment available across the HSC sector to help inform the development of a regional equipment policy.

Accident and Emergency Department at the Causeway Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he can confirm that the future of the Accident and Emergency department at the Causeway Hospital is secure.

(AQW 4960/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to change the provision of Accident and Emergency services at the Causeway Hospital.

Neuro-Physiotherapist at the Causeway or Altnagelvin Hospitals

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is a neuro-physiotherapist based at the Causeway or Altnagelvin Hospitals to treat people with Multiple Sclerosis on a regular basis; or whether he has any plans to provide such a service.

(AQW 4962/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no dedicated Multiple Sclerosis (MS) service provided by neuro-physiotherapists at either hospital. All physiotherapists have the range of knowledge and skills required to delivery physiotherapy services to MS patients and the needs of this client group are met from within the general physiotherapy service resource.

I am committed to ensuring that the health and social care needs of people with MS are met. Any development of a specialised service for MS sufferers is a matter the Health and Social Care Board may wish to consider in light of an assessment of population need and in the context of competing priorities.

Allegations of Ill-treatment of Patients

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there have been any allegations of ill-treatment of patients made against staff from private care companies contracted by the Southern Health Care Trust in the last two years.

(AQW 4988/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There have been 15 such allegations of ill treatment across all programmes of care within the Southern HSC Trust in the last two years in respect of patients cared for in their own home and in respite or residential homes.

Early Years Funding

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the decision by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to reduce its funding to Early Years by 45% for the delivery of early years support and administration to pre-school, daycare and parent and toddler service providers, (i) what consultation was carried out with key stakeholders prior to making this decision; (ii) for his assessment of the impact the cut will have on the provision of these services; and (iii) what consideration was given to Early Years' proposal, made at a meeting with the Trust in September, of a 10% cut, with the organisation subsidising the cut through its own resources.

(AQW 5198/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: (i) The Early Years Teams within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and the District Childcare Co-ordinators for Early Years are satisfied that they have received appropriate feedback views of providers on the support received from the Early Years Organisation.

(ii) The BHSCT does not believe the reduction will have an adverse impact on the provision of services as the number of playgroups using this service has significantly declined.

(iii) The BHSCT gave due consideration of the proposed 10 % cut; however, the new funding level has been set to provide the level of service the Trust has identified to ensure the service is provided and delivered in the most efficient manner.

Safeguarding and Protecting Children

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the five work streams involved in safeguarding and protecting children, established following the North-South Ministerial Council meeting on 20 June 2008.

(AQW 5217/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cross border officials group continues to oversee the:

- development of a joint protocol to deal with children in care or on the child protection register who move between jurisdictions;
- development of a joint communications strategy and communiqué along with advice and guidance material for parents/carers and employers;
- exchange of information on initiatives around internet safety;
- establishment of the North-South Child Protection Network: an internet database which brings together all child protection research in Ireland and the UK, all published policy, inquiry and guidance documents as well as all child protection related news items; and
- sharing of information and learning on developments in relation to Vetting and Barring within respective jurisdictions.

Department for Regional Development

Ulsterbus Comber Town Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers travelled on the Ulsterbus Comber Town service in each year since it was established, including this year to date.

(AQW 4751/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): The information cannot be provided in the format requested. However, the table below shows the number of passenger journeys made in each financial year.

Year	Service	Journeys
2003/04	311A & 311B	3587
2004/05	311A & 311B	3279
2005/06	n/a**	0
2006/07	n/a**	0
2007/08	311	1011
2008/09	311	1450
2009/10*	311	629

* 2009/10 – only covers from 30/03/2009 – 24/01/2010

** The service was withdrawn in 2006 and reintroduced as a single service in 2007

Commuter Travelcard and School Passes are not included.

Number of Vehicles Using Main Street, Limavady

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the change in the number of vehicles using Main Street, Limavady, in each year since the opening of the Limavady bypass.

(AQW 4782/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there have been no traffic counts conducted for Main Street, Limavady in recent years.

However there is a permanent traffic counting site located on the A2 Roe Bridge, on the western edge of Limavady town centre. Roads Service considers that the reduced traffic volumes at this location, since the opening of the Limavady bypass on 4 July 2003, are likely to be similar to those for Main Street, Limavady.

Details of the average annual daily traffic flows, recorded at this site, from 2002, the year prior to Limavady bypass opening to traffic, to 2007, the latest year for which figures are available, are provided in the table below:

Year	Vehicles	Decrease from 2002
2002	19,330	N/A
2003	16,150	- 3,180
2004	10,190	- 9,140
2005	10,010	- 9,320
2006	8,450	- 10,880

Year	Vehicles	Decrease from 2002
2007	10,480	- 8,850

Speed Management Policy

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the speed management policy being developed by his Department.

(AQW 4823/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has been developing a new local speed management policy for the North that closely follows those produced in Britain by the Department for Transport (DfT), Transport Scotland and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Roads Service has taken on board comments received during the public consultation that took place from 21 January to 17 April 2009, and also updated guidance from the DfT.

I hope to publish the final speed management policy document before the end of March 2010.

Roads in the East Antrim Constituency

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the roads in the East Antrim constituency that have had a road bond for (i) one year; (ii) two years; (iii) three years; and (iv) more than three years and to specify the number of years for those in the category (iv).

(AQW 4862/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of the roads in the East Antrim constituency that have had a road bond for one year, two years, three years and more than three years, are set out in the tables below:

Road Bond – 1 year Scheme

- Mill Brae, Larne
- Old Glenarm Road, Larne
- Cable Road, Whitehead
- Craiglands (phase 7), Carrickfergus
- Edenvale Avenue, Carrickfergus
- Larne Road, Carrickfergus
- Larne Road, Carrickfergus

Road Bond – 2 years Scheme

- Bay Road, Carnlough
- Cairncastle Road , Larne
- Cairncastle Road, Larne
- Oakdene, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Mullaghboy Heights, Islandmagee

- Meadowbank Farm, Jordanstown (phase 2)
- Mountpleasant Road, Jordanstown (phase 9)

**Road Bond – 3 years
Scheme**

- Loranville, Larne
- South of Island Road, Ballycarry
- Bay Road, Carnlough
- The Oaks, Larne
- Hawthorn Hollow, Larne
- Hawthorn Hollow, Larne
- Beechlands, Carnlough
- The Hamptons, Larne
- The Hamptons, Larne
- The Hamptons, Larne
- The Hamptons, Larne
- Forthill, Ballycarry
- Forthill, Ballycarry
- The Kiln, Larne
- Oakdene, Larne
- Oakdene, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Lindara, Larne
- Lindara Larne
- Croft Hill, Carnlough
- Drumahoe Manor, Larne
- Cloughlands Park, Carrickfergus
- Craiglands, Carrickfergus (phase 6)
- Woodburn Avenue, Carrickfergus (site at No 77)
- Upper Road, Greenisland
- Circular Road, Jordanstown

Road Bond – more than 3 years			
Scheme	No of years	Scheme	No of years
Weavers Court, Ballycarry	4	Bridewell Drive, Carrickfergus	6
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Farm Lodge (phase 4) Greenisland	6

Road Bond – more than 3 years			
Scheme	No of years	Scheme	No of years
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Glynn Park (phase 1) Carrickfergus	6
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Mountpleasant Road (Phase 9) Jordanstown	6
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Castleview Cottages, Glenarm	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Lindara, Larne	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Gorman Close, Greenisland (phase 5)	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Farm Lodge (phase 3) Greenisland	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Loughview Village (phase 1), Greenisland	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Loughview Village (phase 2), Greenisland	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Woodburn Avenue, Carrickfergus	7
Blackthorn Hollow, Larne	4	Lindara, Larne	8
Hawthorne Grove, Glynn	4	Gorman Close, Greenisland (phase 4)	8
Oakdene, Larne	4	Farm Lodge (phase 2) Greenisland	8
Oakdene, Larne	4	North Lodge Court, Carrickfergus	8
Oakdene, Larne	4	The Beeches, Larne	9
Hampton Manor, Larne	4	Hampton Manor, Larne	9
Farm Lodge (phase 5), Greenisland	4	Ballyloran Manor, Larne	9
Farm Lodge Park, Greenisland	4	Brackenridge, Sloefield Road, Carrickfergus	9
Loughview Village (phase 3), Greenisland	4	Gorman Close, Greenisland (phase 3)	10
Riverford, Slaughterford Road, Carrick	4	Farm Lodge (phase 1) ,Greenisland	10
Walnut Hollow, Larne	5	Loughview Terrace (phase 2), Greenisland	10

Road Bond – more than 3 years			
Scheme	No of years	Scheme	No of years
The Beeches, Larne	5	Swifts Quay (Maritime Area Phase 7), Carrickfergus	10
Lindara, Larne	5	Woodlawn, Woodburn Road, Carrick (phase 7)	10
Drumahoe Manor, Larne	5	Loughview Terrace (phase 1), Greenisland	11
Brooklands Gardens (phase 6), Whitehead	5	Riverbrook, Whitehead	12
Brooklands Gardens (phase 7), Whitehead	5	Swifts Quay (Maritime Area Phase 4), Carrickfergus	12
Gorman Close (The Close), Greenisland	5	Swifts Quay (Maritime Area Phase 5), Carrickfergus	12
Glynn Park (phase 2), Carrickfergus	5	Swifts Quay (Maritime Area Phase 3), Carrickfergus	13
Old Shore Court, Carrickfergus	5	Woodlawn, Woodburn Road, Carrick (phase 6)	13
Riverford, Slaughterford Road, Carrick	5	Cambridge Close, Carrickfergus	14
Hampton Manor, Larne	6	Gorman Close, Greenisland (phase 2)	14
Lindara, Larne	6	Gorman Close, Greenisland (phase 1)	15
Croft Hill, Carnlough	6	Swifts Quay (Maritime Area Phase 1), Carrickfergus	18

Road-bridge over the A1 Linking Sheepbridge Road and Corcreechy Road

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development when the new road-bridge over the A1 linking Sheepbridge Road and Corcreechy Road is due to open.

(AQW 4874/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the new road-bridge over the A1 linking Sheepbridge Road and Corcreechy Road is being constructed as part of the A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dual carriageway scheme.

Lagan Ferrovial, the Construction Contractor, has advised that the laying of the wearing course cannot be undertaken due to the current cold weather. However, once this surfacing has been completed the bridge and link road will be made available to traffic.

Roads Service Staff

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Roads Service staff have been attacked in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4891/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is aware of 9 attacks on Roads Service staff over the last 5 years as shown in the table below.

Year	Number of Incidents (*)
2005/06	1
2006/07	0
2007/08	1
2008/09	3
2009/10	4
Total	9

(*) figures do not include attacks on Roads Service vehicles.

Survey of the Comber Greenway

Mrs N Long asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the terms of reference for McAdam Design in relation to its survey of the Comber Greenway.

(AQW 4893/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As part of its ongoing assessment of the route options for EWAY, Rapid Transit Division require an accurate topographical survey of the possible route alignments. Due to the limited land and road space available, there is a need to determine the likely impact of a public transport / rapid transit corridor on existing land use. Therefore, accurate topographical information regarding existing ground levels, carriageway geometry and location of street furniture is required.

McAdam Design was awarded the commission through DFP Central Procurement Directorate's 'Consultancy Framework Agreement'.

In summary, the Terms of Reference were

- The project objective is to provide information to enable Rapid Transit Division to assess the feasibility of a dedicated rapid transit bus network.
- The end product Rapid Transit Division requires is an accurate topographical survey as indicated on accompanying drawings. This involves processing of survey data, producing the specified survey report and survey data, 2D and 3D CAD drawings of the ground model plan, long sections and cross sections of the roads in the survey areas.

There is a detailed Survey Specification for the commission a copy of which will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Irish Language Lessons

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for his assessment of the benefits for the general public of his Department paying for Irish Language lessons from his departmental budget; and (ii) how many telephone calls his Department has received from people who can only speak Irish.

(AQW 4925/10)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) The Irish language classes held in my Department will help to fulfil commitments under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. One of the objectives of the Charter is the facilitation and encouragement of the use of regional and minority languages in speech and writing in public and private life. The classes therefore have general cultural heritage benefits. There will also be practical benefits, as staff can use the skills they acquire to help the Department fulfil additional European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages commitments.
- (ii) My officials do not usually ask callers who wish to speak in Irish whether they also speak English.

William Street Car Park

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department has received a request from the Department for Social Development to transfer the William Street car park for development purposes.

(AQW 4961/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that officials met with their counterparts in the Department for Social Development to discuss arrangements for the transfer of William Street car park. However, as yet, a formal request to transfer this car park has not been received by Roads Service.

Enterprise Rail Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) pursuant to AQW 967/10 and AQW 968/10 to detail the final passenger and revenue figures relating to the loss of income on the Enterprise service since the collapse of the Malahide railway duct; and (ii) to provide an update on initiatives to encourage passengers back onto the Enterprise service.

(AQW 4974/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information for passenger journeys and revenue on the Enterprise service over the last four years.

Period 6 started on 24/08/09 and period 10 ended on 24/01/10	Passenger Journeys	Revenue (£)
2006/07 Periods 6-10	372,949	2,616,289
2007/08 Periods 6-10	362,429	2,652,866
2008/09 Periods 6-10	332,359	2,710,175
2009/10 Periods 6-10	249,826	1,528,350

A series of discount fare offers were made available by Iarnród Éireann and Translink to encourage passengers back on to the Enterprise service. The initial discount fares offer lasted until 3 January 2010 and aimed to entice passengers back to the service. Passenger miles increased by 240% from November to December, although this may have partially reflected the Christmas period. Given the success of this scheme a further fares discount scheme was introduced to run from 4 January to the end of February.

Translink and Iarnród Éireann are proposing to continue to offer discounted fares from 1 March. The proposed station fares from 1 March are 15% off the standard fares compared to the current promotion offering 25% off. The pre-Christmas offer provided a 50% discount on station fares. The proposed web fares will continue to be priced between £10 and £20 for a day return. It is also proposed to extend the web offers to cover a greater range of services and to include monthly Enterprise Class returns.

The above promotions are advertised heavily on line and through traditional advertising media.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by his Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities other than the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.
(AQW 4976/10)

Minister for Regional Development: All of my Department's Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) are carried out in accordance with the Department's Equality Scheme and the Equality Commission Guidance for Implementing Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As part of the EQIA process, for each policy under consideration a full assessment of impacts is carried out for all nine Section 75 categories. The categories include persons of religious belief, political opinion and racial group. In addition, consideration is given in all EQIAs to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

The Section 75 categories for religious belief, racial group and political opinion cover a wide range of religions and racial groups and all political parties.

Road Surfaces

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has plans to repair the road surfaces of (i) the Shore Road; (ii) the Drumenny Road; (iii) the Ballinderry Bridge Road; and (iv) the Coagh Road in the Cookstown District.
(AQW 4994/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that remedial repair works are ongoing on the Shore Road and Ballinderry Bridge Road.

I am also advised that resurfacing work will take place within the next few weeks on the Drumenny Road between the Mullan Road and Derrychrin Road junctions.

With regard to the Coagh Road, resurfacing work commenced on the Urban Road, Coagh during the week beginning 22 February 2010. Resurfacing of further stretches of the Coagh Road has been deferred until summer 2010 to allow NI Water to install apparatus. Some localised patching has also taken place on the Coagh Road, in the last few weeks, at locations which have been prone to potholes.

Belfast to Larne Rail Line

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the annual passenger numbers on the Belfast to Larne rail line in each of the last three years; (ii) outline any initiatives to (a) encourage greater use of this sustainable mode of transport; and (b) ensure the availability and capacity of this service during the lifetime of the A2 Improvement Project.
(AQW 5029/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have provided the following information for passenger journeys on the Larne line:

2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
2,078,966 (projected estimate)	2,076,398	1,905,071	1,720,190

With respect to initiatives to promote rail use, Translink have indicated that they deliver a year-round programme of advertising and promotional activity to grow customer numbers targeted at the rail network overall and the Larne line in particular. This includes advertising, off-peak travel offers, summer/tourism travel offers and household mail drops of travel information/advertisements/trial

offers. In addition, travel by rail features in advertising and promotional campaigns through the year targeting students, school children, commuters and leisure travellers.

With respect to the A2 Improvement Project, subject to budget confirmation, this project is envisaged to be undertaken between 2011-2013. Translink have indicated their intention will be to keep the existing line fully open for the duration of the project and to increase existing service capacity where possible in line with any increase in passenger demand arising from the A2 Improvement project.

Traffic Calming Schemes

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the traffic calming schemes (i) implemented since May 2007; (ii) currently underway; and (iii) at the planning or consultation stage in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5060/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of traffic calming schemes completed by my Department's Roads Service in the South Belfast constituency since May 2007 are set out in the table below:

Traffic Calming Schemes implemented since May 2007	
Name of Scheme	Streets included in scheme
Lemberg Street	Lemberg Street, Maldon Street, Rydalmere Street, Empire Street, Richview Street, Connaught Street.
Ardenlee Avenue	Ardenlee Avenue, Ardenlee Parade, Haddington Gardens, Onslow Gardens, Shelbourne Road, Finsbury Street.
Lockview Road	Lockview Road, Lucerne Parade, Sharman Road, Richmond Park, Belvedere Park, Cricklewood Park, Knightsbridge Park, Bladon Drive, Deramore Drive.
Lenaghan Area	Lenaghan Park, Lenaghan Avenue, Lenaghan Crescent, Woodbreda Drive.
Maryville Park	Maryville Park, Myrtlefield Park.
Beechill Road	Beechill Road, Newtownbreda Road.

Roads Service has also advised that there are no traffic calming schemes underway at present but there are plans to complete schemes at Friendly Street, Beechill Road and Newtownbreda Road before the end of the current financial year.

Finally, details of those traffic calming schemes at the planning or consultation stage are set out in the table below:

Traffic Calming Schemes currently at the planning or consultation stage		
Finaghy Road North	Cairnshill Park	Wellington Park
Cranmore Park	Burnside Avenue	Wellington Park Avenue
Cranmore Avenue	Burnside Park	Wellington Park Terrace
Cranmore Gardens	Commons Brae	Eglantine Avenue
Osborne Park	Sicily Park	Eglantine Place
Osborne Gardens	Priory Park	Eglantine Gardens

Traffic Calming Schemes currently at the planning or consultation stage		
Bawnmore Road	Locksley Park	Malone Avenue
Osborne Drive	Wellesley Avenue	

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how many requests for the Door-to-Door service have been made by Lisburn residents in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5103/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The information is not available in the form requested.

Door-to-Door transport has been operating in the Lisburn area (which includes both Lisburn and Dunmurry) since May 2007 and only combined statistical data is available for the 2007/08 financial year.

However, I can confirm that there were 4,515 requests made by Lisburn residents during the financial year April 2008 – March 2009 and 4,565 requests during the period April 2008 – January 2010.

During the period May 2007 – March 2008 there were 907 requests made by residents of Lisburn and Dunmurry.

Repairing Potholes

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether the Roads Service has considered the effectiveness of using ‘Jetpatcher’ machines in repairing potholes on rural roads; and (ii) whether he intends to purchase any.

(AQW 5123/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department’s Roads Service has, for over a decade, considered the use of velocity patching to be an effective and economical means of repairing potholes on rural roads, given the appropriate subsurface and weather conditions.

Roads Service uses velocity patching machines, supplied by Velocity Ltd, formerly Jetpatcher UK Ltd, and currently operates a fleet of 17 vehicles. It has no plans to purchase any further machines, at this time.

Late Night Train Service from Belfast to Coleraine

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with Translink in relation to providing a late night train service from Belfast to Coleraine, given that the last train on Saturday currently departs at 21.10.

(AQW 5238/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have indicated that while it may be possible for NIR to run a later train out of Belfast to arrive in Coleraine around midnight they are of the view that such a service would not generate enough revenue to cover costs.

Existing budget constraints mean that NIR cannot bear a direct increase in operating costs without this being balanced by an equal or greater revenue benefit. Translink have also indicated that while no particular market research has been carried out to establish demand patterns for late night services, a review of the passenger loading profile, based on their experience of late night services on other lines, means that an equal or greater revenue benefit is unlikely to accrue at this time.

In the longer term Translink remains committed to further infrastructure developments on the entire Belfast-Derry line, including increased frequencies and passenger capacity on the line following completion of the New Trains Two programme and the Coleraine-Derry track re-lay. The new trains will be operational

in 2013 and at that time, subject to ongoing funding availability, Translink will be re-casting the entire timetable and may be in a better position to consider such a request.

Advertising Reduced Fares on the Enterprise

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4974/10, how much Translink has spent on advertising the reduced fares on the Enterprise since full service resumed.
(AQW 5262/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that they have spent a total of £50,000. This includes all production and media spend. The Enterprise recovery campaign, running from 21 November 2009 to 3 January 2010 cost £35,000. A further £15,000 was spent on the Enterprise fares promotion, running from January to March 2010.

Department for Social Development

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development if she will review the criteria used within the Warm Homes Scheme which precludes the upgrading of existing oil fired central heating in domestic properties.
(AQW 4841/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The new Warm Homes Scheme commenced on 1 July 2009 and I will review the scheme after it has been operational for one year to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development if the entire budget set aside for the implementation of the Warm Homes Scheme will be fully utilised this financial year.
(AQW 4842/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the financial year 2009/10, I made approximately £27 million available to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the Warm Homes Scheme and Fuel Poverty interventions in both the social and private housing sectors. At this time it is predicted that the £27 million allocation will be spent by the end of the financial year, £9 million of which will be spent on the Warm Homes Scheme.

Weber Shandwick

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has spent on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007.
(AQW 4919/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development has undertaken no expenditure on public relations services provided by Weber Shandwick since May 2007.

Kilkeel Town Centre Improvement

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the £1.2m Kilkeel town centre improvement, what she is doing to ensure that the town centre will remain welcoming to all sections of society; and if it is a condition of her spending plans that the town centre must present a neutral environment at every stage of the programme.
(AQW 4932/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department developed the Kilkeel town centre public realm scheme following significant public consultation with the local community, local businesses and statutory bodies. All parties are confident that this scheme will make Kilkeel more welcoming to visitors and that the entire community will be able to enjoy the shared space. My Department will oversee the delivery of the scheme to ensure that presenting a neutral environment is achieved throughout the programme.

Maintenance Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of Housing Executive rent goes back into the maintenance budget.

(AQW 4938/10)

Minister for Social Development: 48.6% of the Housing Executive's rental income was used for revenue maintenance expenditure in the financial year 2008/09.

Kilcooley Community Forum Offices

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what will happen to the funding for the Kilcooley Community Forum Offices if there are no community workers to keep the offices open.

(AQW 4939/10)

Minister for Social Development: The running costs of the Kilcooley Community Forum Offices and the salary costs of the community workers are funded through one project and are therefore interdependent.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive in North Down spent in securing Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in the last financial year.

(AQW 4940/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has not incurred any costs securing Anti Social Behaviour Orders in the North Down area in the last financial year.

Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme for the Kilcooley Estate

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what parts of the Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme for the Kilcooley Estate have yet to be completed.

(AQW 4941/10)

Minister for Social Development: The neighbourhood renewal strategy in Kilcooley is being progressed in line with the Kilcooley Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership's Vision Framework and 3 year rolling action plan for the regeneration of the estate. To date DSD funding of over £1,663,504 has been allocated to a range of projects emanating from the action plan with additional funding of £765,509 levered from other sources. The Partnership is shortly due to carry out its annual Action Plan review and project prioritisation exercise, which will determine its priorities for the next financial year and beyond.

Temporary and Agency Staff

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) temporary; and (ii) agency staff are currently employed by her Department.

(AQW 4963/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below provides the numbers of (i) temporary and (ii) agency staff employed in the Department as at 31 January 2010.

	Number of temporary staff employed at 31 January 2010	Number of Recruitment Agency staff employed at 31 January 2010	Total
Department for Social Development	227	57	284

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of recipients of jobseeker's Allowance who have been subject to sanctions because they have breached rules relating to this allowance; and (ii) the length of these sanctions, in each office area, in each of the last two years. **(AQW 4966/10)**

Minister for Social Development: The information is not routinely recorded in the format requested.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development how many people from Northern Ireland living outside the UK or Ireland received (i) the winter fuel allowance; and (ii) any of the recent cold weather payments.

(AQW 4968/10)

Minister for Social Development: Information on the number of people from Northern Ireland living outside the United Kingdom who receive a Winter Fuel Payment is not recorded separately. However approximately 64,000 pensioners from the United Kingdom living overseas received a payment in 2008/09.

No cold weather payments were made to non resident Northern Ireland customers as it is a condition of entitlement to a qualifying income related benefit that a customer must be resident in Northern Ireland and live within the postcode area where the cold weather period has been notified by the Met Office.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by her Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities outside the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 4979/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is fully committed to complying with the Section 75 obligations of the Northern Ireland Act. The Department, in accordance with Schedule 9 of the Act, has set out in an Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfil those obligations. The scheme details that the Department will carry out EQIA's in accordance with the seven steps set out in the Equality Commission's Guidance. In following these steps my Department ensures that any EQIA's carried out show due regard to the promotion equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, men and women generally, persons with a disability and persons without and persons with dependants and persons without and regard to the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Winter Fuel Payment

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if she has given any consideration to the extension of the Winter Fuel Payment to people under 60 years of age diagnosed with cancer ; and if she has lobbied, or intends to lobby, the British Government on this proposal.

(AQW 4985/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Winter Fuel Payment scheme provides help to people aged 60 and over. Older people are specifically targeted as they are acknowledged as being more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather during the winter months than other groups. People suffering from cancer or any other illness or disability who fall within this age group will benefit from the scheme.

There is a range of social security benefits available to people suffering from illness or disability including Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance.

Vandalism at Housing Executive-owned Traveller Sites

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of recorded incidents of vandalism at Housing Executive-owned traveller sites in each of the last five years; and the total amount of money spent repairing the damage caused by these acts of vandalism.

(AQW 4992/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive previously did not specifically record repairs and maintenance on Travellers sites as relating to incidents of vandalism. However, arrangements have now recently been put in place to record acts of vandalism on Travellers sites. One incident is recorded at an approximate cost of £20,000.

People in Receipt of Benefits

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to list the 50 electoral wards with the highest proportion of people in receipt of (i) Job Seekers Allowance; (ii) Disability Living Allowance; and (iii) Employment and Support Allowance.

(AQW 5007/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the table below. The percentages were calculated against the population eligible to be receiving the benefit. For Disability Living Allowance this was the entire population. For Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance this was calculated against the working age population.

Jobseekers Allowance		Employment & Support Allowance		Disability Living Allowance	
Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD
The Diamond	Derry	Duncairn	Belfast	Whiterock	Belfast
East	Strabane	Clonard	Belfast	Falls	Belfast
Strand (Derry)	Derry	Crumlin (Belfast)	Belfast	Crumlin (Belfast)	Belfast
Rosemount	Derry	Whiterock	Belfast	New Lodge	Belfast
Victoria (Derry)	Derry	Newhill	Ballymoney	Clonard	Belfast
Clonard	Belfast	Ballymacarrett	Belfast	Castlederg	Strabane
Falls	Belfast	Ballysaggart	Dungannon	Shankill	Belfast

Jobseekers Allowance		Employment & Support Allowance		Disability Living Allowance	
Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD
Creggan South	Derry	Termon	Omagh	Upper Springfield	Belfast
Dungiven	Limavady	Falls	Belfast	Shaftesbury	Belfast
Corcrair	Craigavon	Collin Glen	Lisburn	Ballymote	Down
Whiterock	Belfast	Callan Bridge	Armagh	Twinbrook	Lisburn
Shankill	Belfast	The Mount	Belfast	Coolnagard	Omagh
Greystone (Limavady)	Limavady	Shankill	Belfast	Brandywell	Derry
Glentaisie	Moyle	Water Works	Belfast	East	Strabane
Water Works	Belfast	The Diamond	Derry	Ardoyne	Belfast
Creggan Central	Derry	Drumgask	Craigavon	Duncairn	Belfast
Collin Glen	Lisburn	New Lodge	Belfast	The Mount	Belfast
Ballymote	Down	Victoria (Derry)	Derry	Drumgask	Craigavon
Callan Bridge	Armagh	Newbuildings	Cookstown	Ballymacarrett	Belfast
Upper Springfield	Belfast	Armoy	Moyle	Ballybot	Newry & Mourne
Ardoyne	Belfast	Moneymore	Cookstown	Court	Craigavon
Duncairn	Belfast	Dunanney	Newtownabbey	Shantallow East	Derry
Westland	Derry	Dundrum	Down	Drumnamoe	Craigavon
Woodvale	Belfast	Ardoyne	Belfast	Beechmount	Belfast
Newhill	Ballymoney	Carnany	Ballymoney	Glencolin	Belfast
North	Strabane	Woodvale	Belfast	Coalisland North	Dungannon

Jobseekers Allowance		Employment & Support Allowance		Disability Living Allowance	
Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD
Shaftesbury	Belfast	Sunnylands	Carrickfergus	Creggan South	Derry
The Mount	Belfast	Ballybay	Craigavon	Collin Glen	Lisburn
New Lodge	Belfast	Glentaisie	Moyle	Beechwood	Derry
Crumlin (Belfast)	Belfast	Northland	Carrickfergus	Glen Road	Belfast
Blackstaff	Belfast	Antiville	Larne	Taghnevan	Craigavon

Jobseekers Allowance		Employment & Support Allowance		Disability Living Allowance	
Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD	Ward	LGD
Armoy	Moyle	Washing Bay	Dungannon	Drumglass	Dungannon
Shantallow East	Derry	Moat	Ballymena	Westland	Derry
Beechmount	Belfast	Central (Coleraine)	Coleraine	Ardboe	Cookstown
Ballysaggart	Dungannon	Castlewellan	Down	Water Works	Belfast
Drumglass	Dungannon	Shaftesbury	Belfast	Camowen	Omagh
Bonamargy And Rathlin	Moyle	Gortalee	Carrickfergus	Gortrush	Omagh
Gortalee	Carrickfergus	Coolessan	Limavady	Woodvale	Belfast
Harbour (North Down)	North Down	Ardboe	Cookstown	Ballysaggart	Dungannon
Twinbrook	Lisburn	Castledawson	Magherafelt	The Diamond	Derry
Coolessan	Limavady	WeStland	Derry	Creggan Central	Derry
Bushmills	Moyle	Annagh	Craigavon	Kilwee	Lisburn
Dunanney	Newtownabbey	Forkhill	Newry & Mourne	Ladybrook	Belfast
Crevagh	Derry	Brandywell	Derry	Sion Mills	Strabane
Glencolin	Belfast	Moss-Side And Moyarget	Moyle	Andersonstown	Belfast
Coalisland South	Dungannon	Bellaghy	Magherafelt	Coalisland South	Dungannon
Creggan	Newry & Mourne	Derriaghy	Lisburn	Newhill	Ballymoney
Ballylough	Moyle	Dunclug	Ballymena	Crossmaglen	Newry & Mourne
Glencairn	Belfast	Woodstock	Belfast	Daisy Hill	NEwry & Mourne
Ballymacarrett	Belfast	Upper Glenshane	Limavady	Portavogie	Ards

StreetSafe Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what financial support her Department, or any of its agencies, provides for the StreetSafe Scheme.

(AQW 5025/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department does not provide any financial support to the Street Safe Scheme. The scheme is currently funded by the North Down Community Safety Partnership which, in turn, is funded through the Northern Ireland Office's Community Safety Strategy.

Social Housing Waiting List

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the social housing waiting list in each parliamentary constituency.

(AQW 5027/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate social housing waiting list information by parliamentary constituency. The table below details the social housing waiting list by Housing Executive District Office area as at 31 December 2009.

District Office	Housing Applicants
Belfast West	2429
Belfast East	1871
Belfast North	2356
Belfast Shankill	850
Belfast South	2239
Antrim	962
Ballycastle	350
Ballymena	1422
Ballymoney	420
Carrickfergus	962
Coleraine	1163
Larne	513
Newtownabbey 1	784
Newtownabbey 2	887
Armagh	742
Banbridge	642
Dungannon	868
Fermanagh	822
Lurgan	1050
Newry	1762
Portadown	677
Bangor	1887
Castlereagh	1334
Downpatrick	1229
Lisburn Antrim Street	1897
Dairy Farm	634
Newtownards	1641
Cookstown	384

District Office	Housing Applicants
Waterloo Place	861
Waterside	835
Collon Tce	788
Limavady	481
Magherafelt	482
Omagh	570
Strabane	501

Social Housing Newbuilds in the Lisburn City Council Area

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many of this years' proposed social housing new builds in the Lisburn City Council area are bungalows.

(AQW 5047/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are no bungalows within this year's programmed schemes in the Lisburn City Council area.

Housing Development at the Donaghadee Road

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development when the housing development by Connswater Housing Association at the Donaghadee Road, Newtownards will be completed.

(AQW 5080/10)

Minister for Social Development: The contract completion date for this scheme is 21 June 2010.

West Green Flats in Holywood

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development when a decision will be made on the future of the West Green flats in Holywood.

(AQW 5251/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has been working closely with the Housing Executive to identify a way forward for the West Green flats at Loughview in Holywood. A revised Economic Appraisal has now been completed and is currently under technical assessment within my Department. I expect to be able to make a formal announcement in the coming weeks.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Flags

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission to list the flags that are in the possession of the Assembly.

(AQW 4921/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The following flags are currently in the possession of the Assembly:

- 4 Union flags (of 2 different sizes)
- 1 Commonwealth flag

- 1 European Union flag
- 1 United States flag

Flags

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission how much the Assembly has spent on flags in its possession since 1998.

(AQW 4922/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly has spent £1031.65 on flags since 1998.

Statues Within Parliament Buildings

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission to list the number of statues of (i) Unionist politicians; and (ii) Nationalist/Republican politicians there are within Parliament Buildings and the Assembly grounds.

(AQW 4923/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission can confirm that;

- (i) There is a bronze statue of Lord Craigavon, by L.S. Merrifield of Chelsea, located on the Ceremonial Stairs in the Great Hall of Parliament Buildings.

In addition to this is Lord Craigavon's Tomb, which is a sarcophagus of dressed Portland stone, in the grounds of Parliament Buildings.

Although not within the grounds of Parliament Buildings there is also a Statue of Lord Carson, in bronze by L.S. Merrifield at the roundabout in the Stormont Estate.

- (ii) There are currently no statues of Nationalist/Republican politicians within Parliament Buildings and the Assembly grounds.

Parliament Buildings: Roof Leaks

Mr T Burns asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the leaks in the roof of Parliament Buildings; and the cost of any repairs carried out.

(AQW 4989/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): During the summer recess of 2009, Building Services carried out the most extensive repairs to the roof of Parliament Buildings since the building was refurbished in 1998. This work consisted mainly of patch repairs to the waterproof membrane on the top surface of the roof slab.

Persistent inclement weather following on from that highlighted further problem areas that are being addressed with a series of ongoing repairs.

The total value of these patch repairs to date is £26k.

Other issues identified, including repairs to the 'barn' style roof over Room 401 and replacement of the sealant along the parapet walls can only be addressed during a spell of calm dry weather. A work order has been written for this work, and it will be carried out at the first available opportunity. The estimated value of this work is £33k.

Parliament Buildings: Mobile Telecommunication Signal

Mr G Savage asked the Assembly Commission what action is being taken to improve the quality of the mobile telecommunication signal within Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 5276/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): Further to AQW 6049/09 and AQW 7591/09 the Assembly Commission can confirm that signal boosters have been installed for Orange, O2 and Vodafone networks. This work has resulted in enhanced network coverage for users on these networks in particular in the Basement area of Parliament Buildings. As there had been no further complaints in relation to the mobile phone reception, no additional works have been planned.

Due to the nature of Parliament Buildings, it is very difficult to ensure that there is effective network coverage in all areas and, as a listed building there are only certain areas that signal boosters can be installed to ensure that they do not adversely affect the aesthetics of the building.

David Lynn, the Building Services Manager, can be contacted on (028 905) 21346 to discuss any specific issues.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 12 March 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

StreetSafe Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what financial support their Department, or any of its agencies, provides for the StreetSafe Scheme.

(AQW 5024/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Neither OFMDFM through the Community Relations Unit nor the Community Relations Council provides financial support for the Street Safe Scheme.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by their Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities outside the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 5055/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: When conducting an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister adheres to The Guide to Statutory Duties, issued by the Equality Commission, which outlines the statutory arrangements under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The relevant categories include:

- persons of religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Whilst an EQIA must encompass and address all nine categories, it is not intended that each category will be given equal emphasis throughout the assessment process; instead the EQIA must be responsive to emerging issues and prioritise accordingly.

The measures included in the Equality Impact Assessment process require us to determine the extent of differential impact of a policy upon the nine groups. If it is decided that a policy has an adverse impact, we must consider measures which mitigate against adverse impact and alternative policies which might better promote equality of opportunity.

Religious belief and political opinion are categories intended to cover not only the two main traditions but other religions and political opinions. This ensures that adverse impacts of policy can be judged, as appropriate across, and therefore protect the interests of, a wider range of beliefs and opinions.

We continue to maintain close oversight of the commitments contained in our Equality Scheme. We have a responsibility to oversee the implementation of equality obligations throughout the devolved administration, and we have a particular interest in ensuring that our Office shows leadership in this regard.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money has been spent by their Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5086/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The table below details how much the department has spent on fees for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

The figures for 2009/10 represent expenditure to 31st December 2009 as per the latest nine-month Management Accounts for the Department.

Description	2007/08 (£'s)	2008/09 (£'s)	2009/10 (£'s)
Course Fees – inside NI	28,686	19,699	15,940
Course Fees – outside NI	9,119	9,630	8,268
Conference Fees – inside NI	14,210	37,311	8,273
Conference Fees – outside NI	374	12,269	5,504
Total	52,389	78,909	37,985

Travel and subsistence costs for staff attending conferences and courses in the last three years are not available as the accounting system does not record expenditure to this level of detail.

Community Relations Council

Mr J Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how much the Community Relations Council currently pays in whole, or in part, to fund local Council staff in (a) Lisburn City Council; (b) Banbridge District Council; (c) Antrim Borough Council; and (d) Castlereagh Borough Council; (ii) how many staff this involves in each area; (iii) to outline their respective job descriptions; and (iv) their pay bands.

(AQW 5093/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Community Relations Council does not directly fund posts in any District Council including (a) Lisburn City Council; (b) Banbridge District Council; (c) Antrim Borough Council; and (d) Castlereagh Borough Council.

Funding to Promote Good Relations in Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department to promote good relations in Belfast, broken down by the four Belfast constituencies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5247/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Information on detailed funding provided through the Community Relations Council, Belfast City Council and the North Belfast Community Action Unit has been placed in the Assembly Library. The following paragraphs are a summary of the information which has been placed in the Library.

OFMDFM funds a range of Community Relations bodies and groups. Funding for Belfast has been as follows:

- 07/08 £39k
- 08/09 £122k
- 09/10 £168k.

OFMDFM funds the Community Relations Council through grant in aid for it to disburse funding in accordance with its funding schemes guidelines. Total grant in aid provided over the last 3 years is as follows

- 07/08 £3.28m
- 08/09 £3.34m
- 09/10 £3.54m.

We also have a District Councils Community Relations Programme, with funding in each of the last 3 financial years as follows:

- 07/08 £1.97m
- 08/09 £2.53m
- 09/10 £2.7m.

Belfast City Council received funding from that Programme, as below, to undertake a range of good relations programmes which were predicated on a good relations strategy and independent good relations audit.

- 07/08 = £303k
- 08/09 = £452k
- 09/10 = £474k.

Funding to Promote Good Relations in Belfast

Mr G Adams asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department for projects working with young people to promote good relations in Belfast, broken down by the four Belfast constituencies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5256/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Information on detailed funding provided through the Community Relation Council, Belfast City Council and the North Belfast Community Action Unit has been placed in the Assembly Library but a summary is provided in the paragraphs below.

OFMDFM funds a range of Community Relations bodies and groups. Funding for Belfast has been as follows:

- 07/08 £39k
- 08/09 £122k
- 09/10 £168k.

OFMDFM has provided funding of £400k to the Department of Education in each of the last 3 financial years, for a range of youth summer diversionary programmes across all the 5 Library Boards. In 08/09 and 09/10 respectively, specific conditions were that £160k should be earmarked for Belfast with £40k of that total being targeted at North Belfast.

OFMDFM provides funding for a range of youth summer diversionary activities for Community Empowerment Partnerships in north Belfast of £100k in each of the last 3 financial years.

We also fund the Community Relations Council through grant in aid for it to disburse funding in accordance with its funding schemes guidelines. Total grant in aid over the last 3 years is as follows:

- 07/08 £3.28m
- 08/09 £3.34m
- 09/10 £3.54m.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Forestry and Woodland

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 4374/10, why 16,980 hectares of her Department's land is unsuitable for planting forestry or woodland.

(AQW 5040/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Department of Agriculture and Rural Development land is not just for the purposes of forestry. For example, we have specialist facilities at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and our three campuses at CAFRE.

There are many reasons for the Department's land being unsuitable for forestry production. Much the land owned or leased by Forest Service on long term leases could not be planted with trees due to unacceptable or unjustifiable environmental impacts. Such land includes those areas designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) etc. Other reasons for this land being unsuitable for planting trees include forest management and protection purposes (such as roads and firebreaks); recreation and landscaping reasons; and the maintenance of windfirm boundaries between forest blocks.

Other land is unsuitable for a variety of reasons including infrastructure (roads, car parks, yards, forest fire breaks, etc); buildings erected on it; for environmental reasons (e.g. Areas of Special Scientific Interest,); alternative usage for Departmental business (e.g. farmed land at CAFRE for educational purposes and recreational facilities such as playing fields etc); it may contain scheduled monuments; or is for sale.

'Invest to Save' Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what bids her Department has made in relation to the 'Invest to Save' initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5058/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Executive's Invest to Save fund is to be used to provide support to departments in respect of the upfront costs of making future savings.

My Department has tabled the following three bids in relation to the Executive's 'Invest to Save' initiative;

(a) Land Parcel Improvement (LPIS) Project

This will support the drive to better compliance with EC area aid scheme regulations and reduce the risk of Commission disallowance. The project will improve IT systems, maps, data quality, rules about eligibility of claims and standards of inspection. The overall cost is estimated at £14m and payback (measured in terms of a reduction in potential future EC disallowance) should be achieved in 2 years.

(b) CAFRE Enniskillen Campus Improvements

Construction of new learning facilities and to help ensure compliance with disability legislation at a cost of £1m will enable CAFRE to disengage from the Necarne Estate. There are net forecast savings of £0.16m per year.

(c) Badger Prevalence Study

The objective of the study is to provide a measure of both the level of Bovine TB infection in badgers and its geographical spread in order to (a) give a solid scientific basis about where best to target any future interventions and (b) provide baseline data to compare against the results of any interventions. The cost of the study is estimated at £2.5m over 2 years.

The Department is committed to fulfilling its statutory equality and good relations obligations across its business remit. It funds a wide range of projects through the NIRD many of which may help promote integration and impact on communal segregation. Bearing in mind that the total size of the “Spend to Save” fund is £26m and our top priority is a bid for £14m, the likelihood of additional successful bids from the Department is small. However, the Department felt it should bid for CAFRE and TB initiatives as these are related to issues raised by the Public Accounts Committee and are high priorities for the Department. Thus from a DARD perspective, it was felt these bids should take priority over other bids for initiatives such as those to ‘address communal segregation in service provisions and to promote integration’ at this time.

Rural stakeholders have also identified the cost of communal segregation in their contribution to the development of the Rural White Paper. My officials are currently working with other Departments to take forward this work and I hope to consult on a draft Rural White Paper later this year.

2012 Welfare for Laying Hens Directive

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact of the 2012 Welfare for Laying Hens Directive on the poultry industry; and what assistance her Department is offering to those businesses that will be significantly impacted by this Directive.
(AQW 5078/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Council Directive 99/74 lays down standards for the welfare of laying hens. From January 2003, the Directive has banned the use of new conventional or “battery” cages, and from January 2012, it bans the keeping of hens in existing conventional cages. I understand that approximately 73% of egg producers are already using enriched production systems which accounts for approximately 40 % of birds in egg production. Approximately 27% of egg producers are still using conventional cage systems, which accounts for approximately 60% of the birds in egg production.

I am very appreciative of the difficulties facing the egg laying sector and the poultry sector generally at this time. Following discussions with the industry, I have looked widely at all options that would be available under the Rural Development Programme to support modernisation in the poultry sector.

I would draw your attention to the funding that will be available to poultry producers under the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP) Tranche 2. In order that Tranche 2 will provide a good funding opportunity for poultry producers, I have asked that the list of eligible items be enhanced so that it includes a range of items that together will create a system that will meet the needs of poultry producers. The items will include plant, machinery and equipment; and other items that could contribute to modernising production systems for poultry producers. The proposed maximum rate of grant assistance under Tranche 2 is 40% up to a maximum payment of £4k per applicant.

The industry has also expressed concern about the potential competition from cheaper imported eggs after January 2012. In order to help protect producers who have already converted to enriched cage systems, I have written to Defra Ministers requesting that Defra continues to press the European Commission to introduce an intra-Community trade ban on eggs produced by hens in conventional cages after 1 January 2012 in order to prevent a negative impact on the laying hen industry here. I am also supporting Defra’s efforts to press the European Commission to introduce in EU egg marketing

regulations a Code '4' to differentiate between egg production by hens housed in enriched systems and conventional cage eggs.

Hedge Cutting Period

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will consider extending the hedge cutting period for an additional two weeks to make up for the time lost as a result of the recent poor weather and unsuitable land conditions.

(AQW 5084/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The hedge cutting dates are set out in domestic Cross-Compliance legislation which states that farmers in receipt of direct agricultural support (including Single Farm Payment) must ensure that hedge cutting/coppicing or laying is not undertaken between 1 March and 31 August. Hedge cutting between these dates is only permitted where health and safety is an issue, for example roadside hedges.

Any change to the hedge cutting dates would require an amendment to the Cross-Compliance legislation. It would not be possible to amend this legislation to change the start date for the 2010 year.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money has been spent by her Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5087/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

(i) Fees for staff attending Conferences and Courses are:

■ 7-07	£616,158.82
■ 2007-08	£608,737.85
■ 2008-09	£1,047,697.17

The figures represent the fees and, where relevant, associated costs (rental of accommodation and equipment, etc) for conferences and courses attended by DARD staff. Courses refer to training courses.

The increase in costs from 2006-07 and 2007-08 until 2008-09 is due to payments made by DARD to the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL), a centralised NICS training provider created in 2008-09. Prior to 2008-09, these services were provided, primarily, by DARD in-house staff; in-house staff costs are not included in the figures within the return.

(ii) Travel Costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses.

The Department does not hold records categorising travel costs, including subsistence costs, for conferences and courses. This information could be obtained only by performing a manual review of all travel claim submissions and travel bookings, by staff, for each of the three years for which the information has been requested.

This exercise would necessitate a manual review of all travel and subsistence claims and booking documents (approx 90,000) to identify travel and subsistence costs relating to conference and course attendance. Only at this point could the required costs be manually extracted and aggregated.

Consequently, the information is available only at a disproportionate cost.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any members of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute have ever received remuneration for work carried out in connection with the Rose Energy Chicken Litter Incinerator proposal at Glenavy.

(AQW 5107/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To the best of my knowledge, no individual member of staff of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute has received remuneration for work carried out in connection with the Rose Energy Chicken Litter Incinerator proposal at Glenavy. I am, however, aware that in 2006, a consulting business of an AFBI board member was contracted by a third party organisation to undertake work in connection with chicken litter sampling and analysis on behalf of Rose Energy.

AFBI did undertake work on a commercial basis, to provide Marengo and Queens University Belfast (QUB) with a report relating to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that Marengo and QUB prepared for Rose Energy in 2008. The AFBI report provided an assessment of the scale of potential impacts of the Rose Energy proposals on flora, fauna, soils and freshwaters.

Provision of Resources to the Equine Council

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when a decision on the provision of resources to the Equine Council will be taken.

(AQW 5192/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A decision cannot be taken on provision of resources for the Equine Council (ECNI) until issues around representation on the Council have been concluded.

I am aware that the Equine Council wrote to the three remaining Sport Horse sector organisations in January 2010 inviting them to take up the places reserved for them on the Council, and has agreed with the Thoroughbred sector on how the two sectors will work together in the future. I understand responses to these invitations are still awaited and I hope that this opportunity to participate in ECNI will be finalised as soon as possible. It remains my position that one body representing the Equine Industry here is the best way of taking forward the Equine Strategy.

In any event, on clarification of ECNI's final position on membership, my Department would be prepared to consider support for the ECNI, subject to receipt of a suitable business case for funding.

Blue-13 Blight

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Government of the Republic of Ireland in relation to the strains of the Blue-13 blight and its potential impact on potato farmers.

(AQW 5219/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have had no discussions with the Government in the south of Ireland in relation to the strains of the Blue-13 blight. There is, however, a great deal of cross-border collaboration in the form of a blight project involving plant pathologists at our Agri-food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and their counterparts in Teagasc in the south. The potential impact of this strain of blight on potato farmers would be similar to any other strains of potato blight. It has potential to cause serious damage to potato crops and control measures need to be rigorously applied.

My Department, along with colleagues in DAFF, are working on a strategic approach to protect plant health on the island of Ireland from the risks that plant pests and diseases pose to the environment and the economy in particular as the island is a distinct epidemiological unit. This strategic approach also aims to maintain and promote cooperation in the regulation of plant protection products and their use, through a focused approach to key issues with an all-island dimension.

Blue-13 Blight

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what (i) practical support mechanisms; and (ii) compensation schemes are in place for potato farmers whose crops have been destroyed by any strain of the Blue-13 blight.

(AQW 5220/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) My Department through CAFRE and AFBI provide technical recommendations for integrated potato blight control strategies to potato growers. Technical information is disseminated to the potato industry through industry training workshops and is complemented with published material within the Farming Press and also within the potato section of the Rural Portal web site.
- (ii) There are no compensation schemes in place for potato farmers whose crops have been destroyed by Blue-13 or any other strain of blight.

Blue-13 Blight

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many cases of the Blue-13 blight have been reported; (ii) what strains have been detected; and (iii) what action her Department has taken to protect the potato crop from the various strains of this blight.

(AQW 5221/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) There are no figures on the actual numbers of cases of occurrence of Blue-13 blight across potato crops in the north of Ireland.
- (ii) From the results of surveys carried out during the 2009 season, 54% of the isolates from crops that were sampled and tested were A2 (Blue-13) (phenylamide resistant) and 46 were A1.
- (iii) The Department through CAFRE and AFBI provide technical recommendations for integrated potato blight control strategies to potato growers. Technical information is disseminated to the potato industry to ensure they are up to date on the developing blight situation, populations etc through workshops, press articles (eg article in Farm week - 20 Feb, paper at Syngenta Annual Conference - 16 Feb). Growers are also kept informed throughout the growing season through the 'Blightline' pre-recorded telephone answering service and the DARD 'Blightnet' service - http://www.ruralni.gov.uk/crops/potatoes/blight_net/

Halal and Kosher Meat Slaughter Arrangements

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what slaughterhouses, or slaughter arrangements, exist to allow (i) halal; and (ii) kosher meat to be produced.

(AQW 5229/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There are currently no slaughterhouses in the north of Ireland in which either Kosher or Halal slaughter occur on a regular basis. However there is one slaughter man in the north licensed for the slaughter of sheep and goats by the Halal method. Over the past few years only slaughter of sheep and / or goats by the halal method has occurred. It is rare, possibly only once a year, and only in one slaughterhouse.

There is no kosher meat production in the north.

DARD Posts Relocated or Decentralised

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to posts within her Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5258/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development already has a number of posts in a range of offices across the north of Ireland. These are currently being transformed into a network of 12 DARD Direct offices spread across the north providing a one-stop for farm business services. I fully support the decentralisation of public sector jobs, and await an Executive discussion on the recommendations within the Bain Review with a view to moving the issue forward.

Efficiency Savings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 4652/10, how the efficiency savings will be made; and whether this will involve staff redundancies.

(AQW 5270/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I said in answer to AQW 4652/10, my Department is required to make savings to enable the Executive to work within its budget. My budget proposals included one relating to making savings through a review of the work carried out by Supply Chain Development Branch. At this stage I have not made any firm decisions and this position will remain, pending consideration of the views of key stakeholders. However, I do not anticipate any staff redundancies as a result of this review if my proposals are implemented.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department supports the calls for a public inquiry into the proposal for an incinerator in the Glenavy area.

(AQW 5274/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I recognise that there are widely differing and strongly held views on the proposal for an incinerator in the Glenavy area. My ministerial responsibilities span both poultry farmers who have poultry litter to dispose of and those who live in the rural community in Glenavy.

I am eager that the views and concerns of farmers, local residents and all those potentially affected by the proposal are taken into consideration. I believe it would be appropriate to address these concerns by a public enquiry. My support for a public enquiry is on record from 2008.

Soil Tests on Farms

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department conducts soil tests on farms.

(AQW 5309/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department does not conduct actual soil tests on farms. However DARD does assist farmers to carry out soil tests by loaning them the appropriate equipment for taking samples. Their soil samples can then be taken to their local DARD Direct office where staff will complete the necessary administration and send the samples to the testing laboratory. On receiving the results of the soil test the farmer is offered technical support to interpret the information. This technical support will take the form of either, an advisory leaflet, the Crop Nutrient Management Calculator which is available on the DARD Rural Portal (www.ruralni.gov.uk) or specific training on Nutrient Management Planning delivered by CAFRE

Undesignated Waterways

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to AQW 4895/10, (i) for an assessment as to whether, in practice, the Rivers Agency has found the Drainage Order (NI) 1973 to be an adequate legal basis for dealing with undesignated waterways; (ii) to provide an estimate of the number of undesignated waterways in the Belfast City Council area; and (iii) the number

of flooding incidents in the Belfast City Council area in the last five years which can be attributed directly, or indirectly, to undesignated waterways.

(AQW 5352/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) I am confident that, in practice, the provisions within the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 provide a sound legal basis for dealing with watercourses that pose an increased flood risk. This can be done by either designation of the watercourse for improvement works or maintenance works at public expense where this is justified under standard cost benefit criteria, or by administering enforcement action under schedules 5 and 6 of the Order if necessary to ensure that riparian landowners meet their responsibilities.
- (ii) DARD Rivers Agency does not hold any record relating to the number of undesignated watercourses and does not have any statutory requirement to do so.
- (iii) DARD Rivers Agency does not record data relating to flooding incidents in the requested format. The Agency's flooding records include flooding from a diverse range of sources over a large period of time that would require extensive investigation in order to identify those cases that relate to undesignated watercourses.

EID Tags

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of farmers' concerns that the size of EID tags will impact on animal welfare; and to detail what she is doing to facilitate a reduction in the size of these tags.

(AQW 5387/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under The Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order (NI) 2009 and European Council Regulation 21/2004, sheep must be tagged when they reach 9 months of age or when they move off the holding whichever is the earliest. However, a number of flock keepers choose to tag their sheep from birth for management purposes.

At present DARD, as the competent authority, has approved seven electronic tags which are available as either button or loop tags. There are also a number of other tags undergoing the formal approval process. In response to requests from industry we have also allowed the use of electronic boluses and electronic pastern tags.

Tags supplied here have undergone a rigorous and formal approval process, including Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 66 and Joint Research Centre (JRC) testing. Animal welfare considerations are included as part of the formal eartag approval process.

Flock keepers who tag young lambs may choose to use the smaller button tags or loop tags which are now available or small management tags. The choice of tag is purely a decision for the flock keeper.

My officials will investigate any animal welfare issues raised in relation to individual tag types and if necessary will bring concerns to the manufacturer supplying the tag.

Removal of Whin Bushes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of farmers' concerns that the removal of whin bushes during GSI mapping will impact on animals who use these bushes for shelter; and if her Department will take this into account when carrying out GSI mapping.

(AQW 5389/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I fully recognise that whin bushes provide important shelter for animals, especially young stock. However, under current Single Farm Payment Scheme eligibility rules, large areas of whin are ineligible for scheme payment.

Landowners who claim Single Farm Payment (SFP) may decide to maintain areas of whin to provide shelter for animals, however these areas must be removed from their SFP claim.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Northern Ireland Museums Council

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the future of the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

(AQW 5281/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The Review of Public Administration concluded that the functions of the Northern Ireland Museums Council should be transferred to central and local government.

The transfer of functions and the future of NIMC are being considered by the Department.

Proposed Velodrome in Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the proposed velodrome in Downpatrick.

(AQW 5286/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Down District Council, with its proposal for a velodrome in Downpatrick, has been selected by Sport NI as a preferred bidder for its Major Facilities Programme.

Preferred bidders must now proceed to finalise their proposals in order that they can secure final funding approval. Business cases will be assessed against factors such as value for money, viability and need.

Following the assessment of final outline business cases by Sport NI, then by DCAL and finally by DFP, I will be in a position to announce, subject to affordability, which applications have been successful. These will then move forward to design and development stage.

Winter Olympics Sports

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any current or planned provision for winter Olympics type sports.

(AQW 5300/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI is currently supporting, through its Athlete Support Programme, the following Winter Olympic sports:

- Ice Skating; and
- Disabled Snow Skiing

The Northern Ireland Ice Skating Association and Disability Sport Northern Ireland are currently in receipt of £23,000 and £8,000 respectively in support of the training and competition programmes for ice skaters Jenna McCorkell and Karla Quinn and skier Kelly Gallagher. Further applications from these athletes are currently under consideration.

The Northern Ireland Ice Skating Association is the only Winter Olympic sport governing body currently operating in Northern Ireland. SNI is not aware of any plan for other governing bodies to develop opportunities for Winter Olympic sports in Northern Ireland.

Ulster-Scots Related Projects

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been spent on Ulster-Scots related projects since May 2007; and how this compares to the previous Assembly administration.

(AQW 5321/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since December 1999 the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure has been involved in funding various Ulster-Scots activities.

Ulster-Scots Agency

The allocations made to the Ulster-Scots Agency by DCAL equate to 75% of the Agency's funding. The table below shows the amount of funding paid by DCAL to the Ulster-Scots Agency for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 the period of the previous Assembly; and 2007, 2008 and 2009. The figures shown relate to the funding amounts allocated over each calendar year which equates to the Agency's financial year.

2000	£0.5m	2001	£0.97m	2002	£1.07m
2007	£1.938m	2008	£2.486m	2009	£2.317m

Ulster-Scots Academy

The Department has also made available funding to the Ulster-Scots Academy since 2005. The funding made to the Academy over the last two financial years and the amount to date in the 09/10 year is shown in the table below:-

07/08:	£405,189.44
08/09:	£289,157.63
09/10 (year to date):	£99,926.00

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The funding allocations made to Ulster-Scots projects by the ACNI over the last two financial years and the amount to date in the 09/10 year is shown in the table below:-

2000/01	£7.5k	2001/02	NIL	2002/03	£15k
2007/08	£37.24k	2008/09	£62.75k	2009/10	£151.69k

In addition, the ACNI awarded the following amounts detailed below to Marching Bands:

2009/10	£104,822	2008/09	£149,311	2007/08	£150,002
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Integrated Development Fund

Mr G Adams asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the dates of the meetings he held with the Minister for Social Development between 1 September 2009 and 3 March 2010 to discuss the Integrated Development Fund grant to An Cultúrlann, Belfast.

(AQW 5377/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I held no meetings on this subject with the Minister for Social Development during this time period.

Integrated Development Fund

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the dates of all written correspondence received from the Minister for Social Development between 1 September 2009 and 3 March 2009 concerning the Integrated Development Fund grant to An Cultúrann, Belfast.

(AQW 5378/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I received no correspondence on this topic from the Minister for Social Development during this time period.

Integrated Development Fund

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the dates of any telephone contact he had with the Minister for Social Development between 1 September 2009 and 3 March 2010 to discuss the Integrated Development Fund grant to An Cultúrann, Belfast.

(AQW 5379/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I had no telephone discussions concerning this topic with the Minister for Social Development during this time period.

David Beattie

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider a way of recognising David Beattie's achievement in finishing fourth at the 2010 Commonwealth Shooting Federation Championships in New Delhi, India.

(AQW 5388/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is normal practice for the Sports Minister to recognise the success of local sports men and women who achieve a podium finish at National and International competition level. Regrettably Mr Beattie did not attain a medal on this occasion and it would not be appropriate for me to publicly recognise this.

There was some notable Northern Ireland success at the Games and I will be writing to Ms Kirsty Barr to congratulate her on winning a gold medal in the Individual Ladies Trap Event and a bronze medal for the Women's Trap Badge Event at the 2010 Commonwealth Shooting Federation Championships in New Delhi. Ms Barr will also receive an invitation to the DCAL Annual Sporting reception in January 2011 to recognise her success.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what prospect there is of using facilities or venues in the Strangford constituency for the World Police and Fire Games.

(AQW 5398/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: A Stakeholder group incorporating all the key stakeholders Police Service for Northern Ireland, N I Prison Service, N I Fire and Rescue Service, DCAL and Belfast City Council has been established. The Group has identified and taken forward preparatory work on various workstreams groups including Sport, Volunteering, Tourism, Legacy and Transport and Logistics to take forward the planning and organisation of the Games in conjunction with relevant external bodies.

The organisation of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games sports workstream is being taken forward by Sport Northern Ireland who are identifying the sports to be included, the structures for the competitions and potential suitable venues. Final decisions on venues have yet to be taken.

Comber Library

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the plans for the refurbishment of Comber Library; and how much is being invested.

(AQW 5399/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Libraries NI are carrying out a series of improvements to Comber library. These include improvements to the mezzanine floor, staircase and front elevation of the building. The estimated cost of the work is approximately £100,000.

New Library at the Queen's Hall in Newtownards

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how Libraries NI intends to take forward its plans for a new library at the Queen's Hall in Newtownards .

(AQW 5400/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Libraries NI are currently in discussions with Ards Borough Council to explore the possibility of jointly developing a new library and cultural centre on the site of the Queen's Hall.

Following a presentation to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee a motion to support (in principle) a partnership to provide a state of the art Library and Cultural Centre on the Queen's Hall site was agreed by the Council in January. Retention of the Queen's Hall name and foundation stone are important considerations for the Council in any redevelopment.

Greyhound Racing

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding his Department has provided to greyhound racing in the last two years.

(AQW 5421/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. Greyhound racing is not recognised as a sporting activity and has therefore received no funding from SNI over the last two years.

Grants for Shotgun Coaching Qualifications

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he is aware that the Welsh Assembly has made grants available for people to gain shotgun coaching qualifications; and if he would consider allocating funding for a similar scheme here.

(AQW 5470/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I understand that agricultural and farming businesses in Wales can apply for funding towards the cost of a shotgun coaching qualification run by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. This scheme is part of a wider Welsh Assembly initiative known as 'Farming Connect' the aim of which is to help diversify and develop farming and forestry businesses. The establishment of a similar scheme in Northern Ireland would be a matter for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the first instance.

Christine Bleakley Water-ski Attempt

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will issue a statement in support of Christine Bleakley's attempt to water-ski the English Channel in aid of Sport Relief, recognising that this will help promote the take-up of sports and exercise.

(AQW 5471/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have written to Christine Bleakley directly to wish her all the best in her attempt to water-ski the English Channel for Sport Relief. This is a very worthwhile cause.

Road Safety Initiative ‘Live to Play’

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what contact Sport NI has had with the Gaelic Athletic Association in relation to its road safety initiative ‘Live to Play’.

(AQW 5489/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. SNI is aware of the GAA’s road safety initiative, ‘Live to Play’, but has had no formal contact with the organisation nor was it contacted by the GAA about the scheme.

Road Safety Initiative ‘Live to Play’

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has recommended the Gaelic Athletic Association’s Road Safety initiative ‘Live to Play’ to other sporting organisations.

(AQW 5490/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for matters relating to road safety rests with the Department of the Environment (DOE). Having said that, I would welcome any campaign organised by a sporting organisation that is designed to help promote public safety. I understand the DOE Roads Safety Division is already planning to contact both the Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby to see if they intend to run similar initiatives.

£8m for the Irish Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the £8m for the Irish language announced after the Hillsborough Agreement will be distributed.

(AQW 5529/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I can advise you that Departmental officials are currently liaising with officials in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Northern Ireland Office on the details of the funding for the Irish language announced after the Hillsborough Agreement.

At present I am not in a position to provide a response to the question you raised, but I will write to you when the details have been established.

Road Bowls

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps his Department has taken to give official recognition to the sport of road bowls.

(AQW 5531/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for granting official recognition to any sporting activity, including road bowls, is a matter for the UK Sports Councils and not an issue in which the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure can intervene. Organisers and promoters of non-recognised sports, including road bowls, can, however, apply to Sport Northern Ireland, the lead development agency for sport in Northern Ireland, for official recognition. Such applications will be considered in line with the established UK Sports Councils’ recognition procedures.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (All Ireland Fleadh)

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration his Department has given to Northern Ireland hosting Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (All Ireland Fleadh).

(AQW 5533/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department has had no approach regarding the All Ireland Fleadh being hosted in Northern Ireland.

Department of Education

Preventative and Early Intervention Measures

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the percentage of her annual budget which is directed towards preventative and early intervention measures.

(AQW 4315/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): I would suggest that much of education and youth services are essentially preventative and early intervention measures in some way or another and therefore the vast majority of the education budget is attributable to these activities including budgets delegated directly to nursery and primary schools under the Common Funding arrangements, which totalled over £484 million in the current 2009/10 financial year.

Is iad na cláir bhreise a dhéileálfar leis na réimsí seo ná Tús Cinnte, Fairsingiú Réamhscolaíochta, Litearthacht agus Uimhearthacht, Scoileanna Sínithe, an Clár Lán-seirbhíse, Riachtanais Oideachais Speisialta, Tacaíocht do Dhaltaí, Páistí den lucht siúil, núíosacha agus de chuid na Seirbhísí, Béilí Saora Scoile agus Liúntas Éadaí agus Caighdeán Chothaithe do lónta scoile agus bia eile i scoileanna.

Additional programmes that would address these areas directly include Sure Start, Pre-School Education Expansion, Literacy and Numeracy, Extended Schools, Full Service Provision, Special Educational Needs, Pupil Support, Traveller, Newcomer and Services children, Free School Meals and Clothing Allowance and, Nutritional Standards for school lunches and other food in schools. This aggregate total expended on these programmes amounts £110 million. There are also a range of support services and interventions provided centrally which cannot be disaggregated, to determine only those elements relating to early years.

As Minister of Education, I am committed to raising standards in all of our schools, tackling under-achievement and promoting equality of opportunity for all our children and young people.

Fairtrade Products

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education what steps she has taken to encourage the availability of Fairtrade products in schools and school canteens.

(AQW 5095/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an fhreagracht as oibriú lá-go-lá sheirbhísí béile scoile ar na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne sna hearnálacha rialaithe agus faoi chothabháil agus i scoileanna aonair deonacha gramadaí agus i scoileanna aonair comhtháite faoi chothabháil stáit.

The day-to-day operation of the school meals service is a matter for the Education and Library Boards in the controlled and maintained sectors and individual voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools.

The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB), who administer the General Groceries Contract on behalf of the five Boards, has confirmed that Fairtrade tea and coffee are available on the food schedules and that these products are considered along with others in the tendering process.

I will be writing to the Education and Library Boards to encourage them to use Fairtrade products in schools and school canteens.

‘Reach the Heights’ Project in Wales

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the ‘Reach the Heights’ project in Wales to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training; and what consideration she has given to introducing similar measures.

(AQW 5130/10)

Minister of Education: While “Reach the Heights” is a programme developed by my colleagues in Wales, its core aim to address issues of engagement and achievement mirrors the aims of the education reforms I have introduced here and in the services we have put in place to support young people and encourage them to remain in education to learn and succeed.

In order to ensure that our young people remain engaged and can maximise the opportunities presented by education they must see their time in school as relevant. I have introduced the Revised Curriculum which will provide greater flexibility to tailor what is taught to better meet the needs of pupils. The aim is to better prepare young people for the future through the new area of Learning for Life and Work and in response to the needs of employers, a greater emphasis on developing real world skills. It also provides the flexibility needed to give effect to the wider range of opportunities through the Entitlement Framework, matching provision to pupils’ needs and aspirations. This choice is underpinned by a coherent programme of Careers education, advice, information and guidance from Primary school onward.

The Department for Employment and Learning is carrying out a scoping study of those who are not in education, employment or training in the north of Ireland. This study is almost complete. The issues affecting the young people in this group are multi-agency and cross-departmental in nature and the results of the scoping study will be brought to the Executive for consideration. Much is already being done by the statutory and voluntary sectors in support of these young people. Emerging evidence from the scoping study would support the focus in “Reach the Heights” on early intervention and on cross-agency working.

Bíonn mo Roinn ag obair go gar leis an Roinn Fostaíochta agus Foghlama lena chinntiú go bhfuil foráil do dhaoine óga atá idir 14 bliain d’aois agus 19 bliain d’aois comhleanúnach comhlántach agus go bhfuil réimse deiseanna ar fáil do gach duine óg, beag beann ar an áit a bhfuil siad ina gcónaí agus ar an áit ina ndéanann siad staidéar.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Employment and Learning to ensure that provision for young people aged 14 to 19 is coherent and complementary and that a range of opportunities is open to all young people, irrespective of where they live or choose to study.

Review of Capital Projects

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what criteria will be used in relation to the review of capital projects.

(AQW 5223/10)

Minister of Education: The capital review will inform a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and the management of the schools estate. In the current economic climate the review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer. In light of this it is important that we validate that the capital projects in which we invest are viable in the long term.

Mar sin de, caithfear gach tionscadal caipitiúil reatha a bhreithniú i gcoinne réimse iomlán pholasaithe na Roinne agus tabharfar an obair seo chun tosaigh i gcomhthéacs na sé chritéar le haghaidh inmharthanacht a mheas mar atá sonraithe sa Pholasáí do Scoileanna Inmharthana.

It is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review 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.

Terminology in Official Communications

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what guidance has been provided to staff within her Department on the use of the terms 'Northern Ireland' and 'United Kingdom'.

(AQW 5250/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé d'Alex Easton, Comhalta do Thoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh, ar AQW 5160/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 05 Márta 2010.

I refer the Member to the answer I provided Alex Easton the Member for North Down to AQW 5160/10, published in the Official Report on 05 March 2010.

Terminology in Official Communications

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what memoranda or instructions have been provided to staff within her Department on the use of terminology in official communications.

(AQW 5252/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé d'Alex Easton, Comhalta do Thoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh, ar AQW 5160/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 05 Márta 2010.

I refer the Member to the answer I provided Alex Easton the Member for North Down to AQW 5160/10, published in the Official Report on 05 March 2010.

Terminology in Official Communications

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education if staff in her Department are permitted to use the terms 'Northern Ireland' or 'United Kingdom' when issuing (i) correspondence; (ii) press releases; or (iii) official communications.

(AQW 5253/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé d'Alex Easton, Comhalta do Thoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh, ar AQW 5160/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 05 Márta 2010.

I refer the Member to the answer I provided Alex Easton the Member for North Down to AQW 5160/10, published in the Official Report on 05 March 2010.

Students in Inner East Belfast Leaving School Without Five GCSEs

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQO 801/10, how the figure of 78.5% for students in inner East Belfast leaving school without five GCSE's was arrived at; and which schools were included in this calculation.

(AQW 5323/10)

Minister of Education: Áiríodh an figiúr nach mbaineann 78.5% de dhaltáí 5 ghrád GCSE amach (lena n-áirítear coibhéisí) lena n-áirítear Béarla agus Matamaitic trí eolas a úsáid ó Shuirbhé Fágálach Scoile 2007/08, agus ní raibh sé bunaithe ar thorthaí scoileanna aonair. Bailíonn an tSuirbhé Fágálach Scoile eolas postchóid chónaithe agus eolas scrúduithe gach dalta aonair agus, mar gheall air sin, is féidir anailís a dhéanamh ar dhaltáí a chónaíonn i gceantair ar leith. Sa chás seo, léirigh na sonraí gnóthachtáil na bhfágálach scoile a chónaíonn i gCeantar Athnuachan Comharsanachta Oirthear Bhéal Feirste (CAC).

The figure of 78.5% not achieving at least 5 GCSEs (inc.equivalents) including English and Mathematics was calculated using information from the School Leavers Survey 2007/08, and not based on

individual school results. The School Leavers Survey collects the residential postcode and examination information of each individual pupil therefore analysis can be undertaken for those pupils living in specific areas. In this case the data reflect the achievement of school leavers resident in the inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA).

Cost of the Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost, to date, of the Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 5324/10)

Minister of Education: De réir Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt, seo a leanas na híocaíochtaí iomlána, a chuimsíonn táillí taistil agus táillí maireachtála a rinneadh do Choimisinéirí ó ceapadh iad i mí Iúil 2006:

The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the total payments, including fees, travel and subsistence, made to the Commissioners since their appointment in July 2006 is as follows:

- 2006 - £50,316
- 2007 - £97,677
- 2008 - £75,361
- 2009 - £75,154

Payment details for 2010 to date are not yet available.

Closures of Amalgamated Schools

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education (i) how many closures of amalgamated schools have the Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board carried out since 2006; and (ii) to list the names of these schools.

(AQW 5326/10)

Minister of Education: Níor thug Coimisinéirí Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt aon Tograí Forbartha chun tosaigh i dtaca le druideanna scoileanna cónasctha ón bhliain 2006.

The Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board have not brought forward any Development Proposals for the closure of amalgamated schools since 2006.

Greyabbey Primary School

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education why Greyabbey primary school had to close due to sewerage problems in Greyabbey Village in the week commencing 22 February 2010.

(AQW 5328/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Príomhfheidmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt (BOLO) go ndearna an Príomhoide ar Greyabbey Primary School le BOLO Déardaoin, 25 Feabhra 2010 a thuairisciú nach raibh aon áiseanna leithris ag an scoil mar gheall ar locht leis an draenáil. Rinneadh an cinneadh ar na páistí a chur abhaile.

I have been informed by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that the Principal of Greyabbey Primary School contacted SEELB on Thursday, 25 February 2010 to report that the school had no toilet facilities due to a fault in the drainage. It was decided to send the children home.

A contractor was sent to the school who reported the fault was external to the school drainage system.

The SEELB contacted the Water Service who said they would notify the Board when the system was operative. On Friday, 26 February 2010 the fault had not been repaired and the school was still closed.

SEELB arranged to have portable toilets delivered on Friday afternoon. The school re-opened on Monday, 1 March 2010.

Special Needs Assessment

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how many children are awaiting a special needs assessment in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area; and what is the longest waiting time.
(AQW 5339/10)

Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt dom gurb é líon na bpáistí atá ag fanacht ar mheasúnú ar a riachtanais speisialta oideachais ná 552.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the North Eastern Education and Library Board that the number of children currently awaiting an assessment of their special educational needs is 552.

This figure includes Stage 3 (non-statutory assessments) and Stage 4 (statutory assessments) of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, reviews at Stage 3 and Stage 5 of the Code of Practice and a range of individual circumstances.

The Chief Executive has advised that figures regarding the longest waiting time cannot be provided within the timescale of the question. I will write to you again once this information has been provided.

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many Irish-medium schools are currently supported by her Department; and the number of pupils in these schools.
(AQW 5360/10)

Minister of Education: Tá 22 bunscoil dheontaschúnta Gaeilge ann chomh maith le 9 n-aonad Gaeilge i mbunscoileanna Béarla faoi láthair. Tá iarbhunscoil dheontaschúnta Gaeilge amháin ann chomh maith le dhá aonad Gaeilge in iarbhunscoileanna Béarla. Is é líon iomlán na ndaltaí sna scoileanna agus sna haonaid seo do 2009/10 ná 3,640.

There are currently 22 grant-aided Irish medium primary schools and 9 Irish medium units in English medium primary schools. There is one grant-aided Irish medium post primary school and two Irish medium units in English medium post primary schools. The total number of pupils in these schools and units in 2009/10 is 3,640.

There are also 35 voluntary and private Irish medium pre-school centres with 435 children in funded places.

New Builds for Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore and Omagh Integrated Primary School

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the new builds for (a) Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore; and (b) Omagh Integrated Primary School; and (ii) when they are expected to be completed.
(AQW 5361/10)

Minister of Education: It is vitally important that the capital projects taken forward by the Department are consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need. I have therefore commissioned a review of all capital projects, including those for Omagh Integrated Primary School and Dean Maguirc College.

Cuideoidh toradh an athbhreithnithe le cur chuige níos straitéisí a fhorbairt ar chinntí infheistiú caipitil agus ar bhainistiú eastát na scoileanna, agus cuirfear tionscadail in ord tosaíochta le haghaidh seichimh sna blianta airgeadais atá le teacht. Ní féidir, mar sin, nuashonrú a sholáthar ar na mórthionscadail oibreacha caipitil do na scoileanna seo faoi láthair.

The outcome of the review will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the schools estate and projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial years. It is, therefore, not possible to provide an update on the proposed major capital works projects for these schools at this time.

Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education on how many days have the Commissioners for the South Eastern Education and Library Board met since their appointment in 2006.

(AQW 5371/10)

Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that the Commissioners have held 73 board meetings up to the end of February 2010, with a day for each.

Mar bharr ar na cruinnithe seo, bhí Coimisinéirí bainteach ina n-aonar le réimse leathan cruinnithe agus imeachtaí oifigiúla le linn na tréimhse sin freisin.

In addition to these meetings, Commissioners have also been involved individually in a wide range of other official meetings and events during that time.

Meetings of the South Eastern Education and Library Board Commissioners

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many official meetings have the Commissioners of the South Eastern Education and Library Board had since their appointment in 2006.

(AQW 5372/10)

Minister of Education: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that the Commissioners have held 73 board meetings up to the end of February 2010, with a day for each.

Mar bharr ar na cruinnithe seo, bhí Coimisinéirí bainteach ina n-aonar le réimse leathan cruinnithe agus imeachtaí oifigiúla le linn na tréimhse sin freisin.

In addition to these meetings, Commissioners have also been involved individually in a wide range of other official meetings and events during that time.

Preschool Nursery Provision

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to address the shortfall in preschool nursery provision in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 5374/10)

Minister of Education: The enrolment process for the 2010/11 school year is still ongoing and as a result it is not possible, at this stage, to determine if there will be a shortfall in preschool places in North Down in September 2010. However, using the number of children currently in P1 as a proxy for the size of the preschool cohort in 2010/11, it is anticipated that there will be approximately 876 children in their final preschool year in the North Down constituency in September 2010.

According to the October 2009 school census there are 850 preschool places available in the current school year in the North Down constituency. This includes 546 places in statutory nursery schools and nursery units attached to primary schools. In addition, there are 304 places available in voluntary and private settings. However, this number can increase if there is demand for additional places as has happened in previous years.

Coinneoidh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt an tsaincheist seo faoi bhreathnú lena chinntiú go mbaintear amach sprioc beartais na Roinne go soláthraítear aít mhaoinithe réamhscoile do gach páiste ar mhian lena pháiste ceann a bheith aige.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board will keep the position under review to ensure that the Department's policy objective to provide a funded preschool place for every child whose parents wish them to have one is met.

Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what research has been carried out by the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce.

(AQW 5381/10)

Minister of Education: Is iad na dualgais atá ar an Tascfhórsa um Litearthacht agus Uimhearthacht ná a chuidiú leis an straitéis athbhreithnithe um litearthacht agus uimhearthacht a thabhairt chun críche, feidhmiú na straitéise a mhaoirsiú, agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar dhul chun cinn na Roinne ar dhéileáil le moltaí na hOifige Iniúchóireachta/ an Choiste um Chuntais Phoiblí ar an litearthacht agus uimhearthacht. Cé go n-iarann sé eolas agus go bhfaigheann sé eolas ón Roinn Oideachais agus ó eagraíochtaí eile oideachais chun a chuid oibre a nuashonrú, níl sé de chúram air taighde ar leith a dhéanamh.

The role of the Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce is to help finalise the revised literacy and numeracy strategy, to oversee its implementation and to monitor Department's progress in addressing the Audit Office/Public Account Committee recommendations on literacy and numeracy. While it requests and receives information routinely from DE and from other educational bodies to inform its work, it does not have a remit to carry out specific research.

Castle Towers Special School in Ballymena

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education why the economic appraisal for the new Castle Towers Special School in Ballymena has been referred to the Business Compliance unit.

(AQW 5391/10)

Minister of Education: Mionscrúdaíonn Aonad Comhlíonta G nó na Roinne gach Breithmheas Eacnamaíochta.

All Economic Appraisals are scrutinised by the Department's Business Compliance Unit.

Department for Employment and Learning

Capital Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the capital projects (i) planned; and (ii) postponed or abandoned by his Department for 2010/11.

(AQW 5033/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): There are a number of capital projects currently being funded by my Department that commenced in 2009/10 or earlier. These projects, which are ongoing, are listed in Table 1. A further five projects had been planned, one in each of the four higher education institutions and one in further education. These will now be impacted due to the proposed reduction in Department for Employment and Learning's 2010/11 capital funding.

In higher education the Institutions have yet to decide if their four projects, which are partly funded by DEL, could proceed at the proposed reduced level of DEL funding. Until that decision is taken I cannot say whether any of the projects, Table 2, will be postponed or abandoned. In further education, the

Performing Arts and Technology Innovation Centre in Bangor, a South Eastern Regional College project, has been put on hold.

Annex 1

TABLE 1.DETAILING THE ONGOING DEL CAPITAL PROJECTS IN 2010/11

University/College	Campus/Project
South Eastern Regional College	New Campus in Downpatrick – PPP*
South Eastern Regional College	New Campus in Ballynahinch – PPP
South Eastern Regional College	New Campus in Lisburn – PPP
South Eastern Regional College	New Construction Centre in Newtownards
Belfast Metropolitan College	New campus at Titanic Quarter in Belfast – PPP
Belfast Metropolitan College	New campus at Springvale in Belfast
Northern Regional College	Extension and refurbishment in Newtownabbey
North West Regional College	Extension and refurbishment in Londonderry
Queen's University	Renewal of ICT & Infrastructure
Queen's University	Post Grad Executive Education Centre
Queen's University	Medical Health & Life Sciences
Queen's University	Refurbishment of Chemical Laboratories

* Public Private Partnership

TABLE 2.DETAILING DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING'S HE CAPITAL PROJECTS DUE TO COMMENCE IN 2010/11

University/College	Campus/Project
Queen University	Refurbishment of the Ashby Building
Stranmillis University College	Refurbishment of Science Teaching Space
St Mary's University College	Refurbishment (Phase 2) of Main Quad
University of Ulster:	Construction of Sports Centre, Coleraine

Working Age People Educated to Level 4/degree or Above

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to raise the percentage of working age people educated to Level 4/degree or above in the East Londonderry constituency.

(AQW 5048/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is committed to increasing the proportion of the population qualified to Level 4 and above and provides funding for the universities and Further Education Colleges to enable them to deliver both full time and part-time courses at level 4 and above.

In relation to the East Londonderry constituency, you may wish to note that in the current academic year my Department is supporting undergraduate courses in the University of Ulster, including the Coleraine Campus. This is done by the payment of block grant for teaching and learning activities. My Department also provides funding to the North West Regional College and the Northern Regional College.

The Department is also focusing on increasing workforce development and employer engagement through more opportunities for part-time professional and technical programmes, such as Foundation Degrees. This will help raise the percentage of the working age population educated to Level 4/degree or above.

I trust you find this information helpful.

Working Age People Educated to Level 4/degree or Above

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if any research has been undertaken in relation to the disparity among constituencies of the percentage of working age people educated to Level 4/degree or above.

(AQW 5049/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has not carried out any research of this nature and is not aware of specific research on this topic in Northern Ireland, although general research findings suggest that people with higher educational qualifications will be more residentially mobile than those with lower qualifications; and that the pool of applicants for jobs demanding higher-level qualifications will tend to be geographically wider than those demanding lower-level qualifications.

Measures to Prevent Convicted Sex Offenders Working in Universities and Colleges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures are in place in universities and colleges to ensure that convicted sex offenders are not working in a capacity which brings them into direct contact with students or vulnerable adults.

(AQW 5071/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: All Further Education Colleges carry out vetting checks on all new staff by carrying out Enhanced Disclosure checks through Access NI. An Enhanced Disclosure provides details of all convictions, including sexual offences and cautions and whether an individual is included in any of the children's or vulnerable adults' barred lists held in Northern Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. Such individuals are barred from working closely with children and vulnerable adults in Colleges.

All Higher Education Institutions also require applicants for regulated positions involving work with children or vulnerable adults to undergo the Access NI checks and both Further and Higher Education Colleges carry out checks on students whose courses of study involves working with children or vulnerable adults, for example in the fields of education, nursing, allied health professions and social work.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much money has been spent by his Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5091/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Expenditure incurred by this Department on conference and course fees in the last three years has been as follows:

	Invoiced Costs	Notional Charges	Total
Year ended 31/3/2007	£180,394	£277,000	£457,394
Year ended 31/3/2008	£122,820	£238,473	£361,293
Year ended 31/3/2009	£381,436	£0	£381,436

Since 1 April 2006, generic training has been delivered by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL). On 1 April 2008, CAL moved from notional charging to invoicing the Department for its training services. The Department does not separately identify travel and subsistence costs that are directly attributable to attendance at conferences and courses.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what bids his Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5113/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning put forward two bids under the “Invest to Save” initiative as follows:-

- Redundancy and relocation costs for the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, costing £428k; and
- Assistance to achieve additional efficiency savings in the Universities, costing £1.5m.

“Invest to save” is not intended to address communal segregation in service provision and promoting integration. However, the Department is committed to ensuring that promoting integration and shared services is mainstreamed in the Department’s activities.

Titanic Quarter

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures are in place to ensure that the maximum amount of employment opportunities are created locally as a result of the development of the Titanic Quarter, both in terms of construction at present and future opportunities within the development.

(AQW 5161/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: While my Department is not responsible for creation of employment opportunities, it is represented on the Titanic Quarter ‘Employment, Education and Skills’ work group. Officials have met with the lead contractors. My understanding is that the contractors for the Titanic Quarter are complying with their contractual requirements concerning the employment of apprentices and long term unemployed people.

My Department will assist employers who locate in Titanic Quarter to fill vacancies and will consider whether to run a jobs fair at the appropriate time. The Department will also encourage employers to recruit from the unemployed and economically inactive and will, where appropriate, assist these individuals to take advantage of the jobs that might come to the Titanic Quarter. We welcome the opportunity to provide this assistance.

Careers Advice

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what careers advice is offered to unemployed people over the age of 16 in the East Antrim constituency; and where this advice can be accessed.

(AQW 5233/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department’s professionally qualified Careers Advisers provide an impartial all-age careers information, advice and guidance service to all citizens in Northern Ireland, including unemployed people over the age of 16. The Careers Service provides up to date careers information and advice on education, training and employment options and in depth careers guidance to support effective career decision making.

Within the East Antrim constituency careers services are available in the Jobs and Benefits Offices (J&BO) in Carrickfergus and Larne. Clients may be referred by a personal adviser in the J&BO or may choose to make an appointment with a Careers Adviser themselves. Contact details are as follows: Careers Service Carrickfergus 028 93356904, Careers Service Larne 028 28263531. Careers information and advice is also available on the Careers Service website www.careersserviceni.com

Clients from the Newtownabbey area can also avail of services in the Careers Resource Centre, 56 Ann Street, Belfast on a drop in basis.

Careers Advice

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has plans to relocate any careers advice clinics away from the East Antrim constituency.

(AQW 5235/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Careers advice in the East Antrim constituency is currently available, mainly on an appointment basis, at the Careers Office in the Jobs & Benefits Offices in Larne and Carrickfergus.

In order to alleviate pressure on accommodation in the Jobs and Benefits Offices (J&BOs) and to modernise Careers Service provision, I plan to relocate careers staff to a regional Careers Resource Centre. However careers information, advice and guidance will continue to be available in Larne and Carrickfergus J&BOs by appointment.

Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre of the South Eastern Regional College

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to secure funding for the new Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre of the South Eastern Regional College, since the project has received planning approval and is ready to issue final tendering documents.

(AQW 5301/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The procurement of the Bangor Performing Arts Centre and Technology Innovation Centre project has been put on hold due to a reduction in the Department for Employment and Learning's 2010/11 capital budget. This follows the recent Review of the 2010/11 Spending Plans, and a likely decrease in the proceeds from an asset disposal which was included in the Department's 2010/11 budget. The next opportunity to bid for additional resources will be in the June 2010 monitoring round. Thereafter, a bid will be made in the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) exercise.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Accelerated Support Fund

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if the Accelerated Support Fund will receive further funding this year.

(AQW 4991/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The Accelerated Support Fund (ASF) was announced in 2008 as a tactical response to the emerging economic downturn. The Fund had an available budget of £5 million to provide fast-track support to assist Invest NI clients by providing advice and on-site support.

Access to the ASF was by way of attendance at the 'Challenges and opportunities – the Credit Crunch' events - a proactive initiative organised by Invest NI. Between September 2008 and April 2009, 14 of

these events were organised across the province. They were attended by over 830 Invest NI clients, of whom 764 then registered for the free diagnostic service available. In addition, a further 10 seminars, aimed at the wider business base, were held across Northern Ireland, attracting over 700 people from 400 companies. These brought together key local stakeholder organisations and provided businesses with access to a range of practical advice and information on dealing with the impact of the economic downturn.

Under the ASF, over 500 diagnostics have been completed with 300 projects now underway supported either directly via ASF or existing mainstream Invest NI programmes. The original £5 million budget has now been fully allocated and whilst there are no plans to make additional funds available, Invest NI continues to offer diagnostic support and fast-track funding for projects using its range of mainstream programmes.

Short-Term Aid Scheme

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Short-Term Aid Scheme.

(AQW 4993/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: On 26th May 2009, I announced a new £15 million initiative by Invest NI designed to help businesses in difficulty retain key skills through the economic downturn. The Short Term Aid Scheme (STAS) commenced on 1st June 2009 and is scheduled to run until 31st December 2010.

STAS, which has been developed by Invest NI under the European Commission's Temporary State Aid Framework, offers fixed grant rates of 80% for small business; 70% for medium sized business; and 60% for large companies. Support is directed towards the salary costs of key employees.

The Scheme has been broadly welcomed by companies, business organisations and commentators and applications continue to be submitted, however the activity level has slowed in recent months. In total, Invest NI had received 55 applications by the end of February 2010, of which 45 were from existing Invest NI clients and 10 from the wider business community.

Of the 32 cases presented to STAS casework panels to date, 30 businesses have been offered support totalling £3.73 million.

STAS is just one of a range of measures that has been introduced by Invest NI to help businesses cope with the impact of the economic downturn. Other initiatives have included the £5 million Accelerated Support Fund and a series of over 20 information seminars for clients and the wider business base which offered access to practical business advice and support. The agency has substantially simplified its Business Improvement Training Programme application process and has been consistently applying a higher level of support within the Programme. This has allowed companies experiencing difficulty access to retraining focused on developing new markets/products. Invest NI has also continued to increase its support across its range of advisory services, assisting companies to control energy and waste costs, helping them improve their ICT systems and up to date and relevant information through the nibusinessinfo website.

Licence for the Supply of Natural Gas

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how many companies have held a licence for the supply of natural gas in the Belfast area since January 2007; and (ii) for how many years each company has held the licence.

(AQW 5050/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment:

1. Six companies have held licences for the supply of natural gas in the Greater Belfast area since January 2007. These are Phoenix Supply Ltd., Firmus Energy, Viridian Energy Supply Ltd., Power and Gas Ventures Ltd., VAYU Ltd., and Airtricity Energy Supply (NI) Ltd.

2. Viridian Energy Supply Ltd has held a gas supply licence for Greater Belfast since 2000, while Phoenix Supply Ltd., and Firmus Energy have held gas supply licences since 2006. Power and Gas Ventures Ltd has held a licence for three years since 2007, VAYU Ltd. has held a licence for 2 years since 2008, and Airtricity Energy Supply (NI) Ltd has held a licence for some 6 months.

Rose Energy Shareholders

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any senior members of the Ulster Farmers Union are individual shareholders in Rose Energy or shareholders in a company which has shares in Rose Energy.

(AQW 5116/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: From the company information held by Invest NI, it is not possible to identify if any shareholders are members of the Ulster Farmers Union.

Funding to Help Invest NI Clients

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the £5 million announced in September 2008 to help Invest NI clients to navigate the economic slow down, to detail (i) the amount that has been allocated; (ii) the percentage of applicants who were ultimately successful; (iii) the name and location of the businesses which benefited; (iv) the number of these businesses located in Neighbourhood Renewal areas; (v) the number of businesses which received the announced 50% cost of approved projects; and (vi) where the 50% was not received, what percentage was provided.

(AQW 5129/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Accelerated Support Fund (ASF) was announced in 2008 as a tactical response to the emerging economic downturn. The Fund had an available budget of £5 million to provide fast-track support to assist Invest NI clients by providing advice and on-site support. Access to the ASF was by way of attendance at the 'Challenges and opportunities – the Credit Crunch' events - a proactive initiative organised by Invest NI. Maximum support available for any project was £50,000 or 50% of eligible expenditure up to £100,000 whichever was the lesser.

In detailed response to the six issues raised:

- (i) The total amount allocated is £5.895m. This is broken down as: £4.389m for ASF projects plus £1.506m for Credit Crunch Diagnostics.
- (ii) 96% of proposals were successful.
- (iii) I have set out these details in the tables at Annexes A and B.
- (iv) 100 of the 639 combined offers were in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (15.6%).
- (v) 132 businesses received 50% funding.
- (vi) Two projects received less than the maximum available support (one receiving 40% and the other 45%).

Between September 2008 and April 2009, 14 events were organised across the province attended by over 830 Invest NI clients of which 764 registered for the free Diagnostic service available. Over 500 diagnostics have now been completed with 300 projects are now underway supported either directly via ASF or existing mainstream Invest NI programmes.

Annex A

INVEST NI OFFERS APPROVED UNDER CREDIT CRUNCH DIAGNOSTICS SCHEME UP TO 31ST JAN 2010

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Deane Public Works Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
M&M Gas & Refrigeration Services Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Bayview Hotel Partnership	East Londonderry
Industry Training Services Limited	Upper Bann
Michael & Noilin Mullin	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Terra Solutions Limited	South Down
Enterprise Stationery Limited	Upper Bann
Aluminium & Plastics Systems Limited	Lagan Valley
Richard O'lone	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Acheson & Glover Precast Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Hunter Apparel Solutions Limited	Foyle
Rooms Dynamic Furniture Ltd	East Londonderry
Renewable Building Technologies Ltd	West Tyrone
Drew Mccoubrey	East Antrim
Plato Training Ltd.	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Dyna-Power Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Seating Matters Limited	East Londonderry
Tilt-A-Dor Ltd	North Down
George Fleck Snr, George Fleck Jnr, Agnes Fleck, Brenda Fleck	North Antrim
Whitewater Consulting Ltd	Belfast South
Ucs Design Ltd	Belfast West
Level Seven Creative Limited	Belfast East
FortrEss Diagnostics Ltd	South Antrim
Millers Traditional Bakery Ltd	Belfast East
E Culley, G Grattan, K Dominy, A McClelland, P Beattie & A Culley	Belfast North
Aria Clothing Ltd	Belfast North
Glover Site Investigations Ltd	North Antrim
Gerard Cullen	Belfast North
F S L Electronics Ltd	Mid Ulster
G P S Colour Graphics Ltd	Belfast East
Sharman D Neill Ltd	Belfast West
Rubber & Plastic Products (NI) Ltd	Belfast North
Nuachtain	Belfast West
Northside Graphics Limited	Belfast North
Commercial Information Company Ltd	Belfast North

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Power Action Limited	Lagan Valley
Victor Baxter, Michael Murray And Karen Murray	Belfast East
Peter Mc Grath & Brian Mc Grath	Lagan Valley
T A L Ltd	Lagan Valley
Spence Engineering Ltd	Lagan Valley
Dci Energy Control Ltd	East Antrim
Essential Designs (NI) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Redflite Ltd	North Antrim
Huhtamaki (Lurgan) Ltd	Upper Bann
S J Mcauley Engineering Ltd	North Antrim
Crawford Contracts Ltd	North Antrim
Oakfield Cabinets Limited	South Antrim
Sean Blaney	North Antrim
Madden Brothers Limited	North Antrim
Robert Patton T/A Old Mill Saddlery	East Antrim
J M F Ltd	North Antrim
Wafer Enterprises Ltd	Foyle
Aaron Mullan	West Tyrone
Sean Hagan & Cathal Hagan	Mid Ulster
Sean O'Neill	West Tyrone
Pvs Manufacturing Limited	Mid Ulster
Gortavoy Plant Ltd	Mid Ulster
Teague & Sally Limited	Mid Ulster
Emerging Group Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
M P Coleman Limited	Mid Ulster
Deane Public Works Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Canopies (Ireland) Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Bite Snack Foods Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Jmg Systems Ltd	West Tyrone
Frylite Ltd	West Tyrone
Electro-Tech Machinery Limited	Mid Ulster
Raymond & Elaine Boyd	West Tyrone
Charlie Canavan, Connor Canavan & Joel Canavan	Mid Ulster
Porta-Fill International Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Trade Robes Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Cookstown Panel Centre Limited	Mid Ulster
J M Engineering Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Mc Don Peat Supplies Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Acos (NI) Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
P I K EngineeriNg Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Benburb Bramleys Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Caledon Precision Engineering Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Need Of Meats Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Irwin Control Panels Limited	Newry And Armagh
Deli-Lites (Ireland) Limited	South Down
Servasport Ltd	Belfast South
Fintan McMullan Limited	South Down
Messrs Fegan & Mooney	South Down
Ican Engineering Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Blair Neill Ltd	Strangford
Hawthorne Timber Fabrications Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Globeweigh Uk Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Hill Engineering Ltd	South Down
Derrys Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Kevin Murphy Engineering Limited T/A Kme Steelworks	South Down
Mourne Granite Limited	South Down
D & M Cakes Ltd	Lagan Valley
Annaghmore Agencies Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Victor Bowman	Upper Bann
Mc Allister Bros Ltd	Newry And Armagh
C & R Furniture (Armagh) Limited	Newry And Armagh
Mcerlean Trailers Ltd	South Antrim
Opt 2 Vote Ltd	Foyle
Oak Grove Cabins Ltd	Foyle
Copper Industries (Ireland) Limited	Mid Ulster
Beam Vacuum Systems Limited	Mid Ulster
Euro Fire And Security Limited	Foyle
Vijay, Krishna & Jagdish Bedi	Mid Ulster

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Premier Woodlands Ltd	Mid Ulster
Top Glass Contracts Ltd	South Antrim
The Elevate Group Limited	Mid Ulster
Manor Mouldings (NI) Limited	Foyle
Jim, Monica & Rory Jackson	Foyle
Sean Hagan, Eamon Hagan & Cathal Hagan	Mid Ulster
Mid Ulster Reproductions Limited	Mid Ulster
Michelin Tyre Plc	North Antrim
Empire Meats Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Mervyn Kennedy	West Tyrone
Mcelwaine Group	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Botanic Inns Limited	Belfast South
Nutech Renewables Ltd	South Down
Loughtec Ltd	West Tyrone
Jim Martin Marketing Limited	East Antrim
Clare Cannon	North Down
Wall Effects Limited	West Tyrone
Ccs Surveying Ltd.	West Tyrone
Tnr Systems Limited	Mid Ulster
Ibc Trading Limited	North Down
Homecare (Northern Ireland) Limited	Newry And Armagh
Jacqueline Bohill & Una Kennedy Boyd	Belfast West
Erne Management Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Cunamh Ict Ltd	Foyle
Mcauley Kitchens Limited	North Antrim
Mullinsallagh Ltd	North Antrim
TullyheRron Farm Feeds Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Integrated Timber Solutions Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
John & Brian Lagan	Mid Ulster
Frontier Energy Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Dea Gate Automation Limited	Mid Ulster
Dawson Manufacturing & Engineering Ltd	Upper Bann
Awakin Limited	East Londonderry
The Corner Cake Shop Ltd	Mid Ulster

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Sam & Lorna Robinson	Mid Ulster
HarpSCREEN International Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Patrick Murray	Strangford
Arcatech Limited	Lagan Valley
Urban Forest Limited	Newry And Armagh
Victorian Garden Architecture Ltd	Lagan Valley
Raymond Maguire Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Three Software Ltd	Lagan Valley
Bm Steel Fabrications Limited	Newry And Armagh
Global Armour Limited	Lagan Valley
Jonathan Coyle	East Londonderry
The Streat Franchising Limited	North Down
Apollo Marble & Granite Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Mike Haigney	West Tyrone
John And Sally Williamson	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Wilson Property Limited	South Antrim
Michael & Josephine Mc Nelis	West Tyrone
Sycadex Ltd	Lagan Valley
Vivion Mccorley	Mid Ulster
Cooneen Watts & Stone Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Agms Limited	Strangford
Unique Timber Frame Ltd	East Londonderry
Setanta The Construction Company Ltd	Mid Ulster
Cater Waste Products Ltd	Mid Ulster
Kan Teq Ltd	Strangford
Aurion Limited	Belfast South
Aidan Mcalister	South Down
M & K Quarry Plant Ltd	Mid Ulster
Oliver Gormley	West Tyrone
Autogen Manufacturing Ltd	Mid Ulster
Design By Front Ltd	Belfast South
Cromer Enterprises Limited	Foyle
Glencarn Property Ltd	Mid Ulster
JoE, Paul Mahon And Aisling Sloan	Fermanagh And South Tyrone

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Killyhevlin Hotel Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Hastings Hotels Group Ltd	Belfast East
Country Inns (Ulster) Limited	North Down
Beech Hill House Hotel Ltd	Foyle
Nu Print Technologies Limited	Foyle
Kivertech Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Regen Waste Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Numac Waste Systems Ltd	South Down
Em Automation Limited	Mid Ulster
Stephen McClenaghan	Strangford
Glenovation Limited	North Antrim
Capital Reinforcing (Ireland) Ltd	Fermanagh And South TYrone
Ck International Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Northern Automation Limited	East Antrim
Mo Team Limited	Lagan Valley
Asidua Ltd	Belfast South
Asidua Ltd	Belfast South
Mcquaid Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster
Kilbrae Furniture Ltd	Mid Ulster
Fusion Antibodies Ltd	Belfast West
Mccauley Trailers Ltd	South Antrim
Hillgrove Hotel Ltd	East Londonderry
Moore Concrete Products Limited	North Antrim
Pneutrol Ireland Ltd	South Antrim
Tenderlean Meats Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Cabragh Engineering Limited	FermaNagh And South Tyrone
R W Pierce Group Ltd	Belfast North
Cross Refrigeration (NI) Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Patrick Mccaul	West Tyrone
Seagoe Technologies Ltd	Upper Bann
Novosco Ltd	Strangford
Ultra Spreader International Limited	Mid Ulster
Nu-Track Ltd	South Antrim
Garage Door Systems Ltd	North Antrim

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Moyfab Engineering Ltd	South Down
Mourne Country Meats Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Mary Elizabeth Lynn	North Antrim
Mjm Marine Limited	South Down
Copeland Ltd	Mid Ulster
Cottage Catering Ltd	Lagan Valley
Mullins Ice CreaM Ltd	East Londonderry
Willowbrook Foods Limited	Strangford
J Rooney, R Rooney & A Rooney	South Down
Alpha Environmental Systems Ltd	East Londonderry
Webtech (NI) Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Park Gate Foods Ltd	Strangford
Classic Mineral Water Co Ltd	Upper Bann
Deluxe Art & Theme Limited	Upper Bann
E S L Engineering Ltd	East Londonderry
Tullyraine Quarries Limited	South Down
Classic Marble (Showers) Ltd	West Tyrone
Duncan Maxwell Storefitters Limited	North Down
Windell Ltd	Mid Ulster
Specialist JoineRy Fittings Ltd	Mid Ulster
Crossgar Poultry Ltd	South Down
Montupet (Uk) Ltd	Lagan Valley
Springfarm Architectural Mouldings Ltd	South Antrim
A. Diamond & Son (Timber) Limited	East Londonderry
Richard Atkinson & Co Limited	South Antrim
Sports Crest Limited	North Down
Brook Design Hardware Ltd	Lagan Valley
North West Of Ireland Printing & Publishing Co Ltd	West Tyrone
P W S Ireland Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Concrete Flooring Systems Ltd	Mid Ulster
Maghera Joinery Works Ltd	Mid Ulster
John England Textiles Ltd	BelFast East
Denroy Plastics Ltd	North Down
Paul & Reuben Bruce T/A Bruce Engineering	Mid Ulster

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Acheson & Glover Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
The Corporate Wardrobe Ltd	North Down
Springvale E P S Ltd	South Antrim
Texam Ltd	Lagan Valley
Ryobi Aluminium Casting (Uk) Limited	East Antrim
Boomer Industries Ltd	Lagan Valley
Partridge Peartree Promotions Limited	Foyle
Orior By Design Limited	Newry And Armagh
Sepha Limited	Strangford
Sean J Jordan Engineering Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
B A Kitchen Components LTd	Mid Ulster
Evron Foods Ltd	Upper Bann
Stevenson & Company	North Antrim
Rapid International Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Metso Minerals (Cappagh) Limited	Mid Ulster
Rtu Limited	East Antrim
Larsen Manufacturing Ltd	Belfast North
Craftstone 2000 Ltd	Lagan Valley
Mallaghan Engineering Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
W & G Baird Ltd	South Antrim
R W Pierce & Co (Printers) Ltd	Belfast North
Norman Emerson Group Ltd	Upper Bann
Francis Dinsmore Ltd	North Antrim
Fivemiletown & Brookborough Co-Operative Agricultural & Dairy Society Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
NI Shotblasting Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
J H McNickle & Sons Ltd	East Antrim
Mallaghan Convenience Diy Products Ltd	Mid Ulster
Four Dee (NI) Limited	Mid Ulster
Racking & Shelving Limited	South Antrim
Annard Horseboxes Ltd	Newry And Armagh
3d Steelwork Ltd	Mid Ulster
Reprographic Systems (NI) Ltd	Upper Bann
Cde Ireland Limited	Mid Ulster

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Sherwood Systems Ltd	Belfast South
Smyth Steel Ltd	East Londonderry
Garuda Design Ltd	Belfast South
M Herron Ltd	Mid Ulster
NOrth Down Marquees Limited	Strangford
Dc Piling Ltd	West Tyrone
S D C Trailers Ltd	Mid Ulster
Neill Mullin & Sons Ltd	West Tyrone
Gary Parke & Sue Prenter	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
White Ink Architects Limited	Belfast North
Joseph Barrett & Son Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Atlas Fire & Security (NI) Limited	Belfast North
Making It Happen 4 U Ltd	Mid Ulster
Holiday Inn Belfast	Belfast South
Tickety-Moo Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Baron Recycling Ltd	Mid Ulster
Fmc Electrical Services Ltd	West Tyrone
Fusion Broadcast Limited	Lagan Valley
A & N Shilliday & Co Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Apex Fastening Solutions Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Mcnicholl & Hughes Limited	Lagan Valley
Valpar Industrial Limited	North Down
Erne Extrusions Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Nigel Wilson	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Trevor & Samantha Torrens	West Tyrone
Copas Tool & Die Ltd	South Down
Richard O'lonc	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Linton & Robinson Limited	West Tyrone
Willis Heating & Plumbing Co Ltd	Belfast North
Cp Hire Ltd	East Londonderry
Cross Concrete Flooring Ltd	East Londonderry
Paul Quinell	Foyle
Clarity Business Education Ltd	South Antrim
Sembarc Ltd	Lagan Valley

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Lambour Precision Engineering Ltd	Lagan Valley
Versatile Manufacturing Dungannon Llp	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Scott McClelland	Foyle
M E T Steel Ltd	South Antrim
Kiverco Limited	Mid Ulster
P.M. Engineering Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Meteor Controls (International) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Ltd	Foyle
Being Communications Ltd	Belfast East
Excite Exhibition & Display Ltd	Lagan Valley
Michael & Jane Evason & Declan O'duil	West Tyrone
Fire Security Limited	Belfast South
Belfast Print Finishers Ltd	South Antrim
Advanced Industrial Coatings Ltd	Strangford
Team Industries Limited	South Antrim
Happening (NI) Limited	Belfast South
P F C Rainwater Systems Ltd	South Antrim
Pumps & Fuel Installations Limited	Belfast West
Crossen Engineering Ltd	Strangford
Sliderobes Group Limited	Belfast South
Edenderry Print Ltd	Belfast West
Maydown PreCision Engineering Limited	Foyle
Parker Butler Limited	Belfast East
Knysna (N.I.) Limited	Strangford
Ruth Wilson	Lagan Valley
Elmore Fish Limited	Belfast West
Industrial Products Ltd	East Antrim
Michael Morton & David Millsopp	South Antrim
R J F Jennings Bakery Ltd	East Antrim
Eamon Mcveigh	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Spires Gallery Ltd	West Tyrone
Sean O'Neill	West Tyrone
Emerging Group Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
The Creative Media Company (NI) Limited	West Tyrone

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Paul Donnelly	West Tyrone
Monica Mc GeaRy	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Spec-Drum Engineering	Mid Ulster
O & S Doors Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Fast Engineering Ltd	South Antrim
T E S (NI) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Deane Public Works Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Steel Solutions (NI) Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Tailored Image Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
General Cabins & Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster
P M Fireplaces Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Finrone Ltd	West Tyrone
Mckenna Precision Engineering Ltd	West Tyrone
Spincraft Limited	Mid Ulster
Allied Metal Products Limited	Mid Ulster
Seamus Mc Crory	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Liam Casey	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
William Dunlop	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Tyrone Quality Picture Framing Limited	Mid Ulster
Steelweld Fabrications Limited	Mid Ulster
Fabricat (Ireland) Contractors Limited	Mid Ulster
Mc Girr Engineering Ltd	West Tyrone
Ernest Shaw & Philip Shaw	Mid Ulster
The Mcavoy Group Limited	Mid Ulster
The Postcard Company Ltd	West Tyrone
Domestic Sheepskins (UK) Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Orchard Fresh Foods Limited	Newry And Armagh
Irwin Control Panels Limited	Newry And Armagh
Douglas Architectural Systems Ltd	Upper Bann
Pat & Kathy Cassidy	Newry And Armagh
Joe & Marian Annett	South Down
Environmental Fabrications Ltd	Lagan Valley
Around Noon Limited	Newry And Armagh
Herron Engineering Limited	South Down

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Clerk Fencing Ltd	South Down
Robert J Farrell	Newry And Armagh
James Sammon & Co Ltd	Foyle
C M Interiors Ltd	Mid Ulster
Ashland Chemicals & Hygiene Supplies Ltd	East Londonderry
Colin & Sheena Graham	Foyle
CaRella Laminate Systems Ltd.	Foyle
Carella Laminate Systems Ltd.	Foyle
Hegarty's (Fitted Furniture) Limited	West Tyrone
Hegarty's (Fitted Furniture) Limited	West Tyrone
Moyola Mattress Co Ltd	Mid Ulster
Laganvale Enterprises Limited	Upper Bann
Mcc Building Systems Ltd	West Tyrone
Rogers & Smyth (NI) Limited	West Tyrone
Cr Coffee Houses Ltd	South Antrim
John Mcelwaine	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Blakely Mccartney Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Bowman Aluminium Systems Ltd	Upper Bann
Ccs Surveying Ltd.	West Tyrone
Kn Network Services (Northern Ireland) Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Mr Paul Doherty	Foyle
TakeTheBiscuit Ltd	North Antrim
W. D. Irwin & Sons Limited	Upper Bann
Fire Escapes (Europe) Ltd	Belfast South
Floorform Limited	Newry And Armagh
Erne Management Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Electronic & Security Services Ltd	Belfast South
H Ireland & Son Limited	South Antrim
Technical Metals Ltd	Strangford
Larsen (Manufacturing) Limited	Belfast North
M D F Engineering Limited	South Antrim
Flamelily FloWers Ltd	Upper Bann
Springco (NI) Ltd	Upper Bann
Walter C Campbell	Fermanagh And South Tyrone

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Joseph Hughes Industrial Cleaning Limited	North Antrim
Nifty Nosh Ltd	Belfast West
Mcelwaine Smart Technologies Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Mammoth Design Consultants Limited	Belfast South
Dominic Muldoon	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Michael Cunningham	West Tyrone
Bailies Coffee Co. Ltd	Belfast North
K-Space (NI) Ltd	Upper Bann
Acorn Wood Mouldings Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Acorn Wood Mouldings Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Brendan Rafferty	Mid Ulster
Jonathan Coyle	East Londonderry
Abf Grain Products Limited	Belfast East
Merchant Hotel Limited	Belfast North
Ld2 Limited	West Tyrone
Composite Design Ireland Llp	West Tyrone
Fable Multimedia Limited	Belfast North
Lbm Holdings (Uk) Limited	Belfast West
Harry Stuart & Doreen Byers	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Foyle Recyclers Limited	Foyle
Emtek Products Limited	Upper Bann
Fermanagh Properties Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Dunsilly Hotel Ltd	South Antrim
Dolphin Travellers Rest Ltd	East Londonderry
Corlin Developments Ltd	West Tyrone
Corlin Developments Ltd	West Tyrone
A1 Power Systems Ltd	Mid Ulster
Stredia Limited	West Tyrone
Delwyn Enterprises Ltd	Mid Ulster
Roe Park Holdings Ltd	East Londonderry
Dunadry Development Company Limited	Belfast South
Brian And Mary Macklin	Belfast South
Frank Oneill	East Antrim
Ivor Boyd, Norma Wilkinson, Brian Stockman	East Londonderry

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Glenavon House Hotel (1982) Limited	Mid Ulster
Charles Trolan	East Londonderry
Dk Leisure Ltd	East Londonderry
Belle Isle Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Careersport Recruitment & Consultancy Ltd	North Down
Scully Supplies Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Mona Units Limited	Foyle
Alfred Briggs (Alwood) Ltd	Upper Bann
Janus Contracts Ltd	Mid Ulster
Visual Edge Ltd	West Tyrone
Mrs Orreen & Russell C J Yates	East Londonderry
Dernaseer Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster
Inferno Productions Limited	Belfast South
Capital Reinforcing (Ireland) Ltd	Belfast East
Fire Imc Limited	Belfast North
Protturn Precision Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster
Paul Crilly & Johannes Lodewicus Du Preez	East Antrim
Nitronica Ltd	South Down
Hcl Bpo Services (NI) Limited	Belfast South
Colloide Engineering Systems Limited	Mid Ulster
Intelesens Limited	Belfast East
Creation Consumer Finance Limited	Belfast South
Norman & Eileen Moore	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Core Systems (NI) Ltd	Belfast North
Integrated Services Design Ltd	Belfast North
Biznet Solutions Ltd	Belfast South
Kitchenmaster (N.I.) Limited	Strangford
Allstate Northern Ireland Limited	Belfast South
Crossland Tankers Limited	East Londonderry
Chieftain Trailers Limited	Mid Ulster
E D M Spanwall Ltd	Strangford
Billy Warke	North Antrim
The Savile Row Holding Company Ltd	Mid Ulster
Schrader Electronics Ltd	South Antrim

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
N K Coatings Ltd	South Antrim
C N C Components (Uk) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Hampton Conservatories Ltd	East Londonderry
P Clarke & Sons Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Douglas & Grahame Ltd	East Antrim
Schlumberger Oilfield Uk Plc	East Antrim
Classic Marble (Showers) Ltd	West Tyrone
Glen ElecTric Ltd	Newry And Armagh
Digestors Silos & Tanks Ltd	Belfast West
Montupet (Uk) Ltd	Lagan Valley
Tesab Engineering Ltd	West Tyrone
P F Copeland Ltd	South Antrim
N K Fencing Ltd	East Antrim
Adamsez (N.I.) Limited	Strangford
Travan Precision Engineering Ltd	North Antrim
Glas-Seal (NI) Ltd	South Down
Maghera Joinery Works Limited	Mid Ulster
Peden Power Ltd	Mid Ulster
Arntz Belting Company Limited	Foyle
Ardboe Manufacturing Company Limited	Mid Ulster
Rosco Engineering (NI) Limited	Newry And Armagh
Laser PrototYpes (Europe) Limited	Belfast South
Mcivor Plastics Limited	Foyle
Moy Park Limited	Upper Bann
Turkington Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster
Springvale E P S Ltd	South Antrim
Bradbury Graphics Ltd	Belfast East
Macneice Fruit Limited	Newry And Armagh
Browns Coachworks Limited	Lagan Valley

Annex B**INVEST NI OFFERS APPROVED UNDER ACCELERATED SUPPORT SCHEME UP TO 31ST JAN 2010**

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
A. Diamond & Son (Timber) Limited	East Londonderry

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Adamsez (N.I.) Limited	Strangford
Advanced Industrial Coatings Ltd	Strangford
Agms Ltd	Strangford
Aidan Mcalister	South Down
Alfred Briggs (Alwood) Ltd	Upper Bann
Allstate Northern Ireland Limited	West Tyrone
Alpha Environmental Systems Limited	East Londonderry
Annan Interiors Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Aria Clothing Limited	Belfast North
Axon Power & Control Ltd	Mid Ulster
Belfast Print Finishers Ltd	South Antrim
Benburb Bramleys Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Bite Snack Foods Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Blair Neill Limited	Strangford
Boomer Industries Ltd	Lagan Valley
Brett Martin Limited	South Antrim
C & R Furniture (Armagh) Limited	Newry And Armagh
Caledon Precision Engineering Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Capital Reinforcing (Ireland) Ltd	West Tyrone
Carella Laminate Systems Ltd	Foyle
Cde Ireland Ltd	Mid Ulster
Ck InternaTional Limited	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Clarehill Plastics Ltd	Lagan Valley
Classic Marble (Showers) Ltd	West Tyrone
Classic Mineral Water Company Limited	Upper Bann
Complete Beverage Services Limited	West Tyrone
Creative Composites Limited	Lagan Valley
Dark Water Studios Limited	Foyle
Datum Tool Design Ltd	South Down
Dawson Manufacturing And Engineering Ltd	Upper Bann
Deluxe Art & Theme Limited	Upper Bann
Delwyn Enterprises Ltd	Mid Ulster
Denroy Plastics Limited	North Down
Dernaseer Engineering Ltd	Mid Ulster

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Derrys Limited	Newry And Armagh
Digestors Silos & Tanks Ltd	Belfast West
Dk Leisure Ltd	East Londonderry
Drenagh Sawmills Limited	East Londonderry
Electro-Tech Machinery Limited	Mid Ulster
Elmore Fish Limited	Belfast West
Em Automation Limited	Mid Ulster
Environmental Fabrications Limited	Lagan Valley
Essential Designs (NI) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Eurofab Engineering Structures Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Excite Exhibition & DiSplay Ltd	Lagan Valley
Fabricat (Ireland) Contractors Limited	Mid Ulster
Fintan McMullan Limited	South Down
Floorform Limited	Newry And Armagh
Francis Dinsmore Ltd	North Antrim
Fujitsu Telecommunications Europe Limited	South Antrim
Glas - Seal (NI) Ltd	South Down
H Ireland And Son Limited	South Antrim
Hastings Hotels Group Ltd	Belfast North
Hcl Bpo Services (NI) Limited	Belfast South
Hill Engineering Limited	South Down
Hillgrove Hotel Limited	East Londonderry
Intelesens Limited	Belfast East
J F McKenna Ltd	Newry And Armagh
J.M.G. Systems Ltd	West Tyrone
John & Brian Lagan	Mid Ulster
Kan Teq Limited	Strangford
Kathy Faulkner & Brendan Faulkner	South Antrim
Kingspan Environmental Limited	Upper Bann
Kmc Engineering (NI) Ltd	Mid Ulster
Label One Ltd	Belfast North
Lagan Technologies Limited	Belfast East
Langford Lodge Engineering Company Limited	South Antrim
Laser Prototypes (Europe) Limited	Belfast South

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Lbm Holdings (UK) Limited	Belfast West
Liam Casey	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Loughtec Ltd	West Tyrone
M&M Gas And Refrigeration Services Limited	Newry And Armagh
Macneice Fruit Limited	Newry And Armagh
Mc Girr Engineering Ltd	West Tyrone
Mccauley Trailers Ltd	South Antrim
Mcelmeel Mobility Services Limited	Newry And Armagh
Mcelwaine Smart Technologies Ltd	Fermanagh And South Tyrone
Metso Minerals (Cappagh) Limited	Mid Ulster
Michelin Tyre Public Limited Company	North Antrim
Micran Limited	Mid Ulster
Mid Ulster Reproductions Limited	Mid Ulster
Mivan Limited	South Antrim
Moore Concrete Products Limited	North Antrim
Mourne Granite Limited	South Down
Moyfab Engineering Limited	South Down
Moyola Precision Engineering Limited	Mid Ulster
Nitronica Ltd	South Down
Norman Emerson Group Ltd	Upper Bann
Norman Menary And Trevor Kane	East Londonderry
North Down Marquees Limited	Strangford
North West Of Ireland Printing And Publishing Company Limited	West Tyrone
Northern Hydraulics Ltd	Mid Ulster
Northside Graphics Limited	Belfast North
Nu Print Technologies Limited	Foyle
Nu-TrAck Limited	South Antrim
Nuachtain	Belfast West
Parker Butler Limited	Belfast East
Pat & Kathy Cassidy	Newry And Armagh
Pumps & Fuel Installations Limited	Belfast West
R W Pierce Group Limited	Belfast North
R W Pierce Security Print Solutions Ltd	Belfast North
Radius Plastics Ltd	Upper Bann

Company Name	Parliamentary Constituency Area
Richard Atkinson And Company, Limited	South Antrim
Rooms Dynamic Furniture Ltd	East Londonderry
Rtu Limited	East Antrim
Rubber & Plastic Products (NI) Ltd	Belfast North
Ruth Wilson	Lagan Valley
S J Mcauley Engineering Ltd	North Antrim
Seagoe Technologies Ltd	Upper Bann
Seamus & Mary Boden	South Down
Sean Blaney	North Antrim
Sharman D Neill Ltd	Belfast West
Smartstart Specialised Tuition Service Ltd	Foyle
Smiley Monroe Ltd	Lagan Valley
Smyth Steel Limited	East Londonderry
Spires Gallery Ltd	West Tyrone
Springvale Eps Ltd	South Antrim
Stirling Film And Television Productions Limited	Belfast SoUth
Taylor & Boyd	Belfast South
Team Industries Limited	Belfast South
Terence McCormack Limited	Newry And Armagh
Tesab Engineering Ltd	West Tyrone
Texam Ltd	Lagan Valley
The Corporate Wardrobe Limited	North Down
Tilt-A-Dor Limited	North Down
Trevor & Samantha Torrens	West Tyrone
Tullyraine Quarries Limited	South Down
Ulster Carpet Mills (Holdings) Ltd	Upper Bann
Valpar Industrial Limited	North Down
W. & G. Baird Limited	South Antrim
Whitewater Consulting Limited	Belfast South
Wrightbus Limited	North Antrim
Wrightbus Limited	North Antrim

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department will support a public inquiry into Rose Energy's proposal for an incinerator in Glenavy.

(AQW 5275/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI continues to evaluate the Rose Energy project and the due diligence process is continuing and the outcome of this will determine if, and to what extent, an offer of financial support will be made.

Given that planning falls under the remit of the DOE it would be inappropriate for my Department to offer a view in respect of a public inquiry.

Legislation to Permit Natural Gas Companies to Enter Properties

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if, and when, she intends to amend legislation to permit natural gas companies to enter properties to inspect their equipment.

(AQW 5298/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am bringing forward an Energy Bill to be introduced to the Assembly in Spring 2010.

Its proposals include provision for enhanced powers of access for natural gas companies to legally enter customers' premises in situations that are not conditional on there being a danger to life or property. For example, where the gas company wishes to take a meter reading or where they suspect that a customer has been tampering with a gas meter.

It is therefore proposed that legislation for gas companies' existing powers of entry be extended so that they broadly align with the powers available to electricity companies, as included within the current Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 provisions.

Department of the Environment

High Hedges Legislation

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if the proposed high hedges legislation will apply to trees 10-14 feet in diameter.

(AQW 4950/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The proposed high hedges legislation will apply to trees 10-14 feet in diameter provided that they meet the criteria outlined in the draft legislation i.e. the hedge must be formed wholly or predominantly by evergreen or semi-evergreen trees or shrubs; consist of a line of 2 or more trees or shrubs; measure more than 2m from ground level; act as a barrier to light or access; affect residential property; and be growing on land owned by someone other than the person making the complaint.

Bonuses to Civil Servants

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the process followed to award £63,650 in bonuses to civil servants as highlighted in the Public Accounts Committee report on 'The Performance of the Planning Service'; and (ii) what levels of authorisation were required in awarding these bonuses.

(AQW 5045/10)

Minister of the Environment: The bonuses referred to in the PAC report which totalled £63,650, were paid in respect of the period 2003/04 to 2007/08. Two distinct processes were used in awarding the bonuses to the individual civil servants:

- £60,000 - 12 bonuses paid to 4 Senior Civil Servants (SCS); and
- £ 3,650 - 8 bonuses paid to 6 civil servants below SCS grade.

For the SCS grades the processes followed for award bonuses were determined by the NI Civil Service SCS Pay Strategies drawn up for each of the years in question. The level of authorisation for individual bonuses payable was at Permanent Secretary level.

The process for the award of bonuses to civil service grades below the SCS (up to and including Grade 6) is contained in the NICS Special Bonus Scheme. The

scheme allows Departments discretion to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations at any time of the year. The overall cost of special bonuses in each Department must not exceed 0.2 per cent of the pay bill.

The minimum level of authorisation for the award of a special bonus in the Department of the Environment was at Grade 6 level.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment what bids his Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5114/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has submitted five ‘Invest to Save’ proposals to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), as detailed in the table below.

Business Area	‘Invest to Save’ Proposals	Amount
Northern Ireland Environmental Agency	Restoration of hydroelectric power at Roe Valley Country Park.	£740,000
Northern Ireland Environmental Agency	Central Permitting System – IT system to manage, interrogate and co-ordinate permitting activities, facilitate more integrated regulation of industry, speed up handling and processing of applications.	£600,000
Northern Ireland Environmental Agency	Environmental Data and Information Management Platform – IT system to integrate and share NIEA environmental data and information to support risk based regulation, report on the state of the environment, and enhance strategic planning.	£750,000
Planning & Environmental Policy Group	Waste Prevention - initiate a foundation for waste prevention activities and to raise awareness in the NI public.	£500,000
Planning Service	Planning Reform and Review of Public Administration	£4,405,000

DFP has advised that each ‘Invest to Save’ proposal will be assessed not only on the ratio of upfront cost to the net present value of future savings, but also in terms of deliverability. In relation to communal segregation in service provision and the promotion of integration, given the nature of my Department’s five ‘Invest to Save’ bids these issues had no material bearing on the proposals.

Foaming on the Surface of Larne Lough

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the the Northern Ireland Environment Agency investigation into incidents of foaming on the surface of Larne Lough, near Ballylumford Power Station.

(AQW 5117/10)

Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) recently published a report on its website which gives a full update of the NIEA investigations into foaming in Larne Lough, in addition to other monitoring information and assessment. The report can be found at the following website address:-

www.ni-environment.gov.uk/larne_lough_water_quality_jan_2010.pdf. A copy will be placed in the Assembly Library.

The conclusions of the report are that Larne Lough is generally at 'moderate' status under the Water Framework Directive classification schemes and indications are that it will improve to 'good' status by 2015 as required. NIEA staff presented this information at a seminar hosted by Larne Borough Council in Larne, on 17 February 2010 and the Agency is planning further investigations in 2010.

In addition to the NIEA investigations, Premier Power Ltd has carried out investigations into the foam generation and their conclusions are that the foam is natural in origin and that it is probably caused by maceration/agitation of naturally occurring marine organisms in the large quantities of cooling water used in it's relatively new 'C' plant. NIEA is in discussion with Premier Power Ltd, who is currently examining the feasibility of potential solutions to reduce the foam.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment how much money has been spent by his Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5142/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department has spent £3,087, 246 in total on conference /course fees and associated travel costs over the last three years. The table below provides a breakdown of expenditure between conference/course fees expenditure - £2,663,542 and associated travel costs expenditure - £423,704.

DOE	Conference/ Course Fees	Travel Costs	Total
2007/08	713,121	191,431	904,552
2008/09	1,079,064	157,394	1,236,458
2009/10 (1 April to 28 February)	871,357	74,879	946,236
Grand Total	2,663,542	423,704	3,087,246

Removal of Illegal Waste

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the timescale for the removal of illegal waste at Slattinagh in Garrison and Moneygar Road in Trillick.

(AQW 5173/10)

Minister of the Environment: Slattinagh and Trillick will be the first two sites to have their waste repatriated. At the present time, officials from my Department continue to work on the tendering process with Dublin City Council who will be letting the contract for the necessary works.

A precise timescale is not known at present, but I can assure you that time spent on this process at this stage will ensure that the job is done properly and in a way that does not cause pollution or harm to human health.

River Pollution

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been prosecuted for river pollution in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5205/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating reports of pollution affecting ground or surface waters and for instigating appropriate enforcement action.

Table A provides a summary of the number of successful prosecutions for river pollution in each of the last 3 years under the terms of the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and the Pollution Prevention and Control (NI) Regulations 2003.

Table A

	Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999	Pollution Prevention and Control (NI) Regulations 2003
2007	29	0
2008	40	1
2009*	31	1
Total	100	2

* In line with other years, a number of 2009 cases are either pending with Public Prosecution Service (PPS) or remain to be referred to PPS by NIEA.

Planning Applications

Mr J Bell asked the Minister of the Environment how many times, in each of the last three years, Mr John Dallat MLA made representations to the Planning Service (i) in support of a planning application, which was later passed; and (ii) to oppose a planning application, which was later refused.

(AQW 5208/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department's records show that in each of the last three years (including 2010) Mr Dallat made 10 written representations on planning applications, one of which was in support of an application which was later passed. The details of this application are as follows:-

Planning Application Number	Location	Proposal
B/2007/0467/F	8 & 9 Willow Crescent, Ballykelly	Proposed new residential development comprising of 10 No houses and 4 apartments

In each of the last three years (including 2010) Mr Dallat made no representations to oppose a planning application which was later refused.

The other written representations were either in support of an application which was later refused, objecting to an application which was later approved or representations on an application which remain to be decided.

These figures have been extracted from a live dataset which is continuously updated and validated. They should therefore be regarded as indicative only at this point in time and should not be compared with any previous figures published by the Agency.

Mr Dallat regularly makes representations on applications at Council meetings or at meetings with Planning Service officials. However, retrieving this information from the application file or Council minutes could only be done by a manual check at disproportionate costs.

Mr Dallat, along with Patsy McGlone MLA, (then Chair of the Environment Committee) met Planning Service Director of Operations and the Divisional Planning Manager about a planning application which had been refused at Coleraine Road, Portstewart (C/2007/1016/F). An amended application was then submitted and is under consideration.

Planning Service Staff Training

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail (a) the training courses; (b) away days; and (c) seminars that Planning Service staff were invited to attend in the last 24 months; (ii) to detail (a) where these were held; (b) the attendance fee; and (c) the purpose; and (iii) how many staff have participated in (a) training courses; (b) away days; and (c) seminars in the last 24 months.
(AQW 5210/10)

Minister of the Environment: Details of the training courses, away days and seminars that staff in Planning Service have attended over the last 24 months are enclosed.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT EVENTS DELIVERED BY PLANNING SERVICE APRIL 2008 – MARCH 2010

MANDATORY / GENERIC

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
2020 Admin Course	0	22	Developing a Business Case	440	1	Professional Policymaking in Government	770	1
2020 Case Processing	0	14	Developing Policy	560	12	Programme and Project Management	280	1
Microsoft Access 2003: Developers	595	2	Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessment	130	18	Quicker Reading	440	7
2020 Strategic Projects Refresher	0	29	DSE Awareness	78	6	Retirement	440	7
Agency Induction for Managers	0	10	DSE Risk Assessment	155	1	Professional Policymaking in Government - Module 1 Action Learning Set	180	1
Assertiveness at Work	0	23	Effective Writing AA/AO	130	3	Safe Use of Computers (DSE Awareness)	65	32
Coaching for Potential	0	76	Effective Writing E02/E01	130	5	Speech Writing	660	1

Conflict Awareness	0	81	Effective Writing for Managers	130	2	Subordinate Legislation	840	5
Customer Care In-House	0	18	Environmental Impact Regulations	220	1	Subordinate Legislation Template	280	1
DAP Training Course	0	5	EVAC Chair Training	155	1			
Equal Opportunities Awareness	0	54	Evaluating Policy	440	4	Time Management	130	3
Equal Opportunities for Managers	0	147	Financial Management - Overview	45	1	TRIM Power User Training	155	2
Fire Warden Training	0	1	Fraud Awareness All Divisional Offices	155	1	Working with Ministers	660	7
First Aid at Work (4 days)	200	13	Good Management Practice Omagh/ Downpatrick	155	136	Continuous Leadership Development	0	24
First Aid at Work Refresher days)	125	6	Harassment Contact Officer	440	1	Fraud Awareness	0	714
Basic Excel	155	4	Health & Safety Awareness	65	2	Appearing Before an Assembly Committee	65	2
Introduction to Legislation	220	7	Health & Safety Awareness for Managers	78	193	Assembly Questions	65	3
Leader as a Coach	1600	1	ILM Level 3 Award in First Line Management	620	10	Assertiveness	125	1
Planning Service – An Introduction	0	30	ILM Level 7 Award in Professional Policy Making	1860	1	Criterion Based Interviewing Refresher Training for Senior Civil Servants	145	1
Records NI (TRIM)	0	39	ILM Level 5 Award in Management	1475	1	Health and Safety for Premises Officers	250	2
			Influencing & Negotiating	310	10	Healthworks - Total Health	125	18
Administrative Development Programme	620	15	Influencing & Negotiating for Middle Managers	260	4	Managing Personal Stress	125	1
Advanced Word	310	1	Intro to Programming	660	1	Managing Public Money Masterclass	45	1
Programme and Project Management Overview	145	1	Introduction to Internal Audit	450	2	Primary Legislation Training	0	10

MANDATORY / GENERIC

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
Basic PowerPoint	155	1	ITIL Foundation	660	2	Running Small Projects	145	2
CBI - Board Specific	260	2	ITIL Overview	280	1	Secretaryship of Meetings	250	1
CBI Refresher - Board Specific	130	4	Managing Conflict	260	3	Speech Writing	420	1
Coaching Skills	560	2	Managing Small Projects	155	1	Subordinate Legislation	795	6
Content Manager for Authors	155	27	Manual Handling Techniques	78	55	Subordinate Legislation Template	265	8
Criterion Based Interviewing	310	20	Performance Management - 1 day	130	13	Public Accountability for Audit Committee Members	200	4
Criterion Based Interviewing Refresher Training	130	2	Performance Management System - 2 day	310	54	Records Management: Complying with the S46 FOI Code	245	1
Data Protection Act	220	7	Policy Evaluation	560	2	Women's Leadership Initiative	3110	1
Dealing with Difficult Situations	155	3	Practical Data Protection	220	2	Economic Post Project Evaluation	38	29
The Consultation Process in Northern Ireland	210	1	Presentation Skills	440	6	Budgeting Consequences of IFRS	45	2
TRIM End User	145	5	Excelling as first time Manager or Supervisor	99	1	Conducting an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)	210	1
Assembly Legislative Process	0	18	Freedom of Information A-Z	245	2	Handling the Media (Advanced Level)	0	1
Best Practice in Audit Committees	295	1	Fundamentals of Successful Project Management	100	14	Preparing IFRS Shadow Accounts	695	2
Data Protection from A-Z	245	2	How the NI Assembly Works Armagh	245	1	Making the Soundbite Count	1200	3
Developing Leadership in Context Sunningdale	125	1	Implementing Directives in NI	295	2	Meet the Media & Plan your Tactics for 2009	115	2
Digital Web Authoring - Dreamweaver	75	1	Intro to ArcGIS Pt 2	750	1	Perfect Proofreading	295	1

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
Accreditation in Conservation	75	1	Making Transition Work - Craigavon	0	10	The Repair of Old Buildings (6 days) London	700	2
Better Mapping 2008 Edinburgh	70	1	Planning Reform - What Impact for Homes & communities	140	4	Trading Knowledge for Clean Air	37	1
Conserving Historic Places	440	10	Prematurity Training Greenmount	0	29	Transforming the Service of Public Delivery	199	6
Enforcement Notice Training	0	46	Report Writing	0	102	Tree Identification in the Summer	0	8
Environmental Information Regulations	245	1	RSPB NI Futurescapes	0	3	Tree Identification in the Winter	0	1
Getting better value from SEA Glasgow	50	1	RSUA Certificate in Conservation	1440	1	Senior Management Development Programme (3 days)	0	26
Getting the Detail Right: architectural tuning Poundbury	50	1	Site Surveying & Levelling Craigavon	0	5	2020 Enforcement Upgrade	0	94
Getting the Detail Right: architectural tuning Master class Poundbury	50	1	Site Visits & Assessments	0	197	PAC DC Appeals Process and Procedures	0	54
How a Quarry Operates Craiganlet	0	12	SEA -Implementation in Practice	850	1	PACE	185	10
How to extend Historic Buildings	40	1	The Equality Bill in GB	17	2	Rebuttal In House training	0	48
How to get the most out of Brownfield Land for Development	0	2	Traditional Buildings in 21st Century Cushendall	15	3	Regional Spatial Strategies	340	1
Information Security: Law & Practice Manchester	245	1	Trees & Development Training	0	20	Report Writing Bond Salon	240	102
Infrastructure Delivery Workshop	195	3	A practitioners Guide to Visual Tree Assessment Greenmount	165	3	HPTO Management Development Programme Pt 1 (2 days)	0	44
Living with Minerals 3 London	160	2	Planning Appeals - Informal Pt 1 Craigavon	0	23	HPTO Management Development Programme Pt 2 (1 day)	0	48

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
Minerals Planning 2008 Wolverhampton	136	2	Planning Appeals – Informal Pt 2	0	12	Reviewing the Regional Development Strategy	195	7
Mixed Use: Getting the Right Mix Poundbury	50	1						

SEMINARS / RTPI EVENTS

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
@media 2008 London	522	2	RTPI An Introduction to Design Appraisal London	549	1	RTPI Young Planners Conference Brighton & Hove	146.	8
4th All-Island Infrastructure Investment Conference 2008 Dublin	298	2	RTPI Built Environment Conservation London	395	2	SaBRE Executive Stretch Magillian	301.	3
Annual UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference Aberystwyth	0	1	RTPI Economic Development: The New PPS4 London	342	1	Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum Scotland	0	2
Assembly Visit	0	18	RTPI Enforcement London	342	2	The Executive PA	215	4
Chartered Accountants in Business	13	1	RTPI Housing Design London	342	1	The North West City Region Conference Londonderry	195	2
Confidence for Women 3 parts	190	2	RTPI Local Development Framework London	549	2	The Planning Convention 2008 (RTPI) London	450	4
Crime Prevention Conference	0	17	RTPI Local Development Framework Masterclass London	549	1	Wind Farm Visit & Planning Seminar Antrim	80	2
Developer Contribution in Housing: Pancea or Pandoras Box?	180	3	RTPI Negotiating Skills London	158	1	Online Communication Event @ W5	140	1
Developing Northern Ireland Infrastructure Conference	390	2	RTPI Planning Law Update London	342	2	AGI NI Event	65	3
Environment Ireland Conference Dundalk	195	1	RTPI Renewable Energy London	549	1	Biodiversity & Planning Dublin	0	1

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
Has Digital Mapping killed Cartography?	60	3	RTPI Retail & Town Centres London	342	1	CLG/GO Planners Conference Cambridge	100	2
Healthy Cities Conference 2008 Zagreb	864	1	RTPI Strategic Environmental Assessments London	549	1	Creating a Sense of Wellbeing	0	1
Housing, Land Use & Community London	350	1	RTPI Summer School Scotland	905	10	Developing Waste Infrastructure	195	2
How Government Works – Engaging with a Northern Ireland Administration	195	2	RTPI Understanding the Design Appraisal Process London	341	1	Landscape & Cultural Identity ECOVAST	55	1
Involving the Young Citizen: Better Policies Better Planning	0	2	RTPI Urban Design London	341.	2	NAPE Annual Conference Nottinghamshire	0	1
Landscape Awareness Seminar	0	79	RTPI Regional Spatial Strategies London	339.	1	Planning in a Difficult Economy	95	10
Making Consultation Meaningful	245	1	RTPI Regional Strategic Environmental Assessments Masterclass London	433.	1	Planning Law London	340	1
Micro Hydro Seminar	44	2	RTPI understanding Development Finance London	339.	1	PPS 7 Addendum	0	5
NAPE National Conference Birmingham	0	2	Shared Spaces Conference London	245	1	RTPI Annual Development Management London	340	1
Northern Ireland Housing Conference	195	2	RTPI Local Development Frameworks London	340	1	RTPI Annual Enforcement Update London	340	2
Open Space Conference Craigavon	0	30	RTPI Local Development Frameworks Masterclass London	434	2	RTPI/MPA Conference: A framework for Success? Spatial Planning and Minerals Wolverhampton	124	1
RTPI Economic Development London	340	1	RTPI Annual Planning Law Update London	340	2	RTPI NI Convention	70	43
RTPI Island Life Study Trip: Rathlin Island	160	8	RTPI Tall Buildings Conference	80	12	RTPI Urban Design Series 2: Social Urbanism	60	15
RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence Seminar	0	22	RTPI Urban Design In-House	125	16	RTPI Local Planning Law Update	25	33

	Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No		Cost Per Head	Staff No
PPS21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside (RTPI)	55	16	Planning Summer School - Exeter	779	8	CIPFA Project Management Foundation Level	925	3
CIPFA NI Annual Conference Newcastle	595	2	Development Planning Update	22	22	PPS7 Addendum Training Antrim	0	33
CIWM Annual Conference 2008 (4 days) Torbay	572	2	Planning Issues & Practice Update Edinburgh	378	2	NILGA Annual Conference & Exhibition (2 days) Londonderry	255	4

Away Days	Cost Per Head	Staff No
Adamstown Visit	0	19
Building Capabilities: Ability to Change	0	13
RTPI Planning Awards	152	5

Visitors to the Belfast Hills

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the visitor and tourist numbers to the Belfast Hills in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5216/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not record the visitor and tourist numbers to the Belfast Hills.

Ministerial and Council Role: Potential Conflict of Interest

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment if he will seek an opinion from the departmental solicitor on any potential conflict of interest arising from his role as Minister of the Environment and as a local councillor. [R]

(AQW 5225/10)

Minister of the Environment: I do not see a need to seek a legal opinion on this matter. All major decisions on the reform of local government were taken by the Executive before I was appointed as Minister of the Environment.

I have already declared publicly my intention to consider my position as a councillor as soon as the relevant legislation is in place to facilitate this without the need for a costly by-election. I understand the Northern Ireland Office intend to make that legislation very soon. In the meantime, I have withdrawn from all debates relating to local government reform in Lisburn City Council.

Strategic Projects Unit

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to list all planning applications dealt with by the Strategic Projects Unit since its inception; (ii) the average time taken to process these applications; and (iii) the estimated monetary value of each project.

(AQW 5245/10)

Minister of the Environment: Two Strategic Projects teams were created at Planning Service Headquarters in October 2007. In addition to processing Article 31 applications the Strategic Projects teams also process other economically significant applications which while not qualifying as Article 31 are nevertheless viewed as important to the NI economy.

Details of the 45 Article 31 applications processed from April 2008 to 28 February 2010 and 19 other non Article 31 applications processed from April 2009 to 28 February 2010 are set out in the attached Annex. The processing times are set against each application and investment value where known.

It is worth noting that at the time the teams were established they were required to complete the processing of a number of Article 31 applications already in the system. A number were longstanding due to outstanding environmental information despite repeated requests by the Planning Service. The then Minister of the Environment directed that all such applications should be refused.

Within the Programme for Government there is a commitment to process large scale strategic investment planning proposals within 6 months provided there have been pre-application discussions. To date, 10 applications have met the criteria to apply the PfG 6 month target. Of these 8 have been processed on target with the remaining 2 on track for achievement, i.e. 100% record to date.

NON ARTICLE 31 APPLICATIONS PROCESSED BY STRATEGIC PROJECTS TEAMS 2009 - 28 FEBRUARY 2010

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse	Processing timescale	Est Invest where available
1	T/2008/0079	Radox Laboratories, Diamond Rd, Crumlin.	Approve	5 months	£15m
2	Z/2008/2150/F	Petrol Filling Station, Sainsbury's, Kennedy Centre, Belfast	Approve	6 months	
3	Z/2009/0092	Bombardier	Approve	5 months (PfG target)	£300m (part of £520m)
4	N/2008/0835/RM	JH Turkington & Sons, Superstore, Marlborough Retail Park, Highfield Grove, Craigavon	Approve	5 months	
5	K/2008/1167/F	Western Health & Social Care Trust, Road widening and realignment of Donaghane Road	Approve	6 months	
6	Z/2009/0866/F	Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd	Approve	2 months	
7	Z/2009/0668/F	Arqiva Services	Approve	3 months	
8	Z/2008/1548RM	Titanic Quarter. Arc II mixed development.	Approve	12 months	

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse	Processing timescale	Est Invest where available
9	Z/2009/0079	Titanic Quarter & Belfast Harbour Commissioners Ltd	Approve	8 months	
10	L/2008/0741	Western Health & Social Care Trust, emergency Blue Light route	Approve	8 months	
11	W/2008/0302	MLS Partnership, residential development Rathgael Road, Bangor	Approve	16 months	
12	Z/2009/0983	Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd, amendment to previously approved scheme	Approve	2 months	
13	L/2009/0295	Asda Stores, extension to Asda Store, Derrychara Road, Enniskillen	Approve	6 months	
14	Z/2009/0097 & Z/2009/0101LB	Titanic Quarter. Restoration & part change of use of Drawing Offices to function room	Approve	11 months	
15	C/2009/0150/F	Sainsbury's extension to existing Riverside Regional Centre, Coleraine	Approve	9 months	
16	S/2008/0192/F	Antrim Construction Company. Residential development, Brokerstown, Knockmore, Lisburn	Approve	21 months	
17	G/2009/0205/F	Sainsbury's extension and refurbishment of existing store Braidwater Retail Park, Ballymena	Approve	10 months	
18	E/2009/0161/LB	National Trust. Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel.	Approve	9 months	
19	E/2009/0162/F	National Trust. Alteration and extension to the Causeway Hotel.	Approve	9 months	

ARTICLE 31 APPLICATIONS PROCESSED BY STRATEGIC PROJECTS TEAMS 2008 - 28 FEBRUARY 2010

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse / Public Inquiry	Timescale to a recommendation to Minister	Estimated Investment value where available
1	Z/2003/2725	Mixed use development former Sirocco Works, Belfast	Refuse	52 months	

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse / Public Inquiry	Timescale to a recommendation to Minister	Estimated Investment value where available
2	Z/2003/2727	Retail development former Sirocco Works, Belfast	Refuse	52 months	
3	Z/2004/0329	Residential / office development former Sirocco Works, Belfast	Refuse	49 months	
4	Q/2006/1074	Retail development Cascum Road, Banbridge	Approve	16 months	
5	Z/2000/2178	Mixed use development former Sirocco Works, Belfast	Refuse	90 months	
6	Y/2006/0379	DRD Park & Ride facility Carryduff	Approve	21 months	
7	Y/2005/0257	Barleygold retail development, Carryduff	Refuse	35 months	
8	N/1998/0458	Arkon Properties, retail development, Craigavon	Refuse	117 months	
9	Y/2000/0704	Barleygold retail development, Carryduff	Refuse	90 months	
10	N/1996/0321	Windsor Securities retail development, Craigavon	Refuse	144 months	
11	N/2004/1170	Orana Group retail development, Craigavon	Refuse	43 months	
12	Q/2006/1075	Retail development, Cascum Road, Banbridge	Refuse	18 months	
13	A/2004/0976	Tesco, retail development, Buncrana, Londonderry	Refuse	45 months	
14	Z/2006/2864	Residential led / mixed use, Titanic Phase II	Approve	17 months	£450-500 m
15	J/2005/0125	Heron Brothers, retail development, Strabane	Refuse	43 months	
16	X/2004/1800	Retail development, Ards Shopping Centre, Newtownards	Public Inquiry	46 months	
17	X/2005/0653	Retail development, Castlebawn, Newtownards	Public Inquiry	41 months	
18	X/2005/1156	Retail development Tesco/ Castlebawn, Newtownards	Public Inquiry	36 months	
19	N/2007/0131	Retail development, Highfield Grove, Craigavon	Approve	20 months	

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse / Public Inquiry	Timescale to a recommendation to Minister	Estimated Investment value where available
20	Z/2004/2742	Retail development, Westwood Shopping Centre, Belfast	Approve	48 months	
21	N/2005/0288	Vico, retail development, Craigavon	Approve	45 months	
22	L/2008/0637	New Hospital Enniskillen	Approve	8 months	£250m
23	E/2008/0200	National Trust, replacement visitors centre, Giant's Causeway	Approve	6 months (PfG Target)	£20m
24	S/2008/0893	Retail development, Sprucefield Phase II	Public Inquiry	6 months	
25	T/2006/0629	Asda, retail development, Junction 1, Antrim	Approve	32 months	
26	T/2008/0718	GAA Centre, Antrim	Approve	6	£3.79m
27	T/2007/0656	Distribution Warehouse, Rathbeg Estates, Antrim	Refuse	22 months	
28	F/2006/0131	Eco Village, Maghermourne Quarry, Larne	Approve	37 months	£100m
29	A/2004/1251	Office development, Prince's Quay, Londonderry	Refuse	55 months	
30	S/2004/1757	Retail development, Castle Glen, McKinstry Road, Lisburn	Refuse	57 months	
31	S/2005/1556	Dobbies plc, Garden Centre, Strawberry Hill, Lisburn	Approve	49 months	40 full / 60 part time jobs
32	R/2009/0476	Down High School	Approve	5 months	
33	X/2009/0465	Retail development, Tesco, Newtownards	Approve	4 months	£18m
34	Z/2006/2018	Retail development, Castlereagh Road, Belfast	Refuse	39 months	
35	Z/2009/0640	Invest NI, Carbane, Newry	Approve	6 months (PfG Target)	
36	Z/2009/0642	Invest NI, Carbane, Newry	Approve	6 months (PfG Target)	
37	U/2009/0303	Blanca Developments, redevelopment of Northcott Shopping Centre, Glengormley	Approve	5 months (PfG Target)	£35m 200 construction jobs / 200 retail jobs

	Reference Number	Description	Approve / Refuse / Public Inquiry	Timescale to a recommendation to Minister	Estimated Investment value where available
38	S/2009/1046	Retail development, Sprucefield Phase II	Public Inquiry	2 months	
39	S/2007/1482	Urban Village, Hilden Mill, Lisburn	Approve	25 months	£100m 150 construction jobs / 150 post development jobs
40	S/2008/0435	New Acute Hospital, Enniskillen	Approve	9 months	£210m 200 new jobs
41	S/2009/0356	Redevelopment of Dairy Farm Shopping Centre, Dunmurry	Approve	5 months (PFG Target)	£25m 200 construction jobs / 300 post development jobs
42	W/2008/0891	Sainsbury's, Balloo Retail Park, Bangor	Approve	13 months	350 full & part time jobs
43	W/2008/0749	Residential development, Rathgael Road, Bangor	Approve	16 months	125 jobs
44	J/2009/0388	Invest NI, Melmount Road, Strabane	Approve	6 months (PFG Target)	
45	J/2009/0389	Invest NI, Melmount Road, Strabane	Approve	6 months (PFG Target)	

Safety of Cyclists

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what steps he plans to take to ensure the safety of cyclists on roads; and (ii) if he will consider making cycle helmets compulsory for children under 16.

(AQW 5249/10)

Minister of the Environment: In Northern Ireland, figures for 2008 show that two adult cyclists were killed compared with two in 2007 and one in 2006. There have been no child cyclist fatalities here since 2005. Between 2006 and 2008 ten children and 20 adults, on average, were seriously injured each year on bikes. While these figures suggest that measures in place to address cyclist casualties are working, there is certainly no room for complacency.

DOE's Cycling Proficiency Scheme continues to help children to develop observation and manoeuvrability skills, introduces the Highway Code to young road users, teaches the importance of cycle maintenance and hazard awareness, and provides information and advice on being conspicuous and wearing protective headgear. During the 2008/2009 school year 574 primary schools participated in the scheme and over 9,000 children were trained.

Adult cyclists are provided with detailed guidance through the revised 2008 edition of the Highway Code which contains rules, information and advice that helps prepare cyclists for the demands of today's roads. It also includes extensive advice that drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, with extra care and attention.

Informed by Department for Transport (DfT) and international research on cycle helmet wearing, I have no current plans to make mandatory the wearing of helmets by cyclists – either for adults or children.

My Department's current policy mirrors that of the DfT and advises and encourages all cyclists to wear an approved helmet – one that conforms to current regulations, is the correct size and fits properly. These guidelines are also included in the Highway Code.

I intend to consult very shortly on a new Road Safety Strategy for the period from 2010-2020 and as part of that process I will be inviting views on any further measures we might wish to take to improve the safety of all road users, including cyclists.

PPS 18

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list the companies which applied for the contract to draw up the supplementary planning guidance for PPS 18 and the country in which each company is based.

(AQW 5255/10)

Minister of the Environment: Four companies applied for the contract:

- W S Atkins Ltd. – an engineering and design company with offices throughout the world including Belfast, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.
- Environmental Resources Management – a provider of environmental, health and safety, risk and social consulting services with offices throughout the world including England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.
- Hyder Consulting - a multi-national advisory and design consultancy with offices throughout the world including Belfast, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.
- Julie Martin and Alison Farmer Associates – Based in Yorkshire with branches in Edinburgh and Dublin.

PPS 18

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware whether the Landscape Character Areas used in PPS 18 have been applied to policies on wind turbines anywhere else in Ireland or in Britain.

(AQW 5257/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is not aware of Landscape Character Areas currently being applied to policies on wind turbines anywhere else in Britain or in Ireland.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department will support a public inquiry into Rose Energy's proposal for an incinerator in Glenavy.

(AQW 5273/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Rose Energy planning application for a biomass fuelled power plant was submitted in June 2008 and is accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES). Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 was applied to the proposal on 23 September 2008, designating the proposal as a major application.

A further planning application by Rose Energy for water abstraction from Lough Neagh and an associated pipeline was submitted on 12 June 2009. The new application for water abstraction is also

accompanied by an Environmental Statement. Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 was applied to the water abstraction application on 11 August 2009, designating the proposal as a major application. The water abstraction application is being processed in tandem with the power plant application.

Planning officials are currently finalising their consideration of the applications, and shortly hope to be in a position to make a recommendation to me on the way forward. Careful consideration of the planning applications and associated environmental information, and all representations made in relation to them, is necessary before I would be in a position to decide whether to proceed by way of a public inquiry as the most appropriate action. It would not be appropriate therefore at this stage to indicate whether I would call a public inquiry.

Relocated or Decentralised Posts

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to posts within his Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5292/10)

Minister of the Environment: Around 49% of my department's staff is already employed at locations outside the Greater Belfast Area. I currently have no plans to decentralise or relocate further posts in the Department.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether George Best Belfast City Airport's decision to remove the 'Seats for Sale' limit in its planning agreement will remove an important control from this agreement and possibly render it unenforceable.

(AQW 5315/10)

Minister of the Environment: The "Seats for sale" restriction is in the 2008 Planning Agreement with George Best Belfast City Airport. This Agreement remains in place. Under Article 40A (4) and (5) of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 a party to such a Planning Agreement may not apply to modify the agreement prior to the expiry of the relevant period which in this case is 5 years from the date the agreement was entered into.

Wild Deer

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many wild deer there are in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5332/10)

Minister of the Environment: There are three species of wild deer known to be resident in Northern Ireland. These are Red, Sika and Fallow deer.

None of these species is a biodiversity priority and for this reason there has been no compelling conservation case to survey their numbers.

A desk top study in 2003 concluded that all three species were increasing their range across Northern Ireland but no up-to-date population estimates exist.

Car Parks at Belfast International Airport

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what enforcement action has been taken against the illegally operating car parks at Belfast International Airport.

(AQW 5334/10)

Minister of the Environment: Planning Service continues to take formal action as necessary against unauthorised car parks in this area. I can advise that 8 of the sites have had enforcement notices served on the operators.

As a result of enforcement action, 6 unauthorised car parks in the vicinity of the International Airport have ceased operations. One operator has been before the courts on 3 occasions, amassing a total of £40,000 in fines. The remainder are at various stages of enforcement action and investigation.

Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the criteria under which a planning application is designated as being of major importance under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991. **(AQW 5343/10)**

Minister of the Environment: The criteria under which a planning application is designated Article 31 is set out in legislation.

Under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 where the Department considers that the development for which the permission or approval is sought would if permitted –

- a) involve a substantial departure from the development plan for area to which it relates; or
- b) be of significance to the whole or a substantial part of Northern Ireland; or
- c) affect the whole of a neighbourhood; or
- d) consist of or include the construction, formation, laying out or alteration of a means of access to a truck road or of any other development of land within 67 meters of the middle of such a road, or the nearest part of a special road.

The Department may within 2 months from the date of the application apply Article 31 to the application.

Wild Deer

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment (i) the number of reported cases of malnutrition among wild deer; and (ii) the number of reported wild deer deaths, over the recent winter period. **(AQW 5346/10)**

Minister of the Environment: My Department has received no reports of malnutrition among wild deer nor have there been any reported wild deer deaths over the harsh winter of 2009/10.

The Meteorological Office has recently released data suggesting that this winter has been the coldest in Northern Ireland since 1963. During very harsh weather many wild animals succumb to the cold conditions. Populations of some species were severely depleted during the winter of 1963, but in the years that followed their numbers recovered.

If deer populations have been impacted this winter it is likely that their numbers will undergo a similar recovery over time.

Wild Deer

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment if her Department has considered a cull of wild deer, given the recent harsh winter. **(AQW 5347/10)**

Minister of the Environment: Wild deer are protected under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. They are considered as a native or naturalised species to Ireland and are part of our natural heritage. To protect deer from over exploitation there is a 'close season' which runs from 1 May to 31 July for males and 1 March to 31 October for females. Outside this period an 'authorised person' can shoot deer.

During exceptional weather events some wild species may be impacted adversely. My Department would not wish to intervene in controlling deer in such circumstances, if the population is under stress then nature will take its course, the fittest will survive and future generations will be more resilient as a result.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Recruitment Freezes

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel which Departments, or their departmental agencies, have introduced recruitment freezes, or a cut or reduction in overtime, in the last year.
(AQW 4853/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): Departments are currently in the process of assessing the staffing implications of their proposed budget allocations for 2010/11. A number of departments have notified Corporate HR, DFP, of an increasing number of surplus staff to be redeployed across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). In order to give departments an opportunity to assess the situation, on 10 February 2010 DFP Corporate HR imposed a service wide temporary embargo on recruitment and promotion to general service grades (Administrative Assistant (AA) - Grade 6) in the NICS until the end of April 2010. The embargo does not apply to senior or specialist grades.

In addition to the current temporary embargo placed by Corporate HR, some Departments, during the last year separately introduced temporary freezes on recruitment and promotion to allow them to consider their financial position in light of budgetary constraints. They were DFP, DOE, DRD and DEL. DFP also placed a freeze on non essential overtime.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what bids his Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.
(AQW 5109/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department has worked with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on the development of an ‘Invest to Save’ bid. A key component of the bid, on which DARD is taking the lead, is the enhancement of mapping data in liaison with the Land and Property Service agency’s geographic information service. Savings would accrue to DARD through the avoidance of loss of EU funding.

In addition my Department has made two bids for up to £0.5m and £0.1m to support re-training and service development in Central Procurement Directorate primarily to support income generation.

The nature of the services provided by my Department does not readily allow for the consideration of bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

Small Business Rates Relief Scheme

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if, in the context of the small business rates relief scheme, he will consider extending the 100% exemption from Empty Rates for industrial premises to businesses which have closed due to the economic downturn.
(AQW 5136/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of a policy evaluation work carried out last year, in respect of the policy of non-domestic vacant rating, an assessment was made of the current exclusions that apply within that policy. As you point out, industrial premises are one of the exclusions under rating legislation.

While I am mindful of the calls for further concessions, in relation to the rating of empty commercial properties, this has to be balanced against the impact on rates revenue, particularly for district councils where any loss could not be compensated. I have decided to retain relief for empty commercial property at 50% at least until we are well into recovery, which compares favourably to the 100% liability which applies in England and Wales.

While I currently have no plans to extend the list of exclusions to all businesses which have had to close due to the economic downturn, the category was recently extended, as a result of the policy evaluation, to include companies which have gone into administration. This new exclusion will apply from 1 April 2010 and will ensure that where a company goes into administration vacant rates are not imposed.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money has been spent by his Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5139/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total amount of fees paid for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years is provided in the table below:

	£
2009/10 (to end February)	283,065
2008/09	589,591
2007/08	997,470

The information is provided on the basis of financial years representing the basis of preparation of the Department's accounts. The 2009/10 figure represents the year to date position.

Travel and subsistence costs are analysed within the Department's accounting system by type (for example, mileage allowance, air fares) therefore travel and subsistence costs in relation to conferences and courses cannot be separately identified.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 3500/10, to provide further detail on the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.

(AQW 5150/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As previously stated in the reply to AQW 3500/10, a Small Business Rate Relief Scheme is to come into operation on 1 April 2010.

Copies of the Regulations giving effect to the scheme, and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum, have been placed in the Assembly Library and can be viewed online at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr201000>.

In addition to providing rate relief for small business premises the scheme also provides for enhanced rate relief for premises which are used wholly or partly as a Post Office.

Fact sheets have been produced by Land and Property Services (LPS) explaining the detail of the scheme. As with the Regulations copies of these factsheets have been placed in the Assembly Library for your information. They can also be viewed on the LPS website at:

http://www.lpsni.gov.uk/lps_fact_sheet_-_small_business.14jan2010.pdf

http://www.lpsni.gov.uk/lps_fact_sheet_-_post_office.pdf

Rating of Vacant Properties

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the criteria for the adjudication of rating of vacant properties.

(AQW 5153/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As a general rule, no rates are payable in respect of vacant domestic properties within the Northern Ireland rating system which is based on occupancy as determined by rating legislation and its associated case law.

In terms of assessing rates liability for a property, occupation giving rise to a rates charge is deemed to take place where -

- the occupier is making use of the property or there is an intention to return;
- the occupation is of some value to them;
- the occupier exercises some control over the property; and
- the occupation has a degree of permanence.

A property would be deemed to be unoccupied where these four tests are not met, but on a practical level a property can generally be said to be unoccupied when the property is devoid of furniture, that is when all furniture not permanently attached to a wall, roof or floor has been removed.

There is one exception which allows rates to be charged on vacant domestic property and this occurs where there is an agreement made with a landlord to assume liability for rates under Article 21 of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. In this scenario rates are deemed to be payable for any vacant periods due to the collection allowance paid to landlords.

Empty property rates are also chargeable in respect of a non domestic property. At present such charges are restricted to commercial properties with an NAV of £2,000 or more, and are charged at 50% of occupied liability. There are a number of exclusions from liability, such as factories and listed buildings and I have recently added companies in administration to this list, effective from April 2010.

Investment in Infrastructure Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the total investment in infrastructure projects since May 2007.

(AQW 5237/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not currently possible to separately identify expenditure on infrastructure from other capital investment projects. In addition, the information held by DFP is based on expenditure in a financial year running from 1 April to 31 March.

Total departmental gross capital investment in 2007-08 was £1390.2 million, for 2008-09 it was £1,672.3 million. Expenditure figures for 2009-10 will not be available until provisional outturn information in June/July 2010, however the latest forecast outturn figures, received from departments at the beginning of February, indicate departmental gross capital investment of £1,695.7 million in 2009-10.

Excess Winter Deaths

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of excess winter deaths in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5244/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table provides figures on excess winter deaths¹ (the excess number of deaths occurring each winter compared to the average during other months of the year). The latest available figures for Northern Ireland are for winter 2008-9P.

TABLE: EXCESS WINTER DEATHS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, 1999-00^P TO 2008-09^P.

Winter Period	Excess Deaths ¹
1999-00 ^P	1,450
2000-01 ^P	590
2001-02 ^P	490
2002-03 ^P	530
2003-04 ^P	400
2004-05 ^P	560
2005-06 ^P	570
2006-07 ^P	700
2007-08 ^P	860
2008-09 ^P	1,000

1 Excess winter deaths are defined as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding four months (August to November) and the following four months (April to July).

P Excess winter deaths are presented in the table on a date of occurrence basis. As some deaths can be registered later than when they occur, (e.g. coroners cases) all results are provisional and thus have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 does not address the issue of inheritance and rates becoming payable on property in the event of the owner's death.

(AQW 5263/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A wide ranging public consultation was undertaken in 2007, followed by more detailed policy consultation in 2008, as part of the Executive's Review of Domestic Rating. The content of the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 was largely determined by the Executive's review of rating; a review that was consultation led.

The matter of inheritance and rates becoming payable on property in the event of the owner's death was not raised during consultation and therefore provision to this effect was not contained within the 2009 Act.

I am unclear as to what the particular issue is that you are raising, however, I can say that in the event of an owner's death, it is normal practice for Land and Property Services to seek to recover from the person's estate any amounts owing as rate arrears. There is of course a necessary time period that must elapse while the estate is settled.

Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what public consultation took place on the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009.

(AQW 5264/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Detailed consultation was carried out on the key policies contained in the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009.

A wide ranging public consultation was originally undertaken in 2007 as part of the Executive's Review of domestic rating and covered a number of policy areas, including the key domestic measures contained in the Act.

This was then followed by 12 weeks public consultation on the detail of individual policies including those related to green rebates, deferment, the rating of empty homes, data sharing and the maximum capital value, all of which were contained in the Act. This process included liaison with a wide range of key stakeholders and representative bodies, as well as the Finance and Personnel Committee.

A further targeted consultation was also undertaken on the impact of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, provided for in the Act as a result of the economic downturn.

Given this no further public consultation was considered necessary in respect of the Act, which served to give legal effect to the policies already consulted on.

Public Sector Share of the Northern Ireland Economy

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, based on the most recent statistics available, to detail the current public sector share of the Northern Ireland economy in terms of (i) GDP; and (ii) GVA. (AQW 5287/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is not produced for Northern Ireland. Because of a definitional change, what was formerly referred to as GDP was actually Gross Value Added (GVA) at basic prices. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for producing GVA for the UK and its regions. Regional GVA is compiled by industry and region but not by institutional sector. Whilst some industries, notably public administration and defence, are entirely public sector, there are several, such as health, education, financial intermediation and transport, where both sectors are present. For this reason, it is not possible to break the data down into a public / private sector split.

GVA Position in Northern Ireland

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, based on the most recent statistics available, to detail the current GVA position in Northern Ireland relative to (i) the UK average; and (ii) the UK average minus the Greater South East of England. (AQW 5288/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for producing GVA for the UK and its regions. The most recent figures available are for 2008 and show that GVA per head in Northern Ireland is 78.9% of the UK average. This figure increases to 91.5% when the Greater South East of England is removed.

Bonuses for Senior Departmental Staff

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what representations he has had in the last 12 months from Ministers seeking bonuses for senior staff in their Departments. (AQW 5353/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have had no representations in the last 12 months from Ministers seeking bonuses for senior staff in their Departments.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Ireland Eating Disorders Unit

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding has been allocated, but not yet spent, to the Northern Ireland Eating Disorders Unit from (i) his Department;

(ii) Health and Social Services Boards, or the Regional Health Board; and (iii) the Health and Social Care Trusts, in this financial year to date.

(AQW 4609/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): At this time Northern Ireland does not have a dedicated Eating Disorders Unit. My main priority at this time is the development of community-based specialist eating disorders teams. However, the longer term aim is to provide a peripatetic outpatient service and an inpatient specialist eating disorder service in Northern Ireland with re-feeding beds and access to psychological therapies.

Northern Ireland Eating Disorders Unit

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been spent on the Northern Ireland Eating Disorders Unit by (i) his Department; (ii) the Health and Social Services Boards, or the Regional Health Board; and (iii) the Health and Social Care Trusts, in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 4611/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At this time Northern Ireland does not have a dedicated Eating Disorders Unit. My main priority at this time is the development of community-based specialist eating disorders teams. However, the longer term aim is to provide a peripatetic outpatient service and an inpatient specialist eating disorder service in Northern Ireland with re-feeding beds and access to psychological therapies.

Equality Impact Assessments

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are included within Equality Impact Assessments conducted by his Department to ensure that the interests of people with identities outside the two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland are taken into account.

(AQW 4978/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The procedures followed by the Department are set out in the Equality Commission's "Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment". The process includes: defining the aims of the policy; considering the available data and research; assessing the impacts; considering (a) measures which might mitigate any adverse impact, and (b) alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity; and carrying out a consultation.

The scope of the nine equality categories covered by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 is wider than the "two perceived main traditions in Northern Ireland" and this makes possible the inclusion of other identity issues whether this is in terms of religious belief or political opinion or any of the other equality categories, for example, race or sexual orientation.

Swine Flu Vaccine

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) the number of Swine Flu vaccine doses ordered in (a) 2007; (b) 2008; and (c) 2009; (ii) the number dispensed in each year; (iii) the surplus number in each year; (iv) the cost of purchasing the vaccine in each year; and (v) whether he has any plans to review this procurement process.

(AQW 4982/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Swine flu vaccines did not exist in 2007 or 2008.

- (i) in line with advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) enough vaccine was initially ordered for 2 doses for every person in Northern Ireland;
- (ii) by 6 February 2010, over 326,000 swine flu vaccines had been administered in Northern Ireland;

- (iii) as the vaccination programme remains ongoing it is not possible to say if there will be a surplus in Northern Ireland at this stage;
- (iv) the cost of the vaccine remains commercial in confidence;
- (v) Proposals are being considered to review the pandemic response on a UK basis. This is expected to include the procurement process for the purchase of the vaccine.

Complaints Procedure for Alleged Patient Ill-treatment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the complaints procedure for alleged ill-treatment of a patient being cared for in their own home by a Health Trust contracted care company.

(AQW 4987/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Arrangements for the handling of regulated sector complaints are outlined in Circular HSS (SQSD) 23/2009: Guidance on Complaints Handling in Regulated Establishments and Agencies available on http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc__sqsd__23-09.pdf.

Respite Care

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in the expansion of respite care.

(AQW 5002/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 4745/10 on 2 March 2010.

Top-up Payments for Care in Residential or Nursing Homes

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have made top-up payments for care in residential or nursing homes in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5003/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on numbers of top-up payments is not collected centrally.

Top-up payments are made where a resident selects accommodation in a residential care or nursing home which is more expensive than alternative accommodation which meets a resident's assessed need, or where a resident selects an additional service which is not required to meet their assessed need. In these circumstances, a third party such as a relative or friend must pay any additional cost. My Department does not have evidence of top-up payments currently being requested inappropriately.

Top-up Payments for Care in Residential or Nursing Homes

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline the circumstances in which top-up payments are requested for care in residential and nursing homes; and (ii) if his Department has any evidence of top-up payments being requested inappropriately.

(AQW 5005/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on numbers of top-up payments is not collected centrally.

Top-up payments are made where a resident selects accommodation in a residential care or nursing home which is more expensive than alternative accommodation which meets a resident's assessed need, or where a resident selects an additional service which is not required to meet their assessed need. In these circumstances, a third party such as a relative or friend must pay any additional cost. My Department does not have evidence of top-up payments currently being requested inappropriately.

Heart Disease

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the trends in heart disease amongst older people since 2006.

(AQW 5006/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Admissions to Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland for patients aged 65 and over, where a diagnosis of Coronary Heart Disease was recorded in each year since 2006;

Year	Admissions
2006/07	21,505
2007/08	22,428
2008/09	24,804

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Information on GP registered patients and Consultant-led Outpatient Services is not available by age.

Current Ambulance Fleet

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all vehicles in the current ambulance fleet are protected with flame resistant material.

(AQW 5018/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All new vehicles used to transport patients comply with the European Safety Standard CEN 1789:2000 which means that their interior materials are fire resistant and have a burning rate of less than 100 mm/min when tested in accordance with ISO 3795.

The ambulance service does still have a small number of vehicles predating these standards however these will be replaced within the current year.

Weekend X-ray Cover for the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why weekend X-ray cover for the Bangor Minor Injury Unit has yet to be reinstated.

(AQW 5019/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The weekend X-ray cover for the Bangor Minor Injury Unit was withdrawn in February 2001 because of the low demand for this service. An average of fewer than 3 patients per day used the service and it therefore did not represent an efficient use of scarce resources. As there has been no increase in demand since February 2001, the South Eastern Trust has not considered it necessary to reinstate the service. Patients requiring x-ray investigation at a weekend are referred to the Ulster Hospital accident and emergency department.

Weekend X-ray Cover at the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been referred to the Ulster Hospital for X-rays as a result of the lack of weekend X-ray cover at the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit.

(AQW 5020/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The imaging service provided at Bangor Minor Injuries Unit at weekends was withdrawn nine years ago. The number of patients referred to the Ulster Hospital for x-rays over the last three months, as result of the non-availability of an imaging service at weekends at the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit, is outlined in the table below:

Month	Number of patients referred
December 2009	14
January 2010	19
February 2010 ¹	13

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

¹ Includes referrals up to 21/02/10.

DHSSPS Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much of his budget for the last financial year was allocated for (i) capital projects; (ii) revenue; and (iii) recurrent funding. **(AQW 5021/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2009/10, of the initial revenue allocation of £3,216,953,000 to the Health and Social Care Board, (99%) was recurrent.

My allocated capital budget for 2009/10 was £184m.

StreetSafe Scheme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial support his Department, or any of its agencies, provides for the StreetSafe Scheme. **(AQW 5023/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Street Safe Scheme does not receive direct financial support from the Department or its agencies. However, the Public Health Agency supports the work of FASA (Forum for Substance Abuse/Forum for Action on Suicide Awareness), one of whose staff works for four hours each Saturday evening with the Street Safe Scheme at a cost of £57.60.

Neurologists Working in the Health Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Neurologists are working in the Health Service, and if this figure meets requirements. **(AQW 5031/10)**

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below details the number of neurologists currently employed in the Health Service. These figures were provided by the individual Trusts.

Trust	Number of Neurologists	
	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	12	11.5
Northern	1	1
South Eastern	1	0.7
Southern	2	2
Western	1	1
Total	17	16.2

Source: HSC Trusts

These figures are in line with the recommendations of the review of neurology in 2002. The Department has commissioned The HSC Board to evaluate the implementation of that review.

Elliott Dynes Rehabilitation Unit

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3218/10, (i) if he can confirm that the Elliott Dynes Rehabilitation Unit stopped admitting new patients at the end of 2009 and is due to stay closed until March 2010; (ii) what interim arrangements were put in place; and (iii) what plans he has for the building that housed this unit.

(AQW 5043/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Both wards in the Elliot Dynes Unit are currently open. The Unit accepts elderly care patients who are transferred from the main hospital wards, therefore it is not closed to new patients. After May 2010, the Trust plans to continue to use the Elliot Dynes building to house a number of other services currently based therein.

Domiciliary and Intermediate Care

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3218/10, (i) to explain what is meant by “the development and expansion of domiciliary and intermediate care alongside the increasing role of technology” and what this will mean for patients in practice; and (ii) in relation to the rehabilitation beds in the community, (a) whether the beds will be in private or Health Service homes; (b) whether they will be in residential or nursing homes; (c) in which homes these beds will be located; (d) whether patients will have a say in where they are located; and (e) who will pay for these beds.

(AQW 5044/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The increasing availability of domiciliary and intermediate care services providers over the past twenty years has enabled older people with varying levels of need, to receive round the clock care in their own homes. In addition, the availability of 24 hour nursing has meant that older people with health care needs can access a range of health care interventions, for example IV therapy, catheter care, specialist equipment and adaptations, in their own homes. The use of a range of bespoke assistive technology, such as light, heat and water sensors and alarms, is also enabling older people, who would otherwise have been admitted to residential care, to live safely and independently.
- (ii) Intermediate care consists of a range of community-based rehabilitation and reablement services which enable older people receive short-term multi-disciplinary rehabilitation in their own homes or in a community setting following a period of illness or surgery.
 - (a&b) The Belfast HSC Trust's Intermediate Care Service also provides multidisciplinary assessment, rehabilitation and care in specifically commissioned nursing and residential beds in care homes across the statutory and independent sectors for patients who require more intensive levels of support.
 - (c) The Trust advises that the majority of patients being discharged from hospital with ongoing rehabilitation needs will receive their rehabilitation at home.
 - (d) Intermediate Care Services are funded by the Trust and are free to patients.

Home Care Packages

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patient discharges have been delayed due to a lack of home care packages in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 5046/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to identify how many patient discharges have been delayed due to a lack of 'home' care packages.

Financial Help for People Diagnosed With Cancer

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to assist people diagnosed with cancer with the financial costs they incur when travelling to receive treatment.

(AQW 5053/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Hospital Travel Cost Scheme provides support with travelling expenses to those on specified social security benefits or on low income regardless of the medical condition from which they are suffering. This financial help is available to those patients who do not have a medical need for ambulance transport but who cannot meet the cost of travel to hospital. Similar schemes operate in other parts of the United Kingdom.

I announced in May 2008 that cancer patients who must attend hospital frequently while undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment would be exempt from car-parking charges applied by the relevant Trust.

'Go Generic' Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the 'Go Generic' initiative announced on 30 May 2006 delivered its part in the expected overall £55 million of pharmaceutical cost savings by 2008.

(AQW 5056/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Yes it has.

Prescription Items

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of prescription items dispensed; and (ii) the savings made under the generic prescribing initiative in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 5057/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested in part (i) is detailed in the following table.

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008/2009
Number of prescription items dispensed	29.6m	30.9m	31.8m

It is not possible to provide the information requested in part (ii) as the generic prescribing initiative is one of the integrated work strands in my Department's Pharmaceutical Clinical Effectiveness Programme (PCEP).

Discharges from Hospital

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patient discharges from hospital in each Health and Social Care Trust area are currently being delayed because of a lack of domiciliary care.

(AQW 5067/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients in Northern Ireland, who were awaiting discharge from hospital due to a lack of domiciliary care on 19th February 2010 (the latest date for which information is available) is shown in the table below.

Health and Social Care Trust	Number of patients Delayed due to a lack of Domiciliary Care
Belfast	2
Northern	2
South Eastern *	3
Southern	1
Western	9

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

* Two patients in the South Eastern Trust (Ulster Hospital) experienced a delay in discharge as a result of a lack of domiciliary care due to be provided by the Belfast Trust.

Number of People Severely or Profoundly Deaf

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are severely or profoundly deaf.

(AQW 5074/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on persons severely or profoundly deaf is not available in the format requested.

Care Packages

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of older people, in receipt of care packages, in (i) Armagh and Dungannon; (ii) Craigavon and Banbridge and (iii) Newry and Mourne are currently cared for at home through the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 5100/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available in the format requested.

Bed Occupancy Rate

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the average bed occupancy rate in each acute hospital for the last 12 months in total; and for each of the past three months.

(AQW 5108/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The bed occupancy rate for each acute¹ hospital for 2009 (the latest 12 month period for which data is available) is detailed in the table below:-

Hospital	% Occupancy
Altnagelvin Area	81.13
Antrim	82.20
Belfast City	81.38
Causeway Hospital	82.45
Craigavon Area	73.42
Daisy Hill	74.01

Hospital	% Occupancy
Erne	72.47
Mater Infirmorum	87.36
Royal Victoria	85.82
Ulster	86.17

Source: KH03a

- 1 This relates to hospitals designated as 'Acute' in the DHSSPS Developing Better Services Strategy (2003). Information on bed occupancy is not available on a monthly basis.

Beta Interferon Treatment for Multiple Sclerosis

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently awaiting Beta Interferon treatment for Multiple Sclerosis; and what is the (i) average; and (ii) longest current waiting time.

(AQW 5121/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 31st December 2009, there were 22 patients actively waiting for a DMT in Northern Ireland, all of whom were waiting less than 13 weeks.

Support Services Available to People Diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the extent and range of support services, including physiotherapy services, available to people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; and if he has any plans to increase the level of support.

(AQW 5126/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The full range of core community health and social care services are available, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, community nursing, speech and language therapy, dietetics, social work / social care, domiciliary care, day care and day time opportunities and respite, including specialist respite.

In 2002, my Department carried out a Review of Adult Neurology Services and the Health and Social Care Board has been tasked to carry out a full and comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations and report its findings to my Department. The results of this evaluation will help inform policy development for neurology services in Northern Ireland.

Cancer Care Centre at Altnagelvin Hospital

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the planned new cancer care centre at Altnagelvin Hospital; and if construction is still on course to begin in 2012.

(AQW 5128/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western HSC Trust is in the process of developing a business case for the establishment of a satellite unit of BCH at Altnagelvin. It is expected that the business case will be submitted to the Department within the next few weeks for consideration. Whilst I remain committed to the provision of a Satellite Centre at Altnagelvin Hospital, the progress of the project and the timescales associated with it is dependant on the necessary funding being in place to deliver this project.

Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the original 'Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy: The Law and Clinical Practice in Northern Ireland', whether his Department wrote to the Health Trusts to advise them of the Order of the High Court in the recent case of 'Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child v Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety' of 14 December 2009, that the guidelines be withdrawn; and for the date of this communication.

(AQW 5134/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department wrote to Health and Social Care Trusts on 9 February 2010 advising them that 'Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy: The Law and Clinical Practice' (March 2009) had been withdrawn following the recent Order of the High Court.

Hospital Car Parking Charges for Cancer Patients

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to the Macmillan campaign to reduce and stop hospital car parking charges for cancer patients attending hospital for treatment.

(AQW 5149/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 21 May 2008, I announced that cancer patients requiring chemotherapy or radiotherapy would be exempt from car parking charges in all hospitals. The guidance on Health & Social Care car parking provision and management, which confirms this policy, is published on the DHSSPS website.

Principal Dentists

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many principal dentists are operating under Health Service arrangements in the South Belfast constituency; and how many patients are currently registered with these dentists.

(AQW 5163/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer given to AQ 8970/08. The information held is currently correct.

Dentaexpress, Irvinestown

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were registered, under health service arrangements, with Dentaexpress, Irvinestown, when the practice closed in December 2009.

(AQW 5348/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Figures provided by Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation show that as at mid December 2009 there were 1,324 patients registered to the 3 dentists working at Dentaexpress, Irvinestown. Additional patients will have been registered after this date, prior to the closure of the practice on 31 December 2009.

Staff Bonuses

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if he sought a 4% bonus from the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a senior member of staff in his Department in 2009/10; (ii) to provide details of the grade and function of the member of staff in question; and (iii) to detail any other bonuses he sought for other senior members of staff.

(AQW 5357/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No bonuses were sought for, or paid to, any senior member of staff in my Department in 2009/10.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence Awards Scheme

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all bonuses paid under the National Institute for Clinical Excellence awards scheme in 2009; and why he will not support the Minister for Health in Scotland in seeking a freeze to the scheme, given the need to make savings of £113 million across his Department.

(AQW 5401/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the supplementary that I gave in the Assembly on Monday 8 March to Oral Question 879/10.

Services for People with Mental Ill-health at Woodstock Lodge

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether services for people with mental ill-health are being discontinued at Woodstock Lodge and relocating to North Belfast; and whether this decision has been taken before the conclusion of the public consultation on mental health services.

(AQW 5488/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have confirmed that no services are currently being considered for relocation from Woodstock Lodge to North Belfast.

Muscular Dystrophy

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will fund a dedicated care adviser to assist Muscular Dystrophy patients.

(AQO 884/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am committed to providing appropriate care for people affected by disability in Northern Ireland, including those with Muscular Dystrophy.

A business case for the recurrent funding of a Neuromuscular Care Advisor post has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

The health service is faced with delivering £700m of existing efficiencies, meeting a 9% increase in demand and managing a further proposed budget reduction of over £113m. If agreed by the Assembly, this would take my Department's settlement to just 0.3% above general inflation in 2010/11 – effectively a stand-still budget.

In these circumstances, opportunities to progress service improvements that make a real difference for patients, such as the funding of the Care Advisor post for those suffering from neuromuscular disability, will be limited.

Swine Flu Vaccine

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many swine flu vaccines remain unused.

(AQO 886/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The vaccination programme is ongoing and the vaccines are still required and being used. Throughout the vaccination programme my Department has followed the advice of national expert groups such as SAGE and JCVI and will continue to do so. While Swine Flu is now circulating much less in the community, swine flu is likely to be around for some time and the experts advise that it will be the main seasonal flu virus circulating later this year. It is

therefore entirely appropriate that we hold enough vaccine to deal with any future waves of swine flu. I would continue to encourage all those eligible in either phase 1 or phase 2 to take up the offer of the vaccine, particularly healthy under 5s.

DHSSPS Budget

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel regarding adjustments to his departmental budget.

(AQO 887/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As Minister for the Department that has the largest share of the Northern Ireland budget it is to be expected that I will be in discussions with my counterpart in DFP. Since June 2009 I have met face to face with the Finance minister to discuss adjustments to my budget three times: twice in September 2009 and most recently again in November 2009.

Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding his Department has invested in computerised cognitive behavioural therapy.

(AQO 888/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is being delivered through the 'Beating the Blues' programme. Total spend on this programme to the end of February 2010 was £617k. This has enabled almost 200 GP practices to access to the programme for use in the treatment of patients with mild or moderate depression.

I am continuing to develop mental health services, including psychological therapy services, in line with Bamford.

Lisnaskea, Irvinestown and Belleek: Health Centre

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the new Health Centre for Lisnaskea, Irvinestown and Belleek.

(AQO 889/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western HSC Trust has identified a Health and Care Centre in Lisnaskea as its top priority in its Primary and Community Care Infrastructure (PCCI) programme. The Department is in the process of considering the business case for this project. Whilst I am supportive of the project, given the financial constraints facing my Department, it is essential there is sufficient funding to deliver this priority project in advance of starting it. Once I have confirmed the availability of funding I will announce the way forward for this project. In terms of Health Centres for Irvinestown and Belleek, it is unlikely that I will have the funding necessary to progress either project in the foreseeable future.

Survivors of Institutional Child Abuse

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the duty of his Department to uphold the rights of survivors of institutional child abuse.

(AQO 890/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As the member has been advised previously on a number of occasions, this is a matter for the Executive as a whole. I am preparing a paper for consideration by the Executive which will help to inform the way ahead. I have been awaiting the views of the Minister for Education whom I believe shares policy responsibility for this issue along with other Ministers.

The Minister for Education has now indicated that she has asked her officials to look at her Department's responsibilities in relation to this issue and to report to her by 30 April 2010. I will now consider my position in response to this.

Adoption Legislation

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the proposed new adoption legislation will be introduced in the Assembly.

(AQO 891/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In June 2009, a draft Executive paper was issued outlining proposals for the development of an Adoption and Children Bill.

A response is outstanding from OFMDFM. An adoption and children bill is currently scheduled for 2011, however the final timetable for the introduction of the Bill will depend on when Executive approval is achieved and whatever other legislative priorities the Executive may have in the future.

Department for Regional Development

Ulsterbus Workforce

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for the religious breakdown of the current Ulsterbus workforce, broken down by Ulsterbus depot.

(AQW 4800/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I am informed by Translink that the religious affiliation of the Ulsterbus staff as at February 2010 was as set out below. I have not provided the information for each Ulsterbus depot as to do so would make it possible to identify the religious affiliations of individuals.

Ulsterbus Staff

- (i) Protestant 55%
- (ii) Catholic 42%
- (iii) Other 3%

Ulsterbus Drivers

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for the religious breakdown of current Ulsterbus drivers (i) overall; and (ii) broken down by Ulsterbus depot.

(AQW 4816/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I am informed by Translink that the perceived religious affiliation of Ulsterbus drivers at February 2010 was as set out below. I have not provided the information for each Ulsterbus depot as to do so would make it possible to identify the religious affiliations of individuals.

- Protestant 50%
- Catholic 47%
- Other 3%

Metro and NI Railways Workforce

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of the current (i) Metro workforce; and (ii) NI Railways workforce are (a) Protestant; (b) Catholic; and (c) other; and (iii) for the same figures broken down by each depot.

(AQW 4836/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I am informed by Translink that the religious affiliation of the workforce of both Metro and Northern Ireland Railways at February 2010 was as set out below. I have not provided the information at location level as to do so would make it possible to identify the religious affiliations of individuals.

Metro staff		NI Railways Staff	
(a)	Protestant 47%	(a)	Protestant 66%
(b)	Catholic 51%	(b)	Catholic 30%
(c)	Other 2%	(c)	Other 4%

Translink Workforce

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of the current Translink workforce are (i) Protestant; (ii) Catholic; and (iii) other.

(AQW 4837/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I am informed by Translink that the religious affiliation of its workforce at February 2010 was:

- (i) Protestant 56.1%
- (ii) Catholic 40.8%
- (iii) Other 3.1%

Article 11 Procedures Served on Building Contractors

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many Article 11 procedures have been served on building contractors who have been unable to complete roads in developments in each of the last two years, broken down by council area; and (ii) the cost to his Department of completing each development.

(AQW 5010/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Details of the number of Article 11 procedures served by my Department's Roads Service on building contractors / developers, who have been unable to complete roads in developments in each of the last two years, broken down by council area, are set out in the tables below:

ARTICLE 11 PROCEDURES SERVED ON BUILDING CONTRACTORS/DEVELOPERS IN 2008/09

Council Area	Number
Armagh	1
Banbridge	3
Craigavon	6
Ards	1*
Newry & Mourne	1
Belfast	1

Council Area	Number
Castlereagh	3
Carrickfergus	2
Lisburn	3
Newtownabbey	2
Derry	4
Larne	1
Coleraine	1
Fermanagh	2
Omagh	9
Strabane	2
Total	42

* Developer in receivership at an estimated cost to the Department of £2,211.

ARTICLE 11 PROCEDURES SERVED ON BUILDING CONTRACTORS/DEVELOPERS IN 2009/10

Council Area	Number
Armagh	2
Banbridge	1
Craigavon	2
Down	1
Belfast	6
Castlereagh	3
Carrickfergus	3
Lisburn	8
Newtownabbey	5
North Down	6
Antrim	1
Ballymena	2
Ballymoney	1
Fermanagh	2
Dungannon	3
Omagh	4
Strabane	2
Cookstown	1
TOTAL	53

As indicated in the tables above, over the last two years, the Department served Article 11 procedures on 95 occasions and incurred costs of £2,211 when completing 1 development. In all other instances, the costs associated with completing each of the developments were recovered from developers' road bonds.

Relocation of Ferry Services from Stranraer

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take, together with his counterparts in Scotland, and with Scotrail, Stena-Line, P&O and NI Railways, to ensure that the relocation of ferry services from Stranraer will not adversely affect the rail passenger numbers using the trans European network rail route on both sides of the North Channel.

(AQW 5026/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The liaison and integration of rail and ferry services are matters for the respective transport providers on both sides of the North Channel. They are aware of the importance I attach to continuation of the rail / ferry option. I am advised that they intend to work through the implications for those services in light of the planned relocation of the Stena Line terminal to the new port at Old House Point, Loch Ryan.

For its part, NI Railways intends to increase service capacity and frequency on the Larne line during 2012 when it takes delivery of 20 new Class 4000 trains which are scheduled to arrive 2011/2012. This will improve travel options for rail / ferry passengers on this side of the Irish Sea.

Town Bus Services

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many passengers have used the town bus services in (a) Carrickfergus; (b) Larne; and (c) Newtownabbey in each of the last five years; and (ii) if he has any plans to (a) increase the number of services in each area; or (b) increase the frequency of the existing service.

(AQW 5028/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The information is not available in the form requested. Translink records information on the number of passenger journeys rather than the actual number of passengers. The attached table details the number of passenger journeys undertaken in each of the areas in the last five financial years.

Town	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010 To end of period 11
Larne	306,518	272,497	269,909	322,853	248,175
Carrickfergus	67,776	63,011	62,762	45,161	29,933
Newtownabbey	45,033	41,549	41,678	40,910	31,264
Total	419,327	377,057	374,349	408,924	309,372

Decisions regarding services and frequency are operational matters for Translink and I have been advised that it has no plans to either increase the number of services or frequency of services in the three areas mentioned.

Rail Timetables

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take, together with his counterparts in Scotland, and with Scotrail, Stena-Line, P&O and NI Railway, to ensure that rail timetables are organised to ensure that passengers have adequate time between train arrivals and ferry departures.

(AQW 5030/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The liaison and integration of rail and ferry services are matters for the respective transport providers on both sides of the North Channel. They are aware of the importance I attach to an effective rail / ferry option on the link across the North Channel.

Belfast Harbour Commission

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what role his Department has in the corporate plans and operations of the Belfast Harbour Commission; and (ii) the governance and accountancy arrangements between his Department and the Belfast Harbour Commission.

(AQW 5038/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As Minister for Regional Development, I appoint the Belfast Harbour Commissioners under Article 9 of the Belfast Harbour Order (NI) 2002. The Commissioners are responsible for corporate management and operations, although in doing so, they are required to take into account guidance on governance and accountability issued by DRD to trust ports under Article 6 of the Harbours (NI) Order 2002. I hold twice yearly business review meetings with the Commissioners.

Decisions by the Commissioners regarding the disposal or change of use of port land are subject to a Memorandum of Understanding with DRD developed in accordance with Article 4 of the Belfast Harbour Order (NI) 2002.

Under section 30 of the Harbours Act (NI) 1970 the Commissioners are required to prepare an annual statement of accounts and to send a copy to the Department along with a copy of the auditor's report upon the statement.

Masterplan Commissioned by the Belfast Harbour Commission

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any outcomes from the masterplan commissioned by the Belfast Harbour Commission in July 2009.

(AQW 5042/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I assume the masterplan to which you refer is Belfast Harbour Commissioners' development of a masterplan for the city quays area. This is an operational matter for the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. However, I understand that the outcome of the stakeholder consultation is currently being considered by the Harbour Commissioners with a view to providing input, as appropriate, to the developing masterplan. It is Belfast Harbour Commissioners' intention to provide feedback to key stakeholders over the coming months. They would hope to commence this before the end of March 2010.

Road Repairs

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4355/10, how much of the £15 million each Roads Service Division is receiving to carry out road repairs.

(AQW 5051/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, since the beginning of January 2010, Roads Service Divisions have received an additional £16,588,000, which includes additional funds allocated to Roads Service during December Monitoring and an amount from internal adjustments. A breakdown of the allocation to each Division is provided in the table below.

Roads Service Division	Allocation
Northern	£3,951,000
Southern	£4,614,000
Eastern	£3,691,000

Roads Service Division	Allocation
Western	£4,332,000
Total	£16,588,000

The majority of this funding is being targeted towards Structural Maintenance activities, that is, resurfacing and patching activities, with a small proportion being used to deal with Winter Maintenance and other pressures.

Gortcorbies Climbing Lane Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Gortcorbies climbing lane scheme.

(AQW 5061/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As the Member will be aware, my Department's Roads Service has been examining options for the appropriate disposal of the large volume of surplus material, which will result from the construction of the proposed scheme. It is still proving to be very challenging to find a cost effective location for the disposal of this surplus material within the Benevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and to date, a solution has not yet been found.

In these circumstances, I am unable to provide a date for commencement of this scheme.

Dual Carriageway Between Dundonald and Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4860/10, if he will consider bringing forward the start date for the resurfacing of the dual carriageway between Dundonald and Newtownards due to the health and safety implications for drivers and the problems caused by drivers who are unable to cope with the condition of the road.

(AQW 5077/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As indicated in my reply to your recent Question (AQW 4860/10), the works on the A20 Kempstones Road dual carriageway, proposed for this summer, are being funded from the Trunk Road allocation.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that due to the scale of the works, it will be required to appoint a contractor for the scheme through an open tender competition. Preparations are already well advanced, however, the timescale for the tendering process will mean that it will be close to the summer months before a contractor can be appointed and commence works on site. Given the scale of the works and by undertaking construction during the summer months, disruption and inconvenience to the road user will be reduced as there tends to be lower traffic volumes using the road at that time of the year.

As regards works on the other sections of the carriageway, I can advise that these are being carried out under a Roads Service Term Contract. It is currently programmed to have one section of the carriageway completed by the end of June, prior to the commencement of the afore-mentioned more major works, with the remaining section to be completed thereafter.

In the meantime Roads Service will continue to undertake any remedial action required, in advance of the proposed contract works.

Crushing Service for Used Materials Recovered from Roads Works

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the contractors who provide a crushing service for used materials recovered from roads works; (ii) the cost per hour for their services; and (iii) the volume in tonnes processed by each contractor per hour.

(AQW 5098/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that contracts for crushing services are in place with the contractors listed below. The maximum tonnages processed per hour, based on each contractor's tender submission, are also listed.

The cost per hour of these services is commercially sensitive, and, therefore, cannot be released.

Contractor	Tonnage/hr
Corrigan & Steele Dev Ltd	150
Gildernew Environmental (3 machine sizes)	6, 15 & 45
Maurice Flynn & Sons Ltd	125
F McParland & Co Ltd	250
Harold Graham Building Contractor & Plant Hire	80

Crushing Service for Used Materials Recovered from Roads Works

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria used for awarding contracts for crushing materials recovered from road works; and how this criteria is applied to receive best value for money.

(AQW 5099/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the detailed criteria, used to determine the most economically advantageous tender for crushing services, were published in a publicly advertised tender pack. The criteria consisted of Price (60% of score) and Service Delivery (40% of score). These criteria were used to evaluate each of the tender submissions received and to determine a call-off award list.

In the assessment matrix used, points are awarded for price, and for various elements of service delivery, such as delivery times, Health & Safety, user familiarisation, insurances, test certificates, Quality Management System and other aspects. These scores are combined to produce a ranked list of Contractors for each Roads Service Depot location.

Meeting with Business Traders on the Lisburn Road

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the outcome of his recent visit and meeting with business traders on the Lisburn Road, South Belfast.

(AQW 5119/10)

Minister for Regional Development: During my recent visit and meeting with both the Member and a delegation of the Lisburn Road Traders' Association (LRTA), on 16 December 2009, to discuss the traffic flow and parking issues on the Lisburn Road, Belfast, a wide range of issues were raised.

Firstly, it is my understanding that issues relating to the possibility of constructing a new railway halt at Lislea Avenue, constructing a new car park in the area, the feasibility of banning right-turning manoeuvres from the Lisburn Road into side streets and the possibility of introducing one-way traffic arrangements into some of the side streets had been dealt with at the meeting and, therefore, no further action was required. However, should the Member consider this was not the case he should contact the Roads Service's Maintenance Section Engineer for the area, so that any outstanding matters can be investigated further.

I also understand that contact details of the primary point of contact within Roads Service, have been provided to the LRTA, so as they can take forward the other issues raised at the meeting.

In relation to contacting traders regarding future works programmes in the area, my Department's Roads Service had hoped to be in a position to carry out an on-going programme of carriageway

resurfacing, and footway renewal works along the Lisburn Road, over a number of financial years. This was scheduled to commence in 2010/2011, between Lancefield Road and Marlborough Park.

In developing scheme details, Roads Service has held preliminary discussions with both the Department for Social Development and Belfast City Council, to establish if either party had any plans to undertake enhancement works in this vicinity. I can advise the Member that initial indications are that such works are unlikely. However, I have asked Roads Service to defer its works, which were planned for the incoming year, in order to give the LRTA the opportunity to develop and promote their vision for the area, and to seek input from the various statutory agencies. I have asked Roads Service to contact the LRTA directly to discuss this matter further.

With regard to the suggestion of constructing additional parking provision in lay-bys along the Lisburn Road, if the LRTA is successful in promoting the area to the point where an environmental improvement scheme is being actively pursued, this issue could be considered as part of that scheme.

Roads Service has also contacted the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in relation to their involvement in car parking issues. I have been advised that the SIB has engaged consultants to carry out a short study on the potential for providing additional off-street parking within the Lisburn Road area. I understand their study will briefly assess a range of possible measures, ranging from the potential to use surplus government-owned land, either on a leased or purchased basis, to the potential for constructing an underground car park at an appropriate site. It will not, however, consider the wider planning / transport issues that new car parks would raise. For example, it will not address how such car parks would fit within area and transport plans, or how the additional traffic generated at these locations would be catered for within the local road network. The study, when complete, could then be used to inform the private sector, who may wish to build upon the study's findings to promote enhanced parking within the area.

Roads Service has checked its records of land ownership in the area, but has been unable to identify any parcels of land that would be of interest to SIB. However, Roads Service has offered to help with any detailed queries that SIB may have regarding specific small areas of land.

The LRTA also raised the issue of the urban clearway restrictions, and suggested that they should be reduced to operate on a 'tidal' arrangement, that is, where restrictions would only apply in the 'city bound' direction in the mornings and in the 'Lisburn' direction in the afternoons. Roads Service has not yet completed its review of this proposal, and I have asked the Divisional Roads Manager for the area, to write to you directly, with the outcome of that review when it becomes available.

I should advise the Member that, as with all Roads Service proposals, the progress of any planned works will be dependent upon the priority of the scheme and the availability of funding at the time.

NI Water Contract Services Tender C0 71

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many embedded contract personnel staff, under NI Water, have been involved in the contract services tender C0 71; and for how long.
(AQW 5131/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term 'embedded contract personnel'. However, approximately 58 employees of Williams Industrial Services, the contractor engaged by NIW under the current C071 contract, have been involved in the contract since it was awarded in October 2007.

Contract Staff Employed by the Water Service and NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail for each of the last 10 years the number of embedded contract personnel staff employed by (a) the Water Service; and (b) NI Water; and (ii) to list the projects or contracts on which they have worked.
(AQW 5133/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term 'embedded contract personnel'. However, employees of contractors engaged by NIW under a tendered contract arrangement are not deemed to be NIW employees. Apart from the current C071 contract relating to the provision of temporary technical support, NIW holds no records of contractors' employees and is therefore unable to provide the information sought for the past 10 years. Approximately 58 employees of Williams Industrial Services have been involved in the current C071 contract since it was awarded in October 2007.

NI Water Contract Services Tender CO 71

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) when the contract services CO 71 was put out to tender; (ii) when the contract was awarded; and (iii) when the contract is up for renewal.
(AQW 5135/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the C071 contract was competitively tendered in June 2007 and awarded in October 2007. The contract is due to terminate in September 2010.

NI Water Contract Services Tender CO 71

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can confirm that the contract services tender CO 71 is not for the provision of temporary technical support.
(AQW 5137/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the current C071 contract does relate to the provision of temporary technical support.

NI Water Contract Services Tender CO 71

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the title of the current NI Water tender CO 71.
(AQW 5138/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the title of the current C071 contract is 'Management and Supply of Technicians for Support in the Field of Telemetry'.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been spent by his Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5143/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Amounts spent by my Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, are set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Fees	Travel and Subsistence	Total
2006/07	793,162	58,689	851,851.00
2007/08	270,807	44,584	315,391.00
2008/09	550,646	41,781	592,427.00

Water Service (now Northern Ireland Water) was part of the Department until 31 March 2007. The Centre for Applied Learning started to hard-charge the Department from 2008/09.

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the maintenance costs for Donaghadee Harbour in each of the last 10 years.

(AQW 5152/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Financial records of this nature are not retained for ten years. Maintenance costs for the past six financial years are as follows:

Year	Maintenance Costs
2004/05	£54,000
2005/06	£63,000
2006/07	£185,000 #
2007/08	£108,000 #
2008/09	£73,000
2009/10 Expected Costs	£193,000 ##

includes costs of refurbishment of the North Pier

includes anticipated cost of dredging

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department will carry out dredging of the Donaghadee Harbour area; and the length of time before the process needs to be repeated.

(AQW 5155/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Weather and operational circumstances permitting, a full dredge of Donaghadee Harbour will commence this month. The need for future dredging will be determined by hydrographical surveys of harbour depths. These surveys are performed every three years.

Road Safety Measures in Dunloy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Roads Service has to introduce road safety measures in Dunloy.

(AQW 5171/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is currently considering the introduction of traffic calming measures on a number of roads within Dunloy village. However, these schemes will be subject to assessment to determine their priority within Roads Service's overall programme of work, and will have to compete, along with similar schemes in other areas, for the limited amount of finance available for this type of work.

Compensation Paid as a Result of Falls

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of compensation paid as a result of falls (a) in total ; and (b) in each Road Service section office, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5172/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The costs of compensation paid as a result of falls (a) in total; and (b) in each Roads Service Section Office, in each of the last three financial years is shown in the table below.

Roads Service Section Office	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £
Antrim	79,043.43	71,150.68	79,883.91
Ards	158,803.01	112,072.01	124,509.24
Armagh	40,812.25	50,904.26	62,235.63
Ballymena & Larne	68,378.43	271,635.62	37,360.81
Ballymoney & Moyle	13,736.90	10,776.28	74,349.50
Banbridge	66,700.95	50,167.85	21,415.48
Belfast North	602,697.55	627,500.16	691,496.72
Belfast South	211,497.92	427,315.31	462,092.06
Castlereagh	174,598.51	95,282.89	75,907.14
Coleraine	10,387.48	29,320.14	58,284.03
Cookstown	15,371.85	23,590.75	42,349.48
Craigavon	111,352.47	286,099.36	88,396.80
Down	52,538.12	27,377.99	106,876.73
Dungannon	113,970.33	32,312.24	38,103.60
Fermanagh	2,398.44	37,994.23	43,804.86
Limavady	35,611.69	7,500.00	34,208.22
Lisburn	153,566.33	516,199.49	335,626.08
Derry	195,941.47	223,983.02	160,947.10
Magherafelt	11,234.63	21,994.30	5,463.30
Newry & Mourne	85,742.93	197,091.03	114,143.94
Newtownabbey & Carrick	274,874.55	253,653.31	487,118.53
North Down	117,093.74	121,676.00	73,719.57
Omagh	101,398.51	77,040.39	176,081.43
Strabane	19,040.47	15,447.27	51,546.43
Strangford Ferry	14,713.70	NIL	NIL
Total	2,731,505.66	3,588,084.58	3,445,920.59

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider making financial allowances for the extra costs for repairs to Donaghadee Harbour due to recent weather conditions before the handover to Ards council, as part of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 5175/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Maintenance at Donaghadee Harbour is performed on an ongoing basis. A programme of minor works on the harbour structures is due to commence this month. However, this will be paid for out of the regular maintenance budget.

‘Invest to Save’ Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what bids his Department has made in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5176/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The proposals made by my Department in relation to the ‘Invest to Save’ Fund are listed in the table below. This list was compiled following consideration of the assessment criteria provided by DFP i.e. “Each Proposal will be assessed not only on the ratio of upfront cost to net present value of future savings, but also deliverability”.

Although addressing communal segregation in service provision and the promotion of integration were not specific considerations in compiling these proposals, improvements to transport and roads infrastructure would support these actions.

Future Delivery of Bus Services

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultation his Department intends to have on the future delivery of bus services, including the Easibus service, with (i) North Down Borough Council; (ii) the Omnibus Partnership; and (iii) the public.

(AQW 5178/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I met a delegation from North Down Borough Council and the Omnibus Partnership to discuss the Easibus services in Bangor on 9 February 2010. Following that meeting the Council informed me that it intends to facilitate a meeting with representatives from the Omnibus Partnership and Easibus passengers to examine the proposed scheduled services. I understand that the Council will again meet with Translink to discuss the proposals and I have asked departmental officials to also attend that meeting.

The Department also recently carried out a consultation exercise (which closed on 5 February 2010) on the future delivery of public transport in the North, including bus services, and is considering the responses received. A number of public meetings were also held during the consultation period, including one in Bangor, to obtain views on the public transport reform proposals.

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much his Department has spent on Donaghadee Harbour in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5181/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The amount spent in each of the last five financial years is as follows:

Year	Maintenance	Running Costs
2005/06	£63,000	£42,000
2006/07	£185,000 *	£45,000
2007/08	£108,000 *	£38,000
2008/09	£73,000	£38,000

Year	Maintenance	Running Costs
2009/10 Planned spend	£193,000 **	£40,000

* includes costs of refurbishment of the North Pier

** includes anticipated cost of dredging

NI Water: Industrial Tribunals

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many industrial tribunals NI Water has defended since its inception; and (ii) for a breakdown of each case outlining (a) the tribunal decision; (b) legal and other costs incurred; and (c) the amount of damages or compensation.

(AQW 5185/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has not defended any industrial tribunal cases since it was appointed water and sewerage undertaker on 1 April 2007.

Court Cases Inherited by NI Water from the Water Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the court cases inherited by NI Water from the Water Service; and for a breakdown of each case outlining (i) whether the case was being taken or defended; (ii) the outcome; (iii) legal and other costs incurred; and (iv) the amount of damages or compensation awarded.

(AQW 5187/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that 205 cases were transferred to it from the Department for Regional Development (DRD), Water Service in which legal proceedings had already commenced or were subsequently commenced against DRD or NIW. Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost. However, of the total litigated cases, 96 are still ongoing and 109 have been concluded with no damages paid in 48 cases. Legal and other costs, including both the Plaintiffs' and NIW's legal costs, fees for medical experts and court fees amounts to £707,000. Damages or compensation paid amounts to £1.244 million.

Court Cases Inherited by NI Water from the Water Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the court cases (i) defended; and (ii) taken by NI Water since its inception; and for a breakdown of each case by (a) the outcome; (b) legal and other costs incurred; and (c) the amount of damages or compensation.

(AQW 5189/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that since it was appointed water and sewerage undertaker in April 2007 it has defended 61 cases in which legal proceedings were commenced against NIW. Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost. However, of the total litigated cases, 38 are still ongoing and 23 have been concluded with no damages paid in 13 cases. Legal and other costs, including both the Plaintiffs' and NIW's legal costs, fees for medical experts and court fees amounts to £67,208. Damages or compensation paid amounts to £30,280.

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussion his Department has had with Ards Borough Council in relation to by-laws prior to the transfer of Donaghadee Harbour.

(AQW 5201/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Ards Borough Council was a consultee during the consultation undertaken during 2009 by my Department on the draft Donaghadee Harbour Order (NI) which will enable byelaws to be developed at Donaghadee Harbour. The Department has responded to written queries raised by Ards Borough Council.

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to the safety of Donaghadee Harbour and its transfer to Ards Borough Council.

(AQW 5202/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Approximately £90,000 is spent each year at Donaghadee Harbour on safety related works and general maintenance. In addition, dredging of the harbour is planned to be performed this month at a cost of approximately £120,000.

Donaghadee Harbour

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department plans to have with Ards Borough Council prior to the transfer of Donaghadee Harbour.

(AQW 5203/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The officials from my Department intend to meet officials from Ards Borough Council within the next few weeks to discuss matters relating to Donaghadee Harbour. This is separate from the arrangements to discuss the transfer of functions arising from the Review of Public Administration.

Pothole Repairs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if there has been an increase in the cost of pothole repairs for roads in North Down due to the recent bad weather.

(AQW 5204/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that there has been a significant increase in the number of surface defects identified during cyclical safety inspections of the road network within North Down. It may be some time before assessments are completed and the full extent of the damage and cost of carrying out repairs is known. In addition, as it would not be practicable to diagnose each individual failure that led to the formation of the potholes identified, one cannot say with any certainty if they were caused by the recent bad weather, or other factors.

Due to the increase in the number of defects identified and workload associated with carrying out repairs, it is evident that additional resources will be required. However, at this stage, it is not possible to determine what the cost of pothole repairs will be, and if these costs have increased in comparison to previous years.

Car Parking Facility at Abbey Street, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the proposed plans for the car parking facility at Abbey Street, Bangor.

(AQW 5206/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it operates two car parks in Abbey Street, Bangor.

The first, at Abbey Street East, is split into two car parking areas. The area closest to Bangor town centre is operated by Roads Service as a charged car park. The other portion is leased from Roads Service by Translink, who operate it as a free park and ride site, to service commuters who use their bus and rail services.

The other, at Abbey Street West, is a free car park at present, however, as this car park falls within the area of parking restraint identified within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015, Roads Service intends to commence the legislative process in order to introduce charges.

Erection of Memorials

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's policy on the erection of memorials at the side of a road following a death in a road traffic accident.

(AQW 5207/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not approve of, or support, the unauthorised use of departmental property for the erection of illegal roadside memorials. However, where a memorial is erected at the side of a road, following a death in a road traffic accident, no action is taken to secure its removal, unless it is obstructing the road and constitutes a danger to road users.

Staffing Grades of NI Water

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the staffing grades of NI Water; and (ii) the relevant salary range for each grade.

(AQW 5211/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that details of the staffing grades and current salary ranges are as set out in the table below. Levels 1, 2 and 3 grades and all industrial employees are on fixed salary points with no minimum or maximum scale points.

Grade	Minimum Salary	Maximum Salary
Level 1 (Chief Executive)	£182,000	£182,000
Level 2	£70,000	£108,000
Level 3	£48,000	£65,000
Level 4	£35,314	£43,161
Level 5	£27,415	£33,507
Level 6	£22,634	£27,664
Level 7	£15,038	£18,380
Craft Technician*	£23,542	£23,542
SEPO*	£22,523	£22,523
Craft Supervisor 1*	£22,523	£22,523
EPO*	£22,026	£22,026
Craft Supervisor 2*	£22,026	£22,026
Craft Grade A*	£20,907	£20,907
HCO*	£20,709	£20,709
Craft Grade B*	£20,385	£20,385
Class I*	£19,714	£19,714
Class II*	£19,242	£19,242
Apprentice	£11,159	£11,159

* salary includes non-consolidated bonus

NI Water: Staff Bonuses

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the range of bonuses paid to each grade of staff in NI Water in (i) 2007/08; and (ii) 2008/09.

(AQW 5212/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that details of the range of bonuses paid to employees in NIW in 2007/8 and 2008/9 are set out below.

Grade	Bonus 2007/08	Bonus 2008/09
Level 1 (Chief Executive)	£18,700 in line with provisions of employment contract.	No substantive Chief Executive.
Level 2	£3,000 to £6,000 in line with 2007 Senior Civil Service Pay Award:	£3,337 to £10,500 in line with 2008 Senior Civil Service Pay Award:
Level 3	£50 to £150 in line with 2007 Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Pay Award:	£4,750 to £6,250 in line with Discretionary Bonus Scheme:
Level 4 to 7	£50 to £150 in line with 2007 NICS Pay Award:	- £50 to £150 in line with 2008 NICS Pay Award: - £200 Corporate Bonus
Industrial Employees	Non-consolidated weekly bonus scheme 20.68% of hourly rate of pay.	- Non-consolidated weekly bonus scheme 20.68% of hourly rate of pay. - £200 Corporate Bonus

NI Water: Staff Bonuses

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money is available for all bonus payments by NI Water in 2009/10, broken down by staff grade and function.

(AQW 5213/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the money available for all bonus payments in 2009/10 is as set out in the table below. As these budgets are set at a corporate level, it is not possible to provide a breakdown on a functional basis.

Chief Executive	Up to £70,000
Level 2	Bonus arrangements have not yet been agreed for 2009/10
Level 3	Up to £174,000
All other Employees	Up to £555,000 in respect of Corporate Bonus payments

NI Water: Terms and Conditions of Employment

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that NI Water will apply the same terms and conditions of employment to Level 5 managers, who underwent an interview for their current posts, as were formerly applied to the HPTO civil service grade, appointed without an interview.

(AQW 5214/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that during the past two years a number of Level 5 posts have been advertised within the company. Any employee who chose to apply for one of these roles was required to undertake to provide an out-of-hours (On-Call) service as part of their duties. This represented a minor revision to their existing terms and conditions of service, the remainder of which were unchanged.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development why, on 3 February 2010, the Door-to-Door bus service returned to Newtownards from Bangor without any passengers
(AQW 5226/10)

Minister for Regional Development: This is an operational matter for Chambers Coach Hire which operates this service. My Department encourages the Operator to make full use of all vehicles at their disposal. However, there are occasions when, for scheduling reasons, vehicles may make journeys without passengers.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when the consultation process for the Door-to-Door service will be completed; and if input will be sought from people who previously complained about the service.
(AQW 5230/10)

Minister for Regional Development: There is no formal consultation currently being undertaken in relation to Door-to-Door transport. However, as part of a continuing process of looking at how services can be improved, my Department is currently considering options for the future delivery of these services and has sought views from customers and the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee on a number of issues. Complaints about the service as well as positive comments by customers are taken into account in the evaluation of services and in considering options.

Door-to Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development why Door-to Door service staff received a 10% pay cut, without consultation, in the last 12 months.
(AQW 5231/10)

Minister for Regional Development: This is an operational matter for Chambers Coach Hire which is the employer of the staff in question. My Department is aware of the pay cut and has adjusted the compensation to Chambers accordingly.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development why, on 3 February 2010, the Door -to-Door service sent one bus to pick up a family at Loch Cuan Home, Westwinds, and sent a separate bus to pick up a passenger in Cherry Valley, Comber; when it would have been more cost effective to collect both in one run. .
(AQW 5232/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The scheduling of vehicles is an operational matter for Chambers Coach Hire which operates this service. My Department encourages the operator to make full use of the vehicles at its disposal. However, scheduling can produce apparent anomalies. If the member has particular concerns, he should contact me directly.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to whose account the money collected from Door-to-Door bus service fares is paid; (ii) who monitors this account; and (iii) how often the account is monitored.
(AQW 5241/10)

Minister for Regional Development: This is an operational matter for Chambers Coach Hire, Disability Action and Bridge Accessible Transport who are the operators of these services and who retain the

revenue collected. My Department carries out an annual audit of these organisations to ensure that procedures for the proper delivery of door-to-door services, including the handling of monies, are adhered to.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passenger journeys the Door-to-Door service carried out in Lisburn, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5267/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Door-to-Door Transport has been operational in the Lisburn area (which includes Dunmurry) since May 2007 and only combined statistical data is available for 2007/08 financial year.

However, I can confirm that in the Lisburn area 4481 passenger trips were provided in the 2008/09 financial year and 4547 trips were provided in the period 1 April 2009 to 31 January 2010.

Door-to-Door Service

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of the Door-to-Door service in the Lisburn area during the last year.

(AQW 5268/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Lisburn and Dunmurry are treated as one operational area for the purposes of the Door-to-Door transport contract. Therefore, information on costs is not available specifically for Lisburn. However, I can confirm that between 1 February 2009 and 31 January 2010, the cost of Door-to-Door transport in the Lisburn/Dunmurry area was £115,611.

Cost of Damage to Roads

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to estimate the overall cost of the damage to roads during the prolonged cold spell.

(AQW 5271/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, even with regular care and attention, a road will deteriorate over time and require corrective maintenance. The rate and extent of this deterioration is influenced by numerous factors, including traffic volumes, weather conditions and work by utilities.

A relatively wet summer and autumn, followed by the coldest winter in almost 50 years, will undoubtedly have had a damaging effect on the North's road network. The repeated freezing and thawing cycle causes carriageways to split, and potholes to form. However, it will be some time before the full extent of the damage caused to the road network, during the recent cold weather, can be fully assessed.

The total cost of the damage caused solely by the cold weather may never fully be known, as it would not be practical, or indeed possible, for Roads Service to diagnose the causes that have led to, or are likely to contribute to, damage to the roads.

Roads Service undertakes a series of regular inspections and condition surveys to ensure the road network is maintained to defined standards, and that serious road defects are detected and repaired. These arrangements, together with the experience and professional judgement of Roads Service engineers, ensure that the roads remain safe, and do not fall below satisfactory and serviceable levels.

I can also advise the Member that, since the beginning of January 2010, an additional £16.6 million, approximately, has been allocated to Roads Service for use across the North. This money will be used to progress pre-determined programmes of work, targeting the worst roads, and also to deal with the effects of the recent cold spell.

Capital and Resource Investment

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the capital and resource investment provided and planned by his Department and associated bodies, including Roads Service, Translink and NI Water, between 2007-2010, that will benefit the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 5299/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not hold information on investment on a constituency basis. However, it does hold details of the work, carried out per year, by Council area. The South Belfast constituency area covers portions of both the Belfast Council and Castlereagh Council areas. Information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for these two Councils can be found in 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.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-searchall.htm>

Roads Service is currently compiling its Spring Reports to Councils.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that it does not hold details of its capital infrastructure projects by parliamentary constituency. However, listed below are those projects NIW believe to be in the South Belfast Constituency, which have been delivered, or are planned, between 2007 and 2010.

NI Water - Location/Project	Estimated Spend 2007-2010 (£000s)
Springfield Avenue Storm Sewer Extension	123
Belfast Sewers Project	127,287
Belvoir Park Trunk Sewer	1,878
Belfast City Centre Public Realm Strategy	229
Ormeau Road Storm Separation	1,025
Castle Place / High Street Sewer and Water main Upgrade	1,328
Newtownbreda, Dunmurry, New Holland Wastewater Treatment Works - Nutrient Removal	736
Newtownbreda Wastewater Treatment Works	540
Belfast City Centre Public Realm Phase 1, Area 1	417
M1/Westlink Watermains & Sewers Diversions	646
Mains replacement ,Belfast Public Realm Phase 1 Area 2	81
Lower Chichester Street, Belfast Watermains Replacement, Belfast Public Realm	92
Belfast Trunk Main Interconnections	114
Belfast City Centre Zone Watermain Improvements	3,091
Belfast City Centre Public Realm Phase 1, Area 3	508
Purdysburn East Zone Watermain Improvements	1,575
Cross Town Main Extension - Barnettts Park to Purdysburn	851
Total	140,521

The table below shows Translink's capital investment, provided and planned, from 2007-2010, which will benefit the South Belfast constituency. There has also been significant investment in new Trains

and Buses during this time, which are used across the region, but also bring benefits to the South Belfast constituency. Resource expenditure on the bus and rail network cannot be detailed by specific constituency.

Transport Revenue Grants are also an important benefit to the South Belfast constituency. Therefore, the table includes the expenditure on the Fuel Duty Rebate and Concessionary Fare grants relating to the Citybus/Metro network, the Public Service Obligation payments to the NI Railways network and the Belfast wide expenditure on the Door to Door scheme.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AND REVENUE GRANTS IN SOUTH BELFAST ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY

Capital Expenditure* by Project	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 to end Feb 10 £'000	Total £'000
Ulsterbus				
Great Victoria Street Workshop Repairs to Pit Walls		8		8
Laganside Strand Extension for Double Deckers		1	7	8
Bus Drivers Training Facility at Adelaide	15			15
Chamber of Commerce House Training Facilities	7			7
Europa Bus Centre Staff Gym	1	4		5
Great Victoria Street Internal Restructure	2			2
Europa Bus Station Provision of Traffic Barriers on Busway			8	8
Chamber of Commerce House Refurbishment			48	48
Chamber Of Commerce House Refurbishment - replacement of lifts			17	17
Telecommunication Facilities at Laganside			13	13
Project Also Benefitting of Metro Area				
Refurbishment of Paint at Bus Depots & Stations		339		339
Building Upgrade Condition Programme		268	646	914
DDA Compliance	37			37
Building Services Condition Programme			49	49
Installation of Fall Arrest Systems Ulsterbus/Metro			64	64
Metro				
Refurbishment of CCTV System at Short Strand - Phase 1		35		35
Refurbishment of CCTV System at Short Strand - Phase 2		80	23	103
Personal equipment lockers for Short Strand Drivers			4	4

Capital Expenditure* by Project	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 to end Feb 10 £'000	Total £'000
Project Benefitting all of Metro Area				
Additional School Buses - 20 Double Deckers	3257	69		3326
New Buses for Metro Phase 2 - 25 Double Deckers	4,028	137		4,165
4 x Sets Mobile Lifting Jacks Metro Garages			63	43
NIR				
Central Stations Shore Supply Facility	2			2
Customer Information System at Botanic	2			2
Adelaide Frequency Division Multiplexing Replacement	30			30
Human Resources Office Refurbishment at Central Station	18			18
Air Conditioning at Central	6			6
Signalling Simulator at Adelaide	163	356		519
Adelaide Train Maintenance Facility		382	950	1,332
Dargan Bridge Sleeper Rehabilitation		13		13
Refurbishment of Office at Chamber of Commerce House		54		54
Central Line Switch & Crossing Spares		79		79
NIR Trackside Fencing - Adelaide to Bridge End		300		300
Great Victoria Station Automatic Staff Car Park Gates		7		7
Great Victoria Station Railway and Europa Bus Internal Restructure	2			2
Upgrade of Monitoring Equipment for Call Centre		39		39
Botanic Platform Extension			79	79
Great Victoria Station Hub Development			5	5
New furniture for Ops Driver Training Room C1 Rail Operations Training Academy			1	1
Replacement of CCTV System Central Stn			10	10
Dargan 600 points, Insulated Block Joint's and Expansion Switches		104	89	193
Net wide Projects which benefit South Belfast				
New Rail Vision	1,984	3,050		5,034
Disability Discrimination Act	7,532	1,316		8,848

Capital Expenditure* by Project	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 to end Feb 10 £'000	Total £'000
Customer Information System Long Line Public Address Stage ¹	92			92
New Trains Two Platform Extensions		50	296	346
New trains ²		16,957	12,846	29,803
NITHC				
Land at Adelaide			500	500
Chamber of Commerce House Refurbishment		202	76	278

* Capital includes grant aided and non grant aided expenditure.

Revenue Grants				
	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 Planned £'000	Total
Metro/Citybus (total on network)				
Fuel Duty Rebate	2,500	2,700	3,000	8,200
Concessionary Fares	7,300	8,400	10,100	25,800
Railways (Public Service Obligation NIR network wide)	24,100	23,000	23,200	70,300
Door to Door (Belfast wide)	500	700	700	1,900

Mains Water Supply on the Curragh Road, Dungiven

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he would investigate the low pressure in the mains water supply experienced by residents on the Curragh Road, Dungiven, between Thursday and Sunday evenings, since the supply source changed from the Brishey Reservoir to the Banagher Dam last year.

(AQW 5308/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has commenced an investigation into the low water pressure problem experienced by residents in the Curragh Road area of Dungiven. During the next two weeks it will be analysing data from water pressure monitoring equipment installed in the area and I have asked Laurence MacKenzie, Chief Executive of NIW to write to you direct when the outcome of the investigation is known.

Irish Language Lessons

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4925/10, (i) if he can estimate the number of calls his Department has received from people who only speak Irish; and (ii) for his assessment of the provision of Irish language lessons for staff in his Department, in light of the value for money principles endorsed by the Executive.

(AQW 5310/10)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) No, it is not possible to estimate the number of calls received in my Department from people who only speak Irish. The issue is not relevant to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, as its overriding purpose is cultural. An aim of the Charter is to ensure the use of Irish in administrative settings.
- (ii) I consider that the Irish language classes will provide excellent value for money. The classes will cost £1,500 for 24 hours of tuition, for up to 40 staff.

Resurfacing Work on Abbot Drive, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to provide a timescale for the resurfacing work on Abbot Drive, in the Bowtown Estate, Newtownards; and (ii) if he is aware of claims made for damage to vehicles due to the poor condition of this road.

(AQW 5333/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a resurfacing scheme is planned for completion at Abbot Drive, Newtownards within the next two months.

Roads Service has also advised that it has not received any claims in respect of damage to vehicles, due to the condition of Abbot Drive, during the last 10 years.

Directional Signs for Places of Worship

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the process for obtaining a directional sign for a place of worship in a rural village.

(AQW 5404/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a church may be signed when there is a clear road safety need for doing so, or when the following criteria are met:

- there is a seating capacity in excess of 200;
- it is open for worship at least once per week throughout the year; and
- where Roads Service is satisfied that there is obvious difficulty in locating the church building due to its location or remoteness from the main road network.

Signing will not normally be permitted to premises located on rural A or B class roads and will normally only be permitted from the nearest A or B class road.

There are stipulations, which include, that the applicant shall pay in advance the full cost for any signing provided and that the sign becomes the property of the Department.

Railways: Coleraine to Londonderry

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the relaying of the track on the Coleraine to Londonderry section of the Belfast to Londonderry railway line.

(AQO 900/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Detailed planning and design work for the re-lay of the track between Coleraine and Derry is underway and the Department expects to receive the Economic Appraisal very soon. Subject to Executive agreement on funding and the normal approval processes, work on the ground is expected to commence in April 2012 and be completed in 2013.

Public Transport: People with Disabilities

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department has held with disability organisations and groups to maximise the number of people with disabilities using public transport.

(AQO 901/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department continues to engage regularly with the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee, IMTAC, as its primary advisor on transport issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

IMTAC has recently responded to a discussion document about the Regional Transportation Strategy Review, in which IMTAC acknowledged the transformation to the accessibility of the public transport network brought about by investment through the Regional Transportation Strategy. Officials are currently considering the details of IMTAC's paper.

As part of the recent public consultation on the Accessible Transport Strategy Action Plan 2009-2012, my Department met a wide range of disabled people and disability organisations during public meetings and discussed how the accessibility of transport could be improved further.

Officials have also met a number of groups of elderly and disabled people (such as RNIB, residents of sheltered accommodation and senior citizens' clubs) to promote the Door-to-Door transport scheme, which provides accessible transport in urban areas for older and disabled people. Coinciding with the launch of Door-to-Door services in Belfast and Derry 2008, the Department carried out a province-wide advertising campaign to encourage eligible people to avail of these services.

The Department also attends, as a devolved administration observer, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) which is a statutory, independent body established by Government to advise on the transport needs of disabled people in England and Wales.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development if the budget requirements are in place for the Belfast Rapid Transit System.

(AQO 902/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The final budget allocation for Departments for 2010-11 has not yet been agreed by the Executive. However the Executive's draft budget proposals allocate sufficient funding for the Rapid Transit system in 2010-11.

The Executive's Investment Strategy (ISNI 2008-2018) also includes further indicative funding of £99 million.

Department for Social Development

Dismissed Staff

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff have been dismissed from her Department due to (i) poor performance; and (ii) ill health, in each of the past five years.

(AQW 5034/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The table below provides details over the last 5 years of staff dismissed for poor work performance, unsatisfactory attendance and the number of ill-health retirements. The Department considers dismissals for poor performance and ill-health retirement under the relevant NICS-wide policies and procedures set by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009
Dismissal on grounds of inefficiency – work performance	0	0	0	0	0
Dismissal on grounds of inefficiency – unsatisfactory attendance	36	30	30	32	29
Ill-health Retirement	54	45	41	45	27

Staff Transferred due to Poor Performance

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been transferred (i) into her Department; and (ii) out of her Department, due to poor performance in each of the last five years. (AQW 5035/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development has not transferred any staff, either into or out of the Department, due to poor performance in any of the last five years.

Economy 7 Heating within Social Housing

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing dwellings in the Derry Housing Executive area still use Economy 7; and when she intends to replace these with a more efficient system. (AQW 5037/10)

Minister for Social Development: A total of 773 Housing Executive dwellings in the Derry area still use Economy 7. Replacement of existing heating schemes is carried out on a planned basis where Economy 7 exists in an estate undergoing heating replacements. Tenants are offered the opportunity to switch to oil or gas where available but may opt to retain Economy 7 and significant numbers do so for reasons of convenience. The Housing Executive has provisionally planned to replace 107 Economy 7 heating systems in 2010/11, although this will be dependant on the availability of funding. It also plans to offer replacement heating to remaining Economy 7 users over the next five years. With regard to Housing Association dwellings using Economy 7, there are a total of 487 in the Derry Housing Executive area. Housing Associations plans to replace Economy 7 heating vary, although there are plans to replace existing heating systems over the next 5-7 years with gas where available.

Community and Voluntary Sector

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development when departmental funding is removed from or reduced to the community and voluntary sector, what measures will be in place to provide for redundancy payments. (AQW 5039/10)

Minister for Social Development: Voluntary and community organisations are encouraged to build financial reserves to enable them to meet future commitments or unforeseen expenses such as redundancy costs. Reserves are the resources (excluding funding from restricted grants) which the organisation can make available to spend at the Trustees' or Committee members' discretion, once it has met its commitments and covered its other planned expenditure.

In certain circumstances where voluntary and community organisations, as employers, cannot or refuse to make redundancy payments, an application can be made for payment from the Northern Ireland National Insurance Fund.

Regeneration Scheme in the Village Area of South Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process currently being employed by her Department to determine the value of properties which have been, or are being, vested as part of the regeneration scheme in the Village area of south Belfast.

(AQW 5066/10)

Minister for Social Development: All valuations in advance of vesting or after vesting are carried out independently by Land and Property Services on behalf of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Agreement on the purchase price or compensation is reached through negotiation with either the applicant directly or an Estate Agent representing the applicant. The Housing Executive will pay any reasonable Agents fee associated with the negotiations.

Housing Executive Evictions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4538/10, what action she is taking to address the number of Housing Executive eviction notices in the Ards District.

(AQW 5081/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive regards eviction proceedings as a last resort and has a number of preventive measures in place. The Housing Executive is committed to preventing anti-social behaviour through a range of intervention support and diversionary measures and works closely with other agencies in this respect. The Housing Executive will always attempt to address such problems firstly through these preventative measures and only if these fail will compulsory actions be initiated that may lead to eviction. In the case of rent arrears, the Housing Executive's computerised rent accounting system identifies immediately when a rent payment becomes overdue. Housing Executive staff will seek early identification and contact with the tenant regarding any identified rent arrears problems. Staff will ensure that the tenant is assessed for eligibility to Housing Benefit and confidential home visits will be made to the tenant to discuss their rent arrears problem and also offer money advice/support through a range of initiatives.

Number of Trees Planted

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development how many trees have been planted by her Department under (i) town masterplans; (ii) housing new builds; and (iii) environmental improvement initiatives in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5083/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department would usually plant trees as part of environmental improvement schemes, rather than masterplans in town or city centres. The collated available figures for the last five years are as follows.

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Environmental improvement schemes	4421*	4047	4167	2350	2729
Housing new builds	177	442	316	281	318
Total	4598	4489	4483	2631	3047

* Figures for regeneration schemes not available.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in the Lagan Valley area have benefitted from the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 5096/10)

Minister for Social Development: Since the new Warm Homes Scheme was launched on 1 July 2009, 118 homes in the Lagan Valley area have benefitted from measures available from the scheme

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications for the Warm Homes Scheme in the Lagan Valley area have yet to be processed.

(AQW 5097/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 22 applications in the Lagan Valley area which are at various stages of progression through the Warm Homes Scheme.

Social Housing in the Titanic Quarter Development

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to ensure that any social housing in the Titanic Quarter development is maximised, on-site and inclusive of all sections of the community.

(AQW 5162/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan promotes the development of the Titanic Quarter by zoning the site for mixed use provision, of which the residential element would be 15% affordable housing. Following discussions between the Housing Executive and Titanic Quarter Ltd and subsequently between Planning Service and Titanic Quarter Ltd, outline planning permission was granted for Titanic Phase II and included the following condition:

A minimum of 15% of the residential accommodation shall be allocated for affordable housing of which a minimum of 10% shall be allocated within the phase II area in compliance with the Design Principles document date stamp received 18 June 2008. The remainder of the affordable housing provision may be in 'off-site' locations in the Belfast Metropolitan Area. All 'off-site' affordable housing shall be provided prior to the occupation of 70% of the residential accommodation located within Phase II.

It would be my intention to promote 'shared future housing' for the proposed social housing element within Titanic Quarter and there will also be an element of provision for persons with a disability.

It is anticipated that the total residential put back proposed for Titanic phase 2 will be a minimum of 3,500 units.

'Invest to Save' Initiative

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Social Development what bids her Department has made in relation to the 'Invest to Save' initiative; and what consideration was given to bids that seek to address communal segregation in service provision and to promote integration.

(AQW 5167/10)

Minister for Social Development: I can advise that whilst my Department very much welcomes the introduction of this initiative, we have not tabled any bids in the limited time available. However, we hope to avail of the fund in the future when issues such as communal segregation in service provision, the promotion of integration and all other issues relevant to building a shared future in Northern Ireland will certainly be considered.

External Cyclical Maintenance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4747/10, what areas of Newtownards are scheduled for external cyclical maintenance in the next financial year; and the nature of this maintenance.

(AQW 5169/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Ards Town External Cyclical Maintenance Scheme comprises of works to 214 town centre dwellings in the Mark Street, William Street, John Street and Mill Street areas of Newtownards. The items proposed through the scheme include:

- Partial window replacement (to 21 dwellings).
- Replacement of external doors (to 51 dwellings).
- Major roofing works (to 11 dwellings).
- Repair/repainting of walls and fences.

However, these schemes are dependent on the availability of funding and the Housing Executive will review its programmes of activity when budgets for 2010/11 and beyond have been confirmed.

Kitchen Replacements in Killyleagh

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4747/10, what areas of Killyleagh are scheduled for kitchen replacements in the next financial year.
(AQW 5170/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive's Killyleagh kitchen replacement scheme comprises of improvement works to 40 dwellings in the Kerry Drive, Kerry Hill, Kerry Park, Kerry Wynd and Limetree Hill areas of Killyleagh. The items proposed through the scheme include the:

- Replacement of existing kitchen units.
- Re-wiring of kitchen as required.
- Installation of smoke detectors as required.

However, these schemes are dependent on the availability of funding and the Housing Executive will review its programmes of activity when budgets for 2010/11 and beyond have been confirmed.

Cost of Staff Attending Conferences and Courses

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development how much money has been spent by her Department on (i) fees; and (ii) all travel costs, including subsistence costs, for staff attending conferences and courses in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5179/10)

Minister for Social Development: Costs of fees and associated travel/subsistence costs relating to Department for Social Development staff courses and conferences are set out in the table below for the last three full business years.

Travel and subsistence costs recorded in the table relate to DSD Core and Social Security Agency staff attendances at learning and development events only.

Business Year	Course and Conference Fees	Travel and *Susistence Costs
2006/07	£877559	£75855
2007/08	£792772	£40915
2008/09	£685291	£42409

* the Department's Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division does not keep the travel and subsistence information in the format requested and this can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Cookstown Social Security Office

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria were used in the decision to downgrade the Cookstown Social Security Office to front office only as part of the Strategic Business Review. (AQW 5190/10)

Minister for Social Development: I refer the member to page 24 of the 'Equality Impact Assessment on the Implementation Arrangements for the Strategic Business review', published on 23 April 2009 and circulated to all Assembly colleagues. The document details the rationale determining the number and location of Benefit Processing Centres and Front only offices. I would also highlight the fact that, irrespective of the proposed changes to back office processing functions, there will be no downgrade to the service to customers provided by the Cookstown Social Security Office.

Cookstown Social Security Office

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria were used in selecting which members of staff would remain in the Cookstown Social Security Office following the decision to downgrade it to front office only. (AQW 5191/10)

Minister for Social Development: There will be no downgrade to the service to customers provided by the Cookstown Social Security Office. The staff selection arrangements for Customer First have been applied consistently to all offices, including Cookstown. These arrangements pay due regard to the business need, the mobility obligations of staff, their health, caring responsibilities and location preferences in as far as possible.

Housing Waiting List

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development how many people registered with a disability are currently on the (i) housing waiting list; and (ii) homeless list, in the Foyle constituency. (AQW 5193/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. The Housing Executive does not collate information regarding applicants with a disability other than where it pertains to the housing needs of the applicant. In these circumstances, applicants are awarded the relevant points to reflect any functional mobility problems, that is, cannot climb stairs, need a downstairs toilet, need a 'through lift' etc, with regard to their current accommodation. The table below details the social housing applicant households within the Derry City Council area that have been awarded Functionality Points in relation to functional mobility problems with regard to their current accommodation, as at 31 December 2009.

District Office	Housing Applicants	Homeless Applicants
Waterloo Place	165	76
Waterside	81	47
Collon Terrace	94	41
Total	340	164

Economy 7 Heating within Social Housing

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her long term strategy to replace Economy 7 heating within social housing. (AQW 5194/10)

Minister for Social Development: With regard to Housing Executive properties, replacement of existing heating schemes is carried out on a planned basis where Economy 7 exists in an estate undergoing heating replacements. Tenants are offered the opportunity to switch to oil or gas where available but may opt to retain Economy 7 and significant numbers do so for reasons of convenience. The Housing Executive has provisionally planned to replace 624 Economy 7 heating systems in 2010/11, although this will be dependant on the availability of funding. It also plans to offer replacement heating to remaining Economy 7 users over the next five years.

With regard to Housing Association dwellings, Housing Associations' plans to replace Economy 7 heating vary, where one Association has already carried out major upgrade work and has no further plans to carry out any additional works, while others plan to replace existing heating systems over the next 5-7 years with gas where available.

Queen's Parade Development Project in Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queen's Parade development project in Bangor.

(AQW 5196/10)

Minister for Social Development: Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited was appointed as the Department's Preferred Developer on 17 December 2010 to take forward development plans for the Queen's Parade area of Bangor. The developer is currently in Pre Application Discussions with the Planning Service and this process is expected to take between 6 - 9 months.

Harbour Area of Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the plans for the Harbour area of Bangor that was declared a small pocket of deprivation.

(AQW 5197/10)

Minister for Social Development: The NIHE, on behalf of DSD, is liaising with the YMCA in the Harbour area to bring forward proposals and a formal application to the SPOD programme for the forthcoming financial year. Upon receipt of the formal application a decision will be taken on the level of funding to be awarded to the Harbour area.

Social Housing: Heating

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4787/10 and given that basic electrical heating is the most expensive form of heating, why so many social housing tenants are reliant on this form of heating; and when they will be offered alternative forms of heating.

(AQW 5199/10)

Minister for Social Development: Of the current Housing Executive stock, 12% of dwellings have Economy 7 heating. Replacement of existing heating schemes, including basic heating systems, is carried out by the Housing Executive on a planned basis in its estates which are undergoing heating replacements. Tenants are offered the opportunity to switch to oil or gas where available but may opt to retain their current heating system and significant numbers do so for reasons of convenience. The Housing Executive has provisionally planned to replace 624 Economy 7 heating systems in 2010/11, although this will be dependant on the availability of funding, and plans to offer replacement heating to all tenants who have either Economy 7 or basic heating systems over the next five years.

Funding from the Community Investment Fund and the Community Support Programme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for a list of bodies or community groups in the North Down area who currently receive funding from (i) the Community Investment Fund; and (ii) the Community Support Programme.

(AQW 5218/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Community Investment Fund aims to deliver a longer-term, strategic commitment to supporting community development by supporting sub-regional and multi-neighbourhood community development organisations that promote, facilitate or enable the co-ordination of services and activities, the empowerment of communities, help to shape policy, and contribute to sustainability.

The Community Support Programme involves the Department, the 26 District Councils, local community and voluntary groups and local advice organisations. The aim of the Programme is “to strengthen local communities, increase community participation and promote social inclusion through the stimulation and support of community groups, community activity and local advice services.” North Down Borough Council has been offered £134,012 of funding this year to support their plan.

A full list of the groups funded and their addresses is attached at Annex A.

Clanmil Housing Association Developments

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to maintenance work at Clanmil Housing Association Developments to detail (i) the criteria used (a) to make annual assessments of rent increases; (b) when awarding maintenance contracts; and (c) to determine what maintenance is carried out; and (ii) the rules contractors must adhere to when carrying out work.

(AQW 5228/10)

Minister for Social Development: In relation to (i: a) the Clanmil Housing Association Board of Management considers options for the level of rent increases based on the projected levels of expenditure for the following year, taking account of long term maintenance requirements. The Board also considers the level of the Department for Social Development/Northern Ireland Housing Executive rent increase, data on average rents, actual and forecast rates of inflation, the longer term financial model and other relevant strategic factors. In relation to (i: b) maintenance contracts are procured in accordance with the recommendations of the NI Public Procurement Policy and Public Contract Regulations 2006 (EU Guidelines). In relation to (i: c) Clanmil Housing Association delivers maintenance schemes to its tenants as follows:-

Response Maintenance.

These are normal day to day repairs to its properties categorised as follows:-

- Immediate (to be made good within 4 hours)
- Emergency (to be made good within 24 hours)
- Urgent (to be made good within 4 days)
- Routine (to be made good within 20 days)

Cyclical Redecoration.

Clanmil carries out the redecoration of all external and internal communal areas at its schemes, when a scheme reaches 5 years old and at 5 year cycles thereafter.

Service Contracts

Service Contracts are implemented to ensure Clanmil complies with all its statutory legal duties and to ensure the health and safety of tenants. These include:-

- Electrical works
- Mechanical works
- Specialist contracts

Planned maintenance.

This is planned preventative maintenance to replace building components that have reached the end of their useful life.

Aids and adaptations.

Clanmil considers requests for aids and adaptations as supported by the recommendation from an Occupational Therapist so that tenants can continue to live safely in their existing properties.

In relation to (ii), all contractors are required to adhere to the relevant terms and conditions of their contract.

Housing Executive Evictions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4538/10, to outline the reasons for the 75 evictions that took place between 2004 and 2009.

(AQW 5265/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Member is now aware that there were 12 evictions within the Housing Executive's Newtownards District Office area between 2004 and 2009. Five of these were due to rent/rates debt and seven because of nuisance behaviour.

Housing Executive Evictions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many eviction notices were issued in the Down District in each of the last five years; and how many of these notices did not result in an eviction.

(AQW 5266/10)

Minister for Social Development: The tables below provides details of Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who were served with eviction notices in the Down District in each of the last five years and the number of those that did not result in an eviction:-

TABLE 1: HOUSING EXECUTIVE TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	66	91	90	80	73
Did not result in eviction	59	88	86	80	67*

* Possession pending on 1 property.

TABLE 2: HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	2	3	4	7	7
Did not result in eviction	2	3	3	6	6

Social Housing in Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what her Department is doing to honour its commitment to provide social housing in Downpatrick; and how many properties have been purchased or built for social housing in Downpatrick since May 2007.

(AQW 5282/10)

Minister for Social Development: Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 the Social Housing Development Programme will have delivered 50 new starts in Downpatrick itself.

The Housing Executive is also looking at a number of sites either in its ownership or identified by Housing Associations that may be suitable to meet future need in the town. The draft three year Social Housing Development Programme for 2010 -2013 which will be published shortly will feature a number of these sites.

Social Housing in Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what her Department is doing to honour its commitment to provide social housing in Newcastle; and how many properties have been purchased or built for social housing in Newcastle since she May 2007.

(AQW 5283/10)

Minister for Social Development: Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 the Social Housing Development Programme will have delivered 8 new starts in Newcastle. In addition a further 12 units were completed in 2007/08.

The Housing Executive is also looking at a number of sites either in its ownership or identified by Housing Associations that may be suitable to meet future need in the town. The draft three year Social Housing Development Programme for 2010 -2013 will be published shortly.

Social Housing Waiting List

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail for each year since May 2007 (i) the number of people on the social housing waiting list in Downpatrick; (ii) the number of people on the list who were allocated a home; (iii) the number of people on the list who were considered to be in housing stress; and (iv) the number of people on the list who were considered homeless.

(AQW 5284/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, in relation to (i), (iii) and (iv) the table below details the Housing Executive Downpatrick District Office Social Housing Waiting list as at 31 March 2007, 2008 and 2009.

	31/03/07	31/03/08	31/03/09
Total Applicants	1,166	1,297	1,292
Applicants in Housing Stress	663	695	699
Applicants considered Homeless	358	354	384

In relation to (ii) the table below details the number of allocations for the financial years;

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
178	195	217

Social Housing Waiting List

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to detail for each year since May 2007 (i) the number of people on the social housing waiting list in Newcastle; (ii) the number of people on the list who were allocated a home; (iii) the number of people on the list who were considered to be in housing stress; and (iv) the number of people on the list who were considered homeless.

(AQW 5285/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. However, in relation to (i), (iii) and (iv) the table below details the Social Housing Waiting list for Newcastle as at 31 March 2007, 2008 and 2009.

	31/03/07	31/03/08	31/03/09
Total Applicants	260	270	274
Applicants in Housing Stress	155	154	167
Applicants considered Homeless	89	86	104

In relation to (ii) the table below details the number of allocations for the financial years;

2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
25	21	30

Carer's Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people currently claim Carer's Allowance.

(AQW 5302/10)

Minister for Social Development: Information presently available shows that there were 53,799 * Carers Allowance claimants in Northern Ireland at the 4 February 2010.

* The information provided is derived from a 100% un-validated Carers Allowance Scan and the verified data is not available until May 2010.

Multi-element Housing Scheme in Bloomfield, North Down

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development when work will commence on the multi-element housing scheme in Bloomfield, North Down.

(AQW 5304/10)

Minister for Social Development: As the budget has not yet been agreed for 2010/11, there are no Multi Element Improvement schemes planned in 2010/11.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what funding will be available for North Down under the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5306/10)

Minister for Social Development: Rathgill Community Association registered an application to the SPOD programme on 23 February 2010 which has been assessed and an award of £68,998 has been made for the 2010/11 financial year. The NIHE, on behalf of DSD, is liaising with the YMCA in the Harbour area to bring forward proposals and a formal application to the SPOD programme for the forthcoming financial year. Upon receipt of the formal application a decision will be taken on the level of funding to be awarded to the Harbour area.

Waiting Lists for Sheltered Accommodation

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number of people who are on the various waiting lists for sheltered accommodation in the Derry City Council area.

(AQW 5320/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are currently 150 applicants registered on the Waiting List for sheltered accommodation within the Derry City Council area.

Cross-border Benefit Fraud

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been caught committing cross-border benefit fraud in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5329/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development works closely with the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain and the Department of Social and Family Affairs in the Republic of Ireland to detect cross jurisdictional fraud on a North South and East West basis. The formal partnership and arrangements for the provision of mutual assistance between the three Departments is covered by a Memorandum of Understanding.

The table below shows details of cases where a 'Cross Border' benefit fraud offence has been committed against the Social Security Agency. Information is only held in respect of the last 3 years plus the current year.

Details of any 'Cross Border' benefit fraud offences detected by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Social and Family Affairs are held separately by each of these Departments.

Cases where a 'Cross Border' benefit fraud offence was involved	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009 – 3 March 2010
No of cases detected	14	13	12	12

Benefit Claims by People Living Abroad

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development how many successful benefit claims have been made by people from Northern Ireland living abroad in each of the last five years; and the sum total of benefits paid as a result of these claims, broken down by benefit type.

(AQW 5331/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available.

Houses in Multiple Occupancy Registration Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development when the Housing Executive plans to introduce a Houses of Multiple Occupancy Registration scheme in rural areas.

(AQW 5351/10)

Minister for Social Development: The registration of Houses in Multiple Occupation is already a mandatory requirement for all Houses in Multiple Occupation across in Northern Ireland. As there are over 12,000 of these properties they have to be registered incrementally. The Housing Executive plans to have completed registration of all Houses in Multiple Occupation in Northern Ireland by April 2013.

Decent Homes Standard

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4810/10, to outline her Department's definition of the 'Decent Homes Standard'.

(AQW 5354/10)

Minister for Social Development: A definition of the Decent Homes Standard taken from the 2006 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey Report is "A decent home is one that is wind and weather tight, warm and has modern facilities". A decent home meets the following four criteria:-

- It meets the current statutory minimum standards for housing
- It is in a reasonable state of repair
- It has reasonably modern facilities and services
- It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

Public and Private Sector Housing

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4810/10, to provide a breakdown of the public and private sector housing represented by these figures.

(AQW 5355/10)

Minister for Social Development: The 2006 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey demonstrated that 162,100 public and private dwellings do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. 135,880 were private sector dwellings and 26,220 were public sector dwellings.

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to introduce a Boiler Scrappage Scheme; and the expected time-frame.

(AQW 5358/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department is currently working on a review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy and one of the areas we are looking at is a boiler replacement or boiler scrappage scheme. Unlike the English scheme, which appears to be on a "first come first served basis", any scheme administered under the Fuel Poverty Strategy would be targeted at vulnerable people who are fuel poor. All of the proposals from the new Fuel Poverty Strategy will be subject to public consultation which will be held in the spring. The qualifying criteria for a boiler replacement or boiler scrappage scheme would be developed as part of the public consultation.

Multi-element Schemes

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development how many multi-element schemes the Housing Executive has planned for the East Londonderry constituency in the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQW 5368/10)

Minister for Social Development: As the budget has not yet been agreed for 2010/11, there are no Multi Element Improvement schemes planned in 2010/11.

Waiting Lists for Sheltered Accommodation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the various waiting lists for sheltered accommodation in the North Down Borough Council area.

(AQW 5369/10)

Minister for Social Development: At the 5 March 2010 there were 287 applicants registered on the Waiting List for sheltered accommodation in the North Down Borough Council Area (Bangor District Office).

Randalstown Gateway Makeover Project

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Randalstown Gateway makeover project, including an estimated date for completion.

(AQW 5390/10)

Minister for Social Development: I can confirm that the Randalstown Gateway Environmental Improvement works scheme is making satisfactory progress, in spite of the extreme weather conditions experienced, and is on course to be completed by 31 March 2010.

The recent cold snap has resulted in some planned paving work on the scheme being halted during the night for approximately two weeks, due to the freezing of sand screed material used in construction. However sufficient contingencies were included to take account of potential poor weather at this time of year and the work remains on schedule.

Lighting on Housing Executive Pathways and Open Spaces

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her Department's policy on the provision of lighting along pathways and in other areas of open space owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 5422/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive does not have a policy to provide lighting along pathways and open spaces.

Urban Renewal Status for Areas of North Belfast

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development when she will be making a decision regarding the Urban Renewal Status for (i) Upper Long Streets; (ii) Parkside; and (iii) the Glen areas of North Belfast.

(AQW 5537/10)

Minister for Social Development: Significant progress has been made in relation to proposals for housing led redevelopment schemes in both Upper Long Streets and the Glen Areas of North Belfast which includes Parkside. I expect to make an announcement on these in the coming weeks.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Car Parking Facilities

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Assembly Commission if there are any proposals to improve car parking facilities on sitting days.

(AQO 710/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Commission acknowledges the car parking pressure that exists for Members within the upper car parks and in particular on Sitting days.

It is indeed fair and equitable to highlight the car parking pressures that also exist for Secretariat staff on all days of the working week.

The appropriate use of designated spaces in the upper car parks ensures the most efficient use of limited space, whilst also preventing or limiting unnecessary obstructions.

The Commission has asked the Director General to write to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance and Personnel, seeking a strategic approach to tackling this. We are currently awaiting a response.

Car Parks at Parliament Buildings

Mr A Ross asked the Assembly Commission if there are plans to review the number of Upper car park badge holders to ensure that the car park is not overcrowded on sitting days.

(AQW 5516/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission fully recognises the difficulties experienced in parking in the upper car parks on sitting days.

This matter has already been given careful consideration and a recent review has restricted upper car park pass holders to MLAs, Assembly Director staff and a small number of Assembly staff who are temporarily granted a pass on medical grounds.

In essence, this means that on sitting days, the upper car parks are used to their maximum capacity. Enquiries to date have also concluded that it would not be possible to increase the number of parking spaces within the upper car parks without recourse to significant works and redevelopment.

Security staff are on hand however to ensure that the limited parking space available is used as efficiently as possible, and that inconvenience and obstruction is avoided.

The matter will be kept under review and I can also confirm that the Assembly Commission has requested the Secretariat to engage with DFP to establish a broader strategic approach to car parking generally.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 19 March 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Community Relations Council

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding has been made available by the Community Relations Council to projects in North Down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5180/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The following information is based on Community Relations Council providing grants to North Down since April 2004 to 31 March 2009. Records for the current financial year are not yet complete. The grants listed are those specifically directed to North Down and do not include organisations whose activities are region-wide but which North Down may have been a beneficiary.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS CULTURAL DIVERSITY SCHEME – APRIL 2004 – MARCH 2009

Grant No	Group	Project Summary	District Council	Amount (£)
030553	Northern Ireland Scout Council	Development of a community relations audit and economic appraisal	North Down Borough Council	1,500
040531	Hollywood Family Trust	Formulation and delivery of a seminar/workshop series exploring diversity in the Hollywood area	North Down Borough Council	3,792
040532	Hollywood Family Trust	Research to identify minority ethnic needs in the Hollywood area culminating in a comprehensive report which will inform future cultural diversity work	North Down Borough Council	3,000
040721	Hollywood Residents Association	Development of a good relations forum in the Hollywood area	North Down Borough Council	4,385
050743	Kilcooley Central Residents Association	Access All Areas is a cross-community project based in the Kilcooley area of Bangor aimed at addressing cultural identity	North Down Borough Council	2,500
060348	Newtownards Lions Club	Cultural diversity event promoting community relations at a local level.	North Down Borough Council	400

Grant No	Group	Project Summary	District Council	Amount (£)
070738	Bangor Malayalee Association	A Christmas event highlighting the background of the Malayalee community in North Down.	North Down Borough Council	250
070744	Worldwide Women @ North Down	Learning about the divisions of Northern Ireland.	North Down Borough Council	1,150
080615	Seacourt Print Workshop	To host an exhibition exploring the theme of sectarianism by Glasgow based artist Roderick Buchanan	North Down Borough Council	3,000
Total				19,977

VICTIMS CORE FUNDING – APRIL 2004 – MARCH 2009

Group No	Group Name	Description	District Council	Amount (£)
040060	RUC GC Parents Association	Core funding	North Down Borough Council	3,867
Total				3,867

VICTIMS VOLUNTEER BEFRIENDERS – APRIL 2004 – MARCH 2009

Group No	Group Name	Project Description	District Council	Amount (£)
070202	RUC GC Association- Newtownards Branch	Attendance at the national police memorial service in remembrance of colleagues and family members.	North Down Borough Council	3450
Total				3450

Single Equality Bill

Mr D Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the status of the Single Equality Bill policy and bill team.

(AQW 5269/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We continue to legislate in order to provide legal protection against discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity. As no policy decisions have been taken with regard to a Single Equality Bill, there is no team dedicated to working on such a Bill.

Funding for Projects Supporting Victims and Survivors of Conflict in Belfast

Mr A Maskey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding distributed by their Department for projects supporting victims and survivors of conflict in Belfast, broken down by the four Belfast constituencies, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5345/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In the last three years, OFMDFM has provided funding to groups, organisations and projects, in the Belfast City Council area, supporting victims and survivors of the conflict as follows:-

- 06/07 £1,019,728
- 07/08 £ 930,818
- 08/09 £1,775,793

The information is not held in the format requested and it is not possible to break it down into the four Belfast constituencies in the time available. A breakdown of the organisations funded has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Grants for Village Enhancement and Other Regeneration Programmes in East Derry

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants have been made available for village enhancement and other regeneration programmes in the East Derry area in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 5318/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): No grants for village enhancement and regeneration were awarded in the East Derry area in the last 3 years. This period fell between the closure of funding opportunities under the Rural Development Programme 2000 – 2006 and opening calls for funding applications under the current Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013.

Funding for village renewal is available under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013. This funding is administered in the East Derry area by ARC North West, who can be contacted by telephone on 028 8225 0202 or online at www.arcnorthwest.com.

Lower Bann: Walkways and Forestation

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has in place to (i) enhance the areas of the six lock gates on the Lower Bann; (ii) develop and link up walkways along the river bank between Lough Neagh and Coleraine; and (iii) promote forestation along the river.

(AQW 5319/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under Axis 3 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2000 to 2013 there may be potential to fund projects such as those described under Measure 3.3, Encouragement of tourism activities or Measure 3.6, Conservation and upgrading of Rural Heritage.

In the East Derry area the Rural Development measures are being delivered on DARD's behalf by the ARC North West local action group. The Group will support projects which are compatible with the priorities in the local rural development strategy and which have been successful in a competitive assessment.

In relation to part (ii) of your question, this is a matter for district councils to use whatever powers available to it to link up walkways.

The Department also promotes afforestation through its Woodland Grant Schemes administered by the Forest Service, by offering grant assistance and advice to landowners wishing to create new woodland. The Woodland Grant Scheme is promoted widely to farmers, public bodies and private individuals for a wide range of objectives such as the enhancement of landscape, recreation, carbon storage and conservation of biodiversity.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has met with Mr Allan Chambers to discuss his recently published proposals to deal with the safe disposal of poultry litter on arable land; and for her assessment of the impact of these proposals on the need for the proposed Rose Energy incinerator at Glenavy.

(AQW 5364/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Given the high cost of chemical fertilisers, use of organic materials such as poultry, pig and cattle manure and poultry litter should be considered by all arable farmers.

However, with some 5% of agricultural land in the north used for arable and a large poultry sector, the option of utilising poultry litter on arable land is limited.

Additionally this practice needs to be carefully managed at farm level to ensure that excess nutrients, particularly phosphorus, are not over applied. Precautions also need to be taken to prevent disease risk, particularly Botulism in cattle.

Poultry litter is high in phosphorus and applying it to meet crop requirement for nitrogen can result in oversupply of phosphorus with a consequent risk to water quality.

My Departmental Scientific Advisor and AFBI Scientists attended the Ulster Arable Society Conference where Mr Chambers presented his proposals. They have assessed the data presented by Mr Chambers. Their analysis indicates that his proposals would result in a significant oversupply of phosphorus to the majority of arable crops. They have also concluded that, based on crop requirement for phosphorus, there is not sufficient arable land to use all the poultry litter that is produced in the north.

There is a higher proportion of arable land in the south and some poultry litter produced in the north is currently being utilised there. Further controls on phosphorus apply in the south from next year and this may constrain the land available. Transport costs of exporting poultry litter to arable land outside Ireland are likely to be prohibitive.

The poultry sector is experiencing difficulty in finding suitable land with low nutrient status as a spreading outlet for poultry litter, despite having already significantly lowered the phosphorus content in poultry diets. Therefore a long term solution for poultry litter that reduces reliance on land spreading here remains necessary.

Use of Poultry Litter as Fertiliser for Arable Land

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department will consider commissioning urgent research into the recently published proposals of Mr Allan Chambers in relation to the use of poultry litter as fertiliser for arable land.

(AQW 5365/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department and the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) have already conducted scientific research into the use of poultry litter as an organic fertiliser on arable land.

This research has concluded that, based on crop requirements for phosphorus, there is not sufficient arable land available in the north to utilise all the poultry litter that is produced here.

There is a higher proportion of arable land in the south and some poultry litter produced in the north is currently being utilised there. Further controls on phosphorus apply in the south from next year and this may constrain the land available. Transport costs of exporting poultry litter to arable land outside Ireland are likely to be prohibitive.

My Departmental Scientific Advisor and AFBI Scientists have assessed the data presented by Mr Chambers. Their analysis indicates that his proposals would result in a significant oversupply of phosphorus to the majority of arable crops.

Oversupply of phosphorus can result in water pollution. Therefore, Mr Chambers' proposal is not environmentally sustainable.

Nitrates Regulatory Committee

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who will carry out negotiations on behalf of her Department and the Department of Environment, at this year's talks with the Nitrates Regulatory Committee at the European Commission, to press for further derogation allowances between 2011 and 2014 in respect of the disposal of poultry litter on land.

(AQW 5366/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Scientific, Policy and Technical officials from my Department, research staff from the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute and officials from the Department of the Environment are currently in discussions with the European Commission in relation to the Nitrates Directive. These discussions cover the review of the current Nitrates Action Programme, the Action Programme for the period 2011 to 2014, and the application to renew the derogation. An initial presentation has been made to the EU Nitrates Committee on these issues.

The derogation allows grassland cattle farms to operate above the 170kg/Nitrogen/hectare/year limit set by the Directive, subject to specific additional conditions. The derogation only applies to grazing livestock manure. It does not cover poultry manure or litter which must be applied within the 170kg/Nitrogen/hectare/year limit.

The current Action Programme contained a temporary measure to allow the storage of poultry litter in field heaps until 31 December 2008. However, subsequently, agreement was sought and secured from the European Commission to extend this temporary measure in the Regulations up to 31 December 2010.

European Commission officials have made clear that they consider field storage and land application of poultry litter, particularly in localised areas, to represent a significant water pollution risk. They have also made clear that they do not want to see the practice of field storage of poultry litter continue any further beyond 31 December 2010.

Welsh Assembly Farming Connect Scheme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of the Welsh Assembly Farming Connect scheme that enables agriculture and forestry businesses to obtain grants towards the costs of gaining shotgun coaching qualifications; and if she would consider introducing a similar scheme.

(AQW 5463/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Farm Family Options programme, which shares some common elements with the Welsh Assembly Farming Connect scheme, is currently open for applications under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme and provides funding of up to £1,000 to assist farm family members to increase their skills levels. A training allowance of £50 per day is also available up to a maximum of £250. To be eligible for funding, all courses must be accredited to ensure quality of training delivery is maintained and this criterion would also apply to any application to obtain a shotgun coaching qualification.

Tuberculosis in Mid-Down

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she is doing to address the large number of cases of tuberculosis in the Mid-Down area.

(AQW 5543/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Like all areas of the north of Ireland, the TB Control Programme is being routinely implemented within Mid Down. Areas with a higher incidence of TB will naturally have more actions taken within the Programme than areas with a lower incidence, as this is necessary to control disease. These actions will include herd restrictions and additional testing.

A TB Biosecurity (Case Control) Study is currently being developed as a research and development project by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to further our knowledge of this disease within a TB high incidence area. It is proposed that this Study, which will be conducted during 2010/11, will focus on the Co. Down area. The Study will examine a number of herds with, and a similar number of herds without, a recent history of bovine TB to establish if there are demonstrable differences between them.

Hedge Cutting Season

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 5151/10, if she would consider extending the hedge cutting season, given that the bad winter weather has prevented people from keeping to their hedge cutting schedules.

(AQW 5712/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Birds nest in a majority of our hedges, and therefore hedge maintenance, cutting, laying or coppicing is not permitted during the bird nesting season between 1 March and 31 August. This is to avoid damaging the birds, nests or chicks.

The hedge cutting dates are set out in our domestic Cross-Compliance legislation which states that farmers in receipt of direct agricultural support (including Single Farm Payment) must ensure that hedge cutting/coppicing or laying is not undertaken between 1 March and 31 August.

Hedge cutting between these dates is only permitted where health and safety is an issue, for example roadside hedges.

My officials have considered the request to extend the hedge cutting date by two weeks in March 2010. However any change to the hedge cutting dates would require an amendment to the Cross-Compliance legislation. Therefore my Department cannot facilitate such a change at this time.

EU Nitrates Directive

Rt Hon J Donaldson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in implementing the Nitrates Directive.

(AQO 934/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: An Action Programme to implement the EU Nitrates Directive across the North was introduced on 1 January 2007. The Nitrates Action Programme Regulations are joint legislation between my Department and the Department of the Environment. Both Departments have statutory responsibility for implementing the Directive. Regulations governing the use of Phosphorus fertilisers were also introduced in parallel with the Action Programme Regulations.

The Regulations place controls on farming practice to reduce and prevent losses of nitrates and phosphorus to rivers, lakes and groundwater. Some measures, such as requirements for livestock manure storage capacity and the closed spreading period for slurry were introduced on a phased basis.

To help farmers comply, my Department provided over £120million of capital grant aid through the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme for investment in improved slurry and manure storage facilities. The FNMS was the largest capital grant scheme ever run by DARD and some 3900 farm businesses have been assisted. The Scheme has secured a major upgrading of farm infrastructure which will support environmentally sustainable farming practice. In addition, the investment provided much needed work for the construction sector at a time of economic downturn.

Comprehensive advisory support for farmers has been provided through guidance documents, training and on-line compliance calculators. 6500 farmers have attended training workshops related to the Nitrates Directive delivered by The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). A substantial research programme to provide local scientific evidence in support the Action Programme measures is being carried out by the Agri Food and Bio Sciences Institute (AFBI).

Compliance with the Action Programme is assessed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

As required by the Nitrates Directive, a review of the current Action Programme has recently been conducted. A formal consultation on the Action Programme for the next four years from 2011 to 2014 will be carried in the coming months. Discussions with the EU Commission on next Action Programme are also underway.

National Ploughing Championships

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the cost of her Department's attendance at the Republic of Ireland's Ploughing Championships in the last three years.
(AQO 939/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The National Ploughing Championships is the largest annual outdoor event in Ireland and one of the largest agricultural events in Europe, with an attendance of over 150,000 visitors and around 1000 exhibitors.

When I became Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2007, I realised that DARD did not have any presence at this key event. Given the significance of the National Ploughing Championships to rural Ireland, and all of the opportunities for collaboration across the agri-food industry and rural community, I decided that DARD should be represented at this key event, through staging an exhibition and my own attendance.

The primary focus of DARD's exhibition at the National Ploughing Championships has been on facilitating a number of small, locally based, developing rural businesses to access trade opportunities in the south. These businesses had received support through the Rural Development Programme. DARD's exhibition each year has been positively evaluated. For example at last year's National Ploughing Championships, a minimum of 10,000 people visited the DARD exhibition and the eleven rural businesses that exhibited on the DARD stand have achieved sales and confirmed orders to date totaling £88,700. A number of these small businesses, following this support from DARD are now attending or intend to attend, the event independently as exhibitors.

The cost of DARD's attendance at the National Ploughing Championships was £27,500 in 2007, £42,000 in 2008 and £33,500 in 2009.

My own attendance provided DARD and the Executive with a firm voice and a key representational opportunity at this major agricultural event. For example, at last year's National Ploughing Championships, I had the opportunity to speak directly, about agri-food and rural issues, with President McAleese and Minister Brendan Smith, both of whom visited the DARD Exhibition, as well as with senior officials in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

I also hosted a reception on the DARD stand at the National Ploughing Championships, for all trade exhibitors from the north of Ireland, NI Ploughing Association competitors and officials and also for a range of stakeholders. This event has provided great opportunities for networking.

Forestry and Woodland

Mr A McFarland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department has only achieved one quarter of the Programme for Government target to increase forestry and woodland.
(AQO 940/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current Programme for Government (PfG) target is to increase woodland cover by 1,650 hectares by March 2011, primarily through the conversion of agricultural land to woodland under the Woodland Grant Scheme. Up to the end of December 2009, 426 hectares of new woodland have been created by farmers and landowners under the Scheme. This is less than I had planned at this stage of the PfG target period, to a large extent, due to the difficult economic conditions in farming and business and also the strong commitment of landowners to continue to farm.

In order to encourage more farmers and landowners to create their own woodland and put us back on course for meeting the PfG woodland target, I announced increases in grant rates of up to 30 per cent

in November 2009. Since then, there has been a steep rise in applications (more than a three fold increase in December 2009 and January 2010 compared with the same period last year).

In addition, my officials have taken forward a number of initiatives to encourage more woodland creation, including:

- Implementing changes allowing farmers to continue to receive Single Farm Payments as well as forestry grant payments on land converted to woodland.
- Engaging with a wide range of landowning bodies such as local councils and other public bodies, encouraging them to consider woodland as a viable economic alternative to their current land use.
- Engaging with stakeholders to identify barriers to woodland creation and possible solutions.
- Extending the funding of the Short Rotation Coppice Scheme until the end of the current Rural Development Programme in 2013.
- Increasing the resources to promote and publicise the Woodland Grant Scheme.

Our aim is to ensure that these various initiatives put us back on course to meet our PSA targets.

Farming: Severe Weather

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her Department's assessment of the damage and financial loss suffered by the farming industry as a result of the recent severe weather.

(AQO 941/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Following agreement with my Executive colleagues that I should meet with the DFP Minister to discuss hardship funding, for farmers who have lost potato and vegetable crops, I announced the commencement of an assessment of losses incurred by potato and vegetable farmers as a result of the severe frost in January 2010.

Growers wishing to be considered for any financial assistance that may become available were required to complete a 'Crop Damage Assessment Form'. The deadline for receipt of Crop Damage Assessment Forms was Tuesday 9 March at 5.00 pm. and 121 forms were received at the closing date.

The subsequent crop damage inspections are on-going. Eligibility for any assistance will be determined by an analysis on a case by case basis of the information provided by the grower. Eligible growers will be required to demonstrate that the potatoes and vegetables were damaged by frost and the extent of the damage.

The outcome of this damage assessment will inform any future financial support consideration, subject to funding being available and the need to comply with State Aid Rules. My Department is currently facing significant financial and other resource pressures across the board and while my sympathy is with those farmers who have suffered losses I am very mindful of the need to balance and manage expectations.

Agricultural Wages

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the proposal by the Agricultural Wages Board to increase the minimum wage for agricultural workers by 1.8%.
(AQO 942/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The employers' representatives, the UFU, and the workers' representatives, the Unite trade union, have agreed the proposed rise to the Agricultural rate having considered the conditions in the industry and the Board is currently consulting on the new rate. The Board makes its proposals independently from my Department and I have no role in determining the annual increase.

Farming: Infected Foetuses

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice she will be providing to the farming community in relation to the recent incidents of infected foetuses being abandoned on farm land.

(AQO 943/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: For herd owners who have had an abortion in their own herd, the immediate advice is to report the abortion to the local Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO), dispose of the foetus correctly in line with current legislation and isolate the cow or heifer.

Herd owners should also be vigilant with regard to the deliberate dumping of foetuses on their land or near their buildings. They are advised to check their premises routinely and report any suspicious incidents to their local DVO. Brucellosis can be contracted by people and the PSNI may become involved in any incidents; therefore, any foetus and the area surrounding it should be left undisturbed and people and animals should be kept away from it.

If the material has been handled, then hands should be washed, any protective clothing should be cleansed and disinfected and normal clothing changed and washed. This should be done before having contact with other people or livestock.

A Biosecurity booklet, was previously issued to all herd owners and can be referred to for additional biosecurity advice. There has been extensive publicity over the last 10 years in relation to the reporting of abortions.

Famine Commemorations

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to mark the commemoration of the Famine in Ireland.

(AQO 944/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I wrote to Minister Ó Cuiv last year to congratulate him on the 2009 Famine Commemoration event held in Co Cork and to express an interest in how the famine might be appropriately marked on a truly national basis. Minister Ó Cuiv responded with details of the National Famine Commemoration Committee who organise commemoration events for the Famine, advising that this Committee had now agreed that events would be rotated around the four provinces. An event has therefore been planned for Ulster in 2011. I have written to the Minister of Education to consider what opportunities there are for us to contribute to any commemoration event given the rural nature of the tragedy and the interest in the famine through the teaching of history in our schools. The Minister welcomes the chance to discuss any contribution that can be made and I will be following this up with her and Minister Ó Cuiv in the near future. I will continue to work with the National Famine Commemoration Committee to see how we can appropriately mark the event in Ulster.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Ulster-Scots and Irish Language Related Projects

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money his Department has spent on (i) Ulster-Scots related projects; and (ii) Irish Language related projects, in each of the past three years.

(AQW 5322/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The funding by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure to Ulster-Scots related projects and Irish Language related projects for the last three years is shown below under the headings of the key funding streams.

North South Language Body

The funding provided by DCAL to both Agencies of the North South Language Body for the last three calendar years (which is the Agencies financial year) is detailed below. The Language Body is made up of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. DCAL funds to 75% of the Ulster-Scots Agency's budget and to 25% of Foras na Gaeilge's (the Irish Language Agency) budget.

	2007	2008	2009
Ulster-Scots Agency	£1.938m	£2.486m	£2.317m
Foras na Gaeilge	£3.459m	£4.074m	£3.949m

Ulster-Scots Academy

The Department has also made available funding to the Ulster-Scots Academy since 2005. The funding provided by DCAL over the last two financial years and the year to date is shown in the table below:-

May 07/08:	£405,189.44
08/09:	£289,157.63
09/10 (year to date):	£99,926.00

An Cheathrú Gaeltachta Teo (The Gaeltacht Quarter Development Company)

Financial support given by DCAL to the Gaeltacht Quarter over the last two financial years and the year to date is shown in the table below:-

07/08:	£90k
08/09:	£129k
09/10 (year to date):	£119k

An Chultúrlann (Belfast) and An Gaeláras (Londonderry) Capital projects

The Culturlann received a payment of £34,500 towards capital funding in the 2007/08 financial year from the Department.

The An Gaeláras project received capital payments of £363k in April 2008 and £120k in March 2009 from the Department.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund

DCAL paid the following amounts to the Irish Language Broadcast Fund over the last three financial years:-

07/08:	£3m
08/09:	£3m
09/10:	NIL*

* Since April 2009 funding for the ILBF has been provided to NI Screen by DCMS via the UK Film Council.

Colmcille

DCAL's contribution to the Colmcille Initiative is shown below. In 2009 responsibility for the project transferred to Foras na Gaeilge.

07/08:	£180k
08/09:	£180k
09/10:	NIL

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has awarded the following revenue funding to Ulster-Scots projects and Irish language projects in the last two financial years and 2009/10 to date. This includes both exchequer and lottery funding. Note that spend on the later awards may be ongoing.

	Ulster –Scots Projects	Irish Language Projects
07/08:	£37,240	£313,477
08/09:	£62,750	£474,250
09/10:	£151,690	£469,280
Total	£251,680	£1,257,007

The Arts Council has also provided the following capital funding to Irish language projects in each of the last two financial years and 2009/10 to date. These figures reflect actual spend in-year and include Integrated Development Fund spend.

07/08:	£273,779
08/09:	£768,130
09/10:	£94,978
Total	£1,136,887

In addition, it is worth noting that the Arts Council awarded the following amounts to Marching Bands.

07/08:	£150,002
08/09:	£149,311
09/10:	£104,822
Total	£404,135

Funding for Hurling and Curling

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding has been allocated to (i) hurling; and (ii) curling in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5447/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. In the last five financial years, SNI has provided a total of £458,112 to the sport of hurling broken down as follows:

Date	Organisation	Grant Amount
10/3/05	St Brigids GAC	£161,770
2/12/07	Na Magha Hurling and Camogie Club	£286,342
25/3/09	Knocks Grattans Hurling Club	£10,000

During the same period SNI has received no applications for funding from the sport of curling.

Visitors to Libraries

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of visitors to libraries in each of the last ten years, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 5455/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The following table shows the number of visits to public libraries for each of the last ten years broken down by Education and Library Board areas. The figures for 2009/10 to date are not yet available and when released will be a single figure for Libraries NI.

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
2008/09	1,436,448	1,589,376	1,214,356	1,272,336	1,258,888
2007/08	1,328,874	1,586,235	1,273,896	1,295,112	1,217,179
2006/07	1,393,539	1,394,383	1,374,620	1,422,460	1,197,269
2005/06	1,524,602	1,215,760		1,494,688	1,262,105
2004/05	1,575,439	1,420,588	1,462,968	1,578,535	1,104,748
2003/04	1,539,043	1,298,544	1,371,968	1,766,960	1,025,104
2002/03	1,463,998	1,455,480	1,319,188	1,902,524	991,073
2001/02	1,403,685	1,306,656	1,421,108		956,745
2000/01	1,550,795	1,280,500	1,481,432	1,527,448	1,164,436
1999/00	1,625,343	1,112,124	1,434,732	1,444,508	1,138,592

In 2005/06 SEELB did not submit visitor figures

In 2001/02 SELB did not submit visitor figures

Winter Sports

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what facilities currently exist for 'winter sports'.
(AQW 5456/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland is responsible for the development of sport and advises that the following facilities can be used for winter sports training in Northern Ireland:

- Sports Institute for Northern Ireland;
- Dundonald International Ice-Bowl;
- Odyssey Arena; and
- Craigavon Ski Slope.

Lough Cowey in the Ards Peninsula

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what current interest his Department has in Lough Cowey in the Ards Peninsula.

(AQW 5669/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL has a yearly lease with Northern Ireland Water who own Lough Cowey to include Lough Cowey as part of the Public Angling Estate.

Northern Ireland Water have confirmed to the Department that it is their intention to withdraw Lough Cowey as part of their lease of reservoirs to the Department which form part of the Public Angling Estate, as the Lough is surplus to Northern Ireland Water requirements and will be sold.

Department of Education

Use of The Term 'Northern Ireland'

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education if she has ever instructed an official within her Department to remove the term 'Northern Ireland' from correspondence that was due to be signed by an official.

(AQW 5356/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé d'Alex Easton, Comhalta do Thoghcheantar an Dúin Thuaidh, ar AQW 5160/10, a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 05 Márta 2010.

I refer the Member to the answer I provided Alex Easton the Member for North Down to AQW 5160/10, published in the Official Report on 05 March 2010.

Irish-Medium Secondary Education

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education what Irish-medium secondary education provision there will be for pupils currently attending Gaelscoil Phadraig, Crossmaglen and Bunscoil an Iúir, Newry.

(AQW 5423/10)

Minister of Education: Thug mo Roinn údarás do Chomhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) a shainiú, sa chéad ásc, cá maireann an t-éileamh ar an Ghaeloideachas. Is é ceann d'eochairspríocanna phlean oibríochta CnaG ná tionscadail a bhunú atá i gcomhréir leis an Chreat Straitéiseach um Fhorbairt Earnáil an Ghaeloideachais agus a obair le tuismitheoirí agus/nó, i gcás Aonad Gaeilge i scoil Bhéarla, le scoileanna agus an t-údarás earnála ábhartha, d'fhonn roghanna a fhorbairt chun an t-éileamh sin a chomhlíonadh.

My Department has commissioned Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), in the first instance, to identify where demand for Irish-medium education exists. One of the key targets of the CnaG operational plan is to establish projects in accordance with the Strategic Framework for the Development of the Irish-medium education sector and to work with parents, and/or in the case of an Irish-medium unit in an English medium school, with schools and the relevant sectoral authority in the local area, with a view to developing options to meet that demand.

There has been considerable growth in the Irish-medium primary sector which will undoubtedly lead to increasing demands for post-primary provision. Where demand exists, it is important that parents have the option of a continuum of good quality Irish-medium education from nursery through to post-primary and my officials are working closely with CnaG to ensure that this is taken forward in a strategic manner.

Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the amount of funding provided to primary schools, per pupil, under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula, broken down by school management type, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5457/10)

Minister of Education: Leagann an tábla amach meánmhaoiniú an dalta a tarmligeadh do bhunscoileanna faoi Fhoirmle Choitinn Mhaoinithe Bhainistíocht Áitiúil na Scoileanna, miondealaithe de réir cineál bainistíochta scoile, i ngach ceann de na cúig bliana a chuaigh thart.

The table below sets out the average per pupil funding delegated to primary schools under the Local Management of Schools Common Funding Formula arrangements, broken down by school management type, in each of the last five years.

Financial Year	Controlled Primary £	Maintained Primary £	Grant Maintained Integrated Primary £
2005/06	2,241	2,306	2,499
2006/07	2,374	2,445	2,618
2007/08	2,464	2,536	2,663
2008/09	2,604	2,678	2,793
2009/10	2,860	2,954	3,048

Notes:

- (1) The figures include allocations for nursery class pupils in primary schools.
- (2) Funding distributed in 2005/06 and 2006/07 included the transitional funding arrangements designed to support schools and smooth budgetary changes in moving all schools to the single funding formula.
- (3) Funding distributed in 2006/07 and 2007/08 excludes the funding allocated directly to primary schools in respect of the Children & Young People Fund.
- (4) The figures for controlled schools include controlled integrated schools and controlled Irish-medium schools.
- (5) The figures for maintained schools include grant-aided Irish-medium schools.

Temperature of Classrooms

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education what guidance is provided for schools in relation to the temperature of classrooms for (i) children; (ii) teachers; and (iii) non-teaching staff.

(AQW 5460/10)

Minister of Education: Luann an t-eolas atá cuimsithe sna Lámhleabhair reatha um Fhoirgnimh Scoileanna gur chóir go mbeadh teocht de 18°C i seomraí ranga. Níl aon treoir ar leith (i) do pháistí; (ii) do mhúinteoirí; ná (iii) d'fhoireann neamh-mhúinteoireachta.

The information contained in the current Schools Building Handbooks states that the temperature in classrooms shall be 18°C. There is no separate guidance for (i) children; (ii) teachers; or (iii) non-teaching staff.

Recruiting Members for the Interim Education and Library Boards

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the cost of recruiting members for the interim Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 5464/10)

Minister of Education: Níl an próiseas roghnaithe ar bhaill de na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne críochnaithe go fóill. Tá costas de thuairim is £6,800 air go dtí seo.

The process of selecting members for the Education and Library Boards is not yet complete. The costs to date are approximately £6,800.

Sixth-form Provision

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on her plans to review sixth-form provision. (AQW 5467/10)

Minister of Education: Tá m'fhócas dírithe ar a chinntiú go gcomhlíonann soláthar agus infhaighteacht áiteanna na Séú Foirme an méadú ar éileamh agus ardaidhmeanna na ndaoine óga. Tá an Roinn ag breithniú roghanna faoi láthair do thús na scoilbhliana 2010/11.

My focus is to ensure that the provision and availability of Sixth Form places in all areas better matches the increase in demand and the aspirations of young people. The Department is currently considering options for the start of the 2010/11 school year.

As we move towards the full implementation of the Entitlement Framework, we are continuing to work with the Education and Library Boards and other education partners to achieve access for all young people to a broad and balanced curriculum coupled with careers advice to ensure that all young people can fulfil their potential. This work will include curriculum planning, the review of school funding and our Every School a Good School Strategy, all of which are designed to enable young people to progress successfully from school to the world of work or to further or higher education.

Budget for Youth Service Provision in Upper Bann

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the budget for youth service provision in the Upper Bann constituency for 2010/11; and (ii) if any services or projects will no longer be funded. (AQW 5494/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn an Roinn Oideachais maoiniú do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (BOLanna) le haghaidh fhoráil na Seirbhísí don Ógra ina gceantair féin. Tá na BOLanna freagrach as cén dóigh a leithdháileann siad a mbuiséid, agus iad ag cur san áireamh an riachtanais le cinntiú go riartar acmhainní ar bhonn cothrom agus go bhfuil siad bunaithe ar riachtanas oibiachtúil.

The Department of Education provides funding to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) for the provision of Youth Services in their areas. It is the responsibility of the ELBs to decide how they distribute their budgets taking account of the need to ensure that resources are allocated on an equitable basis and based on an assessment of objective need.

The Chief Executive of the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) who has responsibility for youth service provision in the Upper Bann constituency area has advised that the SELB will make a decision on the funding for local youth provision after the Department of Education (DE) has notified it of its budget allocation for 2010/11. DE officials are continuing to work to ensure that the ELBs are notified of all budget allocations as soon as possible after the Executive's decision on DE's budget allocation for 2010/11 is known.

Newbuild for Devenish College, Enniskillen

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the provision of a newbuild for Devenish College, Enniskillen; and (ii) what steps her Department has taken to ensure the delivery of this new build. (AQW 5498/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé fíor-thábhachtach go bhfuil an t-infheistiú san earnáil oideachais i gcomhréir agus tacúil leis an chreat beartais atá mé ag cur i bhfeidm agus go gcloíonn sé lenár ndualgais reachtúla ar chomhionannas agus go leagtar spriocanna amach ar bhonn riachtanas oibiachtúil. Lárnach don

chreat seo atá Gach Scoil ina Scoil Mhaith, An Curaclam Athbhreithnithe, Scoileanna Inmharthana, an tAthbhreithniú ar an Ghaeloideachas agus an Creat Teidlíochta. Mar a fhorbraíonn pleanáil de réir ceantair, cuideoidh na beartais seo lenár n-eastát agus leis na pleananna iarmhartacha infheistithe a athmhunlú

Is critically important that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place and that it adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. At the heart of this is Every School a Good School, Revised Curriculum, Sustainable Schools, Irish Medium Review and the Entitlement Framework. As area based planning develops, these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans.

In this context the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has been working with the controlled/voluntary post-primary schools, including Devenish College, in Co Fermanagh to determine how best to meet the future needs of all the pupils in the area. As a result of this work the WELB has recently presented an Economic Appraisal (EA) to the Department which is now being considered.

Lost School Days

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of school days lost as a result of (i) flooding; (ii) broken heating systems; (iii) vandalism; and (iv) other reasons in (a) primary schools; and (b) post-primary schools, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5518/10)

Minister of Education: Ní mór do scoileanna aon iarratais ar dhúnadh eisceachtúil mar gheall ar imthosca gan choinne a thuairisciú agus an chúis leis an dúnadh a shonrú sa scríobh. Ón eolas a chuir scoileanna isteach, féadaim a dhearbhu gurb é líon na laethanta a dhún scoileanna dé réir na gcatagóirí a iarradh ná:

Schools must report in writing to the Department any request for exceptional closure for unforeseen reasons and specify the main reason for closure. From the information submitted by schools, I can report that the number of days that schools closed for reasons in the categories requested was:

2005

	Primary	Post-primary
(i) Flooding	2	2
(ii) Broken Heating Systems	6	0
(iii) Vandalism	0	0
(iv) Other	140	23

2006

	Primary	Post-primary
(i) Flooding	3	1
(ii) Broken Heating Systems	7	1
(iii) Vandalism	1	0
(iv) Other	63	8

2007

	Primary	Post-primary
(i) Flooding	5	1
(ii) Broken Heating Systems	16	0
(iii) Vandalism	2	0
(iv) Other	257	22

2008

	Primary	Post-primary
(i) Flooding	0	0
(ii) Broken Heating Systems	9	4
(iii) Vandalism	0	0
(iv) Other	34	15

2009

	Primary	Post-primary
(i) Flooding	2	0
(ii) Broken Heating Systems	10	0
(iii) Vandalism	0	0
(iv) Other	107	21

Safety of Children Travelling by School Bus

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what advice her Department has given to the Education and Library Boards in relation to the safety of school children travelling to and from school by bus.
(AQW 5554/10)

Minister of Education: Sa bhliain 2001/02 d'fhoilsigh an Coiste um an Timpeallacht "Tuairisc ar an Fhiosrúchán ar Iompar a úsáideann Páistí ó agus go dtí scoil". Chuimsigh an tuairisc 4 phríomh-mholadh i dtaca le seirbhísí sainaithe bhus scoile. Eadhon, úsáid lámhaltas suíochán 3 do 2 a dhíchur (i.e. úsáideann trí dhalta atá faoi 14 bliain d'aois suíochán beirte), cosc a chur ar dhaltaí a bheith ina seasamh ar bhusanna scoile, críosanna sábhála a bheith ar na busanna sin, agus comhaltáí gealánacha rabhaidh agus soilse a fheistiú chun próifíl na mbusanna a ardú i measc úsáideoirí bóthair eile.

In 2001/02 the Environment Committee published its "Report on the Inquiry into Transport used for Children to and from School". The report contained four main recommendations with respect to designated school bus services. Namely, to eliminate the use of the 3 for 2 seating concession (i.e. three pupils under the age of 14 using a two-person seat), no pupils to stand on school buses, full seat-belted of those buses, and the fitting of flashing warning signs and lights to raise the profile of the buses with other road users.

Since the publication of the report, the Department of Education (DE) has provided advice and funding to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to ensure that these recommendations were met.

As a result, ELB buses now provide each pupil with a seat (ie, there is no standing, or sitting three-for-two on Board buses). From April 2010 all Board buses will be fully seat-belted. DE has further advised Boards to ensure that all contracts with Private Operator bus services stipulate the same rules that apply to Board buses.

Flashing lights and signs have yet to be fitted. The specification for the system requires legislative change and this is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment.

Dickson Plan Area

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many children transferred from junior high schools in the Dickson plan area to senior high schools in the 2008/09 academic year.
(AQW 5582/10)

Minister of Education: Ní leanann an Roinn gluaiseacht daltaí aonair idir tréimhsí san oideachas. Léiríonn an daonáireamh scoile, áfach, go raibh 814 dalta bhliain 10 sna cúig ardscoil shóisearacha sa bhliain 2007/08. Cé nach féidir a rá go cruinn cad iad na scoileanna ar aistrigh na daltaí chucu, is dócha gur aistrigh cuid mhór acu chuig ardscoil shinsearach. Ba é líon na ndaltaí i mbliain 11 a taifeadadh in ardscoileanna sinsearach in eolas an daonáirimh scoile sa bhliain 2008/09 ná 828.

The Department does not track the movement of individual pupils between phases of education. However, the school census indicates that there were 814 year 10 pupils in the five junior high schools in 2007/08. While, it cannot be determined precisely which schools these pupils progressed to, it is likely that a large proportion of them transferred on to a senior high school. The number of year 11 pupils recorded in senior high schools using 2008/09 school census information was 828.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the benefits of one-to-one 'booster sessions' for pupils struggling with numeracy and literacy.

(AQO 923/10)

Minister of Education: Tá na cláir atá deartha le haghaidh riachtanas an pháiste aonair agus atá bunaithe ar mheasúnú gairmiúil iontaofa ar na fáthanna a bhfuil ina gcúiseanna le tearcghnóthachtáil nó gnóthachtáil íseal an pháiste ar na cláir thacaíochta is éifeachtaí.

All effective programmes of support are those which are customised to the needs of the individual child and based on sound professional assessment of the reasons for the child's under or low- achievement.

Therefore a time-bound programme of one-to-one tuition can help some children who are underachieving, and for whom normal whole-class teaching approaches have not proven effective, to achieve at an appropriate level. It is of course for teachers, working with the support of the school and in partnership with the pupil and parents, to determine what support is most suitable for an individual child.

It must surely be better to prevent children falling behind in the first place through high quality teaching from the class teacher. This will be central to my literacy and numeracy strategy. The strategy will set out how we will promote the raising of standards and tackle underachievement in literacy and numeracy and I expect to publish it soon.

DE Budget 2010-11

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Education when she will finalise her Department's budget plans for the 2010/11 financial year.

(AQO 924/10)

Minister of Education: Tá sé sceidealaithe go mbuailfidh an Coiste Feidhmiúcháin le chéile ag deireadh na míosa seo le haontú ar bhuiséid athbhreithnithe dheiridh do na Ranna sa bhliain 2010/11. Ní bheidh mé in ann pleananna buiséid a thabhairt chun críche go dtí go n-aontóidh an Coiste Feidmiúcháin orthu. Dearbhóidh mé buiséid a luaithe is féidir ina dhiaidh sin.

The Executive is scheduled to meet towards the end of the month to agree the revised final budgets for departments in 2010/11. I will be unable to finalise budget plans for the Education Budget until Executive agreement has been reached. I will confirm budgets as soon as possible after this.

Equipment for Primary Schools

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education why parents, through Parent Teacher Associations, are subsidising primary schools to enable them to purchase equipment which should be provided by the Department.

(AQO 925/10)

Minister of Education: Soláthraíonn mo Roinn maoiniú athfhillteach do gach scoil dheontaschúnta faoi shocruithe na Foirmle Coitinn Maoinithe. Lena chois sin, faigheann scoileanna seirbhísí ar leith agus tacaíocht mhaoinithe ó bhuiséid neamhtharmligthe.

My Department provides all grant-aided schools with recurrent funding under the Common Funding Formula arrangements. In addition, schools also receive specific services and funding support from non delegated budgets.

Schools may also generate funds through Parent Teacher Associations or from other external sources. This additional funding can be spent by the school for the benefit of their pupils.

The degree to which individual schools generate these additional funds will vary greatly with some schools having more disposal income than others.

DE Capital Works

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to outline how she plans to spend the £170 million set aside for capital works next year.

(AQO 926/10)

Minister of Education: The net capital budget for DE in 2010-11 is £169.3million. Capital spending plans for 2010-11 has not been finalised at this stage.

It is important to note that the DE capital budget does not merely cover the construction of new schools, it also covers investment in transport, youth and early years, minor works and several other capital requirements such as professional design and project management services. The budget for all capital works including each of these key areas of capital investment is still under consideration.

Ba mhaith liom a chinntiú go bhfuil an t-infheistiú caipitil seo i gcomhréir agus tacúil leis an gcreat beartais ar fad agus go gcloíonn siad lenár ndualgais reachtúla ar chomhionannas agus go ndíríonn muid ar bhonn riachtanas sainaithnithe. Chuige sin, tá mé ag athbhreithniú oibreacha caipitil reatha lena chinntiú go n-úsáidtear na hacmhainní atá ar fáil chun na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach airgid is fearr don cháiníocóir a bhaint amach.

I want to ensure that this capital investment in our schools' estate is consistent with and supportive of the entire policy framework and adheres to our statutory duties in relation to equality and targeting on the basis of objective need. To this end, I am reviewing existing capital works to ensure that the available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for every taxpayer.

Teaching of Entrepreneurship in Schools

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education what steps her Department is taking to encourage the teaching of 'entrepreneurship' in schools.

(AQO 927/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an fostúchas ina eochairthéama den churaclam athbhreithnithe, rud a dhíríonn ar gach duine óg a ullmhú faoi choinne gach gné den saol agus den obair, agus chun iad a chumasú a fhorbairt mar dhaoine deaslabhartha muiníneacha atá in ann ról iomlán a imirt inár sochaí agus inár ngeilleagar.

Employability, including entrepreneurship, is a key theme underpinning the revised curriculum which aims to prepare all our young people for all aspects of life and work and to enable them to develop as confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in society and our economy.

At primary level, young people are now given opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and personal qualities related to enterprise and entrepreneurship.

At post-primary level entrepreneurship is covered under the Learning for Life and Work area of learning, with a focus on Work in the Local and Global Economy, Career Management and Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. Pupils are given opportunity to reflect on their own skills and areas for self-development; to explore enterprise and entrepreneurship; and to develop and practise some of the skills and attributes associated with being enterprising.

My Department also provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation events and programmes for schools. These include Young Enterprise, Sentinus, School Employer Connections, Charter Work Experience and a number of Business Education Partnerships. Additionally, and in partnership with Invest NI, we support other enterprise/innovation programmes, including, for example, the very successful 'Make Your Mark Challenge'. Such events help to promote

an enterprise culture within the classroom and to develop in our young people the innovative and enterprising skills and attitudes that our economy needs.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to outline the position on capital funding for the new build of Bangor Grammar School.

(AQO 928/10)

Minister of Education: Mar Aire Oideachais, ní mór dom a chinntiú go soláthraíonn na hacmhainní substaintiúla atá muid ag infheistiú na torthaí is fearr do pháistí agus an luach airgid is fearr don cháinócóir. Choimisiúnaigh mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal reatha, mar sin, lena dheimhniú go bhfuil siad go léir i gcomhréir leis an chreat beartais atá mé ag cur i bhfeidhm agus lena chinntiú go mbaineann muid ár ndualgais reachtúla ar chomhionannas amach agus go ndíríonn muid ar bhonn riachtanas sainaithe.

As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer. I therefore commissioned a review of all current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need.

The progress of all projects will be dependent upon the outcome of the review, which will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the school estate. Projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial year taking account of available resources.

Lurgan College and Portadown College

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to outline progress in relation to the new builds for Portadown College and Lurgan College.

(AQO 929/10)

Minister of Education: Agus í ag athbhreithniú an Bhreithmheasa Eacnamaíochta do Lurgan College, chinn mo Roinn go raibh easpa fianaise a léiríonn go mbeadh an fhorbairt seo mar chuid de phlean straitéiseach de cheantar Chraigavon agus go mbeadh sí in ann teacht ar an réimse cúrsaí atá de dhíth a sholáthar chun an Creat Teidlíochta a fheidhmiú go hiomlán ón bhliain 2013. Arna iarraidh sin ag mo Roinn, tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt ag athbhreithniú na riachtanas atá ar Lurgan College, laistigh de chomhthéacs níos leithne an Chreata Teidlíochta, d'fhonn plan straitéiseach a thabhairt ar aghaidh don cheantar.

In reviewing the Economic Appraisal for Lurgan College, my Department concluded there was insufficient evidence to provide assurance that this development was part of a strategic plan for the Craigavon area and would be capable of delivering access to the range of courses required to fully implement the Entitlement Framework from 2013. At my Department's request, the Southern Education and Library Board is reviewing the needs of Lurgan College, within the wider context of the Entitlement Framework, with the view to bringing forward a strategic plan for the area.

As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer. I therefore commissioned a review of all current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework I am putting in place to ensure we meet our statutory duties on equality and targeting on the basis of identified need.

The progress of all projects will be dependent upon the outcome of the review, which will inform the development of a more strategic approach to capital investment decisions and management of the school estate. Projects will then be prioritised for progression in the coming financial year taking account of available resources.

Preparatory School Funding

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the potential additional costs that her Department may incur over the next three academic years if her proposal to withdraw grant-aid maintenance for preparatory schools goes ahead.

(AQO 930/10)

Minister of Education: This review is being carried out on the basis of “equality of access” and not on financial grounds.

Preparatory Departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependant on a parents/family's ability to pay substantial costs.

I view it as inequitable to continue a situation where public funding is provided to schools which only accept children whose parents can afford to pay these significant fees. This is effectively buying access to a preparatory department thereby creating an inequality.

Mar a bheidh a fhios ag an gComhalta, d'aibhsigh an tAthbhreithniú Straitéiseach Neamhspleách ar Oideachas, ar a dtugtar Tuairisc Bain, a foilsíodh i mí na Nollag sa bhliain Dhá Mhíle is a Sé, saincheist mhaoiniú na scoileanna ullmhúcháin.

As the member will know, the Independent Strategic Review of Education, known as the Bain Report, published in December 2006, highlighted the issue of the funding of preparatory schools.

One of the key recommendations of the Bain Report was that the rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed. Bain stated,

“Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous.

This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by children whose parents can pay the requisite fee.

This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity.

The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget.”

The Equality Commission in it's document “Every Child an Equal Child” has stated that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education.

In relation to its position on the funding of Preparatory Departments, the Commission has stated that:

“Preparatory Departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependant on a parents/families ability to pay additional substantial costs”.

My Department commissioned Business Consultancy Service (BCS) of the Department of Finance and Personnel to undertake a review of this funding and to provide a report on their findings. This report concluded that my Department should consider the withdrawal of funding to preparatory departments on the basis of equality of access.

I decided that prior to making the final decision on this an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) should be undertaken. This EQIA consultation closed on 4th March and I will consider the responses received to this consultation prior to taking my final decision.

Therefore, until a decision has been taken and the preparatory departments have considered the impact, if any, on their fees, it is not possible to estimate the additional costs that may arise as a result of this change.

However, I would reiterate that this is a matter of equality of access not an economic issue.

Department for Employment and Learning

Unemployed People in East Antrim

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many unemployed people aged between 16-22 have sought careers advice in the East Antrim constituency, in each of the last 24 months. (AQW 5234/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department's Careers Service does not collate statistics in this format. I have placed in the Library and on the Department's web-site details the total number of Careers Adviser contacts with unemployed clients between the ages of 16-22 in the Larne and Carrickfergus Careers Offices, within each of the last twenty four months. These figures may include clients who have been seen by a Careers Adviser on more than one occasion.

Relocation and Decentralisation of Jobs

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration he has given to posts within his Department that could be re-located or decentralised. (AQW 5293/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Posts and services within the Department for Employment and Learning are already widely dispersed across Northern Ireland. Of the 2040 staff presently employed in the Department, 1146 (or approximately 55% per cent) work in 31 offices outside the greater Belfast area. Of those based in the Belfast area, 30% of staff deliver frontline services to the public, with a relatively small core providing support in Headquarters buildings. The Department is also in the process of rolling out the Jobs and Benefits Project, which involves the opening/refurbishment of ten new offices in towns across Northern Ireland with associated recruitment of additional staff.

The Department has given a commitment to DFP to participate in any future discussions regarding the management and costing of specific proposals for the relocation of public sector posts.

Workforce Future Skill Needs Analysis

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the findings of the Workforce Future Skill Needs Analysis in February 2010, for his assessment of whether the current training and education system in the Derry area is producing the skills outcomes necessary for the economy and if a restructuring of the system is required. (AQW 5297/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Workforce Future Skills Needs Analysis has provided empirical evidence, which will be useful to education and training providers in the area and also to the six local Workforce Development Forums, in identifying future skills needs.

The FE colleges, University of Ulster and training and education providers provide a broad range of skills outcomes. The report was not, however, intended to provide a basis on which to assess the effectiveness of the current education and training system within the Derry/Londonderry area.

The North West Regional College and the University of Ulster have both assured me of their commitment to adapt and tailor provision locally, to meet any skills gaps identified.

In addition, my Department is also piloting a number of projects to upskill employees in the Derry/Londonderry area.

Number of Students Enrolled in Universities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students enrolled in each of the last five years, in each campus of (i) the University of Ulster; and (ii) Queen's

University, broken down by (a) full-time undergraduate; (b) part-time undergraduate; (c) full-time post-graduate; and (d) part-time post-graduate in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5350/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Enrolments at each campus of the University of Ulster and the Queen's University, Belfast by level of study and mode of study for each of the last five years is detailed in the Annex attached

ANNEX

Year	Level of study	Mode of study	UU Belfast	UU Coleraine	UU Jordanstown	UU Magee	QUB
2004/05	Postgraduate	Full-time	115	680	880	295	2,135
		Part-time	30	1,090	2,315	325	2,040
		Total	145	1,770	3,200	625	4,175
	Undergraduate	Full-time	975	3,715	8,380	2,795	13,410
		Part-time	180	280	3,480	685	6,590
		Total	1,155	3,995	11,860	3,480	19,995
	Total	Full-time	1,090	4,395	9,265	3,090	15,545
		Part-time	210	1,370	5,795	1,010	8,625
		Total	1,300	5,765	15,060	4,105	24,170
2005/06	Postgraduate	Full-time	105	630	800	275	2,120
		Part-time	20	1,170	2,315	280	2,225
		Total	125	1,800	3,110	555	4,345
	Undergraduate	Full-time	1,010	4,020	8,440	2,950	13,255
		Part-time	195	280	3,665	740	5,890
		Total	1,210	4,300	12,105	3,690	19,145
	Total	Full-time	1,120	4,650	9,240	3,225	15,375
		Part-time	215	1,445	5,975	1,020	8,115
		Total	1,335	6,100	15,215	4,245	23,495
2006/07	Postgraduate	Full-time	55	505	490	200	2,085
		Part-time	5	955	1,945	285	2,090
		Total	60	1,465	2,435	485	4,175
	Undergraduate	Full-time	955	3,835	7,855	2,680	13,385
		Part-time	160	255	2,910	515	5,280
		Total	1,115	4,090	10,765	3,195	18,670
	Total	Full-time	1,010	4,345	8,350	2,885	15,470
		Part-time	165	1,210	4,855	800	7,375
		Total	1,175	5,555	13,200	3,680	22,845

Year	Level of study	Mode of study	UU Belfast	UU Coleraine	UU Jordanstown	UU Magee	QUB
2007/08	Postgraduate	Full-time	105	465	475	195	2,510
		Part-time	10	1,015	1,985	345	2,100
		Total	115	1,475	2,460	540	4,610
	Undergraduate	Full-time	955	3,660	7,550	2,515	13,365
		Part-time	170	395	3,170	635	4,250
		Total	1,125	4,050	10,720	3,150	17,615
	Total	Full-time	1,060	4,120	8,025	2,710	15,875
		Part-time	180	1,405	5,155	980	6,345
		Total	1,240	5,530	13,175	3,695	22,220
2008/09	Postgraduate	Full-time	135	565	660	285	3,060
		Part-time	45	895	1,915	245	2,240
		Total	180	1,460	2,575	530	5,300
	Undergraduate	Full-time	1,085	3,575	7,825	2,445	13,080
		Part-time	140	240	2,690	420	4,430
		Total	1,225	3,810	10,515	2,860	17,510
	Total	Full-time	1,220	4,140	8,485	2,730	16,140
		Part-time	185	1,130	4,610	660	6,670
		Total	1,405	5,270	13,095	3,390	22,810

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) The latest available data are for 2008/09.
- (2) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5
- (3) Due to rounding figures may not sum to totals

Number of Students Enrolled in Universities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled in each campus of (i) the University of Ulster; and (ii) Queen's University, broken down by (a) undergraduate; and (b) post-graduate, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5367/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of full-time equivalent students enrolled in each campus of the University of Ulster and the Queen's University, Belfast, broken down by level of study for each of the last five years is detailed in the table:

Year	Level of study	UU Belfast	UU Coleraine	UU Jordanstown	UU Magee	QUB
2004/05	Postgraduate	107	958	1,484	299	2,923
	Undergraduate	1,026	3,636	9,452	3,007	14,226
	Total	1,133	4,594	10,935	3,306	17,149
2005/06	Postgraduate	86	856	1,397	283	2,776
	Undergraduate	988	3,719	9,162	2,994	14,538
	Total	1,075	4,575	10,560	3,277	17,315
2006/07	Postgraduate	54	913	1,233	320	2,919
	Undergraduate	988	3,775	8,651	2,788	14,609
	Total	1,043	4,688	9,884	3,108	17,529
2007/08	Postgraduate	119	992	1,332	378	3,401
	Undergraduate	1,004	3,585	8,369	2,648	14,386
	Total	1,122	4,576	9,701	3,026	17,787
2008/09	Postgraduate	158	1,032	1,615	422	3,444
	Undergraduate	1,088	3,433	8,272	2,613	14,095
	Total	1,246	4,464	9,887	3,034	17,538

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

(1) The latest available data are for 2008/09.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

New Airline Routes from Belfast

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department and Invest NI has taken to encourage airlines to offer new routes from Belfast International Airport and the George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 5335/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): My Department and the agencies funded by it, which include Invest NI, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland Limited, all actively work with Northern Ireland's airports to provide available assistance in order to achieve our key economic objectives of productivity growth, increased employment and tourism, and in compliance with prevailing regulations.

The development of new air services is primarily a matter for the commercial judgement of the airports working with the airlines to determine whether or not a route will be financially successful. In the absence of clear market failure, such as gave rise to the now closed Northern Ireland Air Route Development Scheme, any direct governmental involvement would be seen as market manipulation and be contrary to the current EU guidance on the provision of start-up aid to airports and airlines.

Co-operation Between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Airline Operators

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what level of co-operation exists between the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and airline operators to market Northern Ireland as a tourist location.

(AQW 5337/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is responsible for marketing within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Tourism Ireland Ltd (TIL) is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland as a tourist destination in Great Britain and overseas. It is therefore within the remit of TIL rather than NITB to co-operate with airline operators regarding destination marketing.

Tourism Ireland engages in cooperative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers to stimulate demand for travel to Northern Ireland and the island as a whole from key source markets and secure existing access networks. Tourism Ireland also works with carriers serving the island of Ireland to include Northern Ireland products in their vacation packages.

Cooperative marketing activities include print advertisements in newspapers and travel and lifestyle publications, online advertising, publicity (including press trips to Northern Ireland for key travel and lifestyle media) and promotions.

Tourism Potential of Strangford Lough

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on plans to improve the promotion of the tourism potential of Strangford Lough.

(AQW 5384/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I value the contribution that Strangford Lough makes to our tourism offering in Northern Ireland. Regarded by many as a purely environmental resource, Strangford Lough has the opportunity to develop further its water-based activity and related tourism product.

I have issued a draft Tourism Strategy for consultation. It identifies Strangford among nine areas listed as examples of key tourist destinations for development over the next 10 years and Strangford is very much a key area for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland as we seek to promote and develop Northern Ireland.

Property Auctions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the current economic climate, if she has had any discussions with banks in relation to their property auctions.

(AQW 5386/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I and my officials are in regular contact with the banks in relation to the important role they have to play in assisting businesses to weather the recession.

I cannot, however, become directly involved in individual cases; and my Department has no remit in relation to how banks manage their lending activities, including property auctions. These are matters for the Financial Services Authority.

Invest NI

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to list the top ten largest funding allocations granted to companies by Invest NI since its formation; and (ii) for an estimate of the number of jobs created by each allocation.

(AQW 5487/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The table below shows the top ten largest offers of assistance made by Invest NI between 1st April 2002 and 28th February 2010. The table also shows the number of new jobs that each project promoted and the estimated number of jobs that have been created by that project. It should be noted that not all offers of assistance are directly employment-related.

INVEST NI TOP 10 OFFERS¹ OF ASSISTANCE APPROVED BETWEEN 1ST APRIL 2002 AND 28TH FEBRUARY 2010²

Company Name	Offer Year	Total Assistance Offered (£m)	Paid at 28th Feb 2010 (£m)	New Jobs Promoted	Net Jobs Created By Company³
Bombardier Aerospace - Short Brothers Plc	2008/09	21.00	2.22	836	409
Randox Laboratories Ltd	2002/03	16.20	7.54	810	148
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	2005/06	13.72	13.63	300	333
F G Wilson (Engineering) Ltd	2005/06	11.50	8.04	155	333
Seagate Technology (Ireland)	2002/03	10.00	10.00	43	252
Nyse Technologies Development Ltd	2009/10	9.58	0.00	400	28
Almac Clinical Services Limited	2009/10	8.55	2.38	325	76
Seagate Technology Media (Ireland) ⁴	2005/06	7.74	4.73	0	0
Citibank International Plc	2004/05	7.64	7.40	375	375
Coca-Cola Hbc Northern Ireland Ltd	2005/06	6.95	6.06	71	71
Total		112.885	62.00	3,315	2,025

Notes:

1. Third Sector Organisations and Universities are not included in the above analysis as these are not companies.
2. Figures for 2009/10 are up to 28 Feb 2010 only and are provisional and may be subject to amendment.
3. In many cases a business will have received various types of intervention during the course of a number of years. These projects will all contribute to the growth of the business but attempting to isolate their respective impacts is in many cases not a viable option.

4. The Seagate Technology Media offer in 2005/06 supported the safeguarding of 787 jobs and was not designed to promote new jobs. This project had maintained these jobs at 31st December 2007. Subsequently, this location was closed (Oct 2008).
5. Some of this assistance is offered in the form of repayable loans and shares.

Commitments to create new jobs are delivered over a period of time – perhaps up to five years. As such there is a lag between offers made and the actual creation of jobs. This means that more recent offers are not likely to have reached their job creation potential. In addition, some of the assistance offered by Invest NI will not be paid if the client does not fully deliver the proposed project. The total paid to date on each project has also been included in the table.

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if Rose Energy has asked Invest NI for a one off grant, of tens of millions of pounds, towards the construction of its proposed Glenavy incinerator, with a further loan guarantee of £70 million underwritten by Invest NI to allow Rose Energy to secure funding from the private sector.

(AQW 5507/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The promoters of Rose Energy have submitted a Business Plan to Invest NI seeking funding towards this project. This process is in line with the procedure followed by all companies seeking grant assistance.

Invest NI continues to evaluate the Rose Energy project and the due diligence process is proceeding. The outcome of this will determine if, and to what extent an offer of financial support will be made and the provision of funding.

As a commercial proposition that is still under evaluation it is not appropriate to comment on the level and type of funding being sought.

Visitors to the Belfast Hills

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of visitors and tourists visiting the Belfast Hills in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5540/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) does not have details of the total number of visitors and tourists visiting the Belfast Hills.

However, NITB conducts an annual survey of visitor attractions. This is a voluntary survey and the details from the survey are given in good faith on the basis of information provided by proprietors of attractions.

Table 1 below details the visitor numbers for the latest available five years to Cave Hill Visitor Centre (situated in Belfast Castle), taken from the Annual Survey of Visitor Attractions. This is the only attraction in the Belfast Hills that responds to the survey and does not represent the total number of visitors and tourists to the Belfast Hills.

TABLE 1 VISITOR NUMBERS TO CAVE HILL VISITOR CENTRE; 2004-2008

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Cave Hill Visitor Centre	37,500	39,375	39,375	45,000	51,500

Rose Energy Incinerator Proposal, Glenavy

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Invest NI was able to provide Rose Energy with an indicative offer of financial support for the Glenavy incinerator ahead of

any due diligence process, given that Rose Energy is a start-up venture without a commercial track record.

(AQW 5607/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI will, on occasion, provide promoters with an indicative offer of financial assistance. This can include new ventures where the promoters are often engaged in wider discussions on funding.

Such indicative offers are used purely as an illustration of the quantum and/or type of assistance that may be available should a project be assessed as acceptable on completion of all necessary due diligence. It is, as its name suggests, no more than an illustration of the likely level of support that a project may attract. It does not represent a contractual offer of support and is non-binding.

The discussions with the promoters of Rose Energy on an indicative offer of assistance took place against the background of the project having already been considered and appraised under the Environmental and Renewable Energy Fund (EREF) criteria.

Advent IT Training and Career Development

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) if her Department is aware of monies owed to students by Advent IT Training and Career Development after it went into insolvency; (ii) to detail the number of students affected; and (iii) what action her Department intends to take to recover this money.

(AQW 5668/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Advent Computer Training Limited and Access 2 Careers Limited went into Administration on 17 February 2010. Both companies are registered in England and are being jointly administered by Ian Gould and Brian Hamblin of PKF (UK) LLP, New Guild House, 45 Great Charles Street, Queensway, Birmingham, B3 2LX.

In these circumstances it would be for individual students to take their own action to recover money owed to them. The Administrators have made provision on two websites, depending upon which company has been paid, to lodge a Proof of Debt claim.

Details of the websites and helplines set up to assist students, employees and creditors are as follows:-

www.pkf.co.uk/advent and www.pkf.co.uk/access2careers The helpline number for Advent is 0844 770 1921 and for Access 2 Careers 0844 770 1922.

Department of the Environment

Planning Applications Considered by Lisburn Council

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications, considered by Lisburn Council's Planning Committee, he has asked his Department to withdraw from the planning schedule since becoming Minister of the Environment; and to provide details, including the location, of any such planning applications.

(AQW 5557/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The Minister has not sought to have any planning application withdrawn from the planning schedules for Lisburn City Council's Planning Committee.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Government-Held Land in East Antrim

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list all land in the East Antrim parliamentary constituency that is currently held by Government Departments; and to detail (i) the purpose; (ii) the value; and (iii) any future plans for each of the holdings.

(AQW 4804/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The information requested is provided in the attached table.

Name of Land or Building	Postal Address (if available)	Owned or Leased	Current use of Land/building	Current value of land/building	Proposed future use
DFP					
Bridgeview House	Glenville Road Newtownabbey	Owned	Leased to private sector company	£1,000,000	No proposals to change use
Carrickfergus Jobs & Benefits Office	Crown Building, 1 Davy's Street, Carrickfergus	Owned	Jobs & Benefits Office	£1,433,794	JBO
Larne Jobs & Benefits Office	Crown Building, 59 Pound Street, Larne	Owned	Jobs & Benefits Office	£2,631,761	JBO
Ballyclare Community Benefits Office	CBO, 29 Hillhead Road, Ballyclare	Owned	DSD office	£94,016	No proposals to change use
DARD					
Portal Inspection Office	Redlands Road, Larne, BT40 1AH	Leased (from Larne Harbour Ltd)	Office accommodation and Inspection/Lairage facilities	Building = £71,499 Land = £38,274	No proposals to change
DSD					
Land only	North Street Carrickfergus	Owned	Vacant	£73,500	To declare surplus and sell on open market
DHSSPS					
58 Main Street Larne	58 Main Street Larne BT40 1SP	Owned	Leased to Age Concern	£172,795	Leased to voluntary sector

Name of Land or Building	Postal Address (if available)	Owned or Leased	Current use of Land/building	Current value of land/building	Proposed future use
Land (19.2 acres) @ Whiteabbey Hospital	Doagh Road Newtownabbey Belfast BT37 9RH	Owned	Currently not in use	£454,545	Part of the site will be retained for future redevelopment of Whiteabbey Hospital. A disposal strategy will be developed for any remaining surplus land
DEL					
Felden House	Mill Road Newtownabbey Co Antrim	Fee Farm grant of £100 per annum paid as Ground Rent	Currently used by Northern Regional College as a skills centre until new Skills Centre at Shore Road is built in September 2010	A number of valuations based on current and alternative uses have been provided – as the Dept is working with LPS and others to maximise the value of the property it is difficult to provide a conclusive valuation at this time	By Sept 2010, the property will be declared surplus to College requirements. The Dept is currently liaising with Planning Service and SIB to maximise the sale of the property
DOE					
Ballylumford Dolmen	Grid ref: D430016 91 Ballylumford Road, Larne BT40 3RN	Owned (c/o Carrickfergus Castle)	Historic monument in State care	Nil	Historic monument in State care
Carrickfergus Castle	Marine Highway Carrickfergus BT38 7BG	Owned	Historic monument in State care	£1,100,000	Historic monument in State care. Plans to renew roof and enhance interpretation.

Name of Land or Building	Postal Address (if available)	Owned or Leased	Current use of Land/building	Current value of land/building	Proposed future use
Carrickfergus Town Walls	Sailor's Row Carrickfergus BT38 7BT (c/o Carrickfergus Castle)	Part owned. (Rest managed by agreement)	Historic monument in State Care	Nil	Historic monument in State Care
Carrickfergus Gasworks (Flame Centre)	44 Irish Quarter West, Carrickfergus	Owned. (Managed by Carrickfergus Gasworks Preservation Society under lease until 2091)	Historic monument in State care	Nil	Historic monument in State Care
Carrickfergus Works Depot	42 Irish Quarter West, C/Fergus	Owned	Works depot	£100,000	Works depot
Castle Lug	Grid ref: J373844 Shore Road Greenisland Carrickfergus BT38 8UA	Owned (c/o Carrickfergus Castle)	Historic monument in State care	Nil	Historic monument in State Care
Olderfleet Castle	Grid ref: D413016 Coast Guard Road –Larne	Owned (c/o Carrickfergus Castle)	Historic monument in State care	Nil	Historic monument in State care
Straidkilly Nature Reserve	Grid ref: D158305 c/o Ulster Wildlife Trust	Owned. (Managed by UWT under lease until 2013)	Statutory Nature Reserve	Book value ca £50,000 (NR status cuts market value to nil)	Statutory Nature Reserve for hazel woodland
Swan Island	Grid ref: J424996 c/o RSPB	Owned. (Managed by RSPB under lease until 2023)	Statutory Nature Reserve	Nil	Statutory Nature Reserve for nesting terns

Name of Land or Building	Postal Address (if available)	Owned or Leased	Current use of Land/building	Current value of land/building	Proposed future use
Driver & Vehicle Agency Test Centre	Ballyboley Road Ballyloran Larne BT40 2SY	Owned	MOT and Driving Tests	Land £270,000 Buildings £260,000. (at 31/3/09) (NB - Land and buildings are owned by the DVA Trading Fund and not the Core Department)	MOT and Driving Tests
Driver & Vehicle Agency Weighbridge & Administration Office	Redlands Road. Larne Harbour.	Owned	Enforcement activity	£164k (Building & Weighbridge only) (at 31/3/09)	Enforcement activity

Events in Stormont Estate

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the external organisations who have applied to hold outdoor events in the grounds of the Stormont Estate, including the Pavilion, in the next twelve months; (ii) the nature of these events; and (iii) whether the events have been approved or declined.

(AQW 5278/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The following events are currently in the Stormont Estate Events Diary for the period requested. Further events may be added as the year progresses. Additionally, other events may be held within the boundaries of the land held by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports and Social Association that have not as yet been notified to the Department.

Organising Authority	Date	Event	Approval Given
NI Cycling Federation/ Cycling Ulster	Fri 2nd April	Tour Of the North Cycle Race	Approved
Tiny Life	Sat 3rd April	Tiny Life Sponsored Walk	Approved
Cancer Research	Sun 30th May	Cancer Research Race for Life	Approved
DFP	Mon 31st May	Children In Need DFP Fun day	TBA
Belmont Play Group	Sat 5th June	Belmont Playgroup Sponsored Walk	Approved

Organising Authority	Date	Event	Approval Given
Diabetes UK	Sun 6th June	Diabetes UK Sponsored Walk and BBQ	Approved
Barnardos	Tues 8th June	Barnardos Sponsored Walk	Approved
Cruse Bereavement	Sat 12th June	Cruse Bereavement Walk	Approved
Runher	Sun 13th June	Runher Womens' Charity Race	Approved
National Osteoporosis Society	Sat 19th June	National Osteoporosis Society Sponsored walk	Approved
NSPCC	Sun 20th June	NSPCC walk and tea party	Approved
NICSSA	Wed 23rd June	Ireland A 'v' New Zealand A cricket	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
NICSSA	Fri 25th June	Ireland A 'v' New Zealand A cricket	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
Cystic Fibrosis	Sat 26th June	Cystic Fibrosis Big Bounce	Approved
TinyLife	Sun 27th June	TinyLife/IKEA fun day	Approved – but request for change of date anticipated
NICSSA	Thu 15th July	Ireland 'v' Bangladesh cricket	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
NICSSA	Fri 16th July	Ireland 'v' Bangladesh cricket	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
Belfast City Council	Sat 31st July	European Pipe Band Championship	Approved
NICSSA	Sat 7th / Sun 8th Aug	Archery Club competition	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
NICSSA	Sat 28th Aug	First Trust Family Day	Approval not required as event on NICSSA ground only
Marie Curie	Frid 3rd Sept	Marie Curie Sponsored Walk	Approved
Runher	Sun 10th Oct	Runher Womens' Charity Race	Approved

Organising Authority	Date	Event	Approval Given
MS Society	Sat 11th Dec	MS Society Santa Dash	Event Approved – date to be finalised

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance have been made in (i) Ards; and (ii) Down Districts to date; and the total value of the awards in each district.

(AQW 5397/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below shows the current Lone Pensioner Allowance awards made by Land & Property Services for owner occupiers in the Ards and Down Districts, along with their total value (as at 28 February 2010):

District	Total current awards	Total value £
Ards	1,070	£192,031
Down	783	£144,315

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive administers Lone Pensioner Allowance for the social and private rented sectors. The Executive is not able to provide figures by District Council area, but has supplied the following information of total current awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance by each of its relevant offices (as at 28 February 2010):

NIHE Office	Newtownards	Downpatrick
Total current awards	270	179

The Executive is not able to provide a breakdown of the financial value by office. The average value of a Lone Pensioner Allowance award made by NIHE is £86.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Lone Pensioner Allowance awards have been made in (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey, in the 2009/10 financial year.

(AQW 5617/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below shows the current Lone Pensioner Allowance awards made by Land & Property Services for owner occupiers in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey Districts, and the number of new awards in 2009-10 (as at 28 February 2010):

District	Total current awards	New awards made 01/04/09 – 28/02/10
Larne	476	112
Carrickfergus	550	119
Newtownabbey	1,237	297

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive administers Lone Pensioner Allowance for the social and private rented sectors. The Executive is not able to provide figures by District Council area, but has supplied the following information of total current awards of Lone Pensioner Allowance by each of its relevant offices:

NIHE Office	Larne	Carrickfergus	Newtownabbey
Total current awards	139	201	332

Rates: Water and Sewerage Services

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of the regional rates is currently allocated to domestic water and sewerage services.

(AQO 950/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member will be aware that a contribution is made from the regional rate towards the funding of all regional public services, including water and sewerage services.

However, there is no specific proportion of either the regional rate or individual rate bills that is allocated directly to the funding of water and sewerage services.

DFP: Staffing Requirements

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the change in staffing requirements within his Department between 1999 and 2009.

(AQO 951/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In January 1999, DFP employed some 1,600 staff. The number of staff employed by DFP at October 2009 was 3253. This reflects a significant growth in the responsibilities and functions of the department.

Compensation for Pleural Plaques

Mr N Dodds asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline progress in relation to the proposal to restore the right of people diagnosed with pleural plaques to seek compensation through the courts.

(AQO 952/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have carefully considered the submissions made during DFP's consultation exercise on pleural plaques and the developments in the other constituent jurisdictions of the UK post-consultation and will shortly be placing recommendations on the way forward in Northern Ireland before Executive colleagues.

Corporation Tax

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will consult the British Treasury on the possibility of a reduced rate of corporation tax, in light of the Economic Reform Group's recent report on this issue.

(AQO 953/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My officials have already ensured that HM Treasury has a copy of this Economic Reform Group (ERG) report. The ERG report doesn't add anything new to the debate that took place at the time of the Varney analysis. Indeed the ERG report is quite simplistic in its analysis and it leaves many important questions unanswered.

These unanswered questions mainly relate to concerns over the methodology employed and the unstated dangers of engaging with HM Treasury on altering how the NI Block grant is determined. But most importantly the report doesn't indicate how or where the Executive should make annual cuts of hundreds of millions of pounds to fund shareholders through lower levels of corporation tax.

For these reasons, and because HM Treasury has already declared its position by accepting the two Varney Reviews in full, I would advise against engaging further with HM Treasury on this issue at this point in time.

Unrecovered Rates

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the amount of unrecovered rates in 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10; and the amounts carried forward from one year to the next.

(AQO 954/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total unrecovered ratepayer debt at 31 March 2008 was £123.8 million.

During 2008-09, £70.7 million of this debt was collected or discharged. This left £53.1 million of prior year debt remaining at 31 March 2009, to which was added £85 million of in-year debt, to give a total ratepayer debt figure at 31 March 2009 of £138.1 million.

At the end of February 2010, £69.7 million of this debt had been collected or discharged, leaving a prior year debt figure at that date of £68.4 million. The in-year debt figure will be added to the prior year debt figure during the completion of the 2009-2010 accounts; it is not possible to provide this figure with any degree of certainty at the moment.

The rising level of ratepayer debt is due to a combination of factors:

- The current economic climate increasing the difficulty for many ratepayers in paying their bills;
- The extensive and far-reaching rating reforms over the last few years which have increased the complexity of the rating system and increased the short-term collection challenge; and
- The continuing belief of many ratepayers in Northern Ireland that not paying rates is acceptable.

My Department continues to focus its energies on collecting all rates that are due. We attempt to offer extended payment arrangements for those suffering genuine difficulty in paying; but we have also been granted over 15,000 court decrees for non-payment of rates during the last nine months.

Civil Service: Pay and Bonuses

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the total cost of pay increases and bonuses across the Civil Service in 2009/10.

(AQO 955/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The total cost of pay increases across the Civil Service in 2009/10 is currently £570,488. This figure represents the increased cost of pay awards to senior civil servants and to Special Advisers who are treated as civil servants under special arrangements. The 2009 pay award for non-industrial civil servants, who represent the majority of staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, is still the subject of negotiation with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance. I can confirm that there were no bonuses paid to senior civil servants as part of the 2009/10 pay award.

Strategic Investment Board and Central Procurement Directorate

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential savings that could be made from the amalgamation of the Strategic Investment Board and the Central Procurement Directorate.

(AQO 956/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: No such proposal is, or ever has been, under consideration. I would remind the Member that both Bodies have distinctive functions.

As a core Directorate of the Department of Finance Personnel Central Procurement Directorate undertakes a number of key functions in relation to procurement, which is a transferred matter under the Northern Ireland Act and for which DFP is responsible. These include: ensuring the policy and legislative framework within which procurement operates is compliant with EU and UK law and supporting the Procurement Board in the development of policy and good practice guidance. In addition CPD acts as a Centre of Procurement Expertise for supplies, services and works for the public sector and is the NICS Centre of Excellence for Programme and Project Management.

The Strategic Investment Board, which is responsible to OFMDFM, focuses on strategic investment opportunities for Northern Ireland, helping Government departments to deliver key programmes, in support of the Executive's Investment Strategy and Programme for Government.

Both Bodies work in partnership, in their very different roles, for the benefit of all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

I have no plans to change the current arrangements.

Rates Relief for Carers

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment he has made of the potential for rates relief for carers.

(AQO 957/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Some months ago I asked my officials to examine what options are available for providing rate relief to carers, in response to a request from the DFP Committee. A preliminary report was produced and provided to the Committee, who then took evidence from Helen Ferguson, Director of Carers NI and my officials. This session took place on the 24th February 2010 and I await a report from officials before deciding on whether further work is merited.

Provision is already made within the existing housing benefit system which increases the level of relief for carers who are eligible. A simple option therefore exists to enhance this existing relief. While this may provide welcome help for some, the numbers benefitting might not be significant and early indications are that the administration costs are disproportionately high. Other options which provide relief across the board to all carers are also possible but these are a lot more expensive. The issue of how to identify all carers for the purposes of such a scheme would also need to be addressed.

Like all Members here, I am sympathetic to the needs of carers and do recognise the contribution they make to caring for members of their family and others, which often goes unnoticed. This is why I think it is important that we consider carefully whether giving carers extra rate relief is the best and most effective means of supporting them. I am also keen to get the ideas of the Committee on how they feel this issue could be taken forward, before deciding how to proceed. You may already know that I have addressed the Assembly on the issue during the debate around the Regional Rates Order on the 22nd February.

Civil Service: Staffing

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what effect efficiency savings and budgetary changes for 2010/11 are likely to have on staffing levels across the Civil Service.

(AQO 958/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Departments are still assessing what the proposed budget allocations for 2010/11 will mean for them in detail, but at this stage estimates predict that the total number of civil service posts in the 11 Northern Ireland Departments will reduce from about 24,000 full time equivalent (FTE) posts at 1 January 2010, to 22,800 (FTE) by 1 April 2011, a net reduction of just under 1,200 (FTE) posts.

Benefits Take-up

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister for Social Development to ensure that people are claiming the benefits to which they are entitled, given that £60 million in unclaimed benefits is potentially lost to the local economy each year.

(AQO 959/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have had no discussions with the Minister for Social Development on this issue.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Swine Flu Vaccine

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3758/10 and AQW 4101/10, how many people were eligible for the swine flu vaccine; and how many people received the vaccine.

(AQW 4442/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): It is estimated that approximately 590,000 people are eligible to receive the swine flu vaccine in Northern Ireland as part of phase 1 and 2 of the vaccination programme. This figure includes health and social care workers. Work is continuing to refine this figure.

By 30 January 2010, 264,566 people had been vaccinated in Northern Ireland. The vaccination programme remains ongoing.

Tamiflu

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been prescribed Tamiflu since the outbreak of swine flu; and in which constituencies prescriptions for Tamiflu have been dispensed.

(AQW 4471/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As of 29 January 2010, a total of 22,566 courses of Tamiflu have been dispensed in Northern Ireland.

It is not possible to break this figure down by constituency.

Urology Day Procedures at the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the cessation of urology day procedures from 8 February 2010 at the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine is temporary or permanent; (ii) to outline the reasons for the closure; and (iii) what contingency or permanent plans are in place to deliver the service to patients.

(AQW 5200/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that urology day procedures at the Causeway Hospital have not ceased.

The Regional Health and Social Care Board recently undertook a public consultation on the Review of Urology Services in Northern Ireland, which included proposals for the service at Causeway Hospital. However, it should be noted that a decision on the future configuration of the urology service, including that provided at Causeway Hospital, has not yet been made.

Draft Regulations on Tobacco Products

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the draft regulations on the banning of the display of tobacco products in retail outlets and the sale of tobacco from vending machines will be published for public consultation.

(AQW 5222/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In mid-December 2009, I circulated a paper to my Executive colleagues seeking their agreement to a public consultation on draft tobacco control regulations to be made under the Health Bill 2009. While all responses received from Executive colleagues to date have confirmed their agreement to the consultation, there are two responses outstanding. Until these have been received, the consultation on the draft tobacco control regulations cannot be commenced.

Funding for Young Carers and Supporting Charities

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to include a cost of living increase in funding for young carers and supporting charities who are struggling to cope with rising costs.

(AQW 5227/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The £92m revenue reduction in 2010-11 will place enormous pressure on my Department's budget. Only inflationary pressures across the HSC will be met.

In that context, the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency will be obliged to assess funding proposals from carers and supporting charities on a case by case basis.

Partnerships for Older People Projects

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the Partnerships for Older People Projects which have been piloted by the Department of Health in England; and (ii) the potential for similar projects here.

(AQW 5240/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Partnership for Older Peoples Projects piloted by the Department of Health in England, were designed to increase the profile of services which help older people to live more independently. Our integrated health and social care system has already developed a wide range of person-centred domiciliary and intermediate care services which, together with the use of modern bespoke technology and the availability of 24 hour nursing care, has over the past twenty years, enabled older people who have varying levels of need to receive round the clock care in their own homes.

Bowel Screening Service

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in establishing a comprehensive bowel screening service.

(AQW 5243/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Significant progress has been made in establishing the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme in Northern Ireland.

Paediatric Audiologists

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many paediatric audiologists are currently employed in each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) if any of the Health Trusts are currently experiencing a shortage of paediatric audiologists; (iii) how the expected cuts in audiology training places in England by the Department of Health will impact on the availability of audologists for local Health Trusts; and (iv) what action he is taking to ensure that the number of paediatric audiologists meets the level of demand over the next few years.

(AQW 5261/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As audiologists are dual trained to work with adults and children it is not possible to provide numbers of dedicated paediatric audiologists for each Health and Social Care Trust.

I am not aware of any proposed cuts to audiology training places in England.

It is a matter for Health and Social Care Trusts to assess the health needs of the population they serve and determine the workforce accordingly however my Department will continue to monitor supply and demand balance of paediatric audiologists through the workforce planning mechanism.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he has any plans to implement any, or all, of the recommendations made by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the future running of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

(AQW 5272/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department commissioned Delivery and Innovation Directorate from the Department of Finance and Personnel to undertake an independent review of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). The review report contains a wide range of recommendations, the majority of which I am minded to accept. Before moving to implementation, however, I have asked the NIFRS to review the report and to let my Department have its response by 12 March.

Health Service Neuro-Physiotherapists

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many Health Service neuro-physiotherapists are available to people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in the Limavady Borough Council area; (ii) where this service can be accessed; and (iii) when the service is available.

(AQW 5280/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 118 (106.6 whole-time equivalent) Physiotherapists within the Western Health and Social Care Trust who have the necessary range of knowledge and skills required to deliver physiotherapy services to Multiple Sclerosis patients. Within the Limavady Borough Council area, the needs of this client group are met from within the general Physiotherapy Service resource, which is accessible by referral from the patient's General Practitioner, Consultant, MS Specialist Nurse, or Community Physiotherapist. The service is available from Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Back Pay Under Agenda for Change

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when staff and former staff entitled to back pay under Agenda for Change will receive their arrears.

(AQW 5311/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC organisations are making every effort to clear the backlog of arrears payments at the earliest possible date.

Telecare and Telehealth

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on Telecare and Telehealth.

(AQW 5312/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am committed to the development of telehealth (remote telemonitoring) across NI and have set a target in Priorities for Action such that 5,000 people with long term chronic disease will benefit from the development of this service by December 2011. My commitment to the use of the new technologies, for example in patient monitoring, image and data transfer and remote consultation, is made within the broader context of our drive to ensure that NI has the best possible measures in place to enable the provision of targeted, effective and efficient health and social care services to people with long term chronic disease. I am also keen to see the wider use of telecare (assistive technology), such as alarms and sensors, wherever appropriate to support safe independent living.

Age of Carers

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many carers are aged (i) 60 years and over; and (ii) under 60 years.

(AQW 5313/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Fire Service: Cross-border Co-operation

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last 5 years, (i) to detail (a) the number of times that fire appliances have crossed the border to assist with fires and other emergencies in the Republic of Ireland; and (b) the number of times that fire appliances from the Republic of Ireland have come north; and (ii) what measures have been taken to improve and enhance cross-border co-operation.

(AQW 5316/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below details the number of times fire appliances have crossed the border to assist with fires and other emergencies in each of the last 5 years.

Year	No of incidents NI fire appliances responded to in ROI	No of incidents ROI fire appliances responded to in NI.
2005	65	Information unavailable
2006	116	Information unavailable
2007	105	8
2008	132	5
2009	104	5
2010 (to date)	26	0

The NIFRS Chief Fire Officer meets quarterly with the Chief Fire Officers of the six border counties in the Republic of Ireland to discuss common issues including operational co-operation and training.

Operational agreements are in place between NIFRS and Donegal County Council and a Memorandum of Understanding is in place with Louth Fire and Rescue Service for responding to incidents on the Newry / Dundalk link road. In addition a partnership agreement is in place between Belleek, Ballyshannon and Bundoran.

NIFRS engages with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the Republic of Ireland to coordinate the annual Fire Safety Week. They use this week to look at ways to provide the entire community with information to reduce fire incidents, casualties and fatalities.

Cross border cooperation is further enhanced through local liaison, exchange visits and cross border familiarisation training.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to improve the treatment, care and support available to people affected by Multiple Sclerosis.

(AQW 5317/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In 2002, my Department carried out a Review of Adult Neurology Services and the Health and Social Care Board has been tasked to carry out a full evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations and report its findings to my Department.

The results of this evaluation will help inform policy development for neurology services in Northern Ireland. In addition, my Department is currently developing a Disability Strategy, which will provide a broad strategic direction for the development of services for people with a physical, sensory or communication disability, including those with a neurological condition such as Multiple Sclerosis.

NI Fire and Rescue Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were rescued from fires (i) injured; and (ii) uninjured by the NI Fire and Rescue Service in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 5325/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Tables 1 and 2 below set out the number of casualties and rescues from fires in each of the last 5 years.

TABLE 1

Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Casualties	449	425	422	473	459

TABLE 2

Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Rescues	146	163	140	150	116

Table 1 shows the total number of casualties from fires. NIFRS does not record how many of these casualties were rescued by NIFRS personnel or escaped by other means.

Table 2 shows the total number of rescues by NIFRS personnel. NIFRS does not at present record the numbers of injuries at each rescue.

GP Practices Using Premium Rate Telephone Numbers

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many GP practices currently use premium rate telephone numbers; and if he will make a statement on the legality of this arrangement.

(AQW 5327/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Board has confirmed that no GP practices in Northern Ireland are using premium rate telephone numbers. Some GP practices do, however, use 084 numbers, although I am advised that these are not classified as premium rate numbers and in many cases, if called from a BT landline, cost less than a call to an 028 number.

H1N1 Vaccines

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of (i) H1N1 vaccines ordered in 2009 in response to the Swine Flu outbreak; (ii) H1N1 vaccines that remain unused; (iii) seasonal vaccines ordered in 2009-2010; and (iv) seasonal flu vaccines that remain unused.

(AQW 5375/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) in line with advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) enough vaccine was initially ordered for 2 doses for every person in Northern Ireland.

- (ii) The vaccination programme remains ongoing and therefore it is too early to say how many vaccines will remain unused;
- (iii) 426,469 seasonal flu vaccines were purchased for the 2009-2010 seasonal flu vaccination programme; and
- (iv) The seasonal flu programme for 2009/10 has now been completed. Over 97% of the number received) were distributed to GPs/Trusts while 2.6% of the total ordered seasonal flu vaccines remained in centrally held stock.

Ambulance Service

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if an inquiry will be launched into the Ambulance Service's refusal to help a north Belfast man who was sleeping rough and has subsequently had his leg amputated.

(AQW 5451/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can assure the Member that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service is a professional emergency service which takes its duty of care to patients very seriously. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service is currently conducting an internal investigation into the circumstances of the incident to which you refer.

Roe Valley Dermatology Clinic in Limavady

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if, and when, the Roe Valley Dermatology Clinic in Limavady is to close; (ii) what alternative arrangements will be put in place; (iii) if General Practitioners in the area were informed; and (iv) what consultation with the public and other stakeholders has taken place.

(AQW 5508/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Health and Social Care Trust is not planning to close the dermatology clinic at Roe Valley Hospital.

Regional Care Advisers for Muscular Dystrophy

Mr B Leonard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a detailed update on whether his Department has decided to fund two Regional Care Advisers for Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5562/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for the recurrent funding of neuromuscular care advisor posts has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

Regional Care Advisers for Muscular Dystrophy

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to ensure the future of Regional Care Advisers posts for Muscular Dystrophy.

(AQW 5577/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A business case for the recurrent funding of neuromuscular care advisor posts has been developed by the Belfast Trust and is currently being considered by the Health and Social Care Board.

Cost of Flights Booked for Civil Servants

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when an answer to AQW 4041/10 will be provided.

(AQW 5578/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The member will receive an answer to AQW 4041/10 when the information requested is available.

Services at Woodstock Lodge

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5488/10, if any services are being discontinued at Woodstock Lodge.
(AQW 5691/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has confirmed that no services are being discontinued at Woodstock Lodge.

Department for Regional Development

Emergency Carriageway Repairs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what impact the emergency carriageway repairs after the recent bad weather will have on his 2010/11 budget strategy.
(AQW 5242/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): Under Article 8 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, my Department's Roads Service has a duty to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition. In recognition of this duty of care, Roads Service undertakes a series of regular inspections and condition surveys, to ensure the road network is maintained to defined standards and that any serious road defects are detected and repaired. These arrangements, together with the experience and professional judgement of Roads Service engineers, ensure that the roads remain safe and do not fall below satisfactory and serviceable levels. While the wet summer and autumn of 2009, followed by the coldest winter for almost 50 years, has undoubtedly had a damaging effect on the road network, Roads Service's budget strategy for 2010/11 will continue to be based on these guiding principles.

While the Roads Service budget for 2010/11 has not yet been determined, I can confirm that since the beginning of January 2010, an additional £16.6 million approximately, has been allocated to Roads Service's Divisions. This money will be used to progress pre-determined programmes of work, targeting the worst roads. It will also deal with the effects of the recent cold spell, thereby alleviating, to some extent, pressures on the 2010/11 budget.

In distributing the resources available for road maintenance, allocations are made to the four Roads Service Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, including resurfacing and patching. The Divisions use these indicators when apportioning funds across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution across the whole of the North.

NI Railways Station in Londonderry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the NI Railways station in Londonderry is manned after 19.00 on a Sunday; and if there is CCTV at the station.
(AQW 5289/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that on Sundays the Sales and Information desk at Waterside Station is staffed from 10:10 hours to 19:00 hours. An early morning train departs at 07:23 hours and a late evening train departs at 19:23 hours on Sundays. At these times the station functions as an unstaffed station/halt, similar to many within the NIR network, with the Conductor on these services fulfilling all the necessary customer requirements in respect of tickets or information.

Although there is no customer interface involved, the signal cabin at Waterside Station is staffed during the hours in which trains are running.

Translink consider the current manning level to be the most cost-efficient way to staff the station.

CCTV is installed at Waterside Station and further upgrades are being considered.

Relocation and Decentralisation of Jobs

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to posts within his Department that could be relocated or decentralised.

(AQW 5290/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Amongst Departments here, DRD is already one of those with the highest proportion of staff (ie 65%) based at work locations outside the Greater Belfast area. Most are attached to Roads Service, where the need to manage and maintain the regional road network and to deliver effective local services means that the bulk of the Agency's staff are based in well-dispersed regional offices outside its Belfast headquarters.

I remain of the view that the decentralisation of jobs can help redress regional inequalities and in revitalising local economies. Whilst there are no current plans for further decentralisation of posts within DRD, this key principle will be promoted when formulating Executive policies and proposals.

NI Water Staff Training

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the training provided to NI Water staff working with the current 'E' ordering system, in light of the number of complaints by staff in relation to this training.

(AQW 5295/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the training provided on the 'E' ordering system was successful and met its objectives. This is reinforced by feedback received from attendees at the end of each training session with 95% rating the training as good or excellent. In addition, refresher training was offered to all staff using the 'E' ordering system and a helpdesk is available, if required.

NI Water 'E' ordering System

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the cost to date of setting up and operating the 'E' ordering system within NI Water; and (ii) to estimate the savings made since it was introduced.

(AQW 5296/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it cost almost £630,000 to set up the 'E' ordering system and its annual operating costs are in the region of £110,000. The business case for 'E' ordering did not envisage that financial savings would be made from its introduction but the benefits available include greater processing efficiency and improved control of all procurement activity.

Disabled Parking Spaces

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of disabled parking spaces provided in (i) Coleraine Borough Council; and (ii) Limavady Borough Council in the last five years.

(AQW 5314/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In the last five years, my Department's Roads Service has provided 26 disabled parking spaces in the Coleraine Borough Council area, and 8 disabled parking spaces in the Limavady Borough Council area.

Sewerage System in Greyabbey Village

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reasons for the breakdown in the sewerage system in Greyabbey Village in the week commencing 22 February 2010; and why it took so long to rectify.

(AQW 5330/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that on 25 February 2010 it became aware that Greyabbey Wastewater Treatment Works was not operating at optimal capacity and this had caused the sewerage network to backup. NIW commenced tankering from both the sewer network and the Works to relieve the system. Investigations found that a storm water culvert, which was not owned by NIW, was blocked by a tractor tyre which was preventing an overflow discharging fully from the sewerage system. The tractor tyre was removed and remedial work at Greyabbey Wastewater Treatment Works continued over the weekend of 27/28 February. Customers affected were kept fully informed of progress and normal operation was restored at the Works on 2 March 2010.

Senior Citizen SmartPass

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many fraudulent claims have been made for the Senior Citizen SmartPass, in each year since its introduction.

(AQW 5338/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In order to obtain a Senior SmartPass all applicants must visit a Translink bus or rail station, bringing with them the prescribed documentary proof of age and residency. Application forms must also be countersigned by a third party. Translink has informed me that it has no record of any incidents whereby someone has sought to obtain a SmartPass with false documents. Experience has shown that where there are errors in applications, these are found to be genuine errors which are subsequently corrected.

NI Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can provide an assurance that NI Water will be able to deliver a consistent level of service despite an increasing workload for remaining staff as a result of staff cuts.

(AQW 5340/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have received assurances from Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the company continues to balance the need for increased efficiency with its responsibility to maintain a secure and reliable service to customers. The company's performance in critical areas of customer service is monitored closely by my Department, the Utility Regulator, the NI Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate on an ongoing basis. This will continue as the company works towards meeting challenging cost efficiency targets in the future.

NI Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the performance of NI Water as compared to the former Water Service under direct Civil Service control.

(AQW 5341/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that since it was appointed water and sewerage undertaker on 1 April 2007 its overall performance, like that of its predecessor the Water Service, has been assessed using a number of key performance targets. These targets cover the full range of its activities and reflect output, quality of service, efficiency and financial performance. Overall performance has been improving year on year through a period of substantial business change involving challenging reductions in manpower numbers and capital and operational expenditure. Compliance levels for drinking water quality and wastewater quality have improved significantly as a result of major investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure aimed

at safeguarding public health and protecting the environment. Good progress continues to be made in a number of areas including improving standards of customer service, reducing leakage from the water distribution system and driving down costs through greater use of technology and enhanced efficiency. Details of performance against the key targets for both Water Service and NIW are included in the Annual Reports which are available on the NIW website at www.niwater.com

NI Water

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans NI Water has for water and sewerage services in the financial year 2010/11, in the East Londonderry constituency.

(AQW 5342/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is currently reviewing its capital investment plans following the final determination of its business plan proposals for the three years ending 31 March 2013 by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

It is therefore not in a position at this time to provide final details of plans for water and sewerage projects in the East Londonderry constituency, but an investment of around £4.5 million is anticipated during 2010/11. This investment will include the continuation of projects such as Dungiven Wastewater Treatment Works and Ballymonie Wastewater Treatment Works and the commencement of new projects such as Benone Area Sewerage and Coleraine Drainage Area Plan Phase 1.

Road Safety along Thomas Street, Portadown

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Roads Service has to improve road safety along Thomas Street, Portadown, near the Presentation Convent Primary School.

(AQW 5344/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they are not aware of any specific road safety issues on Thomas Street, Portadown. However, following a request from the Principal of Presentation Convent Primary School, this location is currently being assessed for inclusion in my Department's Safer Routes to Schools initiative. Those schools, included in this initiative, are provided with improved road markings and flashing school warning signs outside the school.

I have asked Mr Bertie Ellison, Acting Divisional Roads Manager in Southern Division, to write and advise you on the outcome of this assessment.

Disabled Car Parking in North Down and Ards Borough Council

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many disabled car parking spaces have been provided in (i) North Down Borough Council; and (ii) Ards Borough Council in the last five years.

(AQW 5373/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In the past five years, My Department's Roads Service has provided a total of 13 disabled parking bays in the North Down Borough Council area, and 80 disabled parking bays in the Ards Borough Council area.

Free Public Transport

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people aged over 60 are entitled to free public transport, broken down by each constituency.

(AQW 5382/10)

Minister for Regional Development: All persons aged 60 and over who are permanently resident in the North are eligible for free public transport.

My Department does not hold the data requested. However, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency publishes estimates of the number of people by age groups resident in each constituency.

Tender Documents CO 71 and CO 58

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4353/10, how does NI Water define the term 'temporary technical support'.

(AQW 5408/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it defines the term 'temporary technical support' as any support of a technical nature (for example, mechanical, electrical, telemetry, etc.) provided to it by contractors' employees under a formal contract for a defined period of time, normally the term of the contract.

NI Water Staff

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3955/10, (i) whether any staff employed under NI Water tender CO 71 within the Southern Division were promoted, without being interviewed from (a) the Assistant Technician Grade to Technician Grade; (b) the Automated Maintenance Management System Data Clerk grade to Mechanical and Engineering Instrumentation Control and Automation Area Work Controller grade; (ii) whether this was done under the direction of NI Water staff; and (iii) how this impacts on NI Water's previous advice to his Department that it has no role or responsibility for Human Resources issues in relation to contracted staff.

(AQW 5414/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has no responsibility for staff employed by contractors engaged by NIW under a tendered contract arrangement such as tender C071. However, the information requested is as follows:-

- (i) following a request to the contractor engaged by NIW under tender C071 for Data Technicians and an Instrumentation Control Automation Technician, the contractor provided suitably qualified and competent appointees. Some of the appointees were already working for the contractor within NIW in other roles under tender C071.
- (ii) NIW was only involved in making a request to the contractor for the posts required. NIW was not responsible for the promotion of any of the individuals concerned.
- (iii) the provision of the required posts by the contractor has no impact on the previous position, which remains unchanged, that NIW has no role in the human resources process for staff employed by contractors.

NI Water Staff

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3955/10, (i) whether any staff employed under NI Water tender CO 71 within the Southern Division were promoted from the Technician grade to Project Assistant grade and subsequently demoted, prior to 17 November 2007 back to Technician grade; (ii) whether this was done under the direction of NI Water staff; and (iii) how this impacts on NI Water's previous advice to his Department that it has no role or responsibility for Human Resources issues in relation to contracted staff.

(AQW 5420/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has no responsibility for staff employed by contractors engaged by NIW under a tendered contract arrangement such as tender C071. However, the information requested is as follows:-

- (i) following a request to the contractor engaged by NIW under tender C071 for a short term requirement for a Project Assistant, the contractor provided a suitably qualified and competent appointee who was already working for the contractor within NIW as a Data Technician under tender C071

- (ii) NIW was only involved in making a request for a temporary Project Assistant. The contractor was responsible for the appointment of the Data Technician to the Project Assistant role.
- (iii) the provision of a temporary Project Assistant by the contractor has no impact on the previous position, which remains unchanged, that NIW has no role in the human resources process for staff employed by contractors.

Union Jack at the Roads Service Carn Depot, Craigavon

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development under which policy the Union Jack flag flies permanently at his Department's Carn depot, Craigavon.

(AQW 5432/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there is no policy that permits the Union flag to be flown continuously at my Department's Carn depot.

Roads Service has also advised that the Union flag is not flown permanently at Carn Depot, but is flown on those days on which the Flag Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 state the Union flag should be flown on Government buildings in the North.

Water Supply and Pressure Problems in the Killinchy Area

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times and on what dates NI Water dealt with water supply and water pressure problems in the Killinchy area during 2009/10.

(AQW 5433/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it dealt with 57 incidents during 2009/10 in relation to water supply and water pressure problems in the Killinchy area. The relevant dates are detailed below.

Month	Dates
April 2009	26, 27, 28, 29
May 2009	01, 09, 29
June 2009	03, 06, 14, 25
July 2009	10, 21, 22
August 2009	28
September 2009	01, 15
October 2009	11, 12, 16, 18, 29
November 2009	05, 06, 19, 21
December 2009	18, 19, 23, 24, 26, 28
January 2010	02, 04, 08, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 26, 28
February 2010	13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28

Water Supply and Pressure Problems in the Killinchy Area

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to NI Water of dealing with water supply and water pressure problems in Killinchy village, in each the last three years.

(AQW 5434/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not hold records of the costs associated with dealing with individual water supply and water pressure

problems in Killinchy. However, on the basis that each incident cost approximately £60, the table below shows the estimated cost for each of the three years requested.

Year	Number Of Incidents	Estimated Cost
2007/08	16	£960
2008/09	29	£1,740
2009/10	57	£3,420

Water Supply and Pressure Problems in the Killinchy Area

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times and on what dates did the residents of Killinchy village lose their water supply during 2009/10.

(AQW 5435/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it dealt with 44 incidents during 2009/10 in relation to interruptions to the water supply in the Killinchy area. The relevant dates are detailed below.

Month	Dates
April 2009	26, 27
May 2009	09
June 2009	06, 14, 25
July 2009	10, 21, 22
August 2009	28
September 2009	01, 15
October 2009	12, 29
November 2009	05, 06, 19
December 2009	19, 23, 24, 26, 28
January 2010	02, 08, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 26, 28
February 2010	13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28

Water Supply and Pressure Problems in the Killinchy Area

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are in place to address the water supply and water pressure problems experienced by the residents of Killinchy village.

(AQW 5436/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the water supply and water pressure problems experienced by residents in the Killinchy area were caused by bursts in the trunk distribution mains from Ballygowan Service Reservoir. The trunk main is currently being replaced as part of a capital works project costing in excess of £1 million and work is scheduled for completion around mid April 2010. This work aims to reduce the risk of interruptions to the water supply in Killinchy and should lead to an improvement in water pressure to homes in the area.

Repairing Potholes and Resurfacing

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on repairing potholes and resurfacing in the North Down constituency in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5450/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not hold financial information on road maintenance on a Constituency basis. However, the table below details the total expenditure on resurfacing and patching for each of the last five financial years in the North Down Section Office area, the boundary of which is coterminous with that of North Down District Council.

Year	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09
Resurfacing	£805,000	£1,136,000	£1,077,000	£1,630,000	£670,000
Patching	£283,000	£262,000	£310,000	£396,000	£286,000

The above figures include works carried out to both carriageways and footways.

The figures provided for patching include the cost of repairing a range of surface defect types, including cracking, depressions and edge deterioration. Roads Service does not maintain specific details of its expenditure on repairing potholes.

In distributing the resources available for road maintenance, allocations are made to the four Roads Service Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity, including resurfacing, patching, gully emptying and grass cutting. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning resources across council areas, to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the whole of the North.

Requirements to Substantiate a Dual Carriageway

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the daily traffic movements on a trunk road that are required to substantiate a dual carriageway.
(AQW 5499/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that traffic flow levels and carriageway standards as contained in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, recommend, that at the year of opening, the Annual Average Daily Traffic flow for a two lane dual carriageway should lie between a minimum of 11,000 and a maximum of 39,000 vehicles per day.

Property Owners Affected by the Building of a New Road

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development if property owners affected by the building of a new road can apply to his Department for any funding to employ legal advisers.
(AQW 5500/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that when compensation is due for land being acquired for a road scheme, property owners may employ a solicitor to handle the legal formalities in the transfer of the land and payment of compensation. The Department will pay reasonable legal costs incurred by the land owner during this process.

Flyover at the Annaghmore Road and Bells Hill Road Junction

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development why the fly-over at the Annaghmore Road and Bells Hill Road junction, proposed by the Roads Service at the public enquiry in November 2007, is no longer being considered.
(AQW 5512/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Following the Public Inquiry on the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling scheme in 2007, the Inspector recommended that my Department's Road Service should consider an alternative proposal for the treatment of Annaghmore Road and Bells Hill Road junctions. In December 2009 Roads Service consulted on the amended proposals for the junctions.

Cost of Legal Fees

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of legal fees incurred by his Department in dealing with claims in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5513/10)

Minister for Regional Development: The cost of legal fees, including associated costs, incurred by my Department dealing with public and employer's liability compensation claims in each of the last five years are set out below. Other costs associated with compensation claims include medical reports, engineer's reports etc. Separating all other associated costs from the professional legal fees could only be achieved at disproportionate cost.

	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05
Cost of Legal Fees	£2,570,213.15	£2,440,143.85	£2,640,878.02	£2,819,865.51	£2,819,633.75

Claims for Falls and Injuries

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of claims against his Department for falls and injuries in (i) the Lisburn Council area; (ii) the Banbridge Council area; (iii) the Antrim Council area; and (iv) the Castlereagh Council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5514/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit maintains claims statistics on the basis of individual Roads Service Section Office areas. In general however, the Roads Service Section Office maintenance areas correspond roughly with District Council areas. For this reason, the information in the format requested is not readily available but has been provided below, for each of the last three financial years, in respect of the four Roads Service Section Offices. The figures represent the total costs associated with personal injury claims ie compensation paid plus all other costs such as legal costs. Those figures include costs associated with successfully defending claims but those costs cannot be recovered against legally-aided claimants.

Total Cost of Claims Including Legal and Other Costs				
Personal Injury				
	Lisburn £	Banbridge £	Antrim £	Castlereagh £
2008/09	379,218.93	26,415.48	96,056.97	114,634.93
2007/08	542,453.31	56,413.91	79,965.15	91,056.30
2006/07	175,841.31	70,626.79	84,470.17	174,896.02

Cost of Parking Attendants

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the cost to his Department of providing parking attendants; and (ii) the income they have collected in parking fines, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5525/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Traffic Attendants are provided to my Department through its contract for the Operation of Parking and Enforcement Services with NSL Ltd (previously NCP), which commenced in October 2006. The table below provides information on payments made to NSL by my Department for the work carried out through this contract, and the income received for the payment of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs), over each of the last three financial years.

The figures shown for payments to NSL Ltd include all routine aspects of the service provided by them, including deployment of traffic attendants for on and off street enforcement, management of off-street car parks, cash collection and provision of the vehicle clamping and removal service.

Financial Year	Payment to NSL Ltd	PCN Income
2006-07	£2,503,490.11	£1,271,351.35
2007-08	£6,927,929.41	£4,428,427.23
2008-09	£8,305,102.54	£4,411,402.57

NI Water

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AAQW 4663/10, which of the awarded contracts listed were not subjected to a competitive tendering process.

(AQW 5547/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that five of the contracts listed in AQW 4663/10 were awarded through single tender action as the suppliers were sole suppliers of the service or the provider of proprietary goods. The remainder, seventeen of which were transferred across from the Steria contract, were competitively tendered either through a framework or on an individual basis.

Damage to Vehicles Caused by Poor Road Conditions

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has paid in compensation for damage to vehicles caused by poor road conditions in the Newry and Armagh constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5569/10)

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 Newry and Armagh constituency covers all of the Armagh Section Office and the western (County Armagh) part, plus Newry City Centre, of the Newry and Mourne Section Office. Statistics for the Newry and Mourne Section Office however can be disaggregated between the western and the eastern (County Down) parts except Newry City Centre falls fully within the County Down part. A further breakdown to identify those claims from the County Down part of the Newry and Mourne Section Office falling within the Newry and Armagh constituency boundary could only be extracted at a disproportionate cost. The following figures show the amount of compensation paid for vehicle damage in each of the last five years for the Armagh Section Office and the two separate parts of the Newry and Mourne Section Office.

	Compensation Paid
2008/2009	£
Armagh Section Office	11,286.40
Newry and Mourne Section Office West	8,258.80

	Compensation Paid
Newry and Mourne Section Office East, including Newry	34,938.21
Total	54,483.41
2007/2008	£
Armagh Section Office	5,370.94
Newry and Mourne Section Office West	5,586.20
Newry and Mourne Section Office East, including Newry	25,052.65
Total	36,009.79
2006/2007	£
Armagh Section Office	4,424.64
Newry and Mourne Section Office West	2,085.84
Newry and Mourne Section Office East, including Newry	31,687.52
Total	38,198.00
2005/2006	£
Armagh Section Office	6,456.10
Newry and Mourne Section Office West	4,070.43
Newry and Mourne Section Office East, including Newry	11,528.57
Total	22,055.10
2004/2005	£
Armagh Section Office	3,749.27
Newry and Mourne Section Office West	13,154.56
Newry and Mourne Section Office East, including Newry	14,879.06
Total	31,782.89

Senior Citizen SmartPass

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people currently hold a Senior Citizen SmartPass.

(AQW 5576/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that 205,318 Senior SmartPasses had been issued at 1 March 2010. A number of these passes will have been issued to individuals who have since died or who are no longer resident here.

Claims for Falls and Injuries

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of claims for falls and injuries against his Department in (i) the North Down Council area; and (ii) the Ards Council area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5623/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit maintains claims statistics on the basis of individual Roads Service Section Office areas. In general however, the Roads Service Section Office maintenance areas correspond roughly with District Council areas. For this reason, the information in the format requested is not readily available but has been provided below, for each of the last three financial years, for North Down and Ards Roads Service Section Office maintenance areas. The figures represent the total costs associated with personal injury claims ie compensation paid plus all other costs such as legal costs. Those figures include costs associated with successfully defending claims but those costs cannot be recovered against legally-aided claimants.

Total Cost of Claims Including Legal and Other Costs		
Personal Injury		
	North Down £	Ards £
2008/09	100,594.57	151,178.32
2007/08	133,249.74	123,397.91
2006/07	104,274.71	173,494.60

DRD Capital Spend in Mid-Ulster

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's (i) capital spend on projects in Mid-Ulster from 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 to date; and (ii) projected spend for 2010/11.

(AQW 5693/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that while it does not maintain details of its capital expenditure on a constituency basis, it does undertake an analysis of the actual capital spend on a council area basis.

Details of the capital expenditure in the council areas within the Mid-Ulster constituency for 2007-08 and 2008-09 are set out in the table below. Details for 2009-2010 will not be available until after the financial year-end and the projected spend for 2010/11 has not been finalised.

District Council	Capital Expenditure (£)	
	07-08	08/09
Magherafelt	2,651,000	2,544,000
Cookstown	865,000	1,135,000
Dungannon and South Tyrone	14,235,000	4,622,000

The capital expenditure for road improvements is prioritised across the North on the basis of a broad range of criteria which include strategic planning policy, traffic flow, accident numbers, potential travel reduction times, environmental impact, accessibility and value for money. It should be noted that while the actual spend may fall within one district council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the council, constituency or county in which the scheme is undertaken.

My Department's Public Transport Performance Division is able to provide details of capital spend on a constituency basis and the table below summaries the capital expenditure for Ulsterbus projects in Mid Ulster:-

Year	Project Name	Amount (£)
2007/08	-	0.00
2008/09	Refurbishment of Depots	13, 000
2009/10	Building Condition Upgrade	56,000
	Provision of gates, Magherafelt Ulsterbus Workshop	6,000

There is no specific capital expenditure budgeted for Mid-Ulster in for 2010/11, however, projects, such as the planned Building Services Upgrade Programme, may impact on the constituency.

In addition, there has also been significant investment in bus replacement for Ulsterbus. While capital investment in the fleet is managed on a network wide basis and not sub-divided geographically, or otherwise, the new buses will bring benefits to the Mid-Ulster Constituency. Details of investment in the bus fleet are further detailed below.

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total Amount across North (£)	28,728,319	6,341,800	12,081,000	5,400,000 (projected)

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, while it does not hold specific details of capital infrastructure projects broken down by constituency, it estimates that some £16 million has been invested in the Mid-Ulster Constituency during the three year period to 2009/10. Details of the projects associated with this expenditure are included in the table below:-

Location	Spend in 2007-2009 (£)
Killyneese Wastewater Treatment Works Outfall	17,000
Maghera Area Sewers	627,000
Lissan Road Cookstown Replacement Storm Sewer	215,000
Orritor Road, Cookstown - Sewer Replacement. Phase 2	67,000
Derrynoyd Road, Draperstown Foul & Storm Sewer Extension	21,000
Sandhole Wastewater Treatment Works	47,000
Killyfaddy Road, Magherafelt Sewerage Scheme	154,000
Church Street, Cookstown	56,000
Cookstown Road, Moneymore Foul Sewer Extension	36,000
Whitewater Bridge Straw Foul Sewer Extension	34,000
Milburn Storm Sewer	24,000
Bracken Court, Coalisland Storm Sewer Extension	83,000
Kilmascally Road, Ardboe, Storm Sewer	39,000
Knockloughrim Storm Sewer	13,000

Location	Spend in 2007-2009 (£)
Burn Road Cookstown Storm Sewer Extension	160,000
Chapel Street, Cookstown	356,000
Mullanahoe Road Ardboe Foul Sewer	113,000
Tullywiggan Wastewater Treatment Works Improvements	17,000
Hospital Road Magherafelt	57,000
William Court, Bellaghy - Foul and Storm Sewer Extension	19,000
Magherafelt Wastewater Treatment Works Interim Improvements	28,000
Tamnamore/Mullenakill/Clontyclay - WWTW Installations West and South	631,000
Bush Wastewater Treatment Works	294,000
Killyman Wastewater Treatment Works	401,000
Castlecaulfield Wastewater Treatment Works	3,252,000
Clunto Richardson Wastewater Treatment Works Improvements	17,000
Knockloughrim Wastewater Treatment Works Outfall	12,000
Turnaface Road, Moneymore	93,000
Cookstown Wastewater Treatment Works	175,000
Draperstown Wastewater Treatment Works	3,462,000
Tamneylennan - Stewartstown Sewage Pumping Station Upgrade	83,000
The Brambles, Magherafelt – Sewage Pumping Station Replacement	155,000
Ballynakilly Sewage Pumping Station	117,000
Magherafelt Road, Tobermore, Watermain Extension	24,000
Lough Fea Road, Cookstown, Watermain Replacement	62,000
Carnamoney Lane, Draperstown, Watermain Extension	18,000
Oak Park, Draperstown Replacement .Watermain	54,000
Mullaghboy Road, Bellaghy, Watermain Replacement	89,000
Fallagloon Rd. Replacement Watermain	36,000
Brookmount Road, Magherafelt	15,000
Bancran Road, Draperstown, Watermain Extension	27,000
Drummuck Road Maghera Watermain Extension	12,000
Ballynagilly Rd, Watermain & Booster Station	27,000
Creagh Hill, Castledawson, Watermain Extension	13,000

Location	Spend in 2007-2009 (£)
Tullycall Road, Cookstown, Watermain Replacement	61,000
Lough Fea Zone Watermain Improvements	4,546,000
Pound Road, Magherafelt	50,000
Derganagh Road, Knockloughrim, Watermain Extension	18,000
Dunmore Lane, Cookstown, Watermain Extension	31,000
Bank Square, Maghera	16,000
Ballymacombs Road	17,000
Battery Road, Watermain	44,000
Total	16,035,000

I have also been advised by NIW that it is currently reviewing its capital expenditure in the Mid-Ulster Constituency during 2010/11 following the final determination of its business plan proposals for the three years ending 31 March 2013 by the NI Authority for Utility Regulation.

However, the current programme of identified projects, believed to be within the Mid-Ulster Constituency, will cost approximately £6 million in 2010/11. This programme includes work on watermain improvements in the Moyola area and at Brockagh Terrace/Mountjoy Wastewater Treatment Works.

Pothole-related Claims

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many pothole-related claims were made against Roads Service in the Coleraine area, in the financial year 2008/09 and 2009/10 to date; and the total compensation paid during each period.

(AQW 5694/10)

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 Coleraine Section Office area corresponds roughly with the Coleraine Borough Council area. The following figures show the number of pothole related compensation claims received from the Coleraine Section Office area and the amount of compensation paid by the Central Claims Unit in the financial years 2008/09 and 2009/10 (up to 15 March 2010).

	No.of Claims Received	Compensation Paid
2009/10 (up to 15 March 2010)		
Coleraine Section Office	29	£1,435.59
2008/09		
Coleraine Section Office	38	£12,114.02

Department for Social Development

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of applications made to the Warm Homes Scheme; (ii) the number of applications that have been successful; and (iii) the amount of money spent on the Warm Homes Scheme, broken down by District Council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5279/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which acts as Scheme Administrator for the Warm Homes Scheme, has defined an application as a completed survey and a successful application as a completed installation. The table below details the number of surveys, installations and expenditure in each of the last 3 years.

	Completed Surveys	Completed Installations	Expenditure
2006/07	11,106	12,386	£21m
2007/08	12,372	11,912	£22m
2008/09	9,885	11,781	£22m

It is not possible to disaggregate the figures by District Council Area.

Replacement Grants

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Social Development when the Housing Executive will reintroduce replacement grants.

(AQW 5349/10)

Minister for Social Development: I have not yet made a decision on the allocation for grants in the budget for 2010/11 but it is likely next year's position will be similar to this year, that is, only statutory grants and those considered exceptional will be approved.

Household Fuel Payment

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have received the £150 Household Fuel Payment; and how much was paid in each constituency.

(AQW 5383/10)

Minister for Social Development: In 2009 my Department issued £150 Household Fuel Payments to approximately 167,000 vulnerable householders. The value of payments made in each constituency is not available.

Fuel Poor Homes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what she is doing to address the fact that 39.5% of homes in the Ards Borough are considered fuel poor.

(AQW 5385/10)

Minister for Social Development: I am committed to tackling fuel poverty throughout Northern Ireland and this year I allocated £27 million to fund fuel poverty activities. Since the launch of the new Warm Homes Scheme in July 2009, 195 energy efficiency installations have been carried out in the Ards Borough Council area. In addition, a further 88 eligible referrals are at various stages of the application process. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive administers a Heating Replacement Scheme and to date 149 properties have been treated under this scheme in the Ards Borough Council area.

In addition to these schemes my department also administers the Winter Fuel Payment to all pensioners over the age of 60 on an annual basis and runs the Benefit Uptake campaign to encourage all benefit recipients to claim their full benefit entitlement.

Debt Advice

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to address the increasing numbers of people seeking debt advice services after falling behind in their mortgage payments.

(AQO 908/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the absence of sufficient funding to launch a full mortgage rescue scheme, in May 2009 I provided additional funding for the Housing Rights Service to launch the pilot Mortgage Debt Advice Service. This specialised service is preventing, where at all possible, people here from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing related debt. The pilot will be fully evaluated at the end of the 12 month period. I continue to bid for the necessary resources to allow me to establish a full-blooded mortgage rescue scheme here.

Social Housing

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how many units of social housing were started in 2008/09.

(AQO 909/10)

Minister for Social Development: 1136 units of social housing were started in 2009/09. The Programme is on course to deliver 1750 new starts in the current year. Our target remains 5250 new starts over the 3 year period to March 2011. That will be a major challenge in the present budgetary environment. On becoming Minister for Social Development in May 2007 I inherited a woefully inadequate housing budget, with barely the resources to start 600 new houses that year against a target of 1500. However, having made housing my first and foremost priority, I was able to identify and secure the resources necessary in-year which allowed us to surpass our target and start 1595 new homes by March 2008.

Social Housing

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale for the removal of ring-fencing of funding for social housing in North and West Belfast and the Derry City Council area.

(AQO 910/10)

Minister for Social Development: Ring Fencing was just one of the mechanisms used in the past for distributing the Social Housing Development Programme. It helped direct new social housing into areas of particularly acute housing need which is why Derry along with North and West Belfast had this provision made.

Increasingly however, this form of ring fencing did not recognise the huge growth in housing need which was growing disproportionately throughout Northern Ireland. Ring fencing failed to reflect the length of time applicants waited for social housing and so the Housing Executive, having analysed the data, came to the conclusion that it was time to change this policy.

DSD: Payments

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development what is the longest period of time that her Department has taken to pay a supplier since the 10-day payment deadline was introduced.

(AQO 911/10)

Minister for Social Development: The longest period of time taken to pay a supplier since the 10-day payment deadline was introduced is 216 days. The invoice amount was for £5.88. The delay in payment was due to a variety of issues that arose with the migration to Account NI.

Social Security Benefits

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development what action her Department is taking to ensure that people receive all the social security benefits to which they are entitled.

(AQO 912/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department provides a range of services to make people aware of their entitlements. This includes outreach services, participation in local promotional activity, the production of specific publications, some in minority ethnic languages, DSD and NIHE websites, a new online Benefits Adviser Service and general assistance with advice and information through our network of local and centralised offices.

On top of these services, a targeted approach to benefit uptake was introduced in 2005. Specific exercises, targeting people with potential benefit entitlement, were undertaken. By June 2009 this work had generated an additional £27 million of annual benefit and arrears.

The current Benefit Uptake Programme has provided over 25,000 people the opportunity of a benefit assessment through Citizens Advice. In addition, a new Outreach Approach commenced in late November focusing on making sure older people are aware of their potential entitlement across four Council areas with a high older population but with relatively low uptake of the main pensioner benefits.

Coleraine Town Centre Development

Mr G Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Ramparts Scheme and Lanes Scheme developments for Coleraine town centre.

(AQO 913/10)

Minister for Social Development: Both schemes have secured planning permission. In December 2008, I decided that it would be more beneficial for Coleraine town centre for the Lanes Scheme to be delivered first. To facilitate the development of the Lanes scheme, the transfer of the Abbey Street car park from the Department for Regional Development to my Department was approved by the Executive in September 2009.

Difficult economic conditions, particularly the severe downturn in the property market and the retail sector, have delayed the start of work on the schemes. Officials from my Department are in regular contact with the developers of both schemes to ensure they can be developed as quickly as possible.

Social Housing Development Programme

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the output from the social housing development programme in the current financial year.

(AQO 914/10)

Minister for Social Development: 1136 units of social housing were started in 2009/09. The Programme is on course to deliver 1750 new starts in the current year. Our target remains 5250 new starts over the 3 year period to March 2011. That will be a major challenge in the present budgetary environment. On becoming Minister for Social Development in May 2007 I inherited a woefully inadequate housing budget, with barely the resources to start 600 new houses that year against a target of 1500. However, having made housing my first and foremost priority, I was able to identify and secure the resources necessary in-year which allowed us to surpass our target and start 1595 new homes by March 2008.

Lone Parents: Employment

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Social Development how she measures the effectiveness of the Lone Parent Regulations in moving lone parents from Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance to work, given that her Department does not collect or maintain data on the number of lone parents finding work.

(AQO 915/10)

Minister for Social Development: Paid work, for those who can work, is the most sustainable route out of poverty. Evidence that led to this legislation being introduced by Westminster shows that children in lone parent families where the lone parent works part-time have a lower than average risk of poverty, at 17 per cent, whereas children in workless lone parent households have a much higher risk of poverty, at 56 per cent.

The focus of the changes made through the Lone Parents Regulations is to reduce child poverty, by assisting lone parents to seek and find work. The policies for lone parents are a balance between providing financial and other assistance to support his or her family, and wider responsibilities to lift families and children out of poverty.

The current lone parent strategy introduced by Westminster, has helped to increase the lone parent employment rate by 12.5 percentage points to 57.2 per cent. There have been some difficulties in implementation of the full programme in Northern Ireland, largely related to a lack of adequate childcare facilities. As members will be aware this is still a matter to be resolved by the Ministerial Sub Group on Children and Young People

With regard to the impact of the regulations in Northern Ireland we can identify the volume of lone parents moving off Income Support on to Jobseekers Allowance and off Jobseekers Allowance. We can be certain that a significant proportion of such lone parents are moving from benefits into work and therefore be satisfied that the Lone Parent regulations are having the intended effect. However, the data available on the numbers of claimants moving from Job Seekers Allowance into work is incomplete as claimants may leave the Jobseekers Register for other unstated reasons. My Department is working with the Department for Employment and Learning and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to improve the information on claimants moving into employment so that proper policy evaluation can be achieved.

Social Housing

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on her Department's performance in relation to social housing targets.

(AQO 916/10)

Minister for Social Development: 1136 units of social housing were started in 2009/09. The Programme is on course to deliver 1750 new starts in the current year. Our target remains 5250 new starts over the 3 year period to March 2011. That will be a major challenge in the present budgetary environment. On becoming Minister for Social Development in May 2007 I inherited a woefully inadequate housing budget, with barely the resources to start 600 new houses that year against a target of 1500. However, having made housing my first and foremost priority, I was able to identify and secure the resources necessary in-year which allowed us to surpass our target and start 1595 new homes by March 2008.

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.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Neuro-Physiotherapists

In Bound Volume 48, page WA75 replace the answer to question (AQW 4338/10) asked by Mr K Robinson with:

The requested information in relation to Northern Ireland is provided in the table below. Figures for neurophysiotherapists in the other UK countries are not readily available.

Physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills in HSC Trusts.

HSC Trust	Headcount	WTE ¹
Belfast	29	23.28
Northern	22	14.0
South Eastern	12	9.4
Southern	14	10.4
Western	12	10.22

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes:

1 WTE= whole-time equivalent

Neuro-Physiotherapists

In Bound Volume 48, page WA75, replace the answer to question (AQW 4339/10) asked by Mr K Robinson with:

Physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills in the HSC Trusts

HSCT	2005	WTE	2006	WTE	2007	WTE	2008	WTE	2009	WTE
Belfast	21	17	21	17	21	17	29	23.28	29	23.28
Southern	12	9.4	12	9.4	12	9.4	12	9.4	14	10.4
South Eastern	9	6.4	9	6.4	10	7.4	10	7.4	12	9.4
Northern †									22	14
Western	8.5	6.72	10.5	8.72	10.5	8.72	11.5	9.72	12	10.22

Source: Health and Social Care Trust

† Information is not readily available.

Social Development

Eviction Notices Issued in the Ards District

In Bound Volume 48, page WA203, replace the answer to question (AQW 4538/10) asked by Mr Shannon with:

The tables below provides details of Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who were served with eviction notices in the Ards District in each of the last five years and the number of those that did not result in an eviction:-

TABLE 1: HOUSING EXECUTIVE TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	91	142	187	248	190
Did not result in eviction	87	139	186	247	187

TABLE 2: HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	1	3	2	3	1
Did not result in eviction	0	0	0	0	0

Finance and Personnel

Civil Service Posts

In Bound Volume 49, page WA153, replace the answer to question (AQW4208/10) asked by Mr Burns with:

The information sought is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, for the purposes of monitoring the current and previous Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) periods (Budget 07 and CSR04 respectively) details of the new posts created over the past five years has been collated by Corporate HR, DFP. Details of the new posts created are set out in the table attached and where known, the job title and grade have been provided. The figures are shown on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis.

It should be noted that, in overall terms, during both the CSR 04 and Budget 07 period (to date) the overall number of FTE posts in the 11 Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments has reduced and this downward trend is expected to continue until the end of the Budget 07 period.

NEW CIVIL SERVICE POSTS CREATED IN THE 11 GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS SINCE 1 APRIL 2005.

CSR 04 PERIOD (1 APRIL 2005 TO 31 MARCH 2008)

Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DARD	22		1 Divisional Veterinary Officer 2 Veterinary Officers 7 Inspector Group1 12 Meat Inspector	Animal Testing for Dept of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
DCAL	7.5		1 Grade 7, 2.5 Deputy Principals (DP), 1 Staff Officer (SO), 1 Executive Officer 2 (EO2), 2 Administrative Officers(AO)	2012 Olympics
DEL	83.5	Various: E01 Pathways to Work Team Leaders E02 Pathways to Work Personal Advisers AO Pathways to Work Admin Support.	E01 / EO2 /AO	Pathways to Work
DETI	6	Trainee Health & Safety Officers. Gas Compliance Officers.	E01	New Work Pressures within Health and Safety ExecutiveNI

Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DFP	44 8		Various General Service grades AA - DP	Rates Collection Agency* Land Registry - increased work.
DOE	349		Various General Service and other grades	Driver and Vehicle Agency*, NI Environment Agency* and Planning Service* - includes non-NICS funded posts. Increased workload
DSD	68 30		Various administrative grades	Child Support Agency and Belfast Benefit Delivery Centre – increased work*, Pathways to Work
OFMDFM	8		Administrative grades	Crumlin Road Gaol, Records NI, NI Investment Strategy
Total	626			

BUDGET 07 PERIOD -TO DATE. (1 APRIL 2008 TO DATE 1 JANUARY 2010)

Department	Number of posts (FTE)	Job Title	Grade	Purpose/Business Area
DCAL	19		1G7, 1 SO, 4 AO, 1AA, 12 Technical Grades – E01/2 equivalent	Transfer into the Department of the Fisheries Conservancy Board.
DEL	138	Various AO Job Search Officers and E02 Work Focused Adviser posts	AO / E02	Increased benefit uptake
DFP	28		Various administrative grades AA – DP	Transfer into the Department of procurement posts from Northern Ireland Office
DSD	212 197 13		Various administrative grades	Employment Support Allowance (decision still awaited as to the number of these posts which are temporary) Increased benefit uptake. New initiatives in Housing Directorate (fuel poverty).
DE	4	Programme Director Project Officer Finance Officer Admin Support	DP SO E02 AO	International Fund for Ireland (IFI) Education Programme*
Total	611			

Notes:

* Non-NI Block funded posts which are funded by receipts, GB Departments or other means.

Some of the new permanent posts created during the CSR 04 period have since ceased during the Budget 07 period.

FTE – Full Time equivalent

Education

English and Maths GCSE Grades

In Bound Volume 48, page WA225, replace the answer to question (AQW 4892/10) asked by Mr Lunn with:

Soláthraíonn na táblaí thíos na staitisticí a iarraidh: The tables below provide the statistics requested:

North of Ireland -Grammar	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X
English 2008/09	9,196	10.0	29.9	38.4	18.6	2.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Maths 2008/09	8,506	17.2	26.5	33.2	20.2	2.5	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
English 2007/08	9,254	9.4	30.7	38.8	17.8	3.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Maths 2007/08	8,679	19.5	24.7	33.3	19.4	2.2	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.0
English 2006/07	9,282	8.7	31.7	39.3	17.4	2.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maths 2006/07	8,559	15.0	22.2	33.1	25.8	2.6	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0

North of Ireland - Non-grammar	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X
English 2008/09	12,949	0.6	4.4	14.3	32.6	26.1	13.3	4.9	2.1	0.0	1.4	0.2
Maths 2008/09	13,262	1.0	3.4	9.1	29.4	23.2	15.0	10.3	5.7	0.0	2.6	0.3
English 2007/08	13,781	0.7	4.8	14.1	32.8	25.2	12.8	5.4	2.1	0.2	1.6	0.2
Maths 2007/08	14,086	1.0	3.7	10.4	29.3	20.3	15.6	10.5	5.9	0.0	3.1	0.2

North of Ireland - Non-grammar	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X
English 2006/07	14,054	0.7	4.4	13.9	32.1	26.5	13.2	5.5	2.0	0.0	1.4	0.3
Maths 2006/07	14,099	1.0	3.0	11.5	26.2	21.1	17.3	10.8	4.3	0.0	4.4	0.4

North of Ireland - Integrated	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X
English 2008/09	1,806	1.4	6.3	16.4	32.1	24.8	11.5	4.7	1.6	0.0	1.1	0.2
Maths 2008/09	1,805	1.4	3.6	8.7	30.1	22.9	14.5	9.8	5.8	0.0	2.8	0.4
English 2007/08	1,636	1.5	7.0	17.4	32.8	23.8	10.4	4.1	1.8	0.0	1.2	0.0
Maths 2007/08	1,635	1.6	3.5	10.7	29.2	22.0	14.7	9.9	5.6	0.0	2.5	0.4
English 2006/07	1,612	1.1	5.5	15.9	32.9	25.2	11.7	5.0	1.1	0.0	1.3	0.3
Maths 2006/07	1,635	1.3	3.3	11.0	29.1	19.3	17.0	9.5	5.1	0.0	4.1	0.4

North of Ireland - All pupils	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Q	U	X
English 2008/09	22,145	4.5	15.0	24.3	26.8	16.4	7.9	2.9	1.2	0.0	0.9	0.1
Maths 2008/09	21,768	7.3	12.4	18.5	25.8	15.1	9.2	6.3	3.5	0.0	1.6	0.2
English 2007/08	23,035	4.2	15.2	24.0	26.8	16.3	7.7	3.2	1.3	0.1	1.0	0.1
Maths 2007/08	22,765	8.1	11.7	19.1	25.5	13.4	9.8	6.5	3.7	0.0	2.0	0.1
English 2006/07	23,336	3.9	15.3	24.0	26.2	17.0	8.0	3.3	1.2	0.0	0.8	0.2
Maths 2006/07	22,658	6.3	10.2	19.7	26.1	14.1	10.9	6.7	2.7	0.0	3.0	0.3

England	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	X
English 2008/09	655,800	4.3	11.7	20.0	26.6	19.7	9.9	4.4	1.8	1.3	0.3
Maths 2008/09	693,700	4.8	11.5	17.0	26.1	16.7	10.5	7.0	3.8	1.8	0.8
English 2007/08	642,800	4.2	11.8	20.6	26.2	19.2	10.2	4.5	1.8	1.3	0.3
Maths 2007/08	731,900	5.1	10.9	17.3	26.4	16.4	10.6	7.0	3.6	2.3	0.5
English 2006/07	621,900	4.2	12.2	20.5	26.1	18.4	10.4	4.8	1.9	1.2	0.4
Maths 2006/07	705,900	4.7	10.9	18.2	24.4	15.5	12.0	7.0	3.0	2.6	1.8

Wales	Entries	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	No grade
English 2008/09	34,024	3.5	9.9	18.8	29.4	20.3	10.6	4.7	1.7	1.2
Maths 2008/09	36,731	4.3	10.4	15.3	26.5	15.7	10.6	8.5	5.2	3.5
English 2007/08	35,636	3.0	9.8	19.8	31.0	20.5	9.8	3.6	1.4	1.1
Maths 2007/08	37,953	4.5	11.0	17.4	22.9	15.9	11.9	8.7	4.8	2.8
English 2006/07	35,852	2.7	9.5	19.8	29.7	20.3	11.0	4.3	1.4	1.2
Maths 2006/07	37,764	4.9	10.0	19.1	21.2	14.2	12.7	9.7	4.6	3.5

Sources: DCSF, DE, Welsh Assembly

Notes to table:

1. Due to the effects of rounding, not all grade percentages for a subject when added together may equal 100.
2. Wales and England do not have the Q (result pending) grade.
3. Wales do not differentiate between U (ungraded) and X (did not sit). They combine the two into a 'No Grade' indicator.
4. English figures are rounded to the nearest 100 entries.

Social Development

Benefits for Cross-Border Workers

In Bound Volume 49, page WA98, replace the answer to question (AQW 4518/10) asked by Mr Durkin with:

Officials of the Social Security Agency (SSA) met with representatives from the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) on 28 October 2009. The meeting was convened by the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat. Whilst Tax Credits are administered by HM Revenue and Customs and therefore outside the remit of my Department, a useful discussion took place in relation to access to other social security benefits by cross border workers including those factors impacting on the speedy processing of benefit applications. A mechanism for referring individual cases to either the SSA or DSFA for appropriate investigation was agreed.

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